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**My First Orthodox**

**Wedding and the**

**Unveiling of My Own Truth**

**By [Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/23400/jewish/Tamarkin-Sofya-Sara-Esther.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Browse%20more%20articles%20by%20Tamarkin%2C%20Sofya%20Sara%20Esther)**



 I will never forget the day I attended my first Orthodox Jewish [wedding](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/476757/jewish/Jewish-Wedding-Ceremony.htm). My husband and I had the honor of being invited to the wedding of Daniel, a younger brother of the rebbetzin of our community. This was 20 years ago, yet I still remember the moment we walked into the beautiful hall in Brooklyn, N.Y. I was struck by the sea of black hats and black suits.

 While all the men looked the same, the women were dressed in colorful, elegant gowns. Feeling lost, I followed the crowd into a magnificent room where the bride was seated in a throne-like chair alongside her mother, sisters and female family members of the groom’s family. Hors d’oeuvres and refreshments were stationed in the middle of the room.

**Discovered by Another Guest**

 Guests stood in line to approach the bride to congratulate her. I couldn’t hear exactly what people were saying, but I assumed they were wishing her *[mazal](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/160965/jewish/What-Does-Mazel-Tov-Mean.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22What%20Does%20%5C%22Mazel%20Tov%5C%22%20Mean)*[*tov.*](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/160965/jewish/What-Does-Mazel-Tov-Mean.htm)

Then I heard a friendly voice and a woman introduced herself as Lynn Garfinkel. She was a guest too and noticed that I seemed lost in this unfamiliar environment. Lynn explained that the bride has a power to give blessings on her wedding day and encouraged me to join the line. I felt too intimidated to do as she suggested, so I stood to the side watching these meaningful interactions. It was so special to think that on her wedding day, the bride was not focused on herself but used the opportunity to bless her guests.

 I asked my new chaperone of the whereabouts of the groom. She explained that there were two separate [pre-*chuppah* receptions](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/477332/jewish/Kabbalat-Panim-Pre-Chupah-Reception.htm), one for the bride and another for the groom, because they refrained from seeing each other for a [full week](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/475825/jewish/The-Week-Beforehand.htm) prior to their wedding. This separation increased anticipation before the big day.

 Just as I was about to inquire about when the bride and the groom would be reunited, I heard beautiful singing in the distance. Lynn was excited to explain that the veiling ceremony, called the *[badeken](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/313719/jewish/The-Jewish-Veiling-Ceremony-Bedeken.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22The%20Jewish%20Veiling%20Ceremony%20%28Bedeken%29)*, was about to take place.

 I looked behind me and saw a procession of men heading towards the bride. They were singing and dancing around the groom, who approached the bride and reached out to cover her face with a veil. I was mesmerized by this mysterious ceremony.

**Born Under a Communist Regime**

 Born in the former Soviet Union under Communist regime, I was not familiar with any of these customs. I knew little about my Jewish traditions, yet somehow it felt comfortable to my soul. Here I was, in my early 20s, a young mother unsure about my identity and unfamiliar with my Jewish heritage. That day, I felt particularly lost among the sea of black hats and beautiful wigs.

 I stood in awe of the people who knew exactly what was happening. Everyone seemed at ease, familiar with each step of the ceremony. I remember thinking about my own family and about my son’s upbringing. Unlike my husband and me, our son was not going to live in Soviet society, brainwashed by an atheist culture. But if we were not to educate our children in the Jewish value system, then how would they ever feel comfortable amongst people who were familiar with Judaism and lived it every day?

 While watching the ceremony, one thing became absolutely clear: I wanted my children to belong and to feel connected to their heritage. As the groom covered his bride’s face, I felt incredible clarity about my own path in life. Somehow, this ceremony uncovered a 70-year transmission gap that linked me to my Jewish identity.

