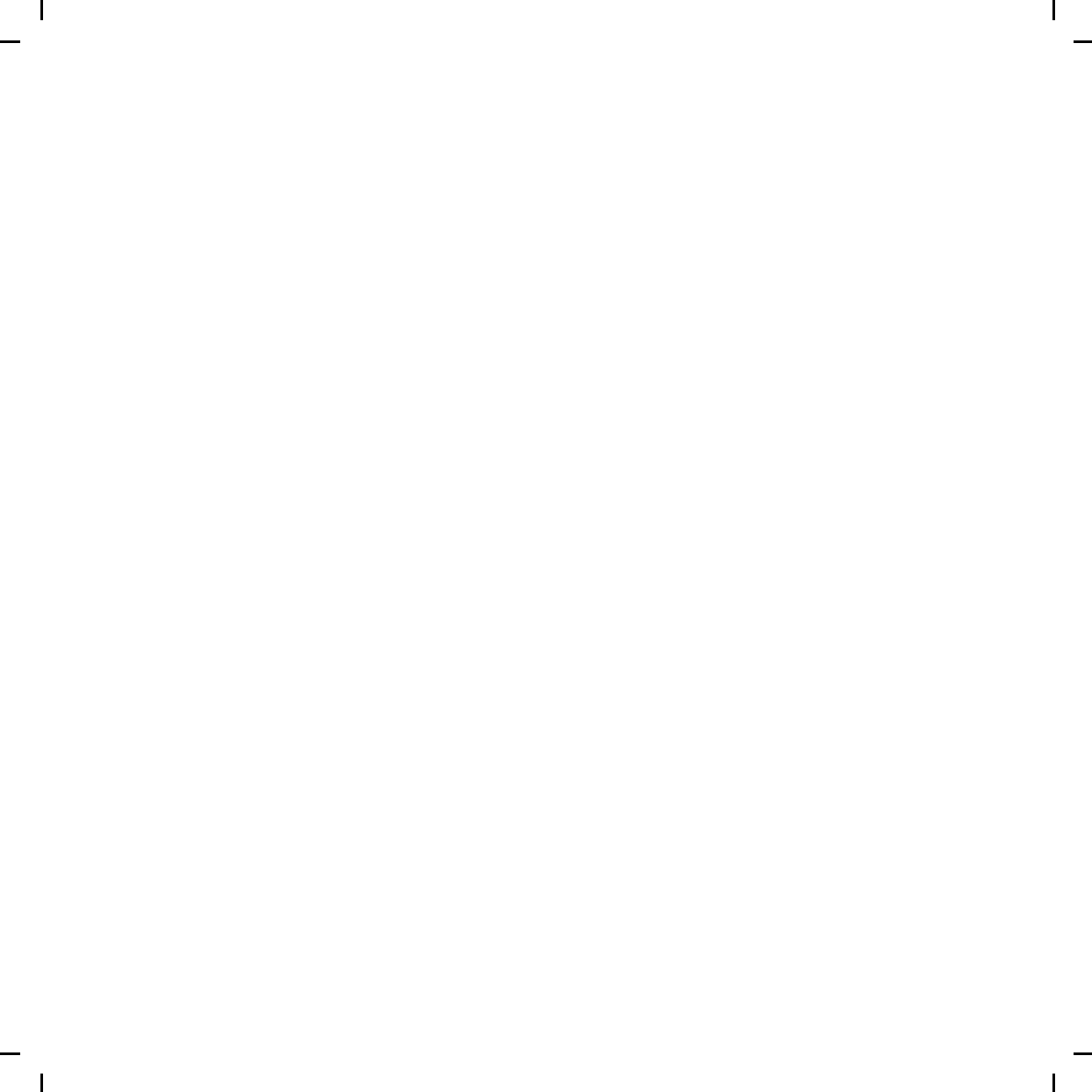


TANYA

for  
the totally  
uninterested



B"H  
Sample Edition

Created in honor of  
Meir & Shterna Shemtov's  
wedding

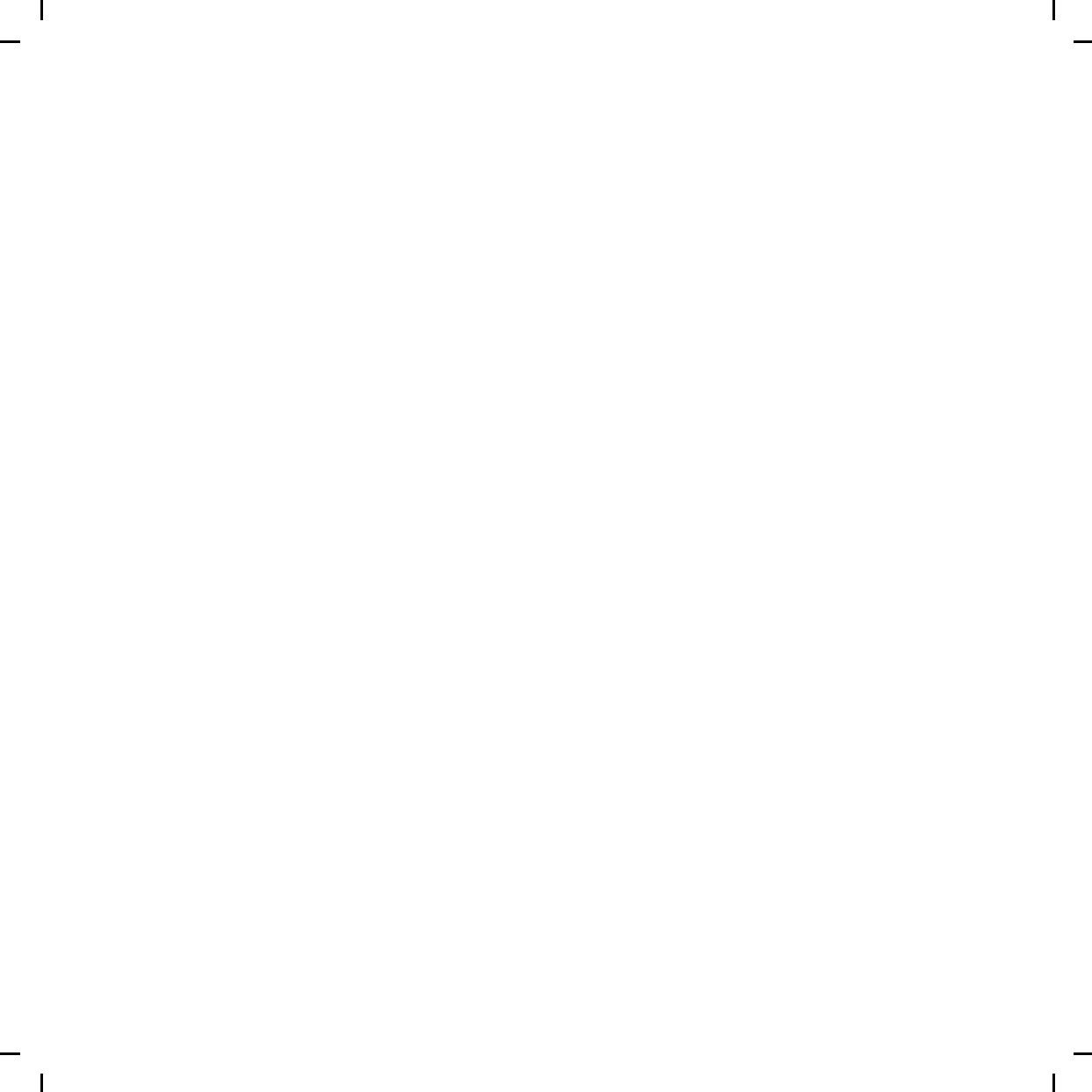
Chai Adar II, 5779  
March 25, 2019

Thank you for joining our Simcha  
Eliezer & Rochie Shemtov  
Nosson & Shternie Blumes



Produced by Rabbi  
Eliezer Shemtov

Written & Designed by  
Chava Witkes



Dear Guest,

Thank you for joining us in celebrating the marriage of our dear children, Meir and Shterna.

As a token of appreciation and in honor of the Chosson and Kallah, we would like to share with you a sample of a work in progress:

**Tanya for the Totally Uninterested.**

However interested or uninterested you are in the Tanya, you understand the revolutionary contribution in being able to introduce an apathetic millennial to the Tanya's teachings—in a language that makes the Alter Rebbe's advice relevant, inspiring, and engaging.

This is a project that began years ago in the course of our Shlichus to Uruguay. We were teaching Tanya to people of different backgrounds and realizing that not everyone speaks the same language. The Tanya, amazingly enough, addresses issues relevant to all of us, but it is our task to search for answers for our own questions within its pages.

