

June, 19, 2020, Parshat Shelach 5780
Dvar Torah by Rabbi Baum
Spending time with a Rebbe

Next Thursday, *Gimmel* Taamuz, is the 26th *yahrzeit* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *zt"l*. Last year I wrote a piece about the Rebbe, https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/4443845/jewish/How-Close-We-Are-to-Each-Other.htm and, thanks to Rabbi Moti Seligson, the Director of Media Relations at Chabad Lubavitch, the article found its way around the world and connected me with even more admirers of the Rebbe. During the last few months I have been thinking frequently about the Rebbe, primarily because many people in Crown Heights were hit hard by the coronavirus, and they continue to be in my prayers, but also because I have tried to attach myself to the Rebbe's "positivity bias" during this trauma. Although the Rebbe had personal challenges throughout his life, his positive perspectives, anchored in an Hashem-balanced positivity, were present throughout much of his writing. He did not offer fabricated optimism, but a Torah-based viewpoint on the greatness of the world at large and of people. This included writings about how we are privileged to be Hashem's guests in the world, even when our expectations of tranquility are shattered. In my Shabbat Hagadol Drasha, delivered while we felt as if we were in the abyss, I used several of the teachings of the Rebbe as primary sources to offer all of us strategies to allow us to bear us through this period of tragic uncertainty. I have found the Rebbe to be my friend and confidant as I try to be hopeful, devotional, reflective and still able to look outward and forward. These are themes and values that dominate many of the Rebbe's teachings. Many continue to share with me that these messages have played an encouraging role in mitigating their inner turmoil and the practical trials that still confront us. As we move closer to the month of Taamuz, we continue to find the Rebbe's teachings as important assets in guiding us forward. My own rebbe, who is not a chasid, has taught me that, at times of vulnerability, I should attach myself to sources of strength. I am privileged that, during the last few years, the *sichot*, lifestyle and faith of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l* have become new sources in my development.

There is no more relevant Parsha than Shelach to reinforce the value of grounding ourselves based on our spiritual guides, whether alive or from the past. At the outset of the Parsha, Yehoshua is given a special blessing from his Rebbe, Moshe. As Rashi (Bamidbar 13:16) explains, based on Gemara Sota 34b, this was not the granting of magical protection, but was a heartfelt prayer that the student should continue to live the life lessons of his Rebbe, even in the face of significant opposition. Rabenu Bachye (Bamidbar 13:22) explains that Yehoshua integrated this message into his leadership style and defiantly stood up against his adversaries, with the encouragement of his Rebbe. Calev also found strength in connecting to mentors. For him, as explained by Rashi and the Seforno (Bamidbar 13:16), it was at the Cave of the Patriarchs, when he felt the pressures of the majority, that he found within himself the capacity to be isolated, standing on the shoulders of the Patriarchs and discovering his own greatness through them.

As we hopefully get a bit closer to actually entering our synagogues, after a more than a three-month absence, we will continue to look to the Rebbe and our other foundations of vigor and vitality for encouragement and inspiration. In *Positivity Bias* (p. 135), Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson references a recollection of Elie Wiesel's about his first encounter with the Rebbe. The Rebbe promised Mr. Wiesel that, after years of not even being able to cry, he would teach him how to sing again. This coming week, on Rosh Chodesh Taamuz, we will recite Hallel, whether at home alone or at one of our outdoor minyanim. But it will be a Hallel with no singing, as directed by our medical and halachic experts. We eagerly await the opportunity to sing again in our shuls. Until that day, we remain hopeful and positive and we continue to appreciate what we do have, not only what we are missing. We all have the ability to be even greater than previously imagined.