

בס"ד

Shluchim Sermons



Bereishis

G-D'S LOVE FOR JEWS

The foundation of Judaism, according to a Yeshiva student traveling to Columbia.

What Will You Teach Him?

Good Shabbos!

It's this time of year every year that the international Chabad movement holds its flagship event: the International Conference of Shluchim.

At a Shluchim Convention some fifteen years ago, one of the featured speakers was Mr. George Rohr.

The Rohr family has been supporting the Rebbe's emissaries on a major global level for many years now, particularly those in the Former Soviet Union. They likewise focus support on Chabad campus outreach throughout the world.

The patriarch of the family, the late Sammy Rohr, began the family's tradition of Chabad support many years ago. Today, his son George continues the tradition. And so, at that Convention, Sammy related how his family came to be connected to Chabad.

The Rohr family originated from Bogota, Colombia, where Rohr Senior did extremely well in business and became the Jewish community's most prominent philanthropist. From time to time, rabbis from Israel would arrive in Bogota to raise funds for their yeshivos, and they all

knew that a visit to Sammy Rohr's office was a must.

Now, Mr. Rohr would greet everyone with a friendly smile. He also employed a lot of Jewish architects, attorneys, accountants and so on, and when the rabbis would show up, he would ask them to go from office to office to speak to his employees about Judaism. But to his frustration, the rabbis would balk at that—they had come to collect checks and get on their way; they had no real interest in connecting with Mr. Rohr's workers.

However, every summer, a group of yeshiva students sent by the Rebbe would visit Bogota every summer. Mr. Rohr noticed that they didn't come to raise funds but rather, to seek out Jewish souls. As such, when they came to Mr. Rohr's offices, they would pop in on every Jewish employee in his office, put tefillin on him, and get him interested in Jewish education for his kids, keeping a kosher kitchen, and so on. Sammy Rohr came to know that the Rebbe's shluchim were made of different material, and he appreciated it.

And so, in 1978, Sammy's daughter, George's sister, started dating a young Jewish man from a suburb just outside Bogota. He was a fine gentleman and, most importantly, as we say, was a nice Jewish boy, but he didn't come from a traditional home.

After one year, the young man decided that it was time to approach Mr. Sammy Rohr and ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. So they met.

Mr. Rohr said that he had no objection to him marrying his daughter, but, since his Jewish knowledge was very minimal, he wanted him to go to a yeshivah in Israel to study for a full year—to learn and familiarize himself with Judaism and then, he could decide how much he wanted to observe and keep. But before that, he needed to at least know before he could make that decision.

Now the young man, who days later became his son-in-law-to-be, said that there was no way that he could just leave for a full year—he was already working full-time in his family’s textile business along with his father and brother, and it was simply not practical to leave for 12 full months.

So Mr. Rohr started negotiating: perhaps he could go to Israel for at least six months? But in the end, he also realized that it wasn’t practical.

But then, he got another idea: to bring a yeshiva student from Israel to Colombia to study with his future son-in-law. Mr. Rohr approached the young man and asked him to guarantee him that if he’d bring a young student in from Israel, that he’d study with him five hours a day.

Well, the groom-to-be agreed.

So Mr. Rohr, who had a trip to Israel planned anyway at the time, decided that while he was in Israel, he’d seek out a yeshiva student who’d agree to come to Colombia for a time to study Judaism with his future son-in-law.

Well, he got to Israel and set about meeting with many Roshei Yeshivos to whose yeshivos he had regularly donated, asking them to find a young student for him who’d be prepared to go to Colombia for half a year or more, and he’d cover all expenses in addition to a respectable salary.

But for starters, the rabbis were not excited about sending a student to Colombia. Secondly, once he had already been introduced to several suitable students, Mr. Rohr noticed that it would be difficult for an ordinary yeshiva bochur to connect with a young man from Colombia who had minimum knowledge of Judaism. When he would ask the candidates, “What would you study with him in Colombia?” he noticed from the yeshiva students’ responses that they had had no

concept of how to connect with a young man who came from a different background.

Ultimately, Sammy Rohr met with Rabbi Ephraim Wolf, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Chabad yeshivah in Lod, Israel.

Rabbi Wolf and Mr. Rohr had been acquainted with each other for many years now. Sammy told him that he was looking for a yeshiva student to come out to Colombia—and that within hours Rabbi Wolf found a suitable candidate. When Mr. Rohr asked the young man, “What are you going to teach my future son-in-law?” the yeshiva student, without blinking an eye, immediately answered: “I will teach him that he needs to love every Jew!” When Mr. Rohr heard that, he was thrilled and said, “That’s exactly what I was looking for!”

But Rabbi Wolf said that, Number One, they wouldn’t be sending just one student—if he’d be going to Colombia, then they’d have to send him with a study partner, too! *Well*, Sammy Rohr thought to himself, *I had planned to bring one student out, and now I’ll have to pay for two...* Secondly, and most importantly, Rabbi Wolf said that they needed to ask the Rebbe—such a thing is not done without the Rebbe’s approval. Rabbi Wolf would regularly speak to the Rebbe’s office every day and so, the Rebbe’s response came the very next day: Go Immediately. And so two yeshiva students were on their way to Colombia by Tuesday, even before Sammy Rohr himself had left Israel.