A full Hebrew version of this project, covering all 53 chapters of Likutei Amarim, was published by Chabad of Israel in 2016 and was very well received by students from all walks of life. It has since been reprinted several times. The present volume is a short sample of our attempt to adapt it for a different demographic: an American Millennial who would rather be on Snapchat.



Because this is a work in progress, any feedback you might have is more than welcome.

I would like to thank Meir and Shterna for their input and encouragement in this project and Chava Witkes for “crushing it” (for the millennially-challenged: bringing it all down to earth).

With confidence that this effort will help hasten the Redemption,

Rabbi Eliezer Shemtov  
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Erev Purim, 5779  
Montevideo, Uruguay

*Promise  
me this*

I like to think of  
myself as an upright  
citizen.

I never cheat on my taxes. I say “good morning” to my barista. I always tip Uber drivers. Isn’t that enough? Why does G-d need me to keep track of all these other obligations—what to eat, what not to eat, which Hebrew words to say before this and after that. Can’t I just focus on being a good person?



Let's try this thought  
experiment:

You are hired by a large corporation that recruited you because of your solid industry rep. Your new bosses want to send you to China to oversee the production run of a new product launching soon. You spend months mapping out the trip, getting briefed by the higher-ups, and ensuring that everything will go off without a hitch. Before takeoff, you text your boss assuring that you've got everything under control.

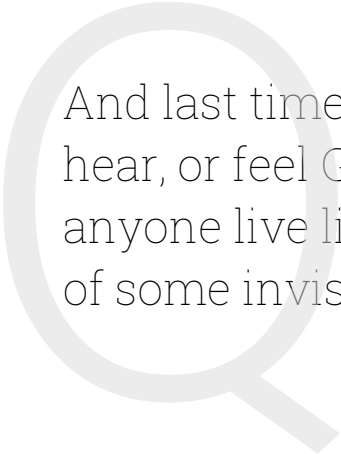
Imagine landing in China and taking a cab straight to the beach. Sleeping late and skipping appointments. Showing up to a gala benefit dinner in athleisure. Not okay or not okay?

The Talmud tells the story of every soul: before being born, you made an oath that you would live according to G-d's rules. You promised to stay true to your mission on this earth.

Now that we're here, we can't forget why we came. The Tanya opens with a reminder about our commitment. We have a mission. We have a responsibility. Let's crush it.

what  
you see  
is not what  
you get

If it can't be proven,  
it isn't real.



And last time I checked, I couldn't see,  
hear, or feel G-d anywhere. Why would  
anyone live life according to the dictates  
of some invisible "higher power"?



Ever felt an emotion that  
was hard to describe?

A powerful force of desire, attachment, or inspiration? Maybe it was a fleeting high you felt while watching a breathtaking sunset, breathing in the smell of a newborn baby, or (finally) grasping an equation in advanced calculus.

Not all truth is tangible. Instead, reality is many shades of gray, with our perception serving as a limited measure of truth.



That feeling of inspiration, of connection to a greater Being? That's an **expression** of your inner G-dliness. Because underneath all your intellectual trappings, there is a **spark** of pure, unadulterated Divine energy embedded deep within. It is the soul.

Maybe you've never really gotten **in touch** with your soul. Maybe anything you can't control makes you a little...uncomfortable. But that doesn't mean the G-dly **power** isn't there.

Before you knock the omnipotent Life Force of Creation, try digging deep. No one will need to prove G-d's existence for you.

Because you'll feel it  
on the inside.

Head  
over  
heels

I have friends who can't make any decisions alone.

First, they need to write a letter to the Rebbe. When life gets rough, they make a trip to the Ohel. I don't get those friends.

Trust me, I know the Rebbe was an important leader and all that, but I don't understand the dogma about "connecting to the Rebbe." Can't we focus on what really matters—being more connected to G-d?

# A

A country is only as strong as  
its leader.

A stock price rises and falls with the  
decisions of a CEO. A family's culture and  
identity is shaped by parents. Leadership  
matters. (Because duh.)

The Rebbe's role as leader goes even further. Think of the way your brain keeps your body going. Ever felt brain fog or a headache? All of sudden your bones feel tired too. The word "Rebbe" stands for "Rosh B'nei Yisroel," head of the Jewish nation. The Rebbe is not just a leader; the Rebbe is energizing force responsible for the well-being of the entire Jewish "body."

