

The Jewish Weekly

When the Ice Burned

By Rabbi Moshe Avrohom Smith

Growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, I used to attend a small yeshivah in Crown Heights, on the corner of Bedford Avenue and President Street. One of the teachers there was a Lubavitcher, and I liked him and his way of doing things very much. On Shabbat afternoons, we would study Maimonides and Tanya, the classic work of Chabad philosophy, together. I learned that Lubavitch has a distinctive prayer book, that they have specific customs relating to their tzitzit and tefillin, and around the time of my Bar Mitzvah, I decided to adopt these customs and become a full-fledged Lubavitcher.

A couple of years later, my mother, Mrs. Freydel Smith, passed away. It was on the 25th of Sivan, 1955, and I was only fifteen years old. Shortly after, my father went off and remarried, and I had nowhere to live. There was a small empty room upstairs above my yeshivah, and I moved in there, living in the building all by myself, although later a few Crown Heights families also took me in. My yeshivah served lunch to the boys each day, but the Lubavitcher yeshivah on nearby Bedford and Dean had breakfast and supper, so I would go there to eat twice a day.

On Shabbat, I would go to Chabad Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway for the prayers. In those days, the entire synagogue consisted of the one small sanctuary on the first floor of 770: The men would be in the synagogue, while some of the younger yeshivah boys prayed in the hall that led into it. But because I was an orphan, the Rebbe had me pray inside, at his own table. And so for a few years, until the congregation moved into the expanded downstairs synagogue in 1960, I would pray right next to the Rebbe.

If the Rebbe came in and did not see me at my place, he would send his secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner, to get me. Rabbi Groner would then go out to the hall and tell the other boys to make room for me to come to the front of the synagogue.

On Simchat Torah, the hakafot dancing would be held in the courtyard outside 770, which had just been turned into a large sukkah for the preceding holiday of Sukkot. One year, I was standing on a bench, against the back wall of the sukkah, watching the Rebbe dance with a Torah scroll. As he came near, I stretched out my hand, trying to give a kiss to the Torah – but I couldn't quite reach. When the Rebbe saw me, he stopped dancing, stretched out his arms while holding the scroll's wooden handles, and leaned forward on the tips of his toes, so that I could touch the Torah. That was the kind of attention the Rebbe gave me, and I have never forgotten it.

It was around this time, when I was still a young yeshivah student, that the Rebbe told me something that left a tremendous impression on me.

It was during a personal audience – a yechidus. While making an emphatic gesture with his hand, he told me: "One need not be concerned with the yetzer hara" – the Evil Inclination that tempts a person to do the wrong thing. "Because whenever we pray anew and study Torah anew, we get fresh power to overcome the yetzer hara."

The power we get from Torah and prayer, in other words, is like spiritual ammunition. If you study and pray every day, you have the power to knock away the yetzer hara and any negativity it brings. There's nothing to be afraid of.

I've tried to live with this idea for my entire life; it's my ammunition for being an ehrlicher Yid, a good, upstanding, faithful Jew.

At one point, I switched to the Lubavitcher yeshivah on Bedford and Dean. There, I began to make a weekly melaveh malkah – the special meal held in the evening after Shabbat is over – for the other boys in the dormitory. Each week before Shabbat, I would go over to 770 to arrange for one of the older yeshivah students to come over and lead a small chasidic farbrengen at these meals.

When I wrote to the Rebbe to inform him that I was doing this, he sent back a reply, through his secretary, thanking me and wishing me well. "For this good news," he added, "I am going to give you a present." It is customary to tell stories about holy tzadikim at a melaveh malkah and, fittingly, the Rebbe's present was a story of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the chasidic movement.

"The Baal Shem Tov loved light," began the story. So, one winter's night, when it had become dark in their synagogue, the Baal Shem Tov asked his students to bring more candles to light up the room.

"We don't have any," the students informed him, and they went to see whether any of the neighboring houses did. But soon they came back and reported that nobody else had any extra candles or lamps.

As it was wintertime, the Baal Shem Tov instructed his students to find an aizlichtel – the Yiddish term for icicle or, literally, "ice-candle" – hanging from the roof outside and take it inside. Then, they should light it.

"He Who said that candles should burn," declared the Baal Shem Tov – referring to G-d, who created and decided the nature of all things – "can make it so that ice should burn."

It Once Happened...

And that was what they did. The students went outside, broke off an "ice-candle," lit it, and it miraculously burned, and gave off light.

That story was the Rebbe's present for my melaveh malkah.

Years later, once I was already married, I had another exchange with the Rebbe involving candles, this time during a personal audience. I had seen, in a certain book, that Jewish women have followed a number of different customs about how many Shabbat candles to light. The common custom is to light at least two, in honor of the Torah's commandments to "remember" and "guard" the day of Shabbat. But some say that you should light five, or seven, or ten, and so on.

"I'd like for my wife to light a lot of candles," I told the Rebbe. "Which number should we pick?"


The Rebbe recommended lighting the regular number of candles, two, and then continuing to add in the future, following the custom to light another candle for each child that is born.

"The number of candles one commits to light has the status of a vow," explained the Rebbe, meaning that one will become obligated to continue lighting that same number each week. "On occasion, you might be in a hotel," – or some other place away from home – "and you won't be able to light a large number of candles." It would be easier for my wife, that is, to stick with the basic custom.


The Rebbe then made an additional recommendation. It is customary for candles to be lit on the lectern from where the prayers are led. "You should be the one to light those candles," suggested the Rebbe, and in that way, I would be able to achieve the spiritual effect of those extra Shabbat candles.

Reprinted from Reprinted from Here's My Story, www.myencounterblog.com.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Moshe Avrohom Smith was a kindergarten teacher who taught the Alef-Bet to children in Crown Heights for nearly fifty years. Currently residing in Deerfield Beach, Florida, he was interviewed in December 2025.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Korach

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	7:10	8:28	9:03
Tel Aviv	7:25	8:31	9:00
Haifa	7:18	8:32	9:04
Be'er Sheva	7:26	8:29	9:01



Life in a Dark, Damp American Cellar

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

A man named Moshe Goldman came to America with his family from Europe in the early 1900's, looking for a better life. He was told it would be difficult religiously, as most businesses were open on Shabbat. Nevertheless, he and his wife made a commitment to stay loyal to Shabbat no matter what.

Sure enough, when he told his first boss that he wouldn't be coming in on Saturday, he was given a pink slip, and this pattern continued week after week. Goldman had a very difficult time earning a living, but his commitment to Shabbat was unwavering.

One day, Goldman came home to his Lower East Side apartment, crushed by the burden of another futile job interview, to find an eviction notice lying on the floor. He was more than three months behind with the rent.

He turned around and went to plead with his landlord, Mr. Wells, for an extension. The latter, however, claimed that he needed the money, and there was someone else willing to rent the apartment.

Fortunately, Mr. Wells was not a heartless person. Out of compassion, he told Goldman he would allow the family to remain in the building, so long as they would be willing to move into the cellar.

Their new "apartment" was actually the building's coal room. It was dark and damp, and thick black soot permeated the entire room, it was free; so they accepted it.

Weeks passed. One day, a wealthy businessman, Mark Bookman, was driving through that neighborhood and was astonished to see two boys with black faces wearing yarmulkas (kipot). He instructed his driver to pull over and stepped out for a closer look.

What he discovered was that they were two fair colored, young Jewish boys who were covered in black soot. He inquired about the soot, and the boys described their heartbreaking living conditions.

Mr. Bookman then asked the boys to show him where they lived, and he followed them to their apartment. When their mother opened the door and saw the distinguished guest, she was completely embarrassed.

Mr. Bookman though, seeing the pitiful situation, was overcome with compassion and wrote them a check for \$5000 (an enormous amount of money in

those days). It was enough to support their entire family for several years.

As she thanked the man, Mrs. Goldman was overcome with joy; this was the answer to all of her prayers. When her husband, Moshe, returned, she told him the good news. His response shocked and dismayed her: "We cannot accept this money!"

"Why not?" she cried out, "He really wanted to give it to us."

"I know Mark Bookman," said Moshe gently. "He desecrates Shabbos. His business continues to operate on Saturdays, and Jews work there. We didn't sacrifice to observe Shabbat for the last two years to be rescued financially by someone who desecrates it."

Early the next morning, Moshe went to Mr. Bookman's sweater factory to return the check. He said that he was extremely grateful for the gesture, but nevertheless he could not accept it.

When he explained why, Mr Bookman stood dumbfounded, unable to utter a word, and when he returned home that night, his wife could see that he looked very disturbed. She asked what was wrong.

"I can't believe he didn't take the money," he told her, as he began to describe the events that had taken place.

Then he became teary eyed as he reminisced. "We used to be like that. Don't you remember? We also treasured Shabbat, until one week, when business was so awful, and we were short on money, we said, we're going to leave the store open on Shabbat. 'Just this one time,' we said. And then,..."

Tears streaked down his cheeks as he recalled that day ten years ago. "I want that passion back," he said. "I want to be a committed Jew also."

Right then and there, they accepted upon themselves to be Shomer Shabbos again. That Friday, an hour before sunset, Mr. Bookman entered his factory and proudly told all the workers, the factory will be closing for Shabbat. When he arrived home on Friday afternoon and watched his wife lighting the Shabbat candles for the first time in ten years, he felt like he had returned home from a very long journey.

The next week, he went back to Moshe Goldman and offered him the check again. This time, he explained how inspired he was from his loyalty to Shabbat, and that he had resolved to keep it from now on.

Moshe and his wife felt both happy and proud, as well as relieved to be free of their financial troubles, and Mr. Bookman merited to have religious grandchildren and great-grandchildren to this very day.

Reprinted from an email from KabbalaOnline.org.

המולד יהיה ביום שני, בשעה 6 בבוקר 46 דקות 161 חלקים

ראש חדש תמוז יהיה ביום שני ובוים שלישי
Rosh Chodesh Tammuz will be Monday and Tuesday

One word says it all.

Every single word of our Torah is sacred, and they all impart such beautiful, enduring messages.

But, so very often, the very beginning of a Parsha, imparts to us a crucial lesson for life – and this is so true of Parshat Korach.

The opening word of Korach actually encapsulates the whole reason why everything went wrong.

What is that opening word? 'ויקה' – 'he (Korach) took'.

What it means in that context is that Korach took himself aside, he separated himself from others and he contended with Moshe and Aharon, challenging their leadership.

This led to a split in the nation. It was horrific. It was equivalent to a brief civil war and as a result, Korach and his followers suffered an awful death.

But what was at the root of this מחלוקת, this conflict?

For Korach it wasn't a 'מחלוקת לשם שמיים' – it was not for the sake of Heaven, it was for the sake of himself. Hence the word 'ויקה' – he wanted to take power, importance, yichus, significance, wealth.

It was all self-serving, not a single element of his leadership had the welfare or the future of the nation in mind.

I think it happens quite often that leaders of all sorts have big egos.

It shouldn't really be the case, but even where there's a big ego, one still needs to be in a position of authority and leadership, for the sake of those whom one is serving.

In the event that there is a leader, who is in their position exclusively for their own sake – not only will the leader be in trouble, but the entire people will be.

So let's show Hashem how we are not all about us but also about others, by praying with all our hearts both for the sake of ourselves, and for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 9
 MITZVOT ASEH: 5
 MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 4

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 95
 NUMBER OF WORDS: 1409
 NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5325

HAFTORA: Shmuel I 11:14 -12:22

Rosh Chodesh - Monday & Tuesday, June 15 & 16, 2026

This week we study Chapter 4 of Pirkei Avot

קרח
שלה לך

This week is sponsored in honor of the 32nd Yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory