Do you know the difference between a dreamer and a visionary?

A dreamer is the only one who sees his dream. A visionary empowers others to see the vision.

A dreamer lives in a fantasy; a visionary makes the vision a reality.

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In 1995 Nechama Cohen of Tamiment, PA, sent a letter to bestselling author Simon Jacobson. In it she spoke of her childhood days in the same section of Brooklyn where Jacobson lives, Crown Heights¹.

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1 Nechama Cohen’s letter to Simon Jacobson:

Dear Rov Jacobson,

Kol hakavod on Toward a Meaningful Life. The book is a beautiful kiddush Hashem, and does full justice to the Rebbe himself.

As a yiddishe maidele who was born into a traditional family in Crown Heights in 1940, and who had the great zchus and mazal from Hashem to know the Rebbe as a beloved childhood friend — whose name was Mister, or so I thought then - the book brings tears to my eyes and overwhelming feelings both of joy and loss to my heart. Since I read Toward a Meaningful Life, I have been deluged with memories of events that I’d forgotten for approximately 45 years…

I knew the Rebbe first as Mister, and then when I learned that Mister was not his name (as I thought it was when I was 5) I asked him his name. But I just couldn’t get the name that he told me — he must have been saying Schneerson – so he told me that we had similar names, and could I say Menachem. That I got immediately, and so he told me to call him Mr. Menachem. Which I did.

It was not until I saw a picture of him, taken about 1950, that I realized that my beloved Mr. Menachem was also the Rebbe. I had been praying for the Rebbe forever, or so it seemed, but I never knew that I was also praying for one of the dearest friends I ever had…
When she was a child, in the 1940’s, she would often meet a man on the way to school; he was on his way to the subway station on Eastern Parkway and Schenectady. She loved these meetings because he was the only adult who would really take her seriously. She called him Mister, and she would save her questions for him.

Mister also regularly asked her what books she was reading. When she was about seven years old – Spring of ’48 – she discovered Science Fiction, and would often go to the library on that corner, Eastern Parkway and Schenectady, to take out Sci-Fi books. She loved it. She gave Mister rave reviews and told him he should read the books. He told her he was too busy reading Jewish books and didn’t have time for them.

Once, she told him of two authors she was reading, Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. She was reading Asimov’s Foundation Series, which is about a secret foundation set up by a psychohistorian name Hari Seldon. The purpose of psychohistory and the Foundation was to perfect the Universe. And she told Mister all about it.

A while later Mister told her he had read the books, and in his opinion she should concentrate on Asimov, not Heinlein. He asked her what she thought about setting up a real Foundation to perfect the world. She thought that sounded wonderful. He told her he was doing it. He would set up centers around the world to perfect the universe. She was floored. It was sci-fi come to life.

Sometime later Nechama saw a picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe circa 1950 and she realized that Mister was none other than the Rebbe.

And today we all see the bigger picture: the man who spoke with little Nechama in the 40’s became the Rebbe in 1951. He did indeed build a Foundation, with over 3000 Chabad centers around the world serving as a home for every Jew, a beacon of Torah light; perfecting the universe.

Mr. Menachem always asked me what books I was reading. When I was seven – Spring of ’48 I think – I discovered Science Fiction in the library on Schenectady. I loved it. I gave him rave reviews of two authors, Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. He was intrigued by the idea of teaching children science through fun-to-read novels. I always told him he should read them, that he would love them. He always told me that he only read Jewish books. Then one day, a year or more later, I told him about Asimov’s book “Foundation”. If you haven’t read Asimov’s Foundation Series then I should tell you it’s about a secret foundation set up by a psychohistorian name Hari Seldon. The purpose of psychohistory and the Foundation was to perfect the Universe. Which is basically what I told him.

Anyway, Mr. Menachem later told me he read the book – which floored me – and told me to concentrate on Asimov, not Heinlein. (And he was right.) He then went on to tell me he’d written to Asimov and had gotten a reply. I was thrilled – that Asimov thought enough of him to write back [Told you I didn’t know who I was talking to. At that point I had no concept of what he truly was, much less what he would become.] He was corresponding with Asimov, and as far as I was concerned that was even better than writing to Jackie Robinson, which I think I told him.

Then he asked me what I thought of the idea of setting up a foundation. I thought it was better than Asimov and Robinson combined and told him so. He then told me he was setting up a foundation. I was so excited I started jumping up and down, telling him I wanted to join, please, please please. He said I could. Well, he did set it up, and I did join for a while. He was talking about Chabad and his shluchim. Maybe other things that I haven’t found out yet. Who knows?

Kol tuv,
Nechama Cohen
Tamiment, PA

http://www.meaningfullife.com/torah/parsha/bamidbar/korach/The_Soul_of_a_Conflict.php
We are currently sitting in one.

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Is this amazing? Well it depends.

In 1988 Gordon Zacks² stood in line with thousands of others to receive a “dollar” and a blessing from the Rebbe. Every Sunday, from the late 80’s until 1992 when the Rebbe suffered a stroke, anyone could have an encounter with him, and he would give each person a dollar to give to charity in accordance with an old Chassidic aphorism “when two Jews meet, good should result for a third”.

As Gordon passed the Rebbe, the Rebbe did something unusual, and asked him a question. (Usually the person, not the Rebbe, initiated any questions/conversations. If there was no question, the Rebbe would just offer a short blessing).

“What are you doing for Jewish education?”

Gordon couldn’t believe his ears!

He met the Rebbe once before, 19 years earlier. And that’s what they had spoken about: Jewish education.

In 19 years the Rebbe had seen thousands of people. Literally. Not only did he recognize Gordon; he remembered what they had spoken about!

Gordon was dumbfounded. He said “Rebbe, you’re amazing!”

The Rebbe smiled and said, “What does it help your community that I am amazing. YOU need to be amazing”.

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In his inaugural address the Rebbe made two revolutionary statements:

1. He said this is the generation that will make Judaism’s vision of a perfect world, a world in which G-d feels at home, a reality. All that Jewish history has been waiting for is about to happen.

2. He further said; don’t expect your leaders to accomplish this incredible task. You will do it. Your leaders will merely help you lead.

Today, as we mark this historic day, there is really only one way to celebrate. We need to be amazing. We need to be part of the Foundation. We need to make the vision come true, to be a beacon of Torah light to our individual surroundings.

In this Facebook Era, I want to suggest a simple four word model for doing this: “Like it. Share it.”

From now through March 31st – The Rebbe’s birthday, which the US President declares every year as Education and Sharing Day USA - remember these four words.

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Like it. Share it. If you like something Jewish, share it.

Signing up for a Jewish class? Tell a Jewish friend about it. Read a good Jewish book? Give it forward to a Jewish friend. Going to a Shabbat dinner? Invite a Jewish friend to come with.

Like it. Share it.

Every Friday night from now until then, I will be looking forward to hearing from you, what you Liked and what you Shared that week.

Let us all be leaders. Let us all be amazing. Because that’s the way we will make the world amazing. That’s the way we will make the vision of our prophets, the era of Moshiach and a perfect world, a reality.