**Shabbos Stories for Simchas Torah And Parshas Bereishis 5774**

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A True Simchat Torah Story

**By** [**Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48865472.html)

He came by my house every six months or so, for a modest contribution to [support](http://www.aish.com/print/?contentID=48899072&section=/h/su/saast) the immigrant village he helped build in Israel to absorb new [arrivals](http://www.aish.com/print/?contentID=48899072&section=/h/su/saast) from Russia. His excited, high pitched voice and happy, dancing eyes belied the deep furrows in his brow which were painfully etched by decades of punishment at the hands of the communist authorities for the terrible crime of being an observant Jew in the [Soviet Union](http://www.aish.com/print/?contentID=48899072&section=/h/su/saast) during the 50's, 60's and early 70's.

**“Perhaps, Just a Glass Tea”**

It became a ritual. I'd ask the diminutive rabbi if he'd like a bite to eat. He would always counter in his Russian accented Yiddish, "Perhaps, just a glass tea." My wife would serve him a steaming cup of dark orange brew along with a generous slice of home-made cake, both of which seemed to help straighten his sagging shoulders just a bit. Trudging door to door for small donations, it had certainly been awhile since his last square meal.

He looked up at me and smiled broadly. "Did you know there was such a thing as a Cantonist Shul?"

I remembered stories I heard as a child which described some of the darkest, but most heroic days in Jewish history.They would be kidnapped from their parents' home, tortured repeatedly until they either accepted Christianity or died of their wounds.

The Cantonists were Jews who from 1825-1840 were forcibly conscripted into the Russian Czar's army from as early as the age of 10, and obligated to serve for 25 years. The authorities saw it as a corrective, forced assimilation of stubborn Jews into Russian society. They would be kidnapped from their parents' home, tortured repeatedly until they either accepted Christianity or died of their wounds.

**Starved, Beaten and Lashed**

They were starved, beaten and lashed, often with whips fashioned from their own confiscated *tefillin*. In their malnourished states, the open wounds on their chests and backs would turn septic and many boys, who had heroically resisted renouncing their Judaism for months, would either perish or cave in and consent to the show baptism. The Czar would have only reliable Christian Russians defending the motherland.

To avoid this horrific fate, some parents actually had their sons' limbs amputated in the forests at the hands of local blacksmiths, and their sons -- no longer able bodied -- would avoid conscription. Many other children tragically committed suicide rather than convert.

Some 40,000 young Jewish boys were forced into Czar Nicholas' army, and very few emerged alive as practicing Jews.

Even the brave few survivors who secretly maintained their faith and managed to return to their families 25 years later, by and large found themselves shunned as traitors to Judaism.

**The Cantonists Had a Shul of Their Own**

"The Cantonists actually did have a shul of their own," the rabbi continued. "After all, they had nowhere else to go."

"My grandfather told me that he once attended the Cantonist Shul on Simchat Torah. The Cantonists could dance like Cossacks. They were huge, strong men, and the heavy Torah scrolls would seem like toothpicks in their arms. They effortlessly danced on for hours on end. Although they were looked down upon by other Jews, and they were not very learned and really couldn't observe the Torah properly, they were nonetheless able to rejoice in their Judaism and celebrate the Torah. It was truly amazing."

He paused long enough to dip a sugar cube into the still hot tea cup, placed the cube in his mouth and swallowed another long swig of the tea.

"Then for the final *hakafah* (circuit around the synagogue's central lectern), the Cantonists, as if on cue, suddenly removed their shirts in unison! With the Torahs held tightly to their bare skin which was covered with the ugliest welts and scars you ever saw, they danced around even more energetically.

 Their smiles were now giving way to streams of tears as they looked out into the crowd of assembled Jews, as if to say, 'You may have studied and observed this Torah, but we gave our bodies and our lives for it. The Torah is at least as much ours as it is yours!'"

As he put the tea cup down, he couldn't hide the tremor in his hand which caused a rattled meeting of cup to saucer.

Wiping away a tear with his napkin, he said, "In democratic America it is so easy. Yet so many say, 'It's so hard.' Go figure."

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**Pedi-Sukkahs Get in**

**Gear for the Holiday**

**By Menachem Posner**

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| Mobile sukkahs are becoming a more familiar sight on city streets. |
| Mobile sukkahs are becoming a more familiar sight on city streets. |

In 2009, 16-year-old Levi Duchman had a zany idea: Why not build a mobile sukkah—one pulled by a bike? It was a concept that made sense to a teenager, and it turned out not to be so zany. Today, pedi-sukkahs spin their wheels in dozens of cities in four different countries.

The sukkah—an outdoor wood or canvas booth covered with a thatched roof—is an integral part of the eight-day holiday of [Sukkot](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4126/jewish/Sukkot.htm), which begins on the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 18. It’s where Jews eat, study, pray and generally spend their time the entire week. For those who don’t have their own sukkah, a pedi-sukkah allows visitors the chance to eat something inside and wave the four different kinds of plants, or [Four Species](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/998913/jewish/The-Complete-Four-Kinds-Owners-Manual.htm), represented by the *lulav* and *etrog* as prayers are recited.

“The concept has really developed in waves,” says Duchman between phone calls from Chabad emissaries placing last-minute orders for [vehicles](http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/2326340/jewish/Pedi-Sukkahs-Get-in-Gear-for-the-Holiday.htm) of their own. “In 2009, I saw a pedi-cab and was inspired to build the first pedi-sukkah. In 2010, I rented 10 tricycles, and we had a fleet. In time for Sukkot 2011, I purchased 10 tricycles of my own, and we doubled our numbers. Now, there are between 30 and 40 pedi-sukkahs in places like Portland, Oregon, and as far away as Brussels, Belgium.”

It has evolved as well. While Duchman’s first models sported lattice-like sukkahs built on heavy wooden frames, which required extensive assembly work every year, those now in use are made of canvas mesh that the wind can blow through. And they can be assembled without a single tool.

The new design is the result of a partnership between Duchman and Wayne Sosin, president of Worksman Cycles, which has been producing cargo bikes, industrial bikes and adult tricycles since the turn of the 20th century.



Wayne Sosin, president of Worksman Cycles, with Levi Duchman

Even though many of the 25,000 vehicles they turn out annually are used to transport cargo, crafting a platform that would be stable enough for people to step on and off proved challenging. The problem was neatly solved by designing a step placed at the base of the platform, which makes for easier access and a sturdier sukkah.

The company, based in Ozone Park, N.Y., also makes a deluxe model that can be propelled by a motor after a long day of pedaling.

Sosin says the pedi-sukkah is definitely one of the more unique projects he has worked on since joining the company in 1979; in fact, it required more customization than normally allowed for projects of this size.

“We have given Levi an unusual amount of freedom” to create his product, Sosin says, “because he is such a wonderful young man and because he doesn’t take no for an answer.”

Working with the craftsmen there, Duchman also designed the vehicles to be year-round “mitzvah-cycles.” On Chanukah, they can pull a *menorah*; before Passover, they hold *matzah* for distribution; at other times, they convert into *tefillin* [booths](http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/2326340/jewish/Pedi-Sukkahs-Get-in-Gear-for-the-Holiday.htm). Duchman says they’ve even been used as a Chabad on campus kosher [hot dog stand](http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/2326340/jewish/Pedi-Sukkahs-Get-in-Gear-for-the-Holiday.htm).

While he was always familiar with sukkahs, Sosin says that working with Duchman has taught him a lot more about *halachic* requirements for sukkah construction.

As far back as Roman times, the ancient sages of Israel taught that it was permissible to build a sukkah on a boat, chariot or even on the back of a camel. They also established that a sukkah must be at least 10 handbreadths tall. Yet it is hard to imagine that anyone foresaw the same laws being applied alongside those of aerodynamics to design a sukkah on wheels.

**The Idea Catches On**

Aside from the sukkah vehicles produced by Duchman, the concept has caught on with Chabad emissaries all over the world, especially those in urban centers.

