

chai TIMES

CHABAD HOUSE ■ **JEWISH STUDENT CENTER** ■ **BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK**
 Serving the Community through Education and Inspiration Iyar 5768 May 2009 Vol. 23, No. 4



The Faces of Chabad 2008-2009

A year at Chabad is about discovering, solidifying and celebrating one's Jewish identity. It's about community, friendship, education, leadership and inspiration. It's about Shabbat, holidays, social action and all sorts of mitzvot. It's about a feeling of belonging and pride. Plus lots and lots of fun!



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At the May 30th Excelsior Awards Ceremony, the Chabad Center shone as it garnered one of the two most prestigious awards of the evening. Chabad was awarded the "Best Program of the Spring Semester" award for its execution of the Purim Carnival (the Best Program of the Fall Semester went to the Caribbean Student Association). Chabad's student President Elliot Zenilman won one of two honorable mentions in the Student Leader of the year award category. Additionally, Chabad was recognized with distinction in the categories of Fund Raising effort of the year, Outstanding Community Service of the year and Outstanding Educational Program/Lecture of the year. Above, University President Lois B. DeFleur poses with members of Chabad's E-Board and Rabbis Aaron and Levi Slonim.

from the DIRECTORS

On The Road Together and Alone

While the air around us is thick with pollen and endings, in the Jewish tradition we are still "en route." As graduation plans swirl about us and talk of summer plans is everywhere, in terms of the Jewish calendar we are still very much "in the middle." In the middle of a seven week count known as the *Sefira* which begins with Passover and ends with the festival of Shavuot. Concerning this Mitzvah, the Torah states: "And you shall count for yourselves...seven complete weeks." The Talmud teaches that the expression "for yourselves", which at first glance seems perfectly unnecessary, implies that each and every Jew must engage in this count, it is simply not enough to have the Jewish court or Rabbi dispense of this obligation on behalf of the community. This focus on the need for each individual to count indicates that it is more than just marking the passage of time in a formal, ceremonial fashion; it is the undertaking of a "journey", something each one of us must do for ourselves.

Concerning the origins of this commandment, our tradition teaches that after their exodus from Egypt the Jews marked the days leading to the revelation at Sinai with anticipation and excitement. Jewish sages, however, have consistently taught that the count was more than just an expression of enthusiastic expectation; it was a form of preparation for the most revolutionary moment in history. The seven weeks were a time of spiritual growth and transformation. The Jews left Egypt as a family, a motley tribe. They had been deeply enmeshed in an immoral society and pagan culture. Now they had to prepare for their destiny as the chosen

nation "a kingdom of priests and a holy people." It was a metamorphosis of the highest order and it required intensive effort.

Each year, as we return once again to this junction in time on the Jewish calendar we too are commanded to undertake this journey. We are exhorted to leave "Egypt", our personal constraints and limitations, and travel inward to the depth of our soul, to the core of our beings-- to stand again at Sinai. We need to prepare by making each day count, by using this very special time to refine and strengthen our soul bond with G-d, so that we can arrive at Sinai.

The midrash records that each and every Jew -- and every future Jewish soul -- was present at Sinai. Had even one been missing, our Rabbis taught, we could not have received the Torah. Juxtaposed, somewhat paradoxically against this emphasis on the totality of the nation, is the way in which the Ten commandments are addressed in the singular rather than the collective plural form. "I am G-d our G-d" says the Almighty to each individual Jew.

The revelation at Sinai highlighted the twin tensions that inform our Jewish consciousness. On the one hand, "all Jews are responsible for one another" -- our reliance on each other and our responsibility towards the nation as a whole and on the other, the need for us to maintain and foster a personal, unique, singular relationship with G-d.

Aaron and Rivky Slonim

Aaron and Rivky Slonim

in the NEWS

Learning Network brings Jewish Study to you

Have you ever wished you could hire a personal trainer, a life coach, a mentor? How about someone to study Judaism with in a deep and meaningful way? Well now you can!

JNET, founded in 2005, is an organization on the cutting edge of distance learning, dedicated to bringing Jewish study to every Jew who wants it. For absolutely no charge it facilitates partnerships, known in Hebrew as *Chevruyas*, between those who want to study and those with more background who want to teach. It's as easy as 1,2,3.

Here is how it works:

1. You log onto Jnet.org and give them your details: What are your interests? Where are you in life? What do you know and what do you want to know?

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3. The two of you work out the schedule -- when and for how long you want to study weekly. Jnet provides support, texts and resources.

Jnet is for Jews of all ages and all walks of life. In the convenience of your own home you can study anything you would like and Jnet staff can help custom-design a course of learning if you are not sure where you want to begin. Jnet is for beginners, intermediates and even people who are advanced but want to continue studying. After all, we are the people of the book!

Log onto to Jnet.org to learn more or apply for a *chevruta* (study partner) today.

How Do We Know That We Heard G-d at Sinai?

Continued from Page 10 in mythical time, long, long ago in a land far away. Back to the Hopi, for instance: They tell a story of how they originated in the bottom world of three worlds that reside below this one. When? How did they get there? That is irrelevant to the story. This part of their story reads not like history, but as a metaphor. The proof is that nobody ever asks those questions.

The Bible is unique among documents of its time in this regard. Egyptian Hieroglyphics are not history but fabulous propaganda. Even Homer was not intending to write a history, but a drama full of metaphor. From reading these things, you have no sense of real time, change and progress. The Bible, on the other hand, tells a story where there is a beginning, a middle and a result. Its narrative is within a context of definite time and space, with precision of names, quantities, dates, because those events are of themselves vitally important. In a fable, for example, you don't give precise measurements for a tabernacle that will never be built again, or the exact details about a one-time ceremony to inaugurate it. When telling history, you do.

But I still contend that if a nation tells you that G-d spoke to all of them at once, and they all give the same version, you should believe them. However, search the globe and you will find only one such story. Why? Isn't that a great way for the spiritual leadership to get their flock in line? I mean, there's only so far that you can go telling the masses a story about a single individual who had a dialogue with an angel. Or a small group that heard a divine voice. Wouldn't it be so much more powerful to tell them that everyone eye-witnessed the event?

Sure it would. Problem is, as we explained, nobody could ever pull that off. It couldn't even gradually evolve over the centuries. Because it's a conspiracy, and conspiracies don't work.

The very fact that no other people ever made up anything similar to the story of Sinai should be enough evidence that it must be true.

Choose Your World

In case you are planning to use the above as debate material, everything I've told you is useless. No matter what arguments you give, don't expect to convince those entrenched in a materialist reductionist view of reality. Our world is not their world. Our world is a world into which the Infinite may enter, and Sinai is a space where the Essence of that world is heard. Our Sinai cannot enter their world -- you must choose between the two, but you cannot keep both.

My dear disciples! Heed my words and know this clearly: To accept Sinai is to reject absolutely the concept that there is a world and there is a G-d, and that the two exist as distinct entities. The knowledge of Sinai is granted only to those who see this world as no more than the utterings of His Divine mouth as He speaks to us at every moment. As tracings of laser beams in the infinite void, so His thoughts appear before us as the reality of this world. To know Sinai is to know that there is nothing else but He alone. Those who purport to believe otherwise are either fools or liars or both.

But those who live in a world that is so real the infinite cannot enter, the Divine must hover beyond -- they are left to accept the absurdity of conspiracy in its most implausible form.

When G-d created all things, He made two versions for you to choose from. He created, and the earth was chaos and empty -- an absurd world where light cannot enter. And He created a heaven and earth of "Let there be light." A world of wonder, a place for the Infinite to dwell.

You choose in which you wish to live.

Courtesy of chabad.org

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TORAH thoughts

Adapted from the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Mathematics of Marriage

by Yanki Tauber

When a person knows and grasps in his mind a Torah law... he thereby grasps and holds and encompasses with his mind the divine wisdom and will... while his mind is simultaneously enveloped within them. This makes for a wonderful union, like which there is none other and which has no parallel anywhere in the terrestrial world, whereby complete oneness and unity, from every side and angle, is attained.

Tanya, chapter 5

Marriage comes in three varieties: the singular marriage, the twosome marriage and the three-dimensional marriage.

In a singular marriage, one partner is completely consumed by the dominant other, as he or she cedes his or her will and identity to serve the other's will and identity. Two have joined to become one, yet theirs is not so much a union as a singularization: either one abnegates one's own understanding, feelings and very self to the others, or one's ego swallows up the other's mind, heart and very being.

In the twosome marriage, each partner preserves his or her distinction as an individual. They share thoughts, feelings and resources, and deeply affect and are affected by each other; but each does so on his own terms, assimilating the marital bond as part of his own experience and identity. So what we have here is not a union, only a relationship between individuals.

Then there is marriage in its true and ultimate sense: a marriage in which two individuals collaborate in the creation of a third reality which suffuses and embraces them both, while preserving their differences as the very dynamics of their union. A true marriage houses not a single, all-negating being, nor two distinct beings, but a threesome that is the essence of unity: the individual selves of the marriage partners, and the marriage itself -- the third element within whose context their two beings unite into a harmonious whole.

