**Shabbos Stories for Simchas Torah And Parshas Beraishis**

**Vol: #2, Issue #4 5771/2010**

**Dancing With G-d**

**By** [**Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=2361)

 They were mere boys—all under the age of eighteen—but in this particular case, their youth proved to be a liability, not the asset it had been under other circumstances. It was puzzling, really: Most camp commandants consigned teenagers sixteen and older to life, since they were deemed hardy enough for the slave labor force into which they were conscripted.

But this camp commandant had drawn the line at eighteen instead, decreeing that all those who were younger be sent to certain death. His orders for additional selections grew more shrill and fevered with each passing day, multiplying the numbers that were fed into the furnaces. Perhaps it was the advent of the Jewish High Holidays that had unleashed his fury, or, in perverse irony, his own heinous way of celebrating.

It was the fall of 1944 at Auschwitz, and Hungarian Jews—the last nationality to be transported to the camp—had arrived in massive numbers. The furnaces worked overtime as the inmates were sped to their inexorable fate. Everything about the camp seemed so surreal—the perpetual fog cover of smoke and ash, the barren landscape of barbed wire and slime—that it served to mirror the prisoners' own profound sense of displacement and disorientation.

Everything had happened so fast: being crammed into the cattle cars that had disgorged them at Auschwitz; the quick, merciless dismemberment of families as spouses, children, parents and siblings were torn apart from one another during the selections; being dispassionately stripped of the clothing and personal belongings that made them human, and the freezing-cold showers and assembly-line delousing that had followed. In the course of only minutes, the new inmates had lost everything they owned, everything they loved.

Already, some were engulfed by the horror, so studded by their sudden plunge into hell, so mummified into *Muselmann* (the walking dead), that they could barely remember their own names, let alone the religious holidays. But there were those remnants, those few who still cared about observing the Jewish holidays; among them were fifty religious boys who had just been selected for the gas chamber and were now being herded into a bathhouse, ostensibly to take "showers."

It was late enough in concentration camp history that they boys knew the truth. Gas would pour through the pipes, not water. It was a ruse that the Nazis used to disarm the inmates, to ensure their cooperation. But these spiritual heroes made a conscious decision not to give in to them, choosing defiance instead.

**Never before had the gas chamber's concrete**

**floor shaken under the pounding of fifty pairs**

**of feet stamping in unbridled joy.**

Amid the tumult in the bathhouse, one boy sprang up and shouted: "Brothers! Today is the holiday of Simchat Torah, when the Jewish world rejoices, having concluded the reading of the Torah over the past year, followed directly with the commencement of the new cycle of the Torah reading. During our short lives, we have tried to uphold the Torah to the best of our ability, and now we have one last chance to do so. Before we die, let us celebrate Simchat Torah one last time.

"We do not possess anything anymore," the boy continued. "We have nothing. We do not have clothes to cover us, nor a *sefer Torah* (Torah scroll) with which to dance. So let us dance with G‑d Himself—who is surely here among us—before we return our souls to Him."

Since it had first been erected and used, the gas chambers had absorbed a cacophony of human sounds—screams, cries, moans, benedictions—that would forever reside within its cold earthen stone walls. But never before had its rafters trembled with the pure, sweet strains of fifty young voices raised in fervent song, never before had its concrete floor shaken under the pounding of fifty pairs of feet stamping in unbridled joy. The boys pierced the heavens with their song: *"Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu u'mah nayim goraleinu umah yafah yerushateinu…"* (How fortunate are we and how wonderful is our portion and how beautiful is our heritage.)

"What is going on in there?" One scowling Nazi guard asked his comrade as they waited outside. "Why hasn't the gas been turned on yet?"

"It sounds like they're singing…and *dancing*. Are they crazy?" another guard said in disbelief.

"Go find out what's causing the delay," an officer commanded. "And get the commandant."

Summoned to the doors of the gas chamber, the commandant listened with growing fury to the incongruous revelry inside. He had watched Jews marching to their deaths hundreds of times before—some weeping softly, others reciting prayers—and he had relished these scenes. But *this*—this singing and dancing—*this* was unacceptable. He flung open the gas chamber doors and pulled one boy toward him.

**“Tell Me Why You are Singing**

**and Dancing Now!”**

"You!" he shouted. "Tell me why you are singing and dancing now!"

"Because leaving a world where Nazi beasts reign is cause for celebration," the boy sneered. "And because we are overjoyed at the prospect of reuniting with our beloved parents, whom you murdered so viciously."

The commandant became enraged at the boy's contemptuous words. Obsequiousness…fear...last-ditch attempts to ingratiate one's self into his favour—those were acceptable modes of behavior. Insolence was not.

"I'll teach you a lesson," he screamed as the boys continued to dance and sing, heedless of his presence. "You thought that the gas chamber would be your last stop. You'll find out otherwise. The gas chamber would have been easy and painless compared to what awaits you now. I will torture each one of you with unbearable suffering. I will slice your flesh till you expire."

**Ordered the Guards to Remove**

**the Boys from the Gas Chamber**

The commandant ordered the guards to remove the boys from the gas chamber and place them in a holding block overnight. He planned to begin the torture sessions the following day.