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*Pedi-sukkah made from an old kiddie stroller on*

*the streets of Montreal last year.*

One such person is Rabbi Yudi Winterfeld, whose Chabad center serves the urban Mile End area of Montreal, Canada, a historically Jewish immigrant neighborhood that has seen an explosion of growth demographically. Still home to a sizable Chassidic community, a young artsy crowd—attracted to the architecture and proximity to the city center—has moved in alongside stalwart Francophones.

But over the years, the groups have wrestled with certain religious issues, particularly over the construction of sukkahs on home balconies. The issues raised include those of an aesthetic nature and a yen for condo conformity, along with a reluctance to have other groups’ religious symbols proliferate on balconies throughout the year.

Winterfeld says his sukkah helps break some of that tension.

“We live in an area known for its many bike paths and pedestrian-only streets, so it really made sense for us,” says Winterfeld, whose sukkah cycle was based on a retrofitted baby bike-trailer.

 “It is amazing to see how much dialogue it created,” he continues. “I parked in front of someone’s house and before you know it, there was a crowd of people gathered. They had lots of questions, and I was really happy to answer them. They were so thankful that we able to dialogue about something that they had seen and heard about, but never experienced firsthand.”

Over in Portland, Ore., known for its pioneering spirit of rugged individuality, Rabbi Chaim Wilhelm has launched an [online indiegogo campaign](http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?AID=2337823) asking people to help fund his dream set of wheels: a full-service *mitzvah* cycle.

As of the day before Sukkot, 28 supporters had pledged more than $1,500 dollars for the vehicle.



Making the blessings on the Four Species last year in New York.

Another sukkah cycle was purchased by Rabbi Hersh and Fraidy Loschak, who are in the midst of establishing a new Chabad center serving Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J. The rabbi plans to ride his new vehicle around campus, introducing himself and offering students the opportunity to climb aboard, shake the *lulav* and *etrog*, and grab a quick bite, thus fulfilling the two central *mitzvahs* of the Sukkot holiday.

“It’s going to make lots of noise,” he says hopefully.

*Reprinted from the current website of Chabad.Org*

**A Jewish-Dutch Tapestry**

**By Joannie (Henya) Tansky**

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| Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, head shliach to Holland and Chief Rabbi of the Interprovincial Chief Rabbinate for the Netherlands. |
| Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs |

*As told by Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, head shliach to Holland, Chief Rabbi of the Interprovincial Chief Rabbinate for the Netherlands and president of the Rabbinical Council. The Queen of Holland recently bestowed upon him one of Holland’s highest civilian awards. Rabbi Jacobs is the seventh generation of his family to reside in Holland.*

**The First Thread**

One day in the spring of 1981, Rabbi Jacobs received a message that a vicar from the Protestant church had called him. The vicar, it turned out, was a woman.

After leaving a few messages with each other, they finally connected, and she explained that she needed to meet with him. Overcoming his initial hesitation, the rabbi agreed, and a date was set.

Arriving at her home, he was ushered into a room that felt like and resembled the tropics, humid and filled with willowy palm trees. In the midst of the foliage, sitting on an oversized chair, was a fragile eighty-year-old woman. She asked Rabbi Jacobs to sit down. “Please, you must listen to my story,” she began.

“My name is Baroness Alice van Slingelandt, and I originate from Vienna. My maiden name is Joachim; my parents were members of the Kultusgemeinde (Jewish Community) in Vienna, and I am Jewish.

“At twenty, I was an artist, and as you are undoubtedly aware, artists can be eccentric. I married a wealthy sixty-year-old man. He was from Holland and living in Indonesia, then a Dutch colony. I followed him to Indonesia, where he died four years later. I was soon to learn that he had bequeathed all of his money to the children of his former wife, leaving me penniless.

“Refusing to come back home, face my family and admit failure, I remained in Indonesia homeless, sleeping in the street. To earn some money, I planted flowers—orchids—and after a few years I had created a successful business with a number of employees. It was during that period that I was approached by missionaries and, succumbing to their overtures, converted to Christianity.

“Soon after, I met my second husband, fifty-five-year-old Baron van Slingelandt, and we returned to Holland together. I began studying theology, and eventually became a vicar in the Protestant Church and a professor at the church university. My husband was an active missionary who tried to convert Jews to Christianity.