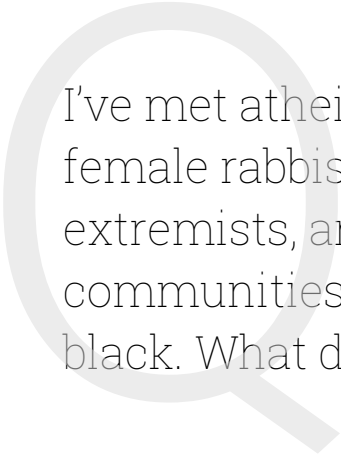
The stronger your connection to the Rebbe, the stronger your connection to G-d. Every Jew of this generation has an inherent bond with the Rebbe, and it's up to us to make that relationship more conscious.

Can I get a retweet?

*we the*  
**People**



No two Jews are the  
same.



I've met atheist actors, kippah-wearing female rabbis, right-wing political extremists, and even visited full communities of Jews who all dress in black. What do any of us have in common?



What makes someone Jewish?

Is a Jew someone who practices Judaism?  
Identifies with the tribe? Believes in the  
traditional values? Speaks Hebrew? Being  
Jewish goes beyond that.

Judaism isn't just a religion. It's an identity. It can't be narrowed down to any specific , beliefs or practice. Being Jewish is coded into a Jew's spiritual DNA. (Think of an abstract 23andme.) We are Jews because we have Jewish souls. And our souls will be eternally and inexplicably connected to G-d —and each other. (Doesn't that make you feel warm and fuzzy inside?)

Yes, our heads might be covered by black hats, knitted kippahs, lace doilies, or not at all, but inside our souls are identical.

Because being Jewish has nothing to do  
with how we do and everything to do with  
who we are.

#blessed

Free  
Enter  
prise

I plan to give my kids  
the education I wish I  
had.

That is, a religiously neutral one. This way, they'll be free to forge their own paths. If they feel connected to G-d, that's great, and it'll be even better because their conviction will have come from within. Why should anyone be forced into a relationship?



Raising kids might be one of the hardest things you'll ever do.

There's the sleep-deprivation of early childhood, the braces and pimples of middle school, the cringey angst of adolescence—and then you still have to pay for weddings. But it seems like everyone around us keeps having kids anyway. What's going on?

Maybe we keep procreating because after all the tears, frustration, and credit card bills, we'll have created another human who will continue our legacy: kids who, after all the whining and complaining of childhood, grow into adults that live by our values.

Parents who make their beds in the morning hope their kids won't be slobs at sleepaway camp. Parents who believe in strong financial footing make sure their kids have a healthy 401k. And parents who believe absolutely in the truth of Judaism will raise their next generation to be devoted too.



Tiger mom's kids got to Juilliard not because they loved violin, but because they feared the fiery woman who birthed them. That's how it always works—what matters to you will matter to your kids. So if you are ambivalent about the importance of daily minyan or checking lettuce for bugs, your kids will be just as confused.

But say I misunderstood your question. Maybe Judaism does matter to you. Maybe your connection to G-d is so personal that you would feel horrified if someone tried to control it.

Maybe all you really want is for your kids to choose Judaism from an empowered, inspired place. Not to please authority or stick to status quo. But how? (Spoiler alert: it's not a religiously neutral education.)

Wake up and smell the cold brew: making the right decisions isn't easy. Short-term gratification is much more alluring than the sacrifices of integrity. Pizza always tastes better than kale (we tried). Hitting snooze is so much easier than getting up. And choosing a lifestyle of self-discipline is a lot less attractive than a melty cheeseburger.

Ever heard of the marshmallow study? Five-year-olds were given one candy now, but they could get a second one if they waited fifteen minutes to eat. Years later, the kids who were able to delay gratification were the most successful. But the majority of kids? They want that marshmallow Right. Now.

How do we train our offspring to hold out for long-term payoffs? That's what education is all about. All through the early years, when kids are still too young to watch PG-13 movies on their own, it's the best time to lay the foundation for taking the high road as an adult.

Conception is the first chance parents have to influence the futures of their offspring. The Zohar explains that the unique garments of a soul are developed during the time husband and wife are together. The purity of the parents' thoughts, speech, and behavior then will determine the future holiness of their children's.

During pregnancy the influence continues. Exposure to holy sights, sounds, and environments bolster your child's spiritual immunity. So does feeding little ones kosher food, singing Shema with them at night, washing negel vasser with them in the morning.

Giving kids a head start in connecting to G-d empowers them to resist temptations that will inevitably surface later on.

That's the best way to give mini humans the power to choose.

Because real freedom means having the strength to wait for the second marshmallow.

*It's  
All in  
your  
Head*

Yes, I believe in G-d.

But the G-d I believe in doesn't look like Dumbledore sitting on a throne in heaven. I've learned enough Kabbalah to understand the spiritual makeup of G-d's infinite layers, attributes, and interfaces. That's why there's a part of Chassidic philosophy that's never jived: loving and fearing G-d. If our Creator is a supreme Being Who is also ineffable, unreachable, and way beyond our grasp, how am I supposed to relate emotionally?

A

Say a friend is late meeting you for dinner.

After twenty minutes of waiting and seven calls that go straight to voicemail, you start getting worked up. So irresponsible! Why am I always the one waiting? Doesn't my time matter? But let's say you find out your friend got into a car accident on the way over. Now there's a whole different set of feelings: guilt, worry, fear. The anger magically disappears.



Feelings don't come out of nowhere. Thoughts lead to emotion. If you think your mother-in-law is controlling, her kindness will be mistaken for manipulation; a \$100 price tag on a bottle of wine automatically makes it taste better (fact); and the teachers will only be fed up with a kid who misbehaves until they find out that the parents are getting divorced.

To improve your mood, switch up your thought patterns. That's the foundation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which took off hundreds of years after the Alter Rebbe told us about this heart-mind connection.

Still not feeling it as far as G-d is concerned? The lack of emotion might not come from your intellectualism, but actually because you haven't engaged your intellect enough.

So, how does that make you  
feel?

LOVE  
*languages*

## G-d and I are tight.

The subway comes just as I walk onto the platform? “Boruch Hashem” is my first thought. “Can you be there at eight?” and my answer is always “G-d willing.” If I see a cop giving out parking tickets, I start praying to G-d that it won’t be my car. I’ve got the belief, the trust, the love—a stronger relationship than most, I would humbly brag. With all that covered, what’s the need for the details. I’ll keep Shabbos, sure, but I’m not ready to stop ripping toilet paper. ‘Kay? Kay.



Once upon a time there was a pair of newlyweds who were not getting along.

When husband came home from a long day of work, his wife opened the freezer and asked “What should we have for dinner?” Husband sighed; his mom had always had dinner hot and ready when dad walked in the door.

When it came to laundry, husband's dirty undershirts piled up until they overflowed...and then piled up again onto the floor. As husband angrily slammed the door to the washing machine, he wondered, What kind of marriage is this? Doesn't my wife love me?

Down the street there was another couple going through difficulties. But in this one-bedroom apartment dinner was served on china every night, and husband's freshly-laundered socks were lovingly folded and placed into drawers.

But after dinner, husband would sit on the couch by himself, wondering why his wife never wanted to spend time together. "I just have to finish making your lunch for tomorrow," she'd say. But after lunch was made, there were dishes to wash, a floor to sweep, and cushions to straighten. An hour later, as husband got up from the couch and started getting ready for bed, he wondered, What kind of marriage is this? Doesn't my wife love me?

Everyone experiences love differently. We all have different needs in a relationship. What works for one set of people might backfire for another.

And guess what? G-d also has a love language, and that is mitzvos.

Imagine a couple that didn't do anything for each other. "I love you honey, but I just don't have the energy to celebrate your birthday." Sounds wrong because it is wrong. Feelings motivate action. Love in a marriage might mean folding socks or it might mean sitting on the couch. Love for G-d means doing what He wants—613 different ways. That's how G-d feels loved.

As warm and fuzzy as your feelings for G-d may be, your relationship will always be limited by the space you make within yourself.



But G-d is infinite, and He wants a relationship that transcends your emotional capacity.

To connect in an unlimited way, feelings are just a bonus. All you really have to do is put a penny into a metal tin, say the right Hebrew words before digging in, or nail a piece of parchment (think of it as a love letter) onto your doorpost. Ah, now you're speaking G-d's language.

Almost as easy as sitting on the couch.

AGAINST  
*the law*

I feel bad for anyone  
still in yeshiva.

Back-to-back Talmud marathons couldn't be a bigger time waster. Why should anyone in 2019 be studying an ancient text that offers so much advice on oxen and donkey? I don't live on a farm, and I don't plan on becoming a Rabbi. So why Talmud?