Channels

As human beings, we inhabit a finite and corporeal reality, which, by nature and definition, precludes all contact with anything truly infinite, transcendent and absolute. Nevertheless, the Creator has established channels of awareness and experience which extend beyond the boundaries of our existence and allow us to relate to His all-transcendent truth.

These outlets to a higher reality assume many forms, but may be divided into three general categories, akin to the three types of marriages described above.

On the unilateral level of relationship, there are occasions when

the Almighty chooses to overwhelm us with a supra-natural, supra-rational dose of His reality. For example,

A true marriage houses not a single, all-negating being, nor two distinct beings, but a threesome that is the essence of unity: the individual selves of the marriage partners, and the marriage itself -- the third element within whose context their two beings unite into a harmonious whole.

we may witness a miracle which shatters the very foundations of how we understand ourselves and our world--an experience which we cannot assimilate in any humanly sensible way except to be overcome with awe and humility. Another example of the unilateral relationship is when a person, confronted with a challenge to his deepest convictions, will choose to sacrifice his very existence for the sake of a higher truth.

In both these cases, the wall which encloses our self-bound existence has been breached. Yet the result is not so much a union of the human with the divine, but the negation of the human, the exposure of its insubstantiality in face of the divine.

Then there are the twosome type relationships between Heaven and earth--natural, humanly digestible points of contact between our world and the divine reality. Every sunrise, every beat of the human heart and every flutter of an insect's wings, is G-d acting upon our reality. While these divine deeds are no less miraculous than the splitting of the Red Sea, nature is G-d's way of affecting our world through a veil of constraint, routine and predictability--a veil which filters His input into our lives in a way that is readily absorbable by our finite senses and minds. On our part, the whole of human science is man's attempt to gain insight into what lies behind and beyond the mere facts of his existence.

Through these natural channels of connection we relate to the divine truth on our own terms, without annihilating the norms of human existence and experience. On the other hand, however, they cannot be said to truly

unite the earthly and the divine--only to establish a connection between them as two distinct and irreconcilable realms.

Meeting of Minds

But on the 6th day of Sivan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 bce), G-d descended on Mount Sinai and "gave a threefold Torah to a threefold people through a third-born on a third day in the third month." Torah is the third element of our relationship with G-d -- the element which makes our relationship a true marriage.

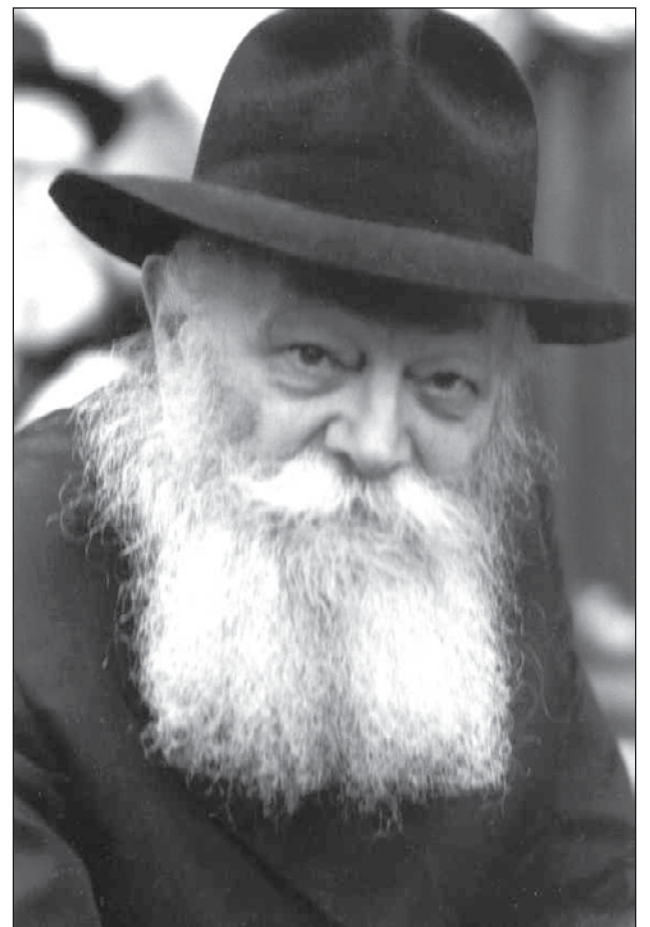
In the words of the Midrash, at Sinai "The higher realms descended to the lower realms" with G-d's descent upon Mount Sinai, while "The lower realms ascended to the higher realms" with Moses ascent to the top of the mountain. Had there only been a descent from Above to below, the divine reality would have totally overwhelmed the earthly reality, resulting in a one-sided marriage -- a relationship that is wholly defined by the nature and character of only one of its partners. If there had been only an ascent from below to Above,

our encounter with the divine would have been characterized by the finiteness and tactility of our physical existence, resulting in a "twosome" marriage in which each side relates to the other from behind the defining walls of self. But at Sinai there occurred both a descent from above by G-d as well as a rising upwards of man. In other words, this was an encounter in which each partner not only

relates to and connects with the other but also participates in defining the nature of the relationship between them, so that the relationship affirms his individual identity even as it expands it to include the very different identity of the other partner.

For at Sinai was introduced the third element of Torah, where the finiteness of man unites with the infinity of G-d in a union that is both finite and infinite, both human and divine.

Torah is the wisdom and will of G-d. But G-d did not communicate His wisdom and will as a detailed manifesto and a codified list of instructions.



The Rebbe

Instead, He gave us a relatively short (79,976 word) Written Torah (the Five Books of Moses), together with the Oral Torah--a set of guidelines by which the Written Torah is to be interpreted and extrapolated, and applied to the myriads of possibilities conjured up by the human experience. So while the Written Torah encapsulates the immense sea of legal, homiletic, philosophical and mystical teaching we know as Torah, it is the human mind and life which G-d designated as the tools with which to unlock the many layers of meaning and instruction implicit in its every word.

This is most powerfully demonstrated by the Talmud's account of a halachic dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and his colleagues:

Rabbi Eliezer brought them all sorts of proofs, but they were rejected... Finally, he said to them: If the law is as I say, may it be proven from heaven! There then issued a heavenly voice which proclaimed: What do you want of Rabbi Eliezer--the law is as he says...

Rabbi Joshua stood on his feet and said: The Torah is not in heaven! ... We take no notice of heavenly voices, since You, G-d, have already, at Sinai, written in the Torah to follow the majority.

Rabbi Nathan subsequently met Elijah the Prophet and asked him: What did G-d do at that moment? [Elijah] replied: He smiled and said: My children have triumphed over Me, My children have triumphed over Me.

Torah is where the human and the divine fuse to one. Where a kernel of divine wisdom germinates in the human mind, gaining depth, breadth and definition, and is then tangibilized in the physicality of human life.

In this marriage, our humanity is not obliterated within the infinite expanse of the divine; but neither does it remain distinct of it. In this marriage, our human finiteness and subjectivity themselves become instruments of the divine truth, joining with it to create the ultimate expression of divine immanence in our world: the Torah.

Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com



Your Shavuot Holiday Guide

May 28-30, 2009 / Sivan 6-7 5769

What is Shavuot?

Shavuot is the second of the three major festivals (Passover being the first and Sukkot the third) and comes exactly fifty days after Passover. The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai over 3,300 years ago. Every year on this day we renew our acceptance of G-d's gift.

The word Shavuot means "weeks": It marks the completion of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot (the 'Omer' period) during which the Jewish people prepared themselves for the giving of the Torah. During this time they cleansed themselves of the scars of slavery and became a holy nation ready to enter into an eternal covenant with G-d with the giving of the Torah.

Shavuot also means "oaths", with the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people and G-d exchanged oaths, forming an everlasting covenant, not to forsake one another.

What is the Torah?

The Torah is composed of two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Together with the Written Torah, Moses was also given the Oral Law which explains and clarifies the Written law. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed in the Talmud and Midrash.

The word 'Torah' means instruction or guide. The word 'mitzvah' means both commandment and connection. There are 613 commandments. The positive commandments ('do'), numbering 248, are equivalent to the number of organs in the human body. The 365 negative commandments ('don't do') are equivalent to the number of blood vessels in the human body.

Through the study of Torah and fulfillment of mitzvahs we connect ourselves and our environment to G-d. G-d's purpose in creating the world is that we sanctify all of creation, imbuing it with holiness and spirituality.

The Role of Children



Our Sages said that before G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He demanded guarantors. The Jews made a number of suggestions, all rejected by G-d, until they declared, "Our children will be our guarantors that the Jewish people will cherish and observe the Torah"; G-d immediately accepted them and agreed to give the Torah.