But the next morning, his plans again went awry. A high-ranking Nazi officer had traveled to Auschwitz to round up slave labor for a work camp that lacked sufficient help. He needed to find several hundred young, able-bodied men capable of performing gruelling work under barbarous conditions.

As he strode through the camp looking for prospects, the Nazi officer just happened to pass by the barracks in which the fifty religious boys had been temporarily housed. Their vitality undiminished by their overnight stay, the boys still radiated strength and good healthy. "Excellent," the Nazi officer smiled in satisfaction. "Exactly the type of boys I need."

The Nazi officer pulled rank on the camp commandant, who revealed nothing about *his* original plans for the boys' fate. He stood silently as the Nazi officer ordered the boys—and several hundred other inmates—to board the trucks that rolled out of Auschwitz into safer climes. Some say that the boys left the grounds singing.

*Postscript: Survivors of Auschwitz report that all fifty boys survived the war.*

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Aish.com. This story comes from the book "Small Miracles of the Holocaust: Extraordinary Coincidences of Faith, Hope and Survival" by Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal, published by The Lyons Press, August 2008. The book is available at all book store chains, Jewish Book Stores, and online book stores.*

**The Soul of the Sole**

Once, on the festival of Simchat Torah, the Baal Shem Tov (founder of Chasidism) told his disciples the following:

"On Simchat Torah people generally oversleep a bit because of the late festival meal and the dancing of the night before. But the angels do not have this sort of schedule, so naturally, they 'wake' up on Simchat Torah at the same time as usual. The angels want to begin chanting their songs of praise to G-d, but they are not permitted to do so until the Jews begin their prayers. So off they go to tidy up the Garden of Eden-Paradise.

"Now, in the Garden of Eden, the angels find articles they have never before encountered. What could these things be? The Garden is strewn with soles of shoes! The angels are mystified. They are accustomed to finding prayer books, Shabbat candles, coins for charity, tefilin, and mezuzot in the Garden, but shoe soles?

Off the angels go to question the angel Michael[[1](http://www.lchaimweekly.org/lchaim/" \l "n1)]. The angel Michael explains to them that this is his doing-these soles and slippers are the result of Jews dancing with the Torah. Lovingly, the angel begins collecting the soles. "These are from Kaminka and these from Mezeritch," and so on, he enumerates.

Then the angel Michael proudly insists that he is superior to the angel who binds crowns for the Creator from the prayers of the Jewish people. "The torn soles of Simchat Torah make a finer crown," he declares.

Many of us aren't gifted with a "good" head. Not everyone has a kind and caring heart. But most everyone has feet with which to dance and hands with which to clap.

And we all have voices with which to sing-though some of us are more in tune than others.

The festival of Sukkot is referred to as the "Season of Our Rejoicing." In addition to participating in the mitzvot (commandments) of eating in a sukka, and shaking the lulav and etrog, we have been given the additional mitzva to rejoice and be happy.

During Sukkot itself, in commemoration of a special service that used to take place in the Holy Temple, celebrations take place in Jewish communities all over the world. At these celebrations, known as Simchat Beit HaSho'eiva, Jews celebrate in a manner in which all Jews are truly equal, by rejoicing!

The dancing and festivities of Sukkot and Simchat Beit HaSho'eiva culminate in the whirling and twirling and uninhibited exuberance of Simchat Torah, when we rejoice equally with the Torah, not with heads and hearts, nor with our wallets, but with feet and shoes and with the soles that are later collected in the Garden of Eden and woven into a most luminous and fine crown for the Creator.

Celebrate with your family, with friends and with your feet during the upcoming "Season of Our Rejoicing." Get out there and exercise your soles and your soul simultaneously!

Reprinted from this week’s issue of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

**Temporary Festival Huts Take Urban Jungle by Storm**

**By Ronelle Grier**

The requirements for a *sukkah* – that temporary booth-like structure that can be seen popping up in Jewish homes’ backyards around the world in the days after Yom Kippur – are simple enough. According to Jewish law, it must have at least two-and-a-half sides and be covered with just enough plant material to provide shelter, but not enough to block a view of the stars.

To build one just might be the perfect outdoor fall activity, unless, of course, you live downtown. Jewish residents of today’s modern metropolises constantly face the same problem. In the high-rise jungle, where should they erect the holiday huts in which the Torah specifies that eating and drinking must take place throughout the course of Sukkot?

In New York City, and in several other urban areas worldwide, Chabad-Lubavitch centers are transforming public parks into full-service holiday locations this year. It’s a task fully sanctioned by the city’s parks department, says Rabbi Uriel Vigler, who lives among many Israeli expatriates on the Upper East Side.

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| Chabad of Midtown’s large sukkah, a temporary booth erected during the Jewish festival of Sukkot, has been a fixture of New York City’s Bryant Park for 13 years. |
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Four years ago, Vigler moved to an apartment building in the area and weeks before Sukkot – which begins this year the night of Sept. 22 – he realized that he couldn’t just erect a hut on the sidewalk. But Ruppert Park, a block-wide oasis of green on Second Avenue between 90th and 91st Streets, would be perfect.

Officials at the parks department “were very helpful,” says Vigler, director of the Chabad Israel Center. “They understood this provides a tremendous service for the community.”

Vigler’s sukkah will return this year, and a huge party this Sunday will offer food and entertainment for the entire community. A singles barbeque is scheduled for Sept. 28, and each day of the holiday, rabbinical students will help visitors make the traditional blessing over a lulav and etrog.

“The feedback is extremely positive and encouraging,” adds Vigler. “It’s become an icon.”

Elsewhere in Gotham

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| A finalist in the Sukkah City design competition (Photo: New York Magazine) |

Union Square Park, meanwhile, is hosting the 12 finalists in the Sukkah City international design competition organized by Reboot and the Union Square Partnership. The finalists, whose sukkah designs were selected for their originality and conformance to Jewish standards by a panel of architects, designers and critics, erected their creations on Sunday.

Although they comply with the traditional rules, these booths are anything but traditional. They range from a structure that resembles a child’s project made of popsicle sticks, to another that appears to be floating under a filmy cover of hessian.

Selected structures from the contest will also be on exhibit at the New York City Center for Architecture during the month of September.

And while people enjoy the sukkahs at Union Square Park and Ruppert Park, Jewish businessmen and women and residents will be able to eat and socialize in a giant booth erected for the past 13 years by Chabad of Midtown at Bryant Park located behind 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. According to Rabbi Yehoshua Metzger, thousands of people walk through the park every day. He’s scheduled several holiday parties to take advantage of the location.

“We’re centrally located between Times Square, Penn Station and Grand Central Station,” says Metzger. “We’re seen by masses of people. It’s our busiest, best-attended event.”

*Reprinted from this week’s Chabad.Org website.*

**New Torah and Synagogue Revitalize**

**Young Israel Congregation in Sunnyside**

**By Kate Nocera**



*Photo by Delmundo/New York Daily News*

*Rabbi Nesanel Lerman holds the new Torah scroll inside the Young Israel Synagogue in Sunnyside, Queens. The scroll was handwritten and each letter inspected for perfection.*

When resurrecting a withering congregation, even Divine intervention can get a little boost from some entrepreneurial spirit.

The once-thriving Young Israel synagogue in Sunnyside was on the verge of disappearing several years ago - a casualty of shifting demographics.

It had no rabbi, a crumbling building on 45th St. and [Sifrei] Torahs that were falling apart. In the years after World War II, the [Queens, New York] neighborhood was a vibrant community for Orthodox Jews, but as congregants moved and aged, the membership dwindled.

[Betty Ann Weiner](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Betty+Ann+Weiner), 55, and her husband joined eight years ago when the congregation was going through perhaps its roughest patch.

"It was a total nightmare," she said. "There was no heat, windows were broken, we had stray cats coming in and living in the building. There were maybe eight people total in regular attendance. The Torah needs to be a perfect scroll, and ours were falling apart. They were unusable."

The turning point was in 2005.

The [National Council of Young Israel](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/National+Council+of+Young+Israel), which has about 200 member synagogues around the country, stepped in and persuaded the Sunnyside congregation to move to a smaller, more manageable location on 46th St.

It also found them a new rabbi and commissioned a new Torah, painstakingly handwritten.

Now, membership is growing and young Jewish families are moving to Sunnyside to be a part of the revitalized community, synagogue officials said.

Last month, congregants put the finishing touches on the Torah scroll as part of a celebration that culminated in a procession down 46th St.

It was emblematic of the new life breathed into a synagogue on the verge of collapse - both literally and figuratively.

The roof partially caved in on [Rosh Hashanah](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Rosh+Hashanah) in 2006, just after the congregation moved out.

"We had another place already. It was meant to be that we should open by the [Jewish] New Year," Weiner said.

Congregants also knew that a new Torah scroll would provide confidence to members that the synagogue was becoming a vibrant place to worship.

They were right.

Membership has steadily increased in the past five years, now with 25 families that regularly attend services.

When the new scroll was brought into the synagogue, "there was not a dry eye in the house," said [Rabbi Pesach Lerner](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Pesach+Lerner), vice president of the National Council of Young Israel.

"For the older Jews in the community, it was special for them to see their synagogue return. For the younger Jews, it was a symbol of rebirth."

The scroll is handwritten and a number of people must inspect every letter to make sure it is perfect. It can cost $50,000 to produce.

"The new Torah has a very special significance for us," said the new rabbi, Nesanel Lerman, 37.

"It's a real symbol of where we want to be and every time we take it out, it fills us with joy."

The members of Young Israel hope Sunnyside will continue to attract Orthodox Jews. Neighborhoods like [Forest Hills](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Forest+Hills+(New+York)) and [Kew Gardens](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Kew+Gardens), which have bustling Orthodox communities, are appealing, but the commute to [Manhattan](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Manhattan) can be cumbersome.

[Zach Berman](http://www.nydailynews.com/topics/Zach+Berman), 22, and his wife moved to Sunnyside a year ago. He was drawn to the easy commute into the city.

But more than that, the young couple said they were delighted by the idea of helping start a Jewish community rather than moving into an established one.

"We feel like we are pioneers out here," he said. "The new Torah scroll represented the start of a new life. It was the start of a new life for us, and a new life for the synagogue."

*Reprinted from last week’s email of the National Council of Young Israel Weekly Email Update.. The article was originally printed in the September 21, 2010 issue of the New York Daily News.*

**The Garden of Eden Ran**

**On Green Energy!**

**By Rabbi Raphael Simcha Goldman**

***Dear Rabbi,***

***As a Jewish woman, I believe it is very important to respect our environment, and I support “green causes” whenever I can. I am curious to know what Judaism says about the subject.***

***Galit H.***

Dear Galit,

Your question touches on a topic that stretches back as far as the first human beings! After G-d created Adam and Eve, he blessed them to be “fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Bereishis 1:28)

Furthermore, when G-d placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, his mission was to “to work it and to guard it.” (Bereishis 2:15) Clearly, then, there is meant to be a deep and significant connection between humanity and the world around us – one that requires an attitude of respect and responsibility.

In fact, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808 – 1888, leader of German Orthodox Jewry) describes the magnitude of this mandate in no uncertain terms:

“‘Do not destroy anything!’ is the first and most general call of G-d, which comes to you… If you regard the beings beneath you as objects without rights, not perceiving G-d Who created them… you have no right to the things around you… If you use them unwisely, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property” (Horeb).

As to specific issues such as preserving the environment, the Torah has a specific commandment not to destroy fruit trees during a time of war, which is understood as a general commandment not to waste anything in the environment unnecessarily.

On this commandment, Rabbi Aaron HaLevi of Barceloni writes:

“This is the way of pious and elevated people… they will not waste even a mustard seed, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see, and if they are able to save, they will save anything from destruction with all of their power… Every person is obligated to master his inclinations and conquer his desires.” (Book of Education, Mitzvah 529 on Devarim 20:19)

And in the times of the Second Temple, there were prohibitions against burning wood from olive trees and grape vines on the altar. According to one opinion in the Talmud, this was to avoid air pollution, since these woods burn with a great deal of smoke. Jerusalem had special legislation to protect its unique environment: all garbage was removed from the city and no kilns or tanneries were allowed to operate within its borders. In this way, pestilence and pollution were kept out of the city to preserve the quality of life. (Bava Kama 82b)

I’d like to conclude with a Midrash that beautifully summarizes the Torah approach to environmental issues: “When the Holy One Blessed Be He created the first man, he took him and showed him all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: ‘See my works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are; and I created all of it for you. Be careful not to spoil or destroy my world because if you spoil it, there will be no one after you to repair it.’” (Kohelet Rabba 7:13)

Sincerely,  
Rabbi Raphael Simcha Goldmann

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Parsha Partner, a publication of Partners in Torah.*

**Ask the Rabbi:**

**Topic:** **Afghanistan: Home**

**To the Lost Tribes of Israel?**

**From: Jeremy in Pittsburgh, PA**

*Dear Rabbi, I have heard that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel may have gone to Afghanistan and that the Afghani people today are their descendants. They supposedly have Jewish customs like lighting candles on Friday and wearing a tallit. Is this true?*

Dear Jeremy, When you think about the fact that Jews as a people are as ancient as the Chinese, you realize that by now there ought to be at least a billion of us. Where are we all? The answer is that being Jewish - while truly a most wonderful thing to be - has never been extremely popular. Aside from murdering us, the nations have shrunk us through assimilation via coercion, enticement and expulsion in all directions.

So finding Jewish traces anywhere on the globe shouldn't surprise us that much. A classic case of this is the Ten Tribes of Israel, who were expelled from their land by the Assyrians around two and a half millennia ago. As one would expect, being exiled was bad for their national identity. They all went lost.

Do any of them live today in Afghanistan?

First of all, let's put the record straight that Bin Laden has no connection to Judaism except maybe for his similarity to Haman and Pharaoh. He's not even Afghani; he hails from Yemen via Saudi Arabia.

As for the Afghani people, yes, there is fascinating evidence that some of them, most notably the Pathani tribesmen, may have roots going back to the Ten Lost Tribes.

First of all, many Afghani people claim this to be so. Rabbi Avraham Hacohen, president of the Jewish community in the Afghani city of Harath, testified that he heard former Afghani king Habib Allah Han proclaim, "I am from the tribe of Benjamin."

In similar testimony, an immigrant to Israel recalls his childhood memory of King Habib Allah's horseback tour of Harath: "The Jewish dignitaries of the city gathered, among them my father.… My father coerced me to join in greeting the king. The King asked the Jews, 'What tribe are you from?' "

'We have no tradition regarding that, so we don't know, O King,' answered the head of the delegation."

'Well, we do know,' said the king. 'We, the Mahmad Zei family, are all descendants of the tribe of Benjamin from the seed of King Saul, from the sons of Yonatan Afghan and Pithon.' "

Many Pathani village elders claim this as well. They are "the seed of Israel," descended, they say, from Pithon of the tribe of Benjamin.

Pithon, a great-grandson of King Saul, is mentioned among a list of hundreds of names chronicling the descendants of the Twelve Tribes (Chronicles I 8:35). Nothing more is said of him.

