



AMERICA IS NO DIFFERENT

What gave the Previous Rebbe the strength to transform American Jewry—when logic said it was impossible?

The Dramatic Announcement

Sixty-seven years ago, in March of 1940, the Previous Rebbe arrived in America on the very last ship to leave Poland after the outbreak of WWII. It was a miraculous journey that saved the Rebbe from the hands of the Nazis. A large crowd gathered at the seaport to greet the Rebbe. The welcoming party soon moved to the Rebbe's hotel, where the impressive event continued. At the event, the Rebbe—who at that time was partially paralyzed—made it clear that he had not come to America to enjoy the remaining years of his life. "My coming to America," the Rebbe said, "is a mission for my soul, to create organizations that will spread Judaism here."

The Rebbe then called a meeting to form a board to establish Yeshivas Tomchei Temimim in America. This yeshiva was to be built and run in the spirit of the yeshivas of the "Old Country." It was then that the Rebbe coined the phrase, "America is nisht andersh, America is no different!"

Among the attendees was a young man named Rabbi Pinchas Teitz of New Jersey. He came to visit the Rebbe at the hotel and requested to be admitted to the Rebbe's room immediately, explaining that he was in a rush. When asked where he was going, he explained that he had a weekly radio show and could not afford to be late.

The Rebbe's son-in-law, Rabbi S. Gurarie, told Rabbi Teitz, "Announce on your show that the Rebbe has established a yeshiva in New York."

Rabbi Teitz was in shock. The Rebbe, already elderly and confined to a wheelchair due to declining health, had just arrived on American soil—and already he had founded a yeshiva!

That very night, the Rebbe received two distinguished visitors. These two guests sat with the Rebbe and tried to dissuade him from going through with the idea of building a yeshiva.

One said, “America is a land that swallows great men and turns them into nothing. Even great individuals who arrive here with the best of intentions eventually fade into obscurity.”

The second added, “For the sake of your honor and the honor of Chabad, we felt compelled to tell you the truth about the chances your yeshiva has. Americans get excited easily and just as easily lose interest. There may be a lot of enthusiasm at first, but in a few weeks it could be forgotten as if it never happened.”

The Rebbe later repeated this conversation and added, “It’s obviously unnecessary to describe what I was feeling when I heard these words.” That night, as the Rebbe recited Krias Shema before going to sleep—a time when Chassidim reflect on the day’s accomplishments—he cried bitter tears. “If this is how my closest associates feel,” he thought, “what will everyone else say?”

Yet, the Rebbe’s vision grew. What started with a handful of students became thousands across the world. The yeshiva was indeed built in the spirit of the Old Country, and it became the first of many institutions the Rebbe would go on to establish in the Free World.

The Number Eight

Where did the Rebbe, in his physically weakened state, find the strength and determination to awaken the sleeping Jewish community of America?

This week’s parsha is called *Shmini*, which means “the eighth.” It continues the story of the Mishkan’s (Tabernacle’s) dedication. In last week’s parsha, *Tzav*, we read about the seven days during which Moshe assembled and disassembled the Mishkan each day. And now, in this week’s parsha, the Mishkan is finally erected and left standing—on the eighth day. That’s when G-d’s presence finally came to rest among the Jewish people.

But here’s a question: why break up the story? Why not finish the whole story of the Mishkan’s dedication in last week’s parsha and start this week with something new—maybe the coronation of the kohanim, or the topic of kashrut?

The Rebbe explains that the number seven represents the full natural

cycle. G-d created the world in seven days. Every culture counts seven days in a week and then starts again at one. Seven is the framework of nature.

Eight, however, represents something entirely different. Eight is beyond nature—beyond logic, beyond reason. It's the number of the miraculous.

We see this with Chanukah. Which Jewish holiday lasts for eight days? (You can ask the crowd—point out that Pesach and Sukkos are technically seven days.) The answer, of course, is Chanukah. The miracle of Chanukah defied the natural order. A small group defeated a mighty army, and one small jug of oil lasted eight days. The whole story is supernatural—and fittingly, it lasts eight days.

Purim, by contrast, is a similar story of the few overcoming the many—but everything in that story happens within the framework of nature. You need to look closely to see the hand of G-d behind the scenes.

There's another place where the number eight plays a central role: the bris. Every Jewish boy is circumcised on the eighth day of life. That's not just tradition—it's a statement. A Jew's connection with G-d is not just rational. It's not based on logic or even on nature. It's something deeper—something that transcends everything.

That's why the Torah makes a break between the seven days of preparation and the eighth day of completion. The eighth day wasn't just the next step—it was a whole new reality. On that day, the infinite G-d chose to rest His presence in a small wooden structure. As King Solomon put it, "The highest heavens cannot contain You—yet this Temple can?" The miracle of G-d's presence dwelling in the Mishkan is nothing short of supernatural. And that's what "the eighth" represents.

You even find this idea in the *Amidah*. The eighth blessing is *Refa'einu*—a prayer for healing. While on the surface we're asking for regular healing, the fact that this is the *eighth* blessing hints that we're really asking for something beyond nature. We're asking G-d to heal us with power that transcends the natural order.

The Eighth Rebbe

The Previous Rebbe was the eighth Rebbe from the Baal Shem Tov. His life, in every sense, operated on the "eighth level." He was miraculously saved from the Communists and their death sentence.

He was miraculously saved again from the bombings and Nazi deportations in Warsaw. And when he arrived in the United States, he was not limited or influenced by the so-called “natural order.”

His advisers, who predicted that Torah institutions wouldn't survive the pressures of American culture, weren't wrong—at least, not according to nature. Logically, they had no chance of surviving, let alone thriving. But the Rebbe, in true eighth-day fashion, defied all logic. He was confident that the same G-d who had saved him through open miracles would continue to help him build Torah and Judaism in this new land.

Dear friends, *America is not different*. When a Jew recognizes that we are not bound by the limitations of nature, success is inevitable. The very fact that we still exist as a nation is the clearest proof that nature does not define us. We are not limited by logic or conventional thinking. We do what we must—and G-d bends nature to meet us there.