## Once upon a time in Russia...

Whoa, cut the Talmud some slack. It's a fascinating text dealing with a wide range of issues—and, yeah, a whole lot of oxen and donkey stuff. That's because when it comes to civil law, oxen and donkey dominated the economic playing field back then. (Think of cattle as the bitcoin of today.)

You still raise a valid point, though. Why subject yeshiva students to hours of back and forth in civil law if Talmudic lawyers isn't even a thing? And, the real ask here: are these sections of the Torah relevant to us?

Torah study is not just an exercise in the transfer of information from book to brain. Studying Torah unites us with its author, G-d.

How does that happen?

Ever put your heart and soul into something you created? A piece of music, a work of art, a pitch deck. If you shared that with others, you'd want them to give it the time of day, am I right?

G-d's like that too, except times infinity. The Torah is the ultimate expression of G-d's deepest essence. His will. His wisdom. Everything He stands for and cares about. When you read about an ox falling into a pit and how much damages need to be paid to whom—that's you appreciating G-d's capstone piece. Your mind is absorbed in G-d's wisdom and G-d's wisdom is absorbed in your mind. The ultimate unity.

So, yes, the Torah deals with every detail of existence, even those issues that may only interest a farmer or tenth-century lawyer. But within every word of the written Torah and within every discussion in the Talmud, G-d is there. And He's pretty grateful that you're interested in connecting.

*hit the*  
**BOOKS**



I put in my time.

I learned all the parsha, halacha, and Chassidus a person might ever need. Now I want a chance at the broad, open-minded vision that only an academic degree can offer. Why is that frowned upon in Chassidic circles?

You want to sharpen  
your mind.

Fulfill your intellectual potential. Expand your worldview. Sounds awesome...but why university?

Comparing the wisdom of the Torah to the wisdom of science or liberal arts is like comparing a 3D imax movie shot in 4K with surround sound to the pixelated phone version. No one will blame you for not having access to the real deal, but if you think that's where the action is, you'd be wrong.

Studying medicine, or finance, or computer science, to complement Torah knowledge or make a few bucks is one thing. But pursuing those hallowed subjects because you think you'll become more intellectually developed? That's just you misleading yourself.

Don't get me wrong, there were many Torah scholars who were also experts in other disciplines. Rambam was an astronomer, the Ramban was a physician, and even the Rebbe had a degree in engineering. But the knowledge was always a complement to Torah study.

Your capacity for  
wisdom through  
Torah is deep and  
complex. Why trap  
it a 2D cage?

*Soul  
cycle*

I feel like the biggest  
flake.

My friend keeps inviting me to join their Tanya class. Every week I have another excuse--it's too early, too late, I've got too much work.... but the real truth? I feel like it wouldn't be authentic. The last time I learned anything was after Maariv on Yom Kippur. Why force myself to do something so far out of character? None of my friends will be fooled, and I'm definitely not buying it either.



## Once upon a time in Russia...

A father took his son to the mikvah on the first day of putting on Tefillin. It was in the middle of winter and they had to break ice in order to dunk in the purifying water.

As the boy jumped out of the icy river he shivered. "Ooh, ooh, ooh!" His father lovingly dried him with a big towel and the child, comforted and warmed, expressed his satisfaction. "Aaah, aaah, aaah."

Once they got home and were sipping venti-sized Chai lattes, the father lovingly pointed out to his son, "This is the difference between doing the right thing and giving in to yourself." When we do a mitzvah, we start by saying 'ooh, ooh, ooh,' but end up saying 'aaah, aaah, aaah'. When doing an Aveira, the opposite happens.

Ever forced yourself off the couch and onto the peloton? Then you know exactly what this Russian dad meant. And if you've ever eaten half a cheesecake or a full pie of pizza, you can relate to the pain and regret that often follows indulgence.



So maybe your question isn't really a question after all. Maybe instead of "I don't feel authentic learning Tanya" you really mean, "I don't feel authentic staying home and scrolling through Instagram."

Doing the right thing--learning with friends, giving a donation--has an eternal value. You will always be proud of your choice (even if this week's 17th charity campaign made you cringe). That's not called being a hypocrite; that's called being true to your values. But not going? Your excuses will keep getting less and less believable.

wear now, shine later. Once the pain of pushing yourself wears off, your soul will be left with an infinite piece of goodness—not a false high that leaves you wanting more.