Other names of Afghani tribes resemble those of some of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel: Rebbani (Reuben); Levoni (Levi\*); Ephriti (Ephraim); Yusuf Si means Sons of Yosef (Joseph). The Ghaghi tribesmen claim their name is from Gad. (\*Levi, as a whole, is not a lost tribe. Many Levites still exist among Jews today. Yet it is assumed that many individual Levites were exiled along with the Lost Tribes.)

Jewish names such as "Israel," not so typical in the radically fundamental Islamic state of Afghanistan, are found among many Pathani. Jewish names have been seen on tombstones in far-flung graveyards around the country.

As for Jewish customs, the Pathani are quite strict about not shaving their sidelocks (peot), which is in accordance with the Torah command, "Don't shave the sides of your head," (Leviticus 19). Their day of rest is Saturday, and Friday towards evening they light candles, which some then cover with a basket (originally to hide their Jewishness?). They wear a four-cornered garment, to which some attach fringes on the corners. Some pray facing Jerusalem, and the Star of David symbol is prevalent in almost every Pathani home!

The great Torah Sage "Tiferet Yisrael" wrote regarding the Ten Tribes: "Many of the remaining became assimilated amongst the non-Jews…. Regarding them is the dispute between the Talmudic Sages Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezar, regarding whether in the future those who remain but are assimilated will eventually be brought back to the true faith in G-d…. For, although many of them are actual idol worshippers and their identity as "Israel" is forgotten, and the few Jewish practices they have are merely traditions handed down from their fathers, such as the people of Afghanistan, regarding whom many geographers consider to be forgotten Jews…."

In sum, there is interesting evidence that some Afghani may have Jewish roots. What do we take from all this? We should realize that it's a miracle of the greatest magnitude that we as Jews exist at all, remaining fully Jewish, and with our entire Torah extant for the 3,314th year in a row.

Sources:

*Based on an article by Rafael Berelson*

*Tiferet Yisrael Reish Perek Chelek*

Reprinted from this week’s Ohr.edu website of Ohr Somayach International in Yerushalayim.

**Living With The Times**

**How to Overcome**

**The Yetzer Hara**

This week's Torah portion, Beraishit (Genesis), is the first portion of the entire Torah. It recounts the entire story of Creation and tells, among other things, about the creation of the first people.

We read that Adam was commanded by G-d not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. But Adam was not able to overcome his temptation and he ate the fruit.

According to the Midrash, the command not to eat the fruit was given after three-quarters of Friday had passed and was to be in effect only until Shabbat began. Adam and Eve were not to eat the fruit for only three hours!

When we consider that Adam was created by G-d, Himself, and heard the command from G-d, it seems amazing that he couldn't control himself for a mere three hours.

We learn from this episode the strength and guile of the yetzer hara--that aspect of our psyche which encourages us to go against G-d's will. The yetzer hara may camouflage its aim by trying to convince us that a commandment is too difficult or unimportant. Nevertheless, its real intention is to persuade us to go against G-d's will. Therefore, the more important a certain command is for a particular person, the harder the yetzer hara will try to dissuade the individual from performing the command. Even if the commandment is a very easy one, the yetzer hara will make it seem extremely difficult.

Thus, we can understand how Adam was tempted to eat the forbidden fruit. The yetzer hara employed its most compelling arguments to convince Adam to sin.

The yetzer hara's arguments are highly evident today. Many contend that if the "burden" of the Torah, the details and laws, would be lightened, all Jews would adhere to them. But this is not true. For, even if there was but one commandment--and that for only three hours--the yetzer hara would make it seem impossibly difficult and repressive.

We cannot overcome the yetzer hara by compromising the Torah. We must, rather, realize that we have all been imbued with the strength to overcome the yetzer hara's arguments and guile. If we draw on our G-d-given inner strength, ultimately we will be victorious.

*Reprinted from L’Chaim edition of Parshas Bereishis (Issue #183) from 5752/1991. Adapted from the works of the Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l. L’Chaim is a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn.*

**Shemini Atzeret – Simchat Torah**

**As Heard From Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**By Sam Gindi**

Happiness is a state of mind. You cannot buy it in any store or find it on a vacation. Happiness is in the mind.

And it is peace of mind that is the only true happiness in this world.

When a man has nothing to worry about and his mind is completely at rest,

that is the ultimate form of Happiness in This World/Olam Ha-ze’.

An idealist cannot have peace of mind unless he is making progress in learning Torah. Unless he is able to perform more Mitzvot. Unless he can have more children to bring up in the ways of the Torah.

Accomplishments are necessary for obtaining peace of mind. Happiness is accomplishing something worthwhile. This is wealth that lasts forever.

  Peace of mind (Menuhat Ha-Nefesh) is the common denominator.

Bitahon (Trust in Hashem) is one of the great forms of peace of mind.

Bitahon: To know that Hashem is in charge of the universe. And in charge of  the affairs of mankind. And in charge of our private individual history.

Hashem is constantly thinking about it and is planning the very best for us.

Therefore, whatever has happened in the past to us has been for our maximum benefit”.

Based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller’s Tape #466 from his famous Thursday night hashkafa shiurim.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “As Heard From Rabbi Avigdor Miller.”*

***A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l***

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| **Capturing the Geshmak (Pleasure) in Learning Torah** |

How does one gain a taste, a *Geshmak* in their *Torah* learning?

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| ANSWER: |

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# You want to get a *Geshmak* [pleasure] in *Torah* learning, you must first get the idea of review, *Chazoro*. *Chazoro* makes it *Geshmak*. The first time you learn it's hard work. Now if you are a big *Tzadik* you'll do it with *Geshmak* too, but since we are not big *Tzadikim*, so you have to first of all review what you learned, once and twice and three times. Once you get the idea, you get the *Tsulsa D'eshmaytsa*, get the whole gist of the *Sugya*, get the idea, the whole picture.

# The *Gemara* is beautifully made. You have to know, the *Gemara* is contrived beautifully. The *Mesaderim* of the *Gemara* were great pedagogues, they knew how to make the *Sugya* not merely for information.They could have told you the *Maskana*, the *Halacha*. No, they tell you the whole business, how we arrived there, in such an interesting way, that when people train themselves to learn it again and again, they become entranced with the *Gemara*, only you have to do it many times like I said before.

# And if you train yourself to talk over, talk over what you learned, talk over the whole thing - not word for word, the whole content - after a while it becomes so delicious to you, it's an experience that you look forward to repeating again and again. The talking over what you learned and understanding it, even though it's not deep, not profound, even *poshut*; this *Ma'an De'omar* says this, the other *Ma'an De'omar* says this, this one learns from this *posuk*, this one from another *posuk*. Why doesn't he want to learn from this *posuk*, why does he learn from the other *posuk*, and you talk over the whole thing, the whole business, any *sugya*, after a while it becomes sweeter and sweeter.

# You know when you chew food it becomes sweet, you know that? When you chew bread, it becomes sweet in your mouth, because the starch under the influence of the ptialina in your saliva, the starch turns to sugar, it's a fact. The bread turns sweet in your mouth from the saliva. As you chew the bread it becomes sweeter and sweeter. The longer you chew something, the sweeter it becomes. And the same is with *Torah*, the longer you chew over this piece of *Gemara*, it becomes sweeter and sweeter in your mouth.

# *Chag Sameach to all.*

# *Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l” that is based on a transcription of one of the questions posed to Harav Miller by members of the audience to his famous Thursday night lectures. To listen to the audio of the above question and answer, please dial (201) 676-3210.*

# The Prime Ministers’ Man

**By Jenny Hazan**

Adviser to five Israeli leaders, Yehuda Avner shares his perspective on Israel and what it means to be a Jew.

When Yehuda Avner first joined the Israeli Foreign Service in 1959, he was the only observant Jew. “When I began I was the only religious fellow in the whole Foreign Service. It wasn’t easy,” recalls Avner, 82, whose diplomatic career ended up lasting an incredible 38 years.

Avner came to Israel in 1947 as a pioneer from Manchester, UK, at the age of 18. After becoming a founding member of Kibbutz Lavi in the Galilee, he caught a break that landed him in the Foreign Ministry’s Political Information Department, a post which propelled him to successive positions as secretary, English speechwriter, and adviser to Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin, and Shimon Peres; Ambassador to London, Australia, and Ireland; and Consul to the Israeli Embassies in New York and Washington, DC.

His story, which touched intimately on the lives not only of Israel’s founding fathers, but also on the likes of Abba Eban, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, Yasser Arafat, Margaret Thatcher and Princess Diana (to name a few), forms the backbone of his new book, *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership* (Toby Press).

The 700-page account tells a thus-far untold version of this critical period in Israeli history, compiled from Avner’s meticulously-kept notebooks, photographs, diaries, minutes, speeches, memorandums, letters, newspaper clippings, classified government material, and his extremely strong and vivid memory.

Avner was Israel’s lone religiously observant diplomat.

Avner, who lives and writes from his home in Jerusalem – a city which after all these years he still says he finds “intoxicating” – recalls how difficult it was for him in the beginning, to be Israel’s lone religiously observant diplomat. “There were times when I had real problems,” he says.

One particularly sticky instance stands out in his mind. In 1985, then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin asked Avner to draft a statement on Shabbat. There was a crisis following Henry Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy and the U.S. had threatened to reassess its regional policies and its relations with Israel. “I refused to do it, and Rabin was full of contempt,” recalls Avner.

Afterwards, he went to one of the leading rabbinic sages of the time to seek counsel on his decision. Since successful diplomacy has the potential to prevent war, potentially saving lives was a factor involved in weighing the decision. The rabbi asked him whether Avner was certain that he had all the pertinent information to make the judgment that he did. Perhaps only the Prime Minister had the full picture. "One will never know whether I behaved correctly or not, and eventually Rabin forgave me.”

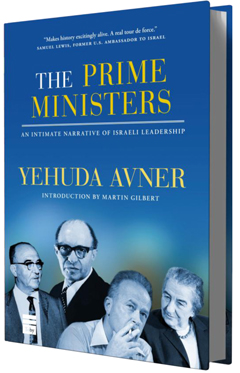
Plenty of never-before-released, personally-gathered stories make the book a compelling source of both historical and academic interest. Avner tells one never-before-published story about late-Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the mezuzot at the Prime Minister’s residence.

Soon after he started working for Begin, in 1977, Avner got a call from a yeshiva student requesting to check the mezuzot at the Prime Minister’s house. “I had been so conditioned by working with all these other secular Prime Ministers, I told him I would take down his phone number, just to get him off my back,” says Avner. “As Begin was leaving that day I mentioned it to him in passing, and he told me it was extremely important and to get the student to the house as soon as possible.

“Begin himself checked every mezuzah with him. It was important to him.”

“Begin himself checked every mezuzah with him,” recalls Avner. “I kept looking for the cameras and the crowds, but no. Begin did it for only one reason – it was important to him. He meant it.”

It was for his sincerity and his traditionalism that of all the heads of State he worked for, Avner says he most admired Begin. “Until Begin came along, all the Prime Ministers I worked for were secular Zionists,” explains Avner. “Begin was a tremendous traditionalist and in public he would never do anything that was not within the bounds of Jewish tradition. As a Jew who strives to keep the mitzvot, this was very exciting and refreshing for me.”

[](http://www.amazon.com/Prime-Ministers-Intimate-Narrative-Leadership/dp/1592642780/friendsofaishat/)

The thing he admired most about Begin was the fact that he was able to bridge his identity as a Jew, religiously, with his identity as a Jewish nationalist, a duality that Avner says is at the crux of Jewish and Israeli identity issues, to this day.

Jewish identity says Avner, is unique in the family of nations, beginning with the Exodus from Egypt, where the Jews entered history as a people, and continuing to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, where the Jews entered history as a faith.

“Ever since, we have walked through history with this duality,” he says. “We are the only ethnic group in the world, in terms of modern statehood, in which we are at one in the same time a people and a religion.”

This dual identity is as disturbing to Jews as it is to non-Jews, and accounts for much of Israel’s internal socio-cultural tensions, namely those between the state’s religious and secular populations. “It is an uneasy coexistence,” says Avner. “While some would like to see the two components of Jewish identity torn apart, others say no way.”

It also accounts for Israel’s isolation in the international community. Avner points to the fact that Israel doesn’t belong to a geographic entity in the UN, neither to a power bloc NATO, nor to an economic space like the EU.

Again, he takes a lesson from Begin. Each Saturday evening, Begin would hold a study session on the weekly Torah portion. Avner recalls one particular week, where the discussion centered around a passage in which the non-Jewish prophet Balaam is bribed by the Moabite king Balak to curse the Israelites, who had been wandering 38 years in the desert and were still two years away from entering the promised land.

Bilam foretells the future destiny of the Jewish people, predicting “... this is a people that shall dwell alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers, 23:9).

“Reading the verse out loud, Prime Minister Begin gave a mild chuckle and said, ‘One does not have to be a mystic for the imagination to be stirred by such an improbable vision of a nation forever ‘dwelling alone’. Is it not a startlingly accurate prophecy of our Jewish people’s experience in all of history?’” Avner reads aloud from the middle of *The Prime Ministers*. “‘So there you have it,’ concluded Begin snapping the book shut. ‘Cease dwelling alone and we cease to exist. What a conundrum!’”

Everything of this civilization is in a museum. We [the Jews], we are alive. We are still here.”

We may be alone in the world, as Begin concluded, but says Avner, we are here. The idea conjures another of Avner’s vivid memories. Once, while on a post-peace treaty tour of a museum in Cairo with Begin, one of the men in the Prime Minister’s entourage commented that the plethora of artifacts representing the vibrant Egyptian civilization, with its incredible arts and culture, made him feel small. “Begin overheard him and said, yes, but everything of this civilization is in a museum. We [the Jews], we are alive. We are still here.”

Avner sees himself and his writing as a link in the chain of that history. “I am hoping [with this book] every generation will simply learn about these early years. That is something very important to me,” he says. “The most important words in all the Bible is ‘teach thy children’. Our job on earth is to teach them, from generation to generation. This is part of the secret of our survival.”

Reprinted from this week’s Aish.com website.

**Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim - Parshat Bereshit**

**Rabbi Yona’s Secret Salvation of the Jewish Nation**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

The Bible begins by explaining, in great detail, how G-d created the world from absolute nothingness in seven days and even what He created on each day.

But the very second sentence of the Bible seems to divert from this topic: “The 'Spirit of G-d hovered over the water“. An explanatory book given by G-d to Moses called ‘The Midrash’ explains that this 'Spirit on the water' is the spirit of Moshiach. (Berashes Rabba 2:4)

But this seemingly just makes things harder to understand.

What is Moshiach? Why is he mentioned on the first day before anything was created? And what does it mean that he is above the waters? This must be very important if it is mentioned in the beginning of the Torah… but what does this have to do with the creation of the world ex nihilo? And even more important….what does it mean to us today?

To understand this here are two stories.

The Talmud in tractate Taanit (23b) relates that it so happened that almost two thousand years ago there was once a drought in Israel. Rain hadn't fallen for almost a year. The Rabbis declared fasts and public prayers but after weeks of suffering and supplication it hadn't helped; the wells were drying up, food was running out and things looked bleak.

There were no lack of holy, devoted Jews in Israel but for some reason their cries and pleas were not answered and no one could imagine where salvation would come from.

But one Jew was a bit different than the others. His name was Rabbi Yona. He was a very holy man as we will see but the Talmud tells us no more than he was so unobtrusive that even his wife and family had no idea of his spiritual achievements.

Rabbi Yona couldn't stand the suffering of his brothers. He waited and participated in the public fasts and prayers but when it became obvious that rain was not coming he took an empty sack and the remaining money in the house and told his wife he was going to the town to see if he could buy some grain to replenish their food supply.

His wife blessed him with good luck and he made his way toward the market.

But he never made it to the market; when he was sure he wasn't noticed he turned to the outskirts of the city then walked to a distant, desolate rocky spot far into the hills where he was certain that no one had ever been, found a place to lower himself in the cleft of some rocks, wrapped himself in his prayer shawl and began to pour his heart out to G-d.

After several minutes a cold wind blew in from the north the skies turned grey, then ominously dark as the wind blew. Soon thunder and bolts of lightning announced the end of the heavenly decree and rain began to drizzle and finally fall in torrents.

Rabbi Yona climbed out of his hiding place put his prayer shawl back in the sack and headed home.

On the way people were dancing in the streets, arms lifted in thanks, faces to heaven weeping in gratitude and soaked with blessed rain.

When he arrived home his wife too was dancing for joy at the rain. She showed him into the house, gave him a dry set of clothes and asked if he had managed to make it to the market and get some grain.

"No" he answered "Before I got to there it began to rain and I reasoned that soon there will be plenty of food for everyone at lower prices. So I came home."

No one ever knew that he saved the entire country.

The second story is about a holy Jew called Pinchas Ben Yair.

In a certain town was a kind-hearted Jew who, in his spare time, dug wells, cisterns and irrigation ditches for those traveling or passing through the area so water would be easily accessible and travelers would never suffer from thirst.

This Jew had a daughter who reached the age of marriage. He found a proper match for her and the date of the wedding was set.

But then tragedy struck. The girl was crossing a river on the way to make preparations for the wedding and somehow slipped, fell into the rapids and drowned.

In fact the waters were so turbulent, deep and murky that her body was never found.  
 When the people in the area heard the heartbreaking story they went to the man's home to comfort him but to no avail. The poor fellow was so beside himself with bitterness, grief and pain that he refused all consolation.

At that time Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair happened to pass by and see the crowd of people entering and leaving the bereaved man‘s house. He understood from the solemn looks on their faces that they were comforting a mourner and he too entered. But when he offered a few words of comfort the mourner refused him as well.

"What type of a Jew is this?" Rabbi Pinchas asked one of those who was also leaving. "Is he the first person to ever have lost a loved one? I agree that death is awful but why is he different from every other mourner? Why is he so bitter?"

"Rabbi," the reply was soon in coming "This man used to dig wells and provide everyone with water and now his daughter drowned in water!!" Answered Rabbi Pinchas "What? Can such a thing be? No! It cannot be that he honored his Creator with water and he now suffers because of water?!"

Just moments later cries of jubilation came from the city. "The girl returned!"  
 Some say that she grabbed onto a pole that suddenly appeared in the water, others say that an angel with the form and face of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair saved her. (Yerushalmi D'mai 4a)

This begins to answer our questions. True G-d creates everything in the world constantly, but the world frequently hides this fact. Indeed the Hebrew words for 'world' and 'concealment' are almost identical: "HaOLOM".

That is why G-d created man.

If man purifies his motives, intellect, emotions, thought, speech and deeds like the Holy men (Tzadikim) in the above stories, he can actually reveal the truth: That G-d is really the Creator and the world is a constant miracle.

This is why the Torah begins with Moshiach.

Because Moshiach is the goal of all creation.

Moshiach will be a man who will teach ALL mankind to walk in the path of the Torah (Noahide commandments for the non-Jews) by convincing them that G-d is infinitely close, is creating them, listens to all prayers and provides all needs.

That is why the Moshiach is above the water.

The Torah is likened to water (Isaiah 54) repentance is likened to water (Lamentations 2), and pleasure is likened to water (Tanya chapt. 1).

Moshiach will teach all mankind the Torah, bring the world to repentance and fill the creation with the pleasure of serving the Creator (like water fills the ocean….see the very end of Rambam).

And, as Pinchas ben Yair did in the second story, Moshiach will eventually raise the dead, which is also likened to water (second blessing of the Amida prayer).

Just as rain begins as water on the ground, then evaporates to 'spirit' (the spirit of G-d floating on the water) and finally miraculously (as in our first story) descends to be physical once again, so too Moshiach. (Chaye Sarah 5752 end of paragraph 13).

This is the theme of the Torah; that the world is in OUR hands! One more good deed, word or even thought can purify the world around us! We must do EVERYTHING possible to bring....**Moshiach NOW!**

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*