**Began to Cry**

 Unexpectedly, as I stood in the corner of the room, I began to cry. Lynn was by my side, exhibiting kindness and empathy as I found myself repeatedly overwhelmed by emotion throughout the night. As I watched Esti, the beautiful and pure bride, stand under the *chuppah* with her groom, my soul felt awakened and cleansed by my tears.

 Later, I learned that the custom of covering the bride’s face with a veil originates from our matriarch Rebecca, who covered her face when she first met her groom, Isaac. The custom was repeated when Leah’s face was covered at her wedding to Jacob. Many reasons are given for this [custom](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/267679/jewish/Why-Does-a-Jewish-Bride-Wear-a-Veil-on-Her-Face.htm), but one is that the groom is not solely interested in the bride’s external beauty, but in her inner integrity.

 I have heard brides describe how the veil covering their face under the *chuppah* helped them feel completely in the moment—all distraction removed with the privacy to focus on their future life with their groom.

 I, too, wanted to uncover my inner essence that was hidden beneath the surface. I instinctively knew that underneath the Soviet mentality and my own “personal Egypt” was an opportunity to experience freedom and liberation. That day, as I watched the groom break the glass, I made a commitment to find my way back to my people and my G‑d.

**One Clap at a Time**

 When I heard everyone cheer *mazal tov*, the words were familiar. I clapped along with the other guests. One clap at a time, one word at a time, one step at a time.

 Many changes and big adjustments have happened during the last two decades in my life. My children received a Jewish education. My husband and I committed to building a Jewish kosher home. Every week, we welcome Shabbat into our lives and discuss Torah wisdom at our table.

 While we are now much more familiar with our Jewish heritage, we still remain influenced by our Soviet upbringing; it is part of who we are. This is my journey, but I am no longer confused.

 My favorite part of the Orthodox wedding is still the veiling ceremony. When I watch the groom cover his bride’s face, I remind myself that the real growth and real beauty is hidden from the eye. We all have our unique light hidden within. All we have to do is uncover it.

 Born in the Soviet Union, Sofya Sara Esther lives in Philadelphia, runs an orthopedic company, and holds an MBA degree. She teaches Torah, travels the world, and is involved with RAJE (Russian American Jewish Experience) and other outreach organizations. Email Sofya at  HowDoIGrow@hotmail.com

for questions about self-growth and achieving life purpose.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

# Rav Avigdor Miller on

# Does Hashem Owe Us Food



 **QUESTION: Why should we give thanks to Hashem for the food that He gives us? He made us; of course He has to feed us.**

 **ANSWER:** That’s an old question that they ask here many times. If He created us, shouldn’t He have to feed us?

 And the answer is, why should He?!

 Let’s say somebody gave you a car and now you ring his bell in the morning. “What do you want now?” he asks you.

 “Where’s the gasoline?” you say to him.

 “You want gasoline from me too?!”

 And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave you a body.  He could say, “Go look for food yourself.  Scrounge! You can’t find a grocery store? So go someplace in the country; maybe you’ll find wild berries. I have to support you?  I gave you a body!  Just for that you should thank Me all your life!”

 And therefore, it’s only ingratitude that causes this attitude.

 It’s like children today, American boys and girls.  They say to their parents, “Who told you to bring me into the world?  Now you have to support me and buy me a car and give me money for narcotics and every kind of fun that I want to have.”  And their parents are dumb enough to do it.

 The parents can say, “Look.  We gave you your bodies.  Take care of yourselves from now on and be grateful that you’re alive.”
 And so, if you weren’t so ungrateful, you’d be thanking Hashem all the time that you’re alive – you wouldn’t even think of demanding that He give you food too.

*Reprinted from the March 17, 2021 email of Toras Avigdor. - TAPE # 447 (February 1983)*

**The Connection Between the Bread of Affliction and Our Desire to be in the Land of Israel**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 On the verse "He tells His words to Jacob, His laws and ordinances to Israel" our Sages comment: "That which G-d does, He tells Israel to do." Conversely, G-d himself fulfills the same precepts He commands the Jewish people to fulfill. It follows, then, that on the night of the Passover seder G-d "reads" the Hagada along with us, albeit in a higher, more spiritual sense.