Because what would you rather: a million in counterfeit cash or one authentic dollar?

no  
such  
luck

Life, stop reminding  
me how unfair you  
are.

Seriously though, my best friend got married last week and that leaves me as the last of our group still single. I'm so done. Done with going to Shabbos meals full of couples and sitting in the corner. Done with watching everyone else move on with their lives while I'm stuck way behind.

The kids I went to yeshiva with, they're launching businesses, making serious money...and then when it comes time to pay rent I still have to call my father for help. Everyone else is good at something—what's **wrong** with me?

I try not to be alone too often, because when I am, I can't help but wonder why G-d is out to get me.

Will I ever be happy?



We are the stories we  
tell ourselves.

In the story you've written about your life, your character is the victim. Everyone else is happy but you'll never be because you're the worst and G-d doesn't love you.

That narrative will never allow you to be happy. How can you fulfill your potential if you feel like a loser?

What if you rewrote the script? What if you aren't married yet because you are on a journey to figure yourself out? What if you have a wealth of hidden talent that you just need to uncover? And what if, G-d hasn't forgotten you at all—what if He is watching you at every moment and cheering you on?

Life doesn't just happen to us. And there is no such thing as bad luck. G-d is up there giving everyone what they need.

When a kid walks into the doctor's office for a vaccine, they might also feel like the people who are supposed to care about them cause the most suffering.

But when that kid gets ice cream afterward, they feel like they have the best parents in the world. But what's better for a kid—immunization to deadly illnesses or frozen milk and sugar?

The bottom line is that we don't know always know what's better for us. Our worldview is limited by our finite perception. But would you believe it if the Alter Rebbe said it? Pain has a purpose. And sometimes that purpose makes the pain a good thing. Something to be grateful for.



The bottom line is that we don't know always know what's better for us. Our worldview is limited by our finite perception. But would you believe it if the Alter Rebbe said it? Pain has a purpose. And sometimes that purpose makes the pain a good thing. Something to be grateful for.

What if you could, once and for all, stop judging whether life is fair or not, whether everyone else has it better than you? What if you trusted that every single life event is for your benefit—the good and the hard.

So the next time you're sitting at that Shabbos table, maybe look around the room with a different voice playing in your head. One that says, "G-d, thanks for everything, and can you please hurry up the struggling part?"

*Infinity*  
*War*

## Adulting can be super stressful.

At the end of my work day--a marathon of meetings, errands, and pretending to be functional, all I want is a bag of chili-lime chips and some mind-numbing Netflix. I know, I could be using that time to start a blog that would make me millions in passive income...or at least calling my mom. That's why last week, when I finished a season of Shtisel, I resolved not to start a new one.

But then 9:00pm hits. Four episodes later and I'm embarrassed to look in the mirror. Now what?

Will I ever learn to keep my  
cravings in check?

# A

We were born to fight.

Every time that voice whispers in your ear--“Just one cookie,” or “A little nicotine never hurt anyone,” or “You haven’t bought yourself something in soooo long,”--that’s the voice in your head declaring war.

The bad news is that you won't always win. But the good news? You don't have to always win.

Those voices in our head will persist no matter how hard we work to silence them. But even if we can't eliminate that side to ourselves, choosing to fight is already a victory.

The time has come to stop expecting yourself to be constantly productive or pragmatic. (Because you'll never get there.) It's okay if we feel lazy, selfish, or angry, and it's also okay if we crave things that we know are bad for us.

But you know what's never okay? To stop fighting.

What does that fight look like? Play defense to keep out desires—not letting that urge progress further, to speech or action.

Staying in control of our impulses will require every ounce of inner strength we can muster. Difficult, yes, but not impossible. Hey, no one said life was going to be easy, right?

Maybe every time you walk by the fridge, you start to crave soda. Maybe it's cigarettes with friends that get you every time.



The next time you are challenged by a decision that goes against your better judgement—don't get down on yourself. Use the urge as an opportunity to wage war. Take life by the horns and show that voice in your head who's boss.

Because there is no high like  
the one that comes from  
beating someone as powerful  
as yourself.

One in  
<sup>a</sup> Billion

There's a lot of  
people out there.

Last time I checked, a total of 7,691,606,437 human beings sharing Planet Earth. If we're talking kosher, a ratio less than  $1/60$  is considered insignificant, and compared to everyone else around here, I'm a lot less than even  $1/6,000,000,000$ . Do I even matter?

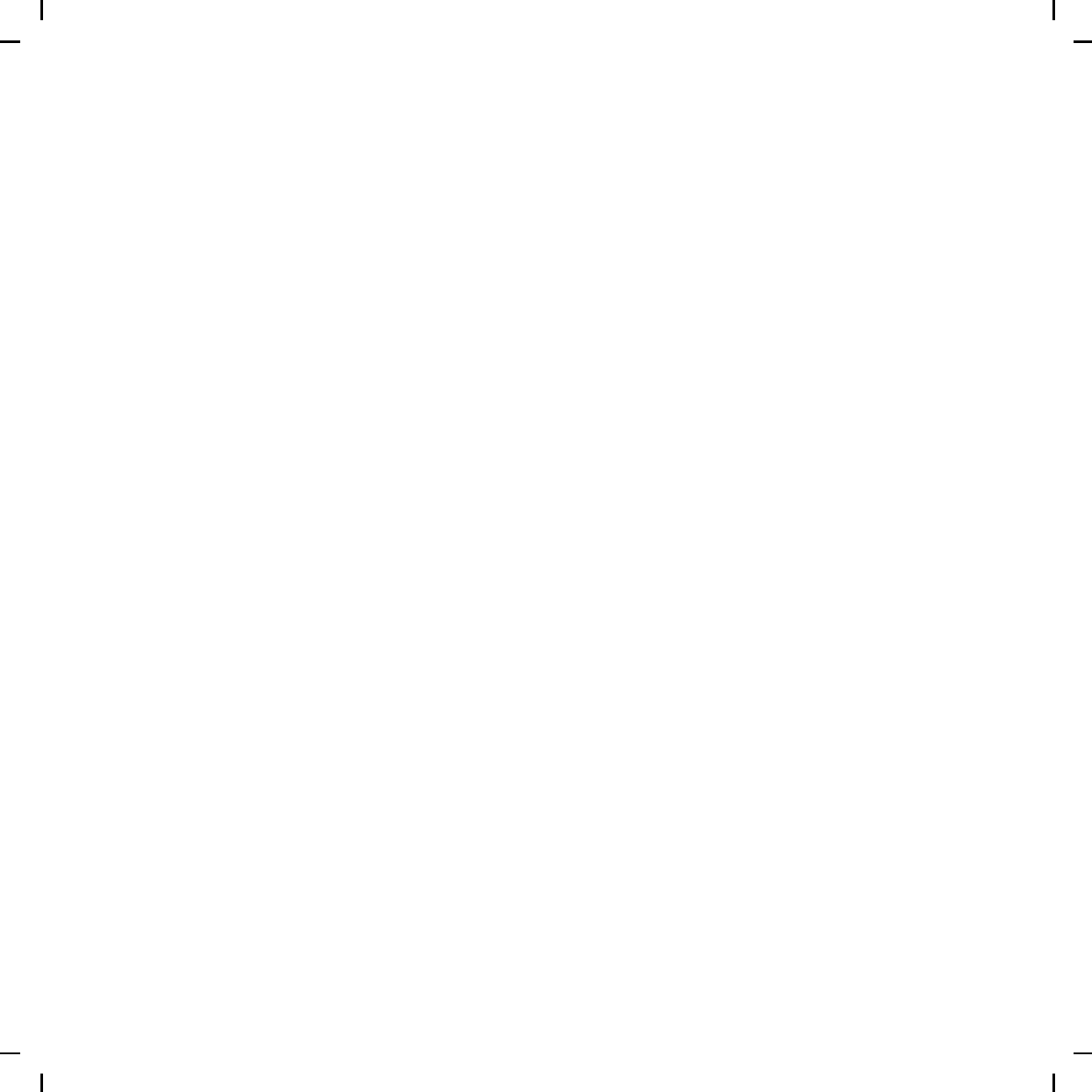
# A

Are you just a  
number?

According to demography, math, maybe. But although that premise might be true—you're outnumbered 7 billion to one—there's a major flaw in your conclusion. Seven billion other people walking around out there, and G-d needed one more: you.

Rumi said it pretty well: You are not a drop in the ocean. You are an entire ocean in a drop. (No pressure. Really.)

G-d needs you because there's something that only you can get done. An impact you can have that not one of the people you're sharing the planet with could ever pull off.



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Mazal  
TOV Meir  
Shterna &