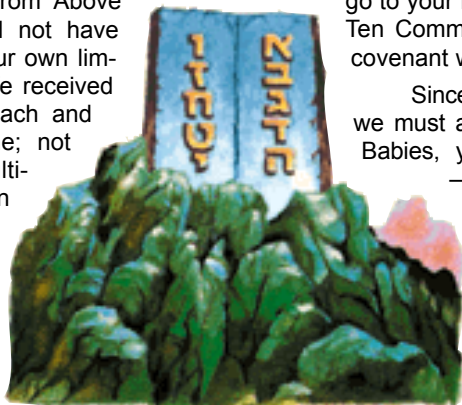
When the Torah is read in the synagogue on Shavuot, G-d is actually giving the Torah anew. Therefore every Jewish man, woman and especially children should make every effort to be present in a synagogue on Friday, May 29, 2009, as the Ten Commandments are read from the Torah.

The Giving of the Torah

The giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event - one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul then and for all time. Our Sages have compared it

to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. One of the many names of Shavuot is the Day of the Great Oath, (the word shavuah also means oath). On this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.

On this day we received a gift (matan) from Above which we could not have achieved with our own limited faculties. We received the ability to reach and touch the Divine; not only to be cultivated human beings, but Divine human beings who are capable of rising above and beyond the limitations of nature.



Why Wasn't the Torah Given in Israel?

The Torah was given freely, in an ownerless public place. If it had been given in the land of Israel, the nations of the world would say that they have no portion in it. Anyone who wishes to properly accept it is welcome to do so.

Why was Mount Sinai chosen to be the site for the giving of the Torah? The conventional answer is that the choice of Mount Sinai was to teach us humility, since Mount Sinai was the most humble of all mountains. If so, why was it not given in a low lying valley? Surely that would have been a stronger lesson in humility?

Hence, we learn that a Jew must be able to distinguish between being proud and being arrogant. Arrogance is distasteful. Being proud of one's roots is a virtue. The Torah therefore, was given on a humble mountain.

Additional Names for Shavuot

Shavuot is also called Atzeret meaning, The Completion, because together with Passover it forms the completion of a unit. We gained our freedom on Passover in order to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

Another name for Shavuot is Yom Habikurim or the Day of the First Fruits. In an expression of thanks to G-d, beginning on Shavuot, each farmer in the Land of Israel brought an offering to the Temple of the first wheat, barley, grapes, figs pomegranates, olives and dates that grew in his field.

Finally, Shavuot is also called Chag HaKatzir, the Festival of the Harvest, because wheat, the last of the grains to be ready to be cut, was harvested at this time of the year.

Learning on Shavuot Night

On the first night of Shavuot (this year Thursday, May 28, 2009), Jews throughout the world observe the centuries-old custom of conducting an all-night vigil dedicated to Torah learning. One explanation for this tradition is that the Jewish people did not rise early on the day G-d gave the Torah, and that it was necessary for G-d Himself to awaken them. To compensate for their behavior, Jews have accepted upon themselves the custom of remaining awake all night.

The Ten Commandments

The holiday of Shavuot is the day on which we celebrate the great revelation of the giving of the Torah at Mount

Sinai, 3321 years ago. You stood at the foot of the mountain. Your grandparents and great-grandparents before them. The souls of all Jews, from all times came together to hear the Ten Commandments from G-d himself.

This year, on Friday, May 29, 2009, go to your local synagogue to hear the Ten Commandments and reaffirm the covenant with G-d and His Torah.

Since we all stood at Mount Sinai, we must all reaffirm our commitment. Babies, young children, the elderly - all that are able should attend.

The Book of Ruth

In many synagogues the book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot. There are several reasons for this custom:

A) Shavuot is the birth-day and yahrtzeit (day of passing) of King David, and the book of Ruth records his ancestry. Ruth and her husband Boaz were King David's great-grandparents.

B) The scenes of harvesting, described in the book of Ruth are appropriate to the Festival of Harvest.

C) Ruth was a sincere convert who embraced Judaism with all her heart. On Shavuot all Jews were converts having accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.



Adorning the Home with Greenery and Flowers

It is customary on Shavuot to adorn the home and synagogue with fruits, flowers and greens. The reason is that in the time of the Temple, the first fruits of harvest were given on Shavuot. As well, our Sages related that although Mount Sinai was situated in a desert, when the Torah was given the mountain bloomed and sprouted flowers.

NOTE: All arrangements should be done early on Sunday, before the onset of the Holiday, to respect the sanctity of Shavuot.

Eating Dairy Foods

It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. There are a number of reasons for this custom:

With the giving of the Torah the Jews now became obligated to observe the laws of Kashruth. As the Torah was given on Shabbat no cattle could be slaughtered nor could utensils be koshered, and thus on that day they ate dairy.

Another reason is that the Torah is likened to milk. The Hebrew word for milk is chalav. When the numerical value of each of the letters in the word chalav are added together - 8; 30; 2 - the total is forty. Forty is the number of days Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah.

SHAVUOT CALENDAR 5769-2009

Times shown for Binghamton only

Date	Time
May 28 Make Eruv Tavshilin; see page 8 for details	
May 28 Light Candles, blessings 1&3*	8:12 pm
May 29 Listen to the Ten Commandments	
May 29 Light Candles, blessings 2&3**	8:13 pm
May 30 Yizkor Memorial Service	
May 30 Yom Tov Ends at	9:22 pm

* If lighting after sunset, light only from a pre-existing flame.

** Do not light after sunset, and only from a pre-existing flame.

A pre-existing flame is a flame burning continuously since the onset of the festival, such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame

Candle Lighting Blessings

1) BA-RUCH A-TAH ADO-NAI E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-OLAM ASHER KID-E-SHA-NU BE-MITZ-VO-TAV VETZI-VA-NU LE-HAD-LIK NER SHEL YOM TOV.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the holiday light.

2) BA-RUCH A-TAH ADO-NAI E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-OLAM ASHER KID-E-SHA-NU BE-MITZ-VO-TAV VETZI-VA-NU LE-HAD-LIK NER SHEL SHABBOS V'SHEL YOM TOV.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of Shabbat and the Holiday.

3) BA-RUCH A-TAH ADO-NAI E-LO-HE-NU ME-LECH HA-OLAM SHE-HECHE-YA-NU VE-KI-YE-MA-NU VE-HIGI-A-NU LIZ-MAN HA-ZEH.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

The State of the University Address

By the Graduates of 2009

SENIOR REFLECTIONS

After four years at Binghamton University, the seniors know it all! Below you will find the thoughts and sentiments expressed by some of this year's graduates.

They were asked the following questions:

1. How has your collegiate experience at Binghamton University affected your Jewish identity?
2. Which event(s) were most memorable/meaningful/helpful/enjoyable for you as a Jew?
3. How would you describe the role of Chabad House within the greater Jewish experience at Binghamton University?
4. What would you like to see changed/added in terms of Jewish life on this university?

Name: Isaac Attias
Major: Philosophy, Politics & Law
Future Plans: Make it big!

1) My collegiate experience has most definitely affected my Jewish Identity. Since I arrived at Binghamton University I expected Chabad to be another one of those religious groups on campus trying desperately to get people to come to their events, when it turns out that the most memorable experiences I have had at Binghamton University have been because of Chabad. I thought I would never say it, but it's true! Chabad has channeled my Jewish experience and made me never forget who I truly am - a member of the worldwide Jewish community. Had it not been Chabad's efforts I would have veered off the path and become consumed with questionable practices. So thank you Chabad for all the wonderful work you have done over the years since you have been here at Binghamton University. Your organization truly is the shining example of what it means to be a good Jew.

2) Yom Kippur services, Purim services and the Purim Carnival, Yom Ha'atzmaut, eating in the Succah and the most important, Shabbat

3) As a keeper of the light that Binghamton University needs.

4) More challah baking events!



Name: Natalie Elisha
Major: PPL and Philosophy
Future Plans: Paralegal; Law School

1) I am proud to say that coming to Binghamton University enhanced my Jewish identity in ways I never deemed possible. I have made great friends that I share Shabbat dinner with at the Chabad house and have taken classes about Judaism that have vastly expanded my understanding of what it means to be a Jew.

2) My favorite events during the time I was in Binghamton University include JHP meetings, Chabad Shabbat dinners and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Fest!

3) The Chabad house is like a river, allowing the Jews on campus to flow in unison and when needed, take their own route to discover their Jewish identity.

4) I would like to see more classes like Matters of Life and Death being administered at the University.