 The Hagada begins with the words "This is the bread of affliction." This opening section makes three points:

 This is the bread of affliction (matza) that our forefathers ate in Egypt.

 Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and conduct the Passover seder.

 This year we are here; next year in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

 The Jewish people are not alone in their exile; G-d is in exile with them. The inner meaning of exile and "affliction" is a lack of understanding and perception of G-dliness; indeed, the entire concept of exile is none other than the concealment of the true G-dliness that sustains the world.

 G-d fills the entire universe; the reason we cannot see this openly is because the Divine Presence is in exile. Thus, "This is the bread of affliction" refers to the phenomenon of exile, "which our forefathers (avot -- symbolic, in Chasidic philosophy, of human understanding and intellect) ate in the land of Egypt". (Mitzrayim -- from the Hebrew meaning limitation, i.e., within the limitations imposed by the physical world.)

 Next, G-d gives us His "recipe" for redemption: "Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat." I promise, G-d declares, that whoever is hungry for the truth, for the light of My holy Torah, will have his spiritual hunger sated.

 "Whoever is in need, let him come." Even a person who is already knowledgeable and well-versed in Jewish teachings will be blessed with a richness of understanding, just as the Paschal sacrifice was eaten only after the meal, on a full stomach.

 This "richness" leads to the third point: Even though we are now "here," in exile, "next year in the land of Israel" -- we will be in a state of redemption. Not that we will have to wait an entire year for Moshiach to come, G-d forbid, but the Redemption will occur "in the blink of an eye," and by this time next year we will have long since been "in the land of Israel."

 "This year we are slaves, next year we will be free people." In the Messianic Era we will experience the ultimate liberation, for Moshiach will uncover the true and inner essence of every Jew, and the entire world will attain its ultimate freedom.

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Tzav edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Tzav 5781**



 The Torah begins this week's reading with the verbal commandment –Tzav – ordering Moshe to command and demand from his brother Aaron certain fulfillments of ritual and service in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. The verb that is used is one of strength. Just as in a well-disciplined army, an officer's commands are fulfilled to be able to execute grand strategies, so, too, in Jewish life. The only way that the great strategy of connection with the Creator, living a holy life and being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation can be fulfilled is by obeying and observing commandments.

 This is true even if the lowly private does not understand or is not even aware of the grand strategy of the general staff supervising the army. So, too, there are many times in Jewish life when we as individuals may question the validity and necessity of following an order, just as the soldier in the army. But just as simply by joining the Army and becoming a part of it forfeits that soldier's right to disobey orders.

**An Agreement to Fulfill G-d’s Orders**

 The Jewish people at Sinai agreed that they would fulfill G-d's orders, irrespective of their deeper understanding of those orders themselves. This may sound too authoritarian, even dictatorial, to modern ears and sensitivities. Nevertheless, it was and is the basis for Jewish life throughout the millennia of our existence. There are many things in life that we do simply because we are commanded to do so. If we have belief in the One that commands them despite human questions and doubts, we will always attempt to fulfill our duty and obey the commandment.

 The text of all blessings, before performing any of the Torah commandments, explicitly states that G-d has sanctified us by giving us these commandments, and that He commands that we fulfill them to the utmost extent that we can. Over the centuries, there have been many scholarly explanations and reasons given for certain Torah commandments. Times change though, as do societal mores, customs, and social viewpoints.

**The Torah is Nevertheless Eternal**

What may have been a perfectly logical and satisfactory explanation for the necessity of a commandment a few centuries ago, may today have no relevance, and be viewed as only hollow words and ideas. But the Torah, which is eternal and given for all times and situations, chose to avoid giving easy explanations as to the reasons for its commandments and demands of the Jewish people.

 Instead, it relies upon the fact of the binding covenant that the Jewish people entered at Mount Sinai, that has obligated this special people to the Almighty for now and well over three millennia. We certainly wish to understand everything that we can about the competence, direction, and strategy of the Torah. However, we admit that after all is said and done, our ability to understand everything is limited and often fallacious. The bedrock of Jewish life is that we have been commanded and that we are willing to fulfill these decrees fully.

*Reprinted from the current website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Tzav**

**Ours is to Question Why…**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



 “*And Aharon and his sons carried out all the matters that HASHEM commanded through Moshe*.” — Vayikra 8:36

 After a long and detailed description of the avodah (service) to be done in the Mishkan, the parshah ends by telling us that “Aharon and his sons did as they were told.”

 Rashi seems to be bothered by how obvious this statement is. Of course Aharon did what HASHEM told him to do! Why is it necessary to say so? Rashi explains that the Torah includes it as a statement of praise: Aharon and his sons didn’t veer off to the right or to the left.

 This Rashi is difficult to understand. It doesn’t seem like he answered his question. Of course, Aharon didn’t veer off to the left or the right. This was the avodah in the Mishkan that he was performing, and the directives came straight from HASHEM. Would he possibly think that he knew better than HASHEM how to perform the service? If that wasn’t reason enough, the Torah tells us repeatedly that the punishment for a Kohen who deviates from the avodah is death.

 Imagine a man working with high voltage electrical equipment. He has been given clear safety instructions. Make sure the power is off before you switch on the transformer. Make sure that you are wearing protective gloves and that you are grounded. Wouldn’t we expect him to follow every nuance because of the danger involved?

 So what type of praise is this? The answer to this question can be best understood with an example.

**In the Image of HASHEM**

 There is a story told about an Englishman who visited a farm in Texas in the 1880’s. As he approached the ranch, he saw a cowboy herding the cows. He asked to see the cowboy’s boss. In doing so, he used an expression common in England then: “Is your master at home?”

 The cowboy put both hands on his hips and proclaimed, “The son of a gun ain’t been born yet.”

 This anecdote is illustrative of a very human trait: we don’t like to be bossed around. In fact, we hate it. I’ll gladly help you, I’ll do anything for you — but ask nicely. Boss me around and forget it. I’m out of here.

 This isn’t just a quirk of human nature. It’s a direct outgrowth of man’s inherent greatness.

 Chazal explain that when the Torah writes that HASHEM created man in His image, it isn’t merely an expression. Man is both the reason for all of existence and the maintainer of it. Everything physical has a spiritual counterpart sustaining it. HASHEM put man into the role of being the one who upholds the spiritual level of the world. His actions, deeds, and thoughts build upper worlds and sustain the lower worlds. Our eyes may not be attuned to it, but man is the maintainer of physicality. He is more significant than we can ever imagine, more important than anything we can envision. He is a little creator.

**Bosses Don’t Like Being Bossed Around**

 While this greatness of soul allows man to reach dizzying heights, it also comes with a liability. It is very difficult for us to follow orders. Even when we know that they are right. Even when we know that they are good for us. Even when those orders are given by the greatest of all greats, by the Creator of the heavens and the earth. We don’t like taking orders.

 This seems to be the answer to the question on Rashi.

 Aharon was one of the greatest men who ever lived, and he had a high and lofty sprit. As such, it should have been very difficult for him to follow orders. For him, “doing as he was told” should have been very hard. Nevertheless, it wasn’t. He was exceedingly humble, so he was able to recognize his greatness and act in a bold and innovative manner when it was called for, yet accept that HASHEM was in charge. As great as he was, he was but a servant in front of his Master. He had overcome one of the paramount challenges to man — recognizing his greatness yet remaining humble.

 Understanding this balance is critical for our growth. The Torah wasn’t given to robots, or for people to follow it blindly without understanding. We are expected to ask questions and delve into the reasoning behind things. We are obligated to strain our minds to the best of our ability in the process. And yet, we are expected to yield to the superior wisdom of our Creator and to humbly submit to His directives. Ours is to question why, and yet ours it to do or die.

