



# Put Others First

*American Jews are worried about the Israelis, and Israeli Jews are worried about Americans. What is wrong with us?*

## Inspire, and Be Inspired

Many people who traveled to Israel after the outbreak of the war talk about an interesting phenomenon. They came there to help and support the residents who were affected by the conflict, whether it was families of the hostages, or the injured in hospitals, or the hundreds of thousands who evacuated from their homes in the north and south. But when they met with those families and individuals, they discovered that they were being inspired themselves.

The Israelis were telling them that they were concerned about the situation of Jews in the United States. They read on social media and in the media in general about the spread of anti-Semitism in the U.S. and worldwide, and they were concerned with the Jews of America!

In many cases, they try to convince them to make Aliyah, claiming that there is less anti-Semitism in the streets, and in Israel everyone's in the same boat. "We'll get through it," the Israelis say, "but how will you survive? Antisemitism is only growing worse!"

## The Great Advocate

I want to tell you about one of the great Chassidic leaders, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. He was a great Torah scholar, and he had a wonderful sense of music. The previous Rebbe writes that the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin was his descendant, and inherited his sense of music from him. Yet, what Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was famous for, was being the "Advocate of Israel"; he was famous for his love and concern for the Jewish people, and for how he advocated for them before G-d.

I want to share with you a few anecdotes that illustrate who he was.

The story is told that once he saw a wagon driver, wearing Tallis and

Tefillin, preparing his wagon for travel. He was greasing the wheels as he davened. Another person would have been critical of such behavior, seeing it as a desecration of prayer, but Rabbi Levi Yitzchak saw something completely different. He turned to the Creator and said: “Look, Master of the Universe, what devout children you have—even when they grease their wheels, they say ‘Shema Yisrael.’”

He once encountered a young man eating in public on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak approached him and said, “Perhaps you don’t feel well?” The young man insisted that he was healthy as a horse.

So he asked again, “Perhaps you forgot that today is Yom Kippur, the holy day of the year?”

“Who doesn’t know that today is Yom Kippur?” Said the young man.

“Maybe they didn’t teach you that Jews don’t eat on Yom Kippur?” asked Rabbi Levi Yitzchak.

“Every child knows that we don’t eat on Yom Kippur,” replied the young man.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak raised his eyes to heaven and said, “Creator of the world, see how wonderful your children are—here sits a Jew who eats on Yom Kippur and yet refuses to lie.”

This is the type of person he was.

## **The Holiday Names**

He once shared a very interesting idea.

Why, he asked, does the Torah refer to Passover as “Chag Hamatzot” (the Festival of Unleavened Bread), while we call it Pesach, Passover. Why don’t we use the name given by the Torah for this holiday?

He gave a very interesting answer. In the Torah, God describes the holiday with a name that emphasizes the greatness of the Jewish people: “Chag Hamatzot.” Matzah reminds us how we left Egypt, the most advanced civilization of the time, and followed Moses into the desert with only a few pitas. They didn’t ask what they would eat or where they would find medicine for the old or milk for the babies; they went with full trust in the Creator.

Therefore, God calls it Chag Hamatzot—to emphasize the greatness of Israel.

But the Jewish people call it Passover, which highlights the greatness of God—when He passed over and spared the homes of the Israelites, despite their spiritual decline, and redeemed them from Egypt.

In other words, He praises us, while we praise Him.

## **The Ark and Cherubim**

The Rebbe once shared a very similar idea on this week's Torah portion, from his father, who had the same name—Rabbi Levi Yitzchak.

This week, G-d commands the Children of Israel, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." G-d wants them to build for Him something tangible here in the physical world.

The first command is regarding the Ark. G-d does not speak about the building itself, its width, and height. Instead, He begins to speak about the furnishings that will be inside this structure, and the first furnishing mentioned is the Ark, which emphasizes that it is the most important item in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

The Torah explains exactly how to build the Ark: cover it with gold inside and out, insert the poles, and above it there should be a cover made of gold, and upon it—two cherubs resembling the faces of infants. Inside the Ark, Moses is to place the Tablets, and then the Torah concludes with beautiful words: "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the ark-cover, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Exodus 25:22).

The account here is simple and smooth.

But when comparing this with the next time the Torah mentions G-d speaking from between the cherubim, there is a difference.

In Parshat Naso, in the very last verse of the portion, the Torah writes, "And when Moses would go into the tent of meeting for G-d to speak with him, he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the ark-cover that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim" (Numbers 7:89).

Here, in this verse, the Torah first mentions the Ark, and only afterwards the cherubim. In the verse in our Torah portion, the cherubim are mentioned before the Ark.

Jews are meticulous about every letter in the Torah and also about the order of things. So, why in our portion does the Torah mention the cherubim first, while doing the opposite in the book of Bamidbar?

## **Mutual Love**

What do the cherubim symbolize?

Commentators explain that the cherubim are shaped in “the image of a child’s face” to teach about G-d’s immense love for the Children of Israel; it comes in the form of love for a small child.

This means that the cherubim symbolize the Jewish people, while the Ark containing the Tablets represents G-d, who gave the Tablets.

This holds the key to understanding why the cherubim are mentioned first in our Torah portion, but second in Bamidbar.

In our Torah portion, the verse is speaking from G-d’s perspective; “there I will meet with you...” Therefore, G-d focuses on the aspect which shines light on His love for the Jewish people—the cherubim. But the second verse, which speaks from the perspective of Moses, focuses on G-d’s presence. Therefore, it mentions the ark before the cherubim.

In the Rebbe’s words: “G-d is more meticulous about the honor of Israel than His own honor, and Moses, conversely, is meticulous about honoring G-d more than the honor of the Jewish people” (Toras Menachem 5735 v. 3 p. 355).

## **Our Healthy Marriage With God**

This indicates that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev’s teaching about Passover is based on G-d’s conduct in the Torah itself—where He mentions Israel first, while Moses mentions G-d first.

We all know that in a healthy marriage, the husband always gives credit to his wife, while the wife gives credit to the husband.

This is so ingrained in Jewish culture that in a situation of war, when a person is stuck in a hotel for over four months with three children, without a job, and uncertain about when he will be able to return home, he is busy concerning himself with the well-being of Jews in America, and wants to know how we are dealing with the antisemitism.

He has his own problems, and he obviously knows that they are more

severe, but it's in the Jewish DNA to care for others before caring for yourself.

That's what we learned from G-d himself.