Name: Alex Freundlich
Major: PPL
Future Plans: Law School

Chabad of Binghamton has meant so much to me. Growing up in a town with a small and relatively homogeneous Jewish population, I had not been exposed to many Jews from a non-Conservative background. Coming to Binghamton was an interesting experience for me because it allowed me to understand how diverse the Jewish community really is. Over the past few years, my interactions with other Jewish students from different backgrounds, especially those who were involved in Chabad, has truly allowed me to find my place in the Jewish community. My enthusiasm for the Chabad house extends to its programming. I enjoyed so many of the events during my 3 1/2 years at the University. I always looked forward to



dancing and singing on Simchat Torah. Simchat Torah could get a little wild at times, but it was always a great experience for me because it allowed me to see the Jewish community together in a lively and exciting way. Perhaps I enjoyed Purim more than any other event. Each year I tried dressing up in an interesting and creative costume. I will never forget how I won second place in the costume contest for dressing up as a "Jewish Tree." The Chabad House played a very special role in my life during my time at Binghamton. Not only did I meet many of my good friends through the Chabad House, but, I also was encouraged to explore my Jewish identity through classes or one-on-one study sessions. The lessons I learned at the Chabad house will stay with me forever and will continue to play a significant role in my life.

Name: Jonathan Fulop
Major: Mathematical Sciences
Future Plans: Actuary

Many of my most meaningful experiences and relationships involved the Chabad of Binghamton. As I look back at my four years of Binghamton I view Chabad as a place where I strengthened my Jewish identity, met great friends, interacted with people from different backgrounds, and had an amazing time. Chabad works extremely hard to create the open, friendly and fun environment that attracts 100s of Jews every week. When speaking about Chabad the phrase "home away from home," comes to my mind and the many others that have walked through Chabad's doors. Chabad deserves thanks for their amazing work, and the inspiration they've been to an incredible number of students including myself.



Name: Adam Goodman
Major: English/Rhetoric
Future Plans: Undecided

1) When I first came to college I would consider myself a 'rebellious' Jew. My parents forced Judaism on me while I was growing up (temple every Saturday, keeping real-deal kosher for passover, going to temple on the holidays - much longer than all my friends had to - etc.) Binghamton offered an opportunity to take whatever you wanted out of the Jewish community. Nothing was forced, nothing was required, nothing was too religious. I have made numerous friends through the Jewish community and I am more proud to be a Jew (on the terms I want to be) than I have ever been.

2) I enjoyed all the major Jewish events. Shabbat 1500's, Purim Carnivals, JHP events... I love meeting new people (especially an opportunity to meet that nice Jewish girl to take home to my parents), and the organization/preparation for these major student events never let me down.

3) When I first got to college I was against Chabad. However, due to the homely atmosphere, friendly people, and Rivky/Yael's delicious challah, I can safely say I have been going to Chabad for Shabbat dinner at least twice a month, for the last year and a half.

4) Keep doing what you're doing.



Name: Albert Hazan
Major: Biology
Future Plans: Medical School

I was attracted to BU because I knew of its great Jewish community. I thought that this community would give me the ability to keep the ideals that I was brought up with. I received SO much more than that. The Jewish community at BU gave me the opportunity to interact and learn with Jews from all different backgrounds, which in turn helped me mature and develop a well rounded understanding of the global Jewish community.

Friday night dinners for me, though I often took them for granted, will probably prove to be my most memorable, helpful, meaningful, and enjoyable event of the many events I have taken advantage of at Chabad. It is the place where I was able to feel like I was at home and with family. It was a place where I could connect to Hashem on Shabbat, continue to observe the traditions I was given as a child, a place I could enjoy great food and meet great people. I could not fathom my college experience without Chabad and Friday night dinners. When I often got excited to come back to school after breaks, the Friday night tables at the Chabad House, with hundreds of people standing around them singing "Shalom Alechem", was always the image in my mind coupled with that excitement.

For me the Chabad House was my Jewish experience here at BU. They offer so much, be it programs or services, that there was no need for a greater Jewish experience. If I had a question about anything I always knew I could call the Chabad House. If I wanted to celebrate a holiday or another happy occasion I always knew that Chabad probably had a program for it, and that the details of that program was in my E-mail inbox. The Chabad House provided me with everything I ever needed, and so much more than that.

Though I have seen a remarkable growth in the Chabad House during my four years here, I think there is more growth to be had. That growth must come from students. BU students who enjoy the vast program set that Chabad offers need to show their friends what they are missing. All it takes is to ask a friend to come to a Friday night dinner, or Chabad cafe, and most probably that person will get hooked to Chabad. That friend will then get their friends hooked etc. etc.



Name: Joshua Hollander
Major: Mechanical Engineering; Business
Future Plans: MBA, Masters Engineering



1) As a graduate from Solomon Schechter High School, I was happy to be involved in Chabad in which it allowed me to continue my Jewish education as well as provide a warm environment for Jewish life.

2) It was very meaningful to have the High Holiday services on campus for the students as well as the community. In addition, experiencing Friday night services and activities at Chabad were some of my most memorable moments in which I not only met great people, but continued my devotion to Judaism.

3) With the addition of the Chabad Student Center for Jewish Life, Chabad has become a great place to relax, study, and learn. It has helped my Jewish experience at Binghamton University by always providing a comfortable place to go.

4) I would like to see more students involved with Chabad and participating in Jewish activities on Campus.

in an environment where I came to realize that meaningful commitment need be a force pushing one from inside in order to be lasting. My time here has reinforced the realization of the importance of community with which to share identity.

3) Very important throughout my time here has been the morning *minyan* at Chabad at which I could start my day focused on what is important and where I am going - even if those thoughts inevitably drifted elsewhere during the day they returned the next day in yet another episode of Chabad *Shacharit* services. Without a doubt the most important events for me were the weekly shabbat dinners. They provided me with familiar tunes to hum and sing when I found myself celebrating Shabbat alone in another country. Shabbat at Chabad became as familiar and appreciated as the Chabad staff's ever-present inquiries into my well being. I will miss nothing at Chabad or at Binghamton more than Shabbat, the smell of challah and several hundred friends.

The Chabad House was, as advertised, my home away from home. My connection with Chabad only increased with each year. The friends, the Torah learning, the sneaking downstairs for cookies during shul, the adopted siblings I felt I had, the smell of challah, the smiling *shluchim*, and always an invitation to something or other. No people or experience has ever so positively influenced my Jewish identity as has the Chabad at Binghamton and its caring staff.

4) I can't really think of anything that Chabad could provide that it isn't already in place. I'm satisfied.

Name: Lisa Kaplan
Major: Psychology, Studio Art
Future Plans: Graphic Design



1) The Jewish Life at Binghamton University has definitely made me a 'better' Jew. Having Shabbat dinner with all of my friends is a unique experience that I will always cherish. I know it will not be the same after I graduate. I will miss celebrating all of the Jewish holidays with my friends. Furthermore, because of my positive Jewish experience at Binghamton University, I have become involved with even more Jewish organizations. I had a summer internship at a Jewish organization two years ago and I continue to do freelance graphic design for that organization. Also, I co-founded Challah for Hunger at Binghamton. I am so happy that I started something that is enabling other Jewish students to become involved in Jewish Life on campus, so that hopefully they can have as positive an experience as I did.

2) Friday nights are the most memorable. Eating Shabbat dinner with all of my friends, followed by game night, is something I look forward to every week and I will miss it very much. It is wonderful that everyone is welcome at Chabad, and students from all types of Jewish backgrounds become friends. Everyone is able to learn from one another, and Chabad helps make this possible.

4) I would like to see more joint Hillel-Chabad programs and less tension between the two organizations.

Name: Ari Krauss
Major: Political Science
Future Plans: Aliyah & IDF next year



1) The Chabad of Binghamton has helped to strengthen my Jewish Identity in an environment that is not as conducive to living an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle that I was accustomed to before coming to SUNY Binghamton. They helped me become a better Jew and a better person.

2) There was nothing that I look forward to more during the week, or that I missed more over the Summer months than Friday night dinners. When is the next time that I will ever be able to have Shabbat dinner with all my friends every week? Friday nights at Chabad are something that I will miss for long after I have departed from Binghamton. (I will probably also never get Chabibi out of my head.)

3) Chabad is a place for everyone to learn, grow, and take something with them when they leave. How much is up to you but the opportunity is certainly there if you want it. From the bottom of my heart thank you to Chabad for everything that you have done. The universal Chesed and Midot that you showed to me and that you show to everyone who comes through your doors is something that everyone can aspire to. Thank you to all my friends for making the last four years an unforgettable experience.

4) What would I want to add to Jewish life here? Late morning *Shacharit* *Minyan*....

Name: Sari Katz
Major: Psychology
Minor: Physician Assistant



1) Before college I knew very little about what it meant to be Jewish. Since coming to Binghamton, I've been a member of JHP (Jewish Heritage Program) all four years and each year have become more involved in Chabad events. I have had the opportunity of learning about my religion while meeting and befriending other Jewish students. Since entering college, I've learned more about my religion than I could have anticipated and with this newly found knowledge and experience, my interest and pride in being Jewish has sky-rocketed.

2) My most memorable event by far was having my Bat Mitzvah at the Chabad house. Finally getting the opportunity to experience such a joyous event at the age of 21 meant so much to me. Not only did I get to share the event with family and friends, but I got to establish my Jewish identity when it was more meaningful (after gaining a more concrete understanding of what it means to be Jewish). Another event that is meaningful to me is when I got the opportunity to work with Chabad and other female students to put on a fashion show (Fashion for a Cure) to raise money for an organization (Sharsheret) that helps women fighting breast cancer. The show was such a great success and such a fun and informative event, that I only hope it becomes a long tradition at Binghamton University.

3) Chabad has done more for Binghamton's Jewish students than could be expected of it. It has not only become a center for learning, practicing, and celebration, but has become another home for students to feel safe and loved in. Chabad has offered students so many different services and events (like Shabbat 1500) and has raised money for great causes (i.e. breast cancer prevention and awareness). If it wasn't for Chabad, my Jewish experience at Binghamton would have not been the same.

4) Jewish life at Binghamton University is great! I only wish there were more ways to provide funding to Chabad so that it can maintain and expand its ability to provide students with important knowledge and wonderful experiences.

Name: Renee Lasher
Major: Art History
Future Plans: Special Ed, Elementary Ed



1) My experience at Binghamton University's Chabad House has affected me in so many ways. I consider myself a conservative Jew, and I truly appreciate the welcoming atmosphere for all types of Jewish people at the Chabad House. I have made so many friends at the Chabad house that I know I will actually stay in touch with after college. My Jewish identity has changed vastly throughout my years at Binghamton University. I remember my first time at Shabbat dinner when Rivky came up to me and made me feel so...well...Jewish. And I liked it! I felt part of something important and something special. That feeling has continued throughout the last 4 years and I have become more and more involved in the programs here because of it.

2) I feel like every Shabbat has something new to offer. Whether it's a new person sitting with me, a new food on the table, or a guest speaker, there is always something exciting happening. The people that surround me every Friday night keep me coming back week after week. The Shabbat nights are definitely the most memorable part of my experience at Chabad House.

3) Last year we acquired someone who I feel will be a huge asset to the greater Jewish experience of Binghamton University. Hadasa Slonim is a caring, loving person who creates a new element to Chabad. She gives a sense of youth to all the programs that Chabad provides with her flare for fashion and adorable demeanor. The Jewish population at Binghamton University is very lucky to have her and she has definitely given me an even more powerful will to be proud to be a Jewish person. It is because of people like her that Chabad House will thrive and that those who come after me will enjoy their experience just as much as I have.

4) The Chabad House is somewhere that a student can do almost anything. We can study, pray, workout, and don't ever forget...EAT! The programs that Binghamton's Chabad house offers are the perfect mix of many different traditions and customs. I don't feel that there should be any changes to the Chabad House. In fact, I hope that the future students that go here have the same experience I had.

Name: Nicky Kolios
Major: Psychology, Judaic Studies
Minor: Aliyah, IDF, 2nd Degree, Marry



1) G-d willing I am making aliyah this summer and, starting in August, will spend three months on a kibbutz with a group of immigrants my age. We will study Hebrew, work, and travel the country. In November we start a minimum of two years military service in the IDF. After that I will either begin work and or return to school for a second degree. At some point between aliyah and working/finishing a second degree I should probably get married. Ethiopian maybe, or a nice sabra, or maybe I'll keep it real classic with an Ashkenazi girl.

2) My time at Binghamton University allowed me to negotiate my Jewish identity

Name: Jaimie Lipper
Major: Psychobiology
Future Plans: Medical school



The main reason I decided to attend Binghamton was because of the large Jewish population. My collegiate experience at Binghamton has been wonderful and my Jewish identity has been enhanced through my experiences with Chabad.

As a young Jewish woman, the events that were most memorable, meaningful helpful and most enjoyable have been those that were spent every Friday night at the Chabad House

surrounded by wonderful people. I also greatly enjoy my learning sessions at Chabad. The lessons have opened my eyes to a whole new perspective on life.

The Chabad House is an amazing place and I am very sad to be leaving it although I know I am welcome back anytime. The Chabad House truly is a home away from home. Everyone is accepted and loved all the same and it is so wonderful to be a part of this great family. I have had such an amazing experience with Chabad that all I wish to see is that other students who have not yet experienced Chabad get the time to do so before they graduate and it is too late.

Name: Abie Mizrahi
Major: Finance
Future Plans: Undecided

One of my major criteria in choosing a universtiy was the ability to maintain my Jewish lifestyle for four crucial years. After asking a few friends that attended Binghamton University at the time, I was reassured that Binghamton had a Chabad House and everything would be taken care of. When I pictured my four years of college, I saw myself attending Binghamton University and spending Shabbat at Chabad. Four years later and about to graduate, it feels like I've worked a full time job at Chabad while attending Binghamton University on the side. If I could go back in time I wouldn't change a thing.



Name: Steven Pahuskin
Major: Accounting, Pre-Law
Future Plans: Georgetown Law School

1) I believe that at Binghamton I have had a well balanced lifestyle with my Jewish passions complimenting my secular goals.

2) The Purim Carnival, Playing with Facing East

3) An integral part of Binghamton University and its Jewish community. Over the past four years I have had the unique privilege of meeting many students encompassing brilliant minds that I believe will be truly successful. There is no doubt that there is a clear corolation when looking at the number of fascinating student leaders and successful students that attend Chabad every Friday night or participate in their numerous activities compared to the average student at Binghamton University. Could it possibly be a coincidence? I think not; the Chabad House at Binghamton University has transformed into a center for Binghamton Leadership. Every week I have had opportunities to meet and converse with students from all walks of life. I hope you all will continue to be the leaders of tomorrow, and help continue the legacy that Chabad has become.

4) I would like to see more cooperation and conglomeration between Hillel and Chabad because I believe that the two organizations can benefit from one another and they currently do not.



Name: Peter Spaet
Major: Political Science; School of Management Adjunct
Future Plans: Paralegal

It is often the simplest joys in life – those whose merit can be difficult to describe – which are also the most meaningful. When asked why I continue to attend Chabad on a weekly basis after four years in Binghamton, I often find myself unable to describe the motivation; only realizing that things just don't seem right if a week at Chabad was missed. For many of us, Chabad has been a point of consistency and stability throughout our four years at BU. Even those of us who haven't been involved in the day-to-day operations throughout each week, it was always reassuring to know of the community which existed at all times, emanating from just over on Murray Hill Road. Even as I grow increasingly resistant to the notion of leaving Binghamton, it is truly a source of aid and comfort to know that I could return to visit in 3, 5, or even 10 years and expect to find Rabbi Slonim still insisting that he does not want help moving the 15 gallon soup pot, and Rivky memorizing the names of 85 new freshmen within a single weekend. Possibly most unique to Chabad is the unparalleled sense of community which is experienced by each person involved. This community is unlike anything I have ever seen in other contexts or situations, and is without doubt a driving force behind all of Chabad's success. To my fellow graduating classmates: Best of luck to all of you; and most importantly, thank you to Chabad of Binghamton for your undying commitment to this unique and exceptional community. It is unmatched in my experience and something for which we should all be grateful.



Name: Boris Tadchiev
Majors: Math and PPL
Future Plans: Paralegal and Law School

Chabad's most important task is to ensure that Jewish students don't forget their Judaism. This surely isn't easy but Chabad manages to touch the lives of so many students. These past four years I knew that whenever there was a holiday or just a regular Friday night, I had a home and a family to turn to and celebrate. I would like to thank Chabad for making my four years at Binghamton so memorable and fulfilling.



Name: Ilya Teplitskiy
Major: Accounting
Future Plans: Job at Deloitte & Touche

1) It allowed me realize more about myself as a Jew while meeting and befriending some great people, who are Jews, in the process.

2) Earning college credit for learning about Judaism.

3) The Chabad House functions as the headquarters of everything Jewish on and off-campus. No matter what level of Judaism an individual practices or not practices, he/she is always welcome here. It is warming to know that you will always be welcome.

4) I like it just the way it is now. It is there for ones who want it, welcoming for ones that might want it, and respectable of people's choice for the ones that do not.



Name: Yael Tilevitz
Major: Biology
Future Plans: Aliyah, marriage, Environmental Education

Coming from an all girls yeshiva background, as well as Brooklyn, New York, Binghamton was something of a surprise. All of the sudden, I was surrounded by people who wondered what I was doing and why I was doing it. These encounters led me to further my understanding of my Jewish identity in a real and practical way. I remember my first Shabbat in Binghamton. I had just finished my year in seminary in Israel and I wandered into the Chabad House wishing I could be back in Israel. As I started to meet people, I met several people who had the same feelings, one of whom will be my husband! I then met other Jews with similar values and goals and realized that, though I was not in Israel, things would be okay. I started to look forward to Shabbat, and holidays in the Chabad house because I knew that it would "feel like Shabbat". As I started to volunteer with the day to day goings on at Chabad, I met many people who had rediscovered Judaism through Chabad. For all of us, the Chabad house was a way of connecting to Judaism. Whether you were looking for a daily minyan, or just a place to go on Friday night, this was the place. As I learned after I made Aliyah this winter, the skills I developed in the Chabad House did not leave me, and I am now involved in the Ariel Olim community, helping new olim get settled. As we move on in life, the joy we shared should multiply, the skills we learned should grow, and we should all merit greatness and happiness.



Name: Amy Weiner
Major: Psychobiology
Future Plans: MPH; Medical School

1) My experience at Binghamton enabled me to find my Jewish identity. Prior to coming to Binghamton, I had not had much Jewish education. That all changed when I started Binghamton in 2005. I enrolled in a Judaic studies course and that led to me taking more courses. I also discovered Chabad and that changed my life. Chabad offers some of the best teachers anyone could ask for. I sat and studied for hours and had all of my questions answered. Overall, my Jewish identity was shaped during my years at Binghamton.

2) My Bat Mitzvah, Shabbat Dinner, the Mitzvah Marathon and the Snorkel & Study program

3) Chabad House made my Jewish experience at Binghamton. I learned so much and I truly enjoyed my time there.

4) More classes on campus (not necessarily for credit)



Continued on Next Page

GRADUATES!!

To continue receiving the *Chai Times* and news from the Chabad House Alumni Association, please forward your new mailing address, telephone numbers and e-mail address to:

CHABAD HOUSE
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 VESTAL, NY 13850

or e-mail to
aslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com

Keep In Touch!

Name: Eliyahu Zazon
Major: Psychology/Pre-Health
Future Plans: Help others



1) Being an active member at the Chabad of Binghamton has not only enhanced my Jewish identity, but strengthened it as well. Through the weekly Shabbat meals, learning and Jewish events, my college experience was made complete and meaningful.

2) My most meaningful Jewish experience in Binghamton was being able to participate in and lead the Barry Raff Maasim Tovim/Mitzvah Corps hospital/nursing home visitation group. Bikur Cholim is one of the most rewarding mitzvot and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to fulfill it on a weekly basis.

3) The Chabad House is essential to obtaining a greater Jewish experience at Binghamton University. The Chabad House is truly the center for Jewish life at Binghamton University.

4) Sepharadi minyan.

Name: Daniel Zenilman
Major: History
Future Plans: Work; Grad School



Someone I met in Binghamton said that you can get a college diploma in two years, but the experience of learning about others and about yourself takes four years. I could not agree more. It is fitting that Chabad's foundation is based on an old Jewish concept of education. We have all learned here more than we could in the classroom. We learned about the Jewish faith and culture. More than that, we learned about each other. We learned that a Jew is a Jew regardless of any labels we may have learned earlier. I do not think that it is possible to learn all that in two years. Chabad House has created a home-like environment where anyone can learn and grow. Indeed, the slogan of this organization is "You're home away from home." We are all lucky to have found our way home.

Eruv Tavshillin

Ordinarily, we are permitted on Yom Tov to prepare only the foods necessary for that same day. This year, however, the second day of Shavuot, which is Yom Tov, falls on Friday, and the Shabbat meals must, as always, be prepared before Shabbat. Therefore, special action is required so that we may prepare the Shabbat meals on Friday. The *Eruv Tavshillin* ceremony, performed on Thursday, May 28, before sundown, renders this permissible. Consult your *Siddur* or *Machzor* for how to do the *Eruv Tavshillin* ceremony.

Chabad Alumni News

Mazel Tovs!

Class of '87

■ Lenny and Michelle Reback announce the birth of their daughter Samantha Rose on February 2, 2009.

Class of '95

■ Ephraim and Erica Edelman announce the birth of their daughter Shefa Ariel on November 26, 2008. She was welcomed home by big brothers Avishai (5) and Nadiv (2).

Class of '96

■ Rachel Weintraub and Scott Reiter announce the birth of their daughter Dalia Ronit on the last day of Pesach, April 16, 2009. She was welcomed by her older brother Ezra Aaron and older sister Eliana Bayla. The Weintraub Reiters live in Washington, DC.

Class of '99

■ Doron and Staci Zeif announce the birth of their daughter May Dahlia. She was welcomed home by big sister Kira.

Class of '00

■ Stu and Stacy (Bieder) Mayer announce the births of their sons Samuel Thomas, Kalman Eliezer, and Charles Matthew, Asher Yitzchak on April 19, 2009. They were welcomed home by big brothers Noah and Max.

■ Darrin and Jessica Peller announce the birth of their son on May 5. (Name was not yet given as this newspaper went to print).

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Class of '01

■ Stacy (Bieder) and Stu Mayer announce the birth of their sons on April 19, 2009. See '00 for complete details.

Class of '08

■ Sabrina Grunfeld announces her engagement to Max Gornish; a summer 2009 wedding is planned. Sabrina will pursue a degree in occupational therapy, Max is completing his Bachelors in Finance at YU. They will make their home in St. Louis.

Send us your Mazel Tovs so we can share them with the world!!

Chabad House expresses sincere condolences to

Jeremy Weisser '03

upon the untimely loss of his mother

Shoshana Weisser

and to

Rachel Sperling Solomon '96

and Benjamin Sperling '01

upon the untimely loss of their mother

Sandy (Zelda Itka) Sperling

*May the Almighty comfort you amongst the mourners of
 Zion and Jerusalem.*

How Do We Know That We Heard G-d at Sinai?

By Tzvi Freeman

To our enlightened Master and Teacher, the Grand Rabbi of Guadalajara, may he live many years of inner peace and transcendental serenity.

Forgive our ignorance this one more time, you who know the hiding place of all hidden things! Guide us tiny mice through the maze of confusion, oh solver of all puzzles! Explain to us how we can market to the general public this Great and Awesome Event upon which the foundations of our faith are built, this idea of Mass Revelation at Sinai.

Explain to us the evidence that makes it impossible to deny that before three thousand years a heavenly voice boomed down upon the crowd, saying, "I'm the only G-d around here, so you better not have any others. And don't let me catch any one of you lying, stealing, killing, coveting or being disrespectful to your Mom and Dad!"

And then open our eyes and let us know the truth of all truths, oh truthful and authentic sage: If such evidence is so clear and absolute, then why, we beseech you, have the tenured thinkers and scribes of many academic institutions rejected it so?

Response:

Certainly, as salted surfers of the Web, you are intimately familiar with conspiracy. You have heard that no man ever landed on the moon -- it was all filmed in Arizona. Continental drift was initiated in the 50's by the Pentagon to push Russia off the end of the earth. Prozac was developed by AT&T in an attempt to mold human personality to UNIX protocol. Bill Gates owns the Vatican and the Illuminati own Bill Gates. Kellogg's owns the Illuminati and you don't want to know what's in those golden flakes. Time-Warner/AOL is a front for an international association of nuns committed to directing asteroids at California. Asteroids are communist sputniks In case you have been deluded by the propaganda that communism is dead, Bill Clinton is a communist agent and Santa Claus as well.

Conspiracies are very popular, psychologists say, because they provide simple explanations for a very complex world. But they are absurd. Because, as we all know from Poor Richard's Almanac, three people can keep a secret if two of them are dead.

The FBI, KGB, FDA, Microsoft, Vatican, Franciscan nunnery of Homeville, Tennessee -- all are filled with competitive, fumbling, in-fighting human beings just like you and I (okay, maybe the nuns are a little more friendly than the guys at Microsoft. But then, so is the KGB). None of them could keep a conspiracy going longer than a week without wrangling over who is in charge, who messed up, who gets the goods, who gets the blame -- and all those other fun, human games that break up rock bands, countries and corporations every day.

If the FBI would attempt a conspiracy, some branch of the CIA would get all upset because conspiracies are their department and who do those glorified police officers think they are anyway? If the commies or any other enterprising group would find a way to take over the world, Microsoft would buy them out in a snap. Everybody knows what Microsoft is up to -- because everybody else invented all of it. And hey, they can't even conspire to make their OS work consistently.

The greatest conspiracy theory of all time is materialism. The idea that some 1080 particles of matter conspire every day to bring us the orderly form of this world before us. Everybody knows that particles can't agree on anything.

The second greatest conspiracy theory is that the Jews invented the Torah. That millions of Jews over thousands of years could conspire to agree on a single version of a national event that never happened. If nobody else can conspire on anything for more than a week, whoever imagined that Jewish people could get a conspiracy off the ground was totally off his rocker? (Actually, we've tried it. One look at Israeli politics will tell you just how hopeless that was.)

About History

Let's examine what the study of history is. Most of us will say that history is the study of what happened. That's bunk. We barely know what's happening right now. How does anybody know what happened in the past? And what defines what really happened?

Perhaps you know the story of one great Renaissance man, Sir Francis Bacon. Sitting in his room above the tavern, he thought, "I have written on philosophy, science and mathematics. Now I will take on history." As he set his pen to the page, Sir Francis glanced out his window and observed a commotion outside. Then he went downstairs to the tavern, where he heard no less than six highly divergent versions of what had occurred. Sir Francis went back upstairs and tore up what he had written so far. He never wrote a book on history.

I think most historians will agree that history as it is practiced in academic circles can be defined as follows: The search for the most likely sequence of events to explain whatever remnants have endured till today.

Following this paradigm, let us examine our case. The evidence is as follows: Universally, there is a single account of how the Jewish people received the Torah. It states that on the sixth day of the third month of the year 2448 from Creation, an entire nation full of dissidents and skeptics gathered at the foot of a mountain in the Sinai Desert and witnessed how G-d spoke with Moses. Rather overwhelmed by the experience, they asked Moses to kindly fetch all the details of what exactly G-d would like from them and report on it.



Which he did, over a period of forty years wandering in the desert. Moses also charged the people to keep multiple copies of the written record, which they did, and so we have many copies of that record to this day.

Here is the proposed most likely explanation of the existence of this record: Someone made up the whole story. Someone else later wrote it down. A third individual put it together with other manuscripts, and the entire nation conspired to agree that it had actually happened. They agreed to agree on only one version of how it had happened, eradicating any trace of dissent.

Basically, a conspiracy theory. This time, involving huge numbers of people over a very long period of time.

History is not laboratory science -- you can't test it and make observations. But you can still check a theory for inconsistencies. A few bumps here and there are excusable, but with the Jewish conspiracy theory we have some blatant contradictions. For instance:

(a) According to this theory, the Jews are by far the most ingenious people ever. Out of all the peoples of the ancient world, this nation of shepherds and fig-growers came up with the classic work of all time. The work that changed all of history, brought us the concepts of creation ex-nihilo, history, purpose, monotheism, providence, human rights, gave rise to both Christianity and Islam and triggered the Reformation and modernization of western civilization when those gentiles started actually reading it. A supremacy dogma if I ever heard one!

(b) According to this theory, the Jews are by far the stupidest and most gullible people in the world. They fell for a story that restricts their diet, their domination over their slaves, their weekly work habits and their sex-life beyond what any other nation would tolerate. They bought into a lose-lose situation for everybody all 'round: The King's power is restricted, the priestly class cannot own land, and the commoners can't sell it.

They abandon their fields and towns three times a year to the mercy of the hostile nations surrounding them, let those fields lie fallow once in seven years, let their slaves go free after six years, don't charge interest -- and just trust year after year that everything will be okay. After all, G-d promises that when you're planning to leave your land fallow in the seventh, He'll give you a bumper crop in the sixth. So tell me, what happens when one year this just doesn't work out? Do you leave that in the books you're writing?

Furthermore, this theory has the Jewish people making up fables about their blunders in full detail. They declare that they descend from slaves! They tell nasty stories about the forefather of their priestly class, Levi -- even though the Levites were supposed to have written the book. The original high priest gets his hands dirty in the biggest scandal of their history. Who is this fable serving, anyway? Why on earth would anyone want to make up such a story? And what sort of crazy people would want to preserve it?

Second contradiction:

(a) According to this theory, Jews are capable of agreeing on a single version of history. Obviously, to conspire together for so many years in delivering this grand hoax to the entire world, they must be highly cooperative, submissive to authority and like-minded. They must fit well into Eric Fromm's description of the True Believer.

(b) According to this theory, Jews have purposely painted a picture of themselves as recalcitrant, argumentative, scorning of authority and primed to kvetch at the drop of a hat. Not the sort of comrades you would want involved in your classic conspiracy. A personality described by Myers-Briggs Passive-Aggressive Disorder. Of course, this purposeful self-incrimination may be part of the plot. You may decide empirically which description suits best.

The Foundations of Conspiracy

All in all, the conspiracy theory stinks. It doesn't explain anything. There's absolutely no evidence that it's true. And it's about as elegant as a walrus in a tutu.

So what does it really stand on? On the very definite assumption that Sinai could not have happened.

Think for a minute: Did those 19th century German historians who introduced us to J, E, P and D (the supposed authors of the Pentateuch) ever examine the evidence and demonstrate scientifically that Sinai could not have happened? Of course not. They didn't need to. They just knew it couldn't happen. Why? Because G-d, if there is one, doesn't speak to Man. Especially lots of men. Period. No discussion.

You know, in the 18th century, astronomers did not believe in meteorites. Museums all over Europe threw out their precious meteorite specimens as humiliating reminders of superstitious mythology. Why? Because, as Antoine Lavoisier, father of modern chemistry declared, "Stones don't fall from the sky, because there are no stones in the sky!" Period. End of discussion.

Hold it! There's one piece of evidence the biblical critics will hold up: The Pentateuch is written in third person. As in "And then G-d spoke to Moses, saying..." as opposed to, "So then I had this chat with the Boss and He said..." Moses wouldn't write about himself in third person. Right? And Moses couldn't have composed the last eight verses describing his passing. So Moses couldn't have composed the Torah.

Continued on Page 10

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Right. We all agree on something. Moses did not compose the Torah. Nobody ever said he did. G-d composed it. Moses just wrote it down.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) writes in his introduction to his classic commentary on the Torah that this is the reason the Torah is written in third person: Because Moses is no more than a scribe copying from a primeval document. The Torah exists before creation, before time. It is G-d's wisdom, containing the original proposal, concept paper and design notes from which He created heaven and earth. Abraham knew it, Noah studied it, even Adam had the Torah. Moses was the first who was able to channel the Torah down to earth, to resolve it into ink on the page. If Moses had perceived himself as an author, as anything more than a transparent channel for G-dly wisdom, he would have been incapable of such a task.

To the point that, at the end of his transcribing, Moses attained the ultimate degree of self-abnegation: He writes about his own passing from this world. As the Talmud tells us, "G-d dictated and Moses wrote with tears."

In my humble opinion, Ramban's opinion seems much more internally consistent. It also makes fairy dust out of every other piece of evidence biblical critics will cite. And this is the traditional history stated clearly in the Torah: That an entire nation witnessed G-d speaking to Moses the Ten Commandments:

G-d said to Moses, Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever! (Exodus 19:9)

G-d spoke to you from the midst of the fire, you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form, only a sound. He told you of His covenant, instructing you to keep the Ten Commandments, and He inscribed them on two stone tablets. (Deut.4:9-13)

Once the people had witnessed this, they believed Moses. As Maimonides writes:

Israel did not believe in Moses, our teacher, because of the miracles he performed. When you base your faith on miracles, you're still in doubt. Maybe these miracles were done through magic and witchcraft...

So why did we believe him? The revelation on Sinai which we saw with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, not having to depend on the testimony of others... (Mishne Torah - Foundations of Torah 8:1)

Here we have it. A simple and elegant solution to why, of all nations, this nation ended up with the most counter-intuitive set of rules and customs that have by now overthrown the hierarchy of power and world-concept of most of human society. It was a mass revelation from Above. G-d said it, they had to do it.

Problem is, this doesn't fit with our definition of history: the most likely sequence of events to explain whatever remnants have endured. Divine revelation, especially to a crowd, cannot be called likely. I mean, have you seen one lately? When was the last time you were in a crowd, say at the mall, and a booming voice came out of the heavens to speak to the people?

So, the historian, as we have defined him, must reject it.

Digging a little deeper: Accepting G-d speaking to us at Sinai and instructing us in our daily affairs doesn't sound right to the materialist mind -- even if it believes in G-d. G-d is infinite. The world is a finite place made of finite, real things. G-d just can't fit in here. And so, even if we showed the materialist an onsite video certified by peer review, he would have to reject it. Because it just can't happen.

The human mind, when faced with a choice between the absurd and the impossible, will invariably choose the absurd. The absurd is far less frightening and easier to live with than the impossible. To accept the impossible is to undermine the very basis of the rational world we must live in. And here you are faced with just that choice: To accept an event that is totally out of the question to one who lives in a materialistic world, or simply explain all evidence away as artifacts of an absurd conspiracy.

The world a Jew believes in was created by G-d speaking. And it is sustained in that way over and over at every moment. Every second of the day, a Jew experiences G-d speaking to him or her -- through the events of life, through the mitzvahs that come our way, and especially through the Torah we learn each day. And so, what is so impossible if at one point in history the volume was turned way up and all of us heard the same thing at once? But for the materialist and his version of history, none of this is possible.

So we need another definition of history. As Thomas Kuhn would put it, a new paradigm.

History, the Other Way:

In Torah Law, history is defined by the testimony of eyewitnesses. When there are no witnesses available, testimony of a court that accepted the testimony of eyewitnesses is accepted. But if something cannot be corroborated by witnesses, as far as Torah is concerned it did not happen. It is simply not part of reality.

The simplest explanation for this reliance on eyewitnesses is because the Torah is not conspiracy-paranoid. Two witnesses in a decent court will have a very difficult time conspiring together if they have to describe the details of what they saw. Two people can tell the same story, but to describe the same scene precisely is next to impossible.

But if we were quantum physicists, we could philosophize about this a little. Perhaps eyewitnesses are vital because the human observer is a necessary element to all events. After all, this dichotomy of event and observer is a subjective one. Torah provides an objective view, in which event and observer are a single unit. Therefore,

one does not exist without the other. In fact, this is the way most quantum physicists prefer to understand the universe. Interestingly, if you were a gentile theoretical physicist living in Germany after 1933, you were labeled a white Jew. Hey, maybe Moses was a physicist!

Furthermore, the idea of searching for the most likely path to arrive at the present smacks of causality-worship. Our white-Jew friend, Heisenberg, knocked that idol off its pedestal a long time ago. According to his way of thinking, anything could happen. In fact, as Schrodinger puts it, until an observer is there, anything did happen.

Having two accounts is also a good scientific approach. Any observation must be confirmed by more than one party in order to get into a textbook. Because a single observer could be reporting on no more than his own perceptual distortion, or the particular conditions of his frame of reference. Accordingly, the best testimony to any event would be that of a large and highly diverse audience.

Torah demands two witnesses. The court drills the witnesses separately to check for discrepancies in their reports. They make certain that both saw the same event at the same time from corresponding perspectives. They make sure there isn't another set of witnesses that has a conflicting eyewitness report. And then their testimony is accepted as fact. And if what the witnesses tell us is the most outrageous and preposterous event unimaginable, we must accept that as the truth.

Within this paradigm, there is no more certain event in the history of humankind than the revelation at Mount Sinai. We're not talking about a couple of broken shards, or an excavated building for archaeologists to argue over. We're not talking about the account of a single individual, or of a handful of ready-made believers. We're talking a mass eyewitness account of a wide spectrum of observers, passed down in an unbroken chain through multiple paths without distortion. We have the consensus of an entire nation for over 3000 years on a single version of that event (Jewish people actually agreeing on something!).

Contrary to popular misconception, Jews don't believe the Torah is Divine because they are gullible, or because it sounds cool and resonates with their inner soul. We know the Torah is Divine because we empirically experienced that to be so. And ever since, we trust the testimony of our teachers and parents who all agree on the same, single version of that empirical event. If you can't trust them, who can you trust?

To put it in terms of Talmudic logic: If one set of witnesses says, "We speculate that it happened like this", and the other says, "We definitely saw that it happened like that", you must believe the second set. The biblical critics speculate -- and they all argue with each other on those speculations. Our tradition states with certainty -- in a single version.

Perhaps the story was exaggerated over the centuries? Also extremely unlikely. We have a single version in our hands. To conspire at making the same exaggerations over centuries is even more preposterous than making the whole thing up together at once and fooling the world.

So here's the paradigm score:

	Pros	Cons
Sinai Theory	Unbroken tradition from mass eye witnesses.	Sounds outrageously impossible.
Conspiracy Theory	Sounds nicer.	Explains zilch.

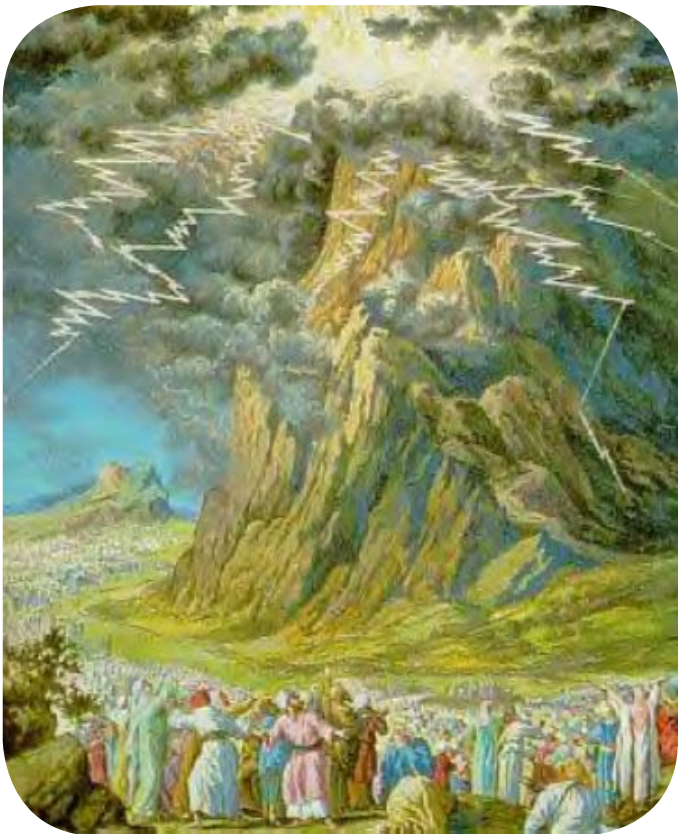
Myths in General

Now you're going to say, "Does this mean that if any nation tells us the legends of their people, we must accept it as truth? What if they claim that G-d gave them the truth and that their ways are the real path?"

If any people will tell you with consistency that a significant portion of their nation witnessed G-d speaking to them, believe them. We're not talking here about a legend about one hero who slew a monster. Or a wise man who heard an angel in a cave. We're talking about an account that states how a nation experienced its history.

In fact, many such legends are true. Just because anthropologists don't think they can get grants for proving native history as authentic doesn't affect history. 19th century historians offhandedly assumed Homer's account of the Trojan War to be a fable, until Heinrich Schliemann went and dug up the evidence. Now the Iliad is looked to as a source of historical data. Anthropologists discounted the legends of the Hopi People of Arizona that described how some of them had travelled to a northern land of rock and ice -- until very recently a lone researcher found the unmistakable traces of their journeys in the frozen north. If a people are telling you something about their origins or their history, listen up. This is important data to them, and it is generally accurately preserved.

Nevertheless, most of these legends nobody ever really believed to be historical fact. Most peoples never even had any concept of historical fact. Aside from the ancestral history mentioned above, they told stories to build common identity and entertain the family around a bonfire at night. Stories that happened



Continued on Page 2

Chabad HAPPENINGS

**The Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation at Work**

Students from Chabad, under the aegis of the Barry Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation, have been visiting area nursing homes and hospitals each Friday bringing flowers and good cheer and gaining so much more in return.

**Welcoming Back The Chometz**

Happy students crammed the Chabad Cafe/Pizza Shop on Thursday night after Passover ended for a midnight Post Pesach Bagel Bust.

The bagels, shmears, waffles, eggs and company were delicious! Welcome Back Chametz! was the overriding sentiment.

Photos by J. Munn

**Siyum on Mesechet Megillah**

The Wednesday night Beit Midrash program dubbed "Supper with Soul" came to a dramatic finale with a Siyum made by Tom Triebwasser and Elan Noorparver who completed their Chevruta study of Mesechet Megillah in the Talmud and celebrated with a festive dinner. May they merit to conclude many more such studies always beginning another. From strength to strength!

**Shalashudis 180!**

Chabad Seudat Shlishit (originally known as Shalashudis) is a whole different time and place. It's mellow, intimate, completely chilled. Just friends enjoying the last moments of Shabbos peace before "the week" begins anew. This year's special seudat shlishit topped previous records with the crowds coming out to see and be seen and taste the outrageous smorgasbord feast prepared for just this event.

**Yeshiva for a Day**

BU guys got a taste of Yeshiva on Sunday, April 26 when eight Rabbinical students came up from NY City to run Yeshiva for a Day which included interactive Chevrotah study, lectures and delicious food for the body as well. Chabad was alive with the sound of Torah.

Photos by J. Munn

**The Great Dessert Bake-Off**

Who knew life could get better at Chabad than the lavish dessert buffet on Friday nights after a full course dinner? But that's exactly what happened on the Friday of April 24 when contestants vied for the title of Dessert Queen/King. What a delicious contest it was!



Chabad HAPPENINGS

Shabbat 1500 Rocked!

They said it couldn't be done but when it comes to Binghamton's Jewish Community - never say never!

Despite the fact that Binghamton had booked its biggest act to date with Jon Stewart playing the event center, 1200 BU students filled the East Gym, joining in one of the biggest Shabbat dinners ever held on a campus.

The food was delicious, the spirit was electric and the sight unforgettable: so many young Jews from every background and social set, united in celebration of their heritage!

Kudos to the fabulous students who worked so hard to make it happen - Yasher Kochachem!

Photos by J. Munn



Knead Dough?

Hadasa's Challah baking workshops at Chabad have become a raving hit at which BU students get to learn about the Mitzvah of Challah, mix, knead, shape and bake their own to take home! Doing the Challah Twist is always fun!

Photos by A. Kassimir



For many more pictures of these and other Chabad activities, please see our website:
www.ChabadofBinghamton.com

The first annual Cholent Cook Off

It was a hot and spicy contest with five contestants vying for the title of Cholent Champ. Ian Schrier and Jon Cogan won the title and donned the crown and apron while Alex Tafet accepted the Scepter as the runner up. The real winners were everyone in attendance as they got to sample a smorgasbord of cholents. Can't wait for next year!

Chabad's on the Ball

Chabad's basketball team knows how to enjoy themselves and have fun. You gotta love them!