*Reprinted from the website of Theshmuz.com.*

**Hametz and the Yetzer Hara**

 We are approaching Pesach, and the *parasha* hints to this holiday. Rabbi Frand writes that *Vayikra* contains the *halachot* of various sacrifices, including the *Korban Minha*. The *Minha* offering is made from flour and oil and although it is baked, it is not allowed to become leavened. Neither *seor—leavening agents* nor *devash*—*sweetener* may be added (2:11).

 *Rabbenu* Bechaye brings two reasons for this prohibition. Rambam says in *Moreh Nevuchim*, the custom of idolaters, when bringing food to their gods, was to specifically add leavening agents and sweeteners. Therefore, the Torah prohibits preparing a flour offering in the same fashion used by the pagans.

**The Purpose of the Sacrifice**

**Is to Achieve Atonement**

 *Rabbenu* Bechaye writes his own explanation for this as well. A sacrifice is meant to achieve atonement. Were it not for a person’s evil inclination, the person would never sin and there would be no need for sacrifices. Leaven and sweeteners represent man’s evil inclination. In other words, *hametz* is symbolic of the *yetzer hara*; therefore, the offering brought to atone for sin must be free of *hametz*[.](https://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?session_redirect=true&userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1616078449&cf=sp&randid=845330804)

 When yeast is added to the other ingredients in a challah recipe, the small amount of dough in the mixing bowl suddenly rises, filling the entire bowl and perhaps even overflowing. How does this happen? It’s not magic, it’s the effect of carbon dioxide. The CO2 gas created by the mixture of flour, water, and the leavening agent makes the dough rise. If a person sticks his finger in the middle of the dough after it rises, the dough plops down, falling flat.

**The False Power of the Yetzer Hora**

 This is why the *seor* is like the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* appears to us as an enormous power of huge dimensions. But in reality, it’s all air. If we lightly puncture it, it will collapse. We all have our *yetzer haras* – sometimes for money, sometimes for honor, sometimes for women. But it is an illusion. We think the *yetzer hara* is unconquerable, but most of it is fluff. For this reason, the evil inclination is compared to the leavening agent.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5781 email of Rabbi Amrmam Sananes as written by Jack E Rahmey.*

**ArtScroll Shloshim Tribute to**

**Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, zt”l**

By Daniel Keren



 It was early last month that the entire Jewish world was deeply saddened to learn of the petirah (passing away) of Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, M.D., zt”l, who had just celebrated his 90th birthday. Besides being a successful psychiatrist who treated thousands of Jews and non-Jews alike who suffered from numerous destructive addictions; he was a beloved author and speaker whose message on the importance of self-esteem resonated so much with readers around the world.

 Rabbi Dr. Twerski authored 90 books on various Torah topics as well as the need to be a confident individual. An underlying theme in his many books and talks

 My favorite Rabbi Dr. Twerski book is his 2003 beautiful 448 page coffee table “Twerski on Chumash” overflowing with inspiring and insightful comments on the weekly Torah portion. There is hardly a Shabbos that I don’t take this volume to the table to read.

 And each Shabbos the idea occurred to me that after the holy day, I should write a short letter of appreciation to the author and mail it to ArtScroll to forward to the author. Unfortunately I never followed up, so this review of the 57 minute ArtScroll Sheloshim Tribute is the best that I can do. And yet, I have no doubt that Rabbi Twerski’s neshama will appreciate it.

 The thoughtfully done Sheloshim Tribute by ArtScroll began with a heartwarming introduction by Rabbi Nosson Scherman, the longtime General Editor of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications who spoke of how it was always such a treat whenever the bestselling author would make a visit to the office of the world’s largest publisher of Orthodox Jewish books.