A landscape view from Holland

“Over time, I came to the realization that the New Testament is a distortion of the Torah. In my lectures in the university, I now avoid teaching Christian dogma.

“In my old age, I have come to understand that Judaism is the truth. I need to learn more.”

After that first meeting, Rabbi Jacobs visited the baroness every second week. He taught her about keeping kosher, the holidays and Jewish [prayer](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2329400/jewish/A-Jewish-Dutch-Tapestry.htm). Slowly she began to observe Shabbat and other mitzvahs. During this time she maintained her public persona, continuing to teach her religious [classes](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2329400/jewish/A-Jewish-Dutch-Tapestry.htm) in the town of Driebergen.

A few years later she fell gravely ill, and was hospitalized. Rabbi Jacobs felt it his obligation to ensure that when the time came, she would be buried as a Jew. Naturally, this would require her consent. Despite her commitment to Judaism, Rabbi Jacobs knew that this step would be an extremely difficult one. Before broaching the subject, he wrote a letter to the Rebbe requesting a blessing that he be successful in persuading her.

On his next visit to the hospital, Rabbi Jacobs delicately explained the importance of being buried as a Jew. The baroness listened politely, and responded that this was not possible because she already had a plot reserved in a non-Jewish cemetery next to her husband, who had died seventeen years earlier.

After some time and many words, she conceded, on one condition. She wanted two vicars, her students at the university, to speak at the funeral. Rabbi Jacobs agreed, but stipulated that they were not allowed to say anything religious. They then discussed what would be engraved on her tombstone. Baroness Alice van Slingelandt passed away March 30, 1985, corresponding to the 8th of the Jewish month of Nissan.

**The Funeral**

Jewish law dictates that at certain times of the year eulogies may not be given, because they are incongruous with the joy occasioned by a festival. One such time is the entire month of Nissan. Rabbi Jacobs was in a bind. He could not, in good conscience, allow the baroness to be eulogized.

A few days before the funeral, Rabbi Jacobs received a phone call from one of the vicars the baroness had chosen to speak. He was shocked to discover that the baroness was Jewish. He told Rabbi Jacobs what he planned to say at the funeral, and Rabbi Jacobs endeavored to explain the law about not giving eulogies during the month of Nissan because of the festival of Passover. The vicar was so incensed that he hung up the phone.

The second vicar, however, had a different reaction. He respectfully expressed compliance with the new developments. At the end of the conversation, he revealed to Rabbi Jacobs that his wife was also Jewish!

In the end, Rabbi Jacobs was the only one to speak at the funeral. He spoke about teshuvah—return. He explained that within every Jew there is a neshamah, a divine spark that remains forever connected to G‑d, no matter how far one has strayed. Teshuvah means simply to return to our true selves, to reconnect to the part of us that is one with G‑d. Little did Rabbi Jacobs know that the wife of the second vicar was hanging onto his every word . . .

**The Second Thread**

In March of 2008, a young man moved from the town of Leiden, on the west coast of Holland, to the neighborhood of Amersfoort, where Rabbi Jacobs lives.

Before leaving his hometown, his Reform rabbi had warned him not to go to Rabbi Jacobs’s shul. He was convinced that Orthodox Jews would not tolerate a Reform Jew in their congregation. Having a curious nature, the young man’s interest was piqued, and he made a point of paying a visit to the shul soon after his arrival. One week led to another, and he became a regular in the shul, often eating the Shabbat meals in the Jacobs’s home.



An urban landscape in Holland

Six months passed. One Shabbat afternoon, Rabbi Jacobs retired to take a nap after lunch, and the young man found himself opening his heart to the rabbi’s wife, Blouma. He told her that his father was not Jewish. His mother and his maternal grandmother were Jews, but his grandfather on his mother’s side was not. In fact, his grandfather was a Protestant vicar.

Blouma then told the young man that she too had an interesting story. She told the baroness’s story, and to her utter amazement the young man sat up and exclaimed, “I know that story! My grandfather was the second vicar she chose to speak at her funeral!”

The young man proceeded to tell a part of the story that neither Blouma nor her husband knew:

“My grandmother was very moved and inