

***Mrs. Mozart, Viktor Frankl and the Lubavitcher Rebbe***  
*by Rabbi YY Jacobson*

In 1981, when **Rabbi Jacob and Edla Biderman** arrived in Vienna to serve as Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries in Austria, they initiated sending an annual appeal to all the local Jews along with a Jewish calendar in honor of the upcoming High Holidays. To their surprise, the famed Viennese professor **Victor Frankl** (1905-1997), author of the perennial best-seller *Man's Search for Meaning* and founder of Logotherapy, each year before the High Holidays would send a donation to "Chabad of Vienna."

Nobody in the Chabad center or in the larger Jewish community could understand why. Here was a man who was not affiliated with the Jewish community of Vienna. He did not attend synagogue, not even on Yom Kippur. He was married to a devout Catholic woman. Yet, he would not miss a single year of sending a contribution to Chabad before Yom Kippur.

The enigma was answered only in 1995, two years before Dr. Frankl's death at the age of 92, when **Marguerite Kozenn-Chajes** (1909-2000) walked into the office of Rabbi Jacob Biderman, the ambassador of Chabad to Austria. The then 85 year old woman was dressed very classy, and looked youthful and energetic. She told Rabbi Biderman: "I know you think you are the first emissary (*shliach*) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Vienna; but that is not the case. I have served as the first ambassador of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to this city, many years before you."

**"Really, I am the First Emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Vienna"**

Marguerite went on to relate her story.

Her mother's maiden name was Hager. The Hagers were no ordinary Jewish family but descendants of the Rebbes of the famed Vishnitz chassidic dynasty. Marguerite was born in Chernowitz, where she studied to become an opera singer, and then moved to Vienna where her career blossomed. She married a Jewish young man with the family name Chajes.[1] They had a daughter.

Marguerite performed during the 1930's a prominent festival of music and drama, held each summer in the Austrian town of Salzburg, the birthplace of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

On 12 March 1938, German troops marched into Salzburg. The Anschluss -- the annexation of Austria by Germany -- was now complete, Nazi ideology immediately began to affect the Salzburg Festival. All Jewish artists were banned, the leading Jewish conductors and composers were removed. Yet Marguerite Chajes was still performing.

For the Festival in August 1939, Hitler himself made an appearance at two Mozart

operas. He did not know that one of the young women singing majestically was a young Jewess, a scion of a leading Chassidic family, Marguerite Chajes.

Shortly thereafter, the general management made a surprise announcement that the Festival would terminate on 31 August, a week ahead of the scheduled finale on 8 September. The reason was, supposedly, that the Vienna Philharmonic was required to perform at the Nuremberg Party Convention. But the Germans were brilliant deceivers. The true reason became apparent on 1 September when the German army invaded Poland and unleashed the Second World War, exterminating a third of the Jewish people, including Marguerite's family.

On the very night after her performance at the Salzburg Festival, close friends smuggled Marguerite with her husband and daughter out of Germany to Italy. From there she managed to embark on the last boat to the US before the war broke out just a few days later. Marguerite and her family settled in Detroit, where she became founder and president of the Pro Mozart Society of Greater Detroit, and acquired in her circles the name "Mrs. Mozart."

Years passed. Marguerite's daughter grew up and married a doctor, who, in 1959, was honored at the dinner of a Chabad institution. In conjunction with that occasion, Marguerite had an audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

"I walked into the Rebbe's room," related Marguerite to Rabbi Biderman, "I cannot explain why, but suddenly, for the first time since the Holocaust, I felt that I could cry. I -- like so many other survivors who have lost entire families -- never cried before. We knew that if we would start crying, we might never stop, or that in order to survive we can't express our emotions. But at that moment, it was as though the dam obstructing my inner waterfall of tears was removed. I began sobbing like a baby. I shared with the Rebbe my entire story: My innocent childhood; becoming a star in Vienna; performing in front of Hitler; escaping to the US; learning of the death of my closest kin.

"The Rebbe listened. But he not only listened with his ears. He listened with his eyes, with his heart, with his soul, and he took it all in. I shared all of my experiences and he absorbed it all. That night I felt like I was given a second father. I felt that the Rebbe adopted me as his daughter.

"At the end of my meeting with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, I expressed my strong desire to go back for a visit to Vienna." She craved to visit the city of her youth.

"The Rebbe requested from me that before I make the trip, I visit him again.

### **You Will Prevail**

"A short while later, en route to Vienna, I visited the Rebbe. He asked me for a favor: to visit two people during my stay in the city. The first was Viennese Chief Rabbi Akiva Eisenberg, and give him regards from the Rebbe (the Rebbe said that his secretariat would give me the address and literature to give to Rabbi Eisenberg.) To find the second person he wanted me to visit I would have to look up his address

myself. The Rebbe said that he headed the Vienna Policlinic of Neurology. His name was Dr. Victor Frankl.

"Send Dr. Frankl my regards," the Lubavitcher Rebbe said to me, 'and tell him in my name that he should not give up. He should be strong and continue his work, with complete resolve. No matter what, he should not give up. If he remains strong and committed, he will certainly prevail.' The Rebbe spoke in German for a long time about the messages he wished to convey to Dr. Frankl. I didn't understand what the Rebbe was talking about. Who was this Dr. Frankl? Why was the Rebbe sending him this message? Why through me? I did not have an answer to any of these questions, but I obeyed."

Marguerite traveled to Vienna. Her visit with Rabbi Eisenberg proved to be a simple task. Meeting Victor Frankl proved far more difficult. When she arrived at the clinic they informed her that the professor has not shown up in two weeks, thus there was no way she can meet him. After a few failed attempts to locate him at the clinic, Marguerite gave up.

Feeling guilty not to fulfill the Rebbe's request, she decided to violate Austrian mannerisms. She looked up the professor's private home address, traveled there and knocked at the door.

A woman opened the door, and in response to Marguerite's request for 'Herr Dr Frankl,' invited her in.

The first thing Marguerite caught sight of in the home was a cross, hanging prominently on the wall. (In 1947 Frankl married his second wife, Eleonore Katharina Schwindt, a devout Catholic. They had a daughter Gabriella.)

"It was obvious that this was a Christian home. I thought to myself, that this must be a mistake; this can't be the person whom the Lubavitcher Rebbe wanted me to encourage."

Victor Frankl showed up a few moments later, and after ascertaining that he was the professor, she told him that she had regards for him.

"He was impatient, and frankly looked quite uninterested. It felt very awkward."

"I have regards from Rabbi Schneerson in Brooklyn, New York," Marguerite told him. "Rabbi Schneerson asked me to tell you in his name that you must not give up. You ought to remain strong. Continue your work with unflinching determination and resolve and you will prevail."

"Do not fall into despair. March on with confidence," Rabbi Schneerson said, "and you will achieve great success."

"Suddenly," Marguerite related, "the uninterested professor broke down. He began sobbing and would not calm down. I did not understand what was going on."

"This Rabbi from Brooklyn knew exactly when to send you here," Dr. Frankl told her.

He could not thank her enough for the visit.

"So you see Rabbi Biderman?" Marguerite completed her tale, "I have been an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Vienna many years before you came around."

### **Forever Grateful**

Rabbi Biderman was intrigued. What was behind the Rebbe's message to Victor Frankl?

Frankl was born in 1905 in Vienna. The young Frankl studied neurology and psychiatry, and in 1923 became part of the inner circle of one of the most famous Jews of the time, Dr. Sigmund Freud, the "Father of Psychoanalysis" who lived and practiced in Vienna.

The "Final Solution" did not skip over the Frankl family. His mother and father were murdered in Auschwitz; his first Jewish wife, pregnant, was murdered in Bergen Belsen. All of his siblings and relatives were exterminated. Professor Frankl was a lone survivor in Auschwitz (he had one sister who immigrated to Australia before the war.) After the war, he returned to Vienna where he taught neurology and psychiatry.

Victor Frankl was now 90 years of age, and was an international celebrity. He had written 32 books which were translated into 30 languages. His book "Man's search for Meaning" has been deemed by the Library of Congress as one of the ten most influential books of the 20th century.

"I called him a few days later," Biderman recalls, "and asked to meet him. But it was difficult for him to meet me in person. So we spoke over the phone. Initially he sounded impatient and somewhat cold.

"Do you remember a regards Marguerite Chajes brought you from Rabbi Schneerson in Brooklyn," Rabbi Biderman asked Dr. Frankl.

Suddenly, a change in his voice. Dr. Frankl melted. "Of course I remember. I will never forget it. My gratitude to Rabbi Schneerson is eternal."

Frankl also confirmed the rest of the story Marguerite had already explained to Rabbi Biderman, which revolves around one of the greatest debates in psychology of the previous century.

### **Frankl and Freud**

Already before the war, and even more so during his three years in the Nazi death camps, Victor Frankl developed ideas which differed radically from Sigmund Freud. Yet the faculty of his department and the academic elite in post-war Vienne consisted of staunch Freudian scholars. They defined Frankl's ideas as "pseudo-science."

Freud emphasized the idea that all things come down to physiology. The human mind and heart could be best understood as a side effect of brain mechanisms. Humans are like machines, responding to stimuli from within or from without, a completely physical, predictable and godless machine, albeit a very complicated

machine.

Victor Frankl disagreed. He felt that Freud and his colleagues reduced the human being to a mere mechanical creature depriving him or her of his true essence. "If Freud were in the concentration camps," Frankl wrote, "he would have changed his position.. Beyond the basic natural drives and instincts of people, he would have encountered the human capacity for self-transcendence. Man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those chambers upright, with the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips."

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: The last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

He concludes that even in the most severe suffering, the human being can find meaning and thus hope. In his words, "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how.'" A person was not a son of his past, but the father of his future.

After the war, Frankl returned to Vienna, where he developed and lectured about his own approach to psychological healing. He believed that people are primarily driven by a "striving to find meaning in one's life," and that it is this sense of meaning that enables us to overcome painful experiences. In the second half of his book, Frankl outlines the form of psychotherapy that he developed based on these beliefs, called logotherapy-the treatment of emotional pain by helping people find meaning in their lives.

But in the Academic Vienna of the 40's and 50's they defined Frankl's ideas as fanatic religiosity, bringing back the old, unscientific notions of conscience, religion and guilt. It was unpopular for students to attend his courses; his lectures were shunned.

"My position was extremely difficult," Frankl shared with Rabbi Biderman. "Rabiner Biderman!" Frankl said, "I could survive the German death camps, but I could not survive the derision of my colleagues who would not stop taunting me and undermining my success."

The pressure against Dr. Frankl was so severe, that he decided to give up. It was simply too much to bear. He was watching his life-work fade away. One day, sitting at home, he began drafting his resignation papers and decided to relocate to Australia where his sister lived. In the battle between Freud and Frankl-Freud would at last be triumphant. Soullessness would prove more powerful than soulfulness.

## **Hope & Resolve**

Then suddenly, as he was sitting at his home, downtrodden, in walked a beautiful woman. She sent him regards from a Chassidic master, Rabbi Schneerson from Brooklyn, New York. His message? "Do not dare give up. Do not dare despair. If you will continue your work with absolute determination, you will prevail."

Frankl was stunned. Somebody in Brooklyn, no less a Chassidic Rebbe, knew about his predicament? And what is more -- cared about his predicament? And what is more -- sent someone to locate him in Vienna to shower him with courage and inspiration?

Frankl began to cry. He was deeply moved and felt like a transformed man. It was exactly what he needed to hear. Someone believed in him, in his work, in his contributions, in his ideas about the infinite transcendence and potential of the human person.

"That very moment I knew that I would not surrender. I tore up my resignation papers. New vitality was blown into me. I grew confident and became motivated."

### **The Conflict between Religion and Therapy**

Why did the academic community dismiss Dr. Frankl?

In a letter dated June 19, 1969 (3rd Tammuz, 5729), to an Israeli psychiatrist, Dr. S. Stern-Mirz in Haifa, concerning one of her patients, the Lubavitcher Rebbe presents one possible reason. [2]

"I would like to take this opportunity to add another point, albeit this is her field, that the medical condition of...proves (if proof is needed in this area) the great power of faith-especially when applied and expressed in practical action, community work, observance of *mitzvot*, etc.-to fortify a person's emotional tranquility, to minimize and sometimes even eliminate inner conflicts, as well as "complaints" one may have to his surroundings, etc.

"This is in spite the philosophy that faith and religion demand from a person the "acceptance of the yoke," to restrain and suppress natural instincts and drives, and is, therefore, undesirable for any person, particularly in the case of a person who requires treatment for emotional anxiety.

"I particularly took interest in the writing of Dr. Frankl (from Vienna) in this matter."

[One episode to illustrate this: A religious Jewish psychiatrist, Jacob Greenwald (today in Jerusalem), related that he was once invited by the Lubavitcher Rebbe for a visit. The Rebbe wanted to know if he was familiar with the writings of Victor Frankl and if they could be integrated into a Torah perspective of therapy. Greenwald was surprised of how familiar the Rebbe was with Frankl's works, "especially due to the fact that to the best of my knowledge his writings were available at the time only in German and Portuguese."]

### **International Influence**

Back to the telephone conversation between the Chabad ambassador to Austria and Dr. Frankl.

"Indeed," Victor confirmed, "the words of Rabbi Schneerson materialized. My work soon began to flourish."

A short while later, Frankl's magnum opus "Man's Search for Meaning" was translated into English (first under a different title.) It became an ongoing bestseller to this very day and has been deemed as one of the most influential books of the 20th century. The professor's career began to soar. The once-scoffed-at professor became one of the most celebrated psychiatrists of a generation. "Man's Search for Meaning" has been translated into 28 languages and has sold over 10 million copies during his life time. Frankl became a guest lecturer at 209 universities on all five continents, held 29 honorary doctorates from universities around the world, and received 19 national and international awards and medals for his work in psychotherapy.

His brand of therapy inspired thousands of other books, seminars, workshops, new-age and spiritual groups, which have all been based on Frankl's ideas of the unique ability of the human to choose its path, discover meaning in every experience. From Scot Peck's "Road Less Traveled" to Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits," and hundreds of other bestsellers during the last 30 years, all of them were students of Victor Frankl's perspectives.

Victor Frankl concluded his story to Rabbi Beiderman with these words stated above: "I will eternally be grateful to him, to the Lubavitcher Rebbe." Then, not knowing whom he was talking to, Victor Frankl added:

"A number of years ago Chabad established itself here in Vienna. I became a supporter. You too should support it. They are the best..."

Finally, Rabbi Biderman understood why he was getting a check in the mail each year.

## **Frankl & Judaism**

The story, though, is not over.

When Dr. Frankl was asked about faith in G-d, he regularly gave an ambiguous answer. Throughout his years he never displayed any connection to Jewish faith or practice.

Yet in 2003, Dr. Shimon Cowen, an Australian expert on Frankl, went to visit his non-Jewish widow, Eleonore, in Vienna. She took out a pair of *tefilin* (phylacteries) and showed it to him.

"My late husband would put these on each and every day," she said to him.

Then she took out a pair of *tzitzis* (fringes) he made for himself to wear.

At night in bed, the widow related, Victor would recite the book of Psalms.

Indeed, Haddon Klingberg, author of *When Life Calls Out To Us: the love and lifework of Viktor and Elly Frankl*, the only authorized biography of Viktor and Eleonore ("Elly"), writes:

"After his death I asked Elly if he actually made these prayers every day. 'Absolutely. He never missed a day. Every morning for more than fifty years. But nobody knew

this.' As they traveled the globe Viktor took the phylacteries with them, and everywhere, every morning, he prayed. He uttered memorized words of Jewish prayers and Psalms."

"After Viktor died I saw his phylacteries for the first time. Elly had placed them in the little cubicle with his few simple possessions..."

It seems that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was determined to help Dr. Frankl get this message out to the world: We really do have a soul; the soul is the deepest and most real part of us; and that we will never be fully alive if we don't access our souls.

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[1] He was a grandson of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, who lived from 1805 till 1855, was one of the foremost Galician Talmudic scholars. He is best known for his work *Mevo Hatalmud* (Introduction to the Talmud), which serves both as commentary and introduction, as well as for his commentary on the actual Talmud. He was also the nephew of Rabbi Zvi Peretz Chajes, who served as chief Rabbi of Vienna, from 1918 till his death in 1927.

[2] Published in *Igros Kodesh* vol. 26 p. 156.

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*Source:* Condensed (23% less) by Yerachmiel Tilles from a well-researched article by the incomparable YY Jacobson on //TheYeshiva.net.

*Connection:* Weekly Reading (beginning) "*Lech Lecha*" -- "Go to Yourself" or "Go for Yourself" -- the truest expression of "man's search for meaning."

*Biographical notes:*

**Dr. Prof. Victor Frankl** – see story above

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson** ז"ל [11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754 (April 1902 – June 1994 C.E.)], became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law's passing on 10 Shvat 5710 (1950 C.E.). He is widely acknowledged as the greatest Jewish leader of the second half of the 20th century C.E. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.