**A Perfect Frumer Yid who Happened to be a Psychiatrist**

 What impressed Rabbi Scherman was the spiritual integrity of Rabbi Dr. Twerski. He noted that you can be a psychiatrist who is an Orthodox Jew. But primarily you are a psychiatrist. Your values in today’s society may be that of a psychiatrist or that of an attorney or that of an accountant. But with Rabbi Dr. Twerski you had a person who was a perfect frumer Yid who happened to be a psychiatrist and his practice of his profession was always within the parameters of his what he was – a frumer Yid.

 The three keynote speakers at the ArtScroll Sheloshim Tribute included two fellow bestselling ArtScroll authors – Rabbi Berel Wein, renowned rav and world famous Jewish historian; and Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, popular author of the ArtScroll “Maggid” series, renowned mohel and inspirational speaker.

 Rabbi Wein, a native of Chicago recalled his 75 year-long friendship with the nifter (the deceased) going back to the years they learned together at the Beis HaMidrash LaTorah in Chicago (now relocated to Skokie, Illinois under the name of the Hebrew Theological College.) They continued their friendship until last month’s petirah of Rabbi Twerski.

 Rabbi Wein noted that before coming to Chicago, Rabbi Twerski grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where his father was the Hornistopler Rebbe of Milwaukee. There were no Orthodox Jewish yeshivas or even day school in Milwaukee in the 1930s and 1940s and the future Rabbi Twerski had to attend public school until he was old enough to be enrolled in the Chicago yeshiva.

**On Par with the Illuys of Lublin**

 Nevertheless with Torah teaching of his father, he was still one of the best students at Beis HaMidrash LaTorah. In fact Rabbi Wein recalled that their teacher Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth [who later became the Chief Rabbi of Congregation Machzikei Hadaas in Antwerp, Belgium] said of Rabbi Twerski that had he been in the famous yeshiva in Lublin [Poland], he would have been recognized as one of the great illuys (Torah geniuses) of the generation.

 Rabbi Paysach Krohn spoke of how much he was impressed by the many talks he heard Rabbi Twerski give over at Torah gatherings and how inspired he was when the nifter led the Shabbos morning davening at one of those events.

 Completing the almost hour-long tribute to a man whose many accomplishments will continue to benefit Klal Yisroel was his grandson – Rabbi Chaim Twerski – who declared that his zeidie never carried the mantle of being a world renowned psychiatrist helping people with addiction ailments or the author of popular self-help and inspiring books. He was just Zeidie who was there for his family and could be approached on almost any topic or concern.

 As we are approaching the joyous but difficult to get ready for festival of Pesach, I will end the review of the ArtScroll Sheloshim Tribute by recalling an incredible story related by the grandson.

**The Clash Between a Special Minhag and Shalom Bayis**

 Rabbi Chaim Twerski noted that the special minhag of baking matzos on the afternoon before Pesach was a specially highly regarded custom of the nifter. For a few days before he talked on numerous occasions to his grandson of just how much he was anticipating the chance to participate in helping to bake the matzos and how special it would be to eat those matzos on the Seder night.

 They were in the car and the grandfather was about to start driving to the matzah bakery, when all of a sudden he pulled the car out of the ignition and said that they were going home instead. When his grandson asked why, he explained that his Bubbie (Rabbi Twerski’s wife) was napping. Another granddaughter and her husband recently married were invited. He had unsuccessfully tried to call the granddaughter to find out when she was coming.

 He was afraid that her knocking on the door would wake up Bubbie who needed her nap. Rabbi Twerski said to his grandson Chaim that shalom bayis (tranquility in the home) was more important than even the holy minhag of baking matzos on the afternoon before the Passover Seder. And he never uttered one regret about having to forgo his beloved custom.

 Readers wanting to view this beautiful Sheloshim Tribute to one of the greatest practitioners of ahavas Yisroel (love and respect for a fellow Jew) can google ArtScroll Shloshim Event to Pay Tribute to Dr. Abraham J Tweski.

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