So Mr. Rohr called his future son-in-law and informed him that two yeshivah students were coming to Colombia to study with him and that he was supposed to meet them at the airport and greet them. So the son-in-law asked him, “How am I going to find them in the middle of an airport?” Sammy Rohr laughed and said, “Don’t worry—I guarantee you that you’ll see them.”

On their first Friday in Colombia, Mr. Rohr—who was still in Israel—got

a frantic call from his son-in-law.

The young man told him that the two students had told him that they wanted to go to the beach and, well, dunk themselves in the water wearing nothing but their smiles. (You get the picture.) He had never heard of anything so outrageous—especially from people who were supposed to be religious! But Sammy laughed and explained that it was not at all what it sounded like—it was just the Chasidic custom of immersing in a mikvah, a natural body of water, before Shabbos. (Of course, they would wade into the water up to their necks wearing robes and bathing suits so there'd be no accusations...) But since there was no indoor private mikvah in Bogota (at least at the time), they wanted to use the next best thing, the ocean itself. So Mr. Rohr told him to take them to the most secluded beach where they would do their thing—adding that they would need to use the ocean every Friday.

Ending the story, George Rohr says that today, his brother-in-law is the most religious member of their family.

(See Yemei Temimim, Vol. VII, pg. 260 on how a bochur named Shlomo Raifkind met with Mr. Rohr and went to Colombia in Elul of 5738.)

I Loved You

This brings us to this week's reading—not to the Torah reading but to the Haftarah reading, which, for the Torah portion of Toldos, comes from the Book of Malachi.

The Prophet Malachi lived during the "Return to Zion" period at the start of the Second Temple era. What's more, and most importantly, Malachi was the last official prophet of the Jewish Nation.

From the time of Moshe Rabbeinu, the "Master of All Prophets," there had been prophecy within the Jewish Nation—over a period of close to

1,000 years, with the Prophet Malachi the one who sealed the Era of the Prophets.

The Book of Malachi consists of only three chapters, and our Haftarah this week consists of its first chapter and half of the second.

And what are the first words of the Jewish Nation's last Prophet? "I loved you, said the L-rd." Right there, G-d declares to the Jewish Nation that He loves them.

Now, what exactly is love? I mean, we all know what love is—but have any of us ever stopped to think of what love is, meaning, what it consists of and what it's there for?

So, let's take a quick look at what classical Judaism has to say about love.

True love is something that is above and beyond reason and intellect—when a parent loves a child, he or she does not need to explain to himself or herself why he or she loves the child. This is because love comes from a place much deeper than consciousness—on the contrary, if a parent feels a need to explain why or she loves his or her child, it's a sure sign that there is something missing in their bond. Because love is the deepest feeling a person can feel—it's beyond consciousness and it requires no explanations. It's just there.

It's the same thing that G-d declares here: "I loved you, said the L-rd." It's the best news that the Jewish Nation can hear, ever—namely, that G-d loves us like a parent loves a child, no matter how the child behaves. Because that is essential love, and that is exactly how G-d loves us, too.

And just like a parent will never give up on his kids and never exchange them with other kids who behave better, so too, G-d will

never exchange His Nation of Israel with another.

The story is told that when Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812, the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad) came to Mezritch, the first teaching he heard from the Maggid of Mezritch (the successor to the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism) was that “I loved you, said the L-rd” means that one must love every Jew. Until then, the behavior of Rabbi Shneur Zalman “was in a manner of separation and distance from ordinary people, but after hearing this teaching, he began to draw close and endear simple folk” (Simchas Beis Hashoeivah, 5722, Toras Menachem Vol. 32, pg. 72.)

Perhaps we can say that G-d, at the end of the Era of Prophecy, as the voice of prophecy fell silent, wanted to tell the Jewish Nation how He truly feels about them. And so he had Malachi, the last of the Prophets, declare in His name, “I loved you”—meaning, I want you to know that My love for you is above reason and consciousness. And on top of that, it requires no explanation—and so, it will never end or stop.

The Condition

Now, everyone is familiar with the Passover Seder custom of putting the Kos shel Eliyahu, the Cup of Elijah the Prophet, on the Seder table. But where does Eliyahu Hanavi suddenly come into the Seder?

The answer is that it's mentioned in Halachah (Jewish law), and many other sources, that Eliyahu HaNavi is the Herald of the Redemption—that he'll be the one to arrive and announce to us that Moshiach is coming. Since the Seder night is the most auspicious time for Moshiach to come, because that's the night on which our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt, we set out a cup and invite Eliyahu to come and announce that the Redemption is coming (Code of Jewish Law, Laws of Pesach, Section 480 at the end.)

From where do we know that Eliyahu HaNavi is supposed to come and announce the Redemption to us? From the Book of Malachi.

The two last verses of Malachi (3:23-24) reads as follows: “Lo, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...”

Perhaps we can say that the way to earn G-d’s sending us Eliyahu HaNavi to herald the arrival of Moshiach, as mentioned in the last words of Malachi, depends on the first words of Malachi: “I loved you, said the L-rd.”

The story is told that Chasidim asked Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi what’s more important: loving G-d, or loving fellow Jews? So he answered that loving fellow Jews is more important “because you’re loving what your loved one loves.”

That means that if you truly love a certain person, you will care about and love that person’s children, too. Similarly, one who truly loves G-d will love every Jew, because G-d loves every Jew—as Malachi says, “I loved you, said the L-rd.” (Hayom Yom, 28 Nissan.)

Good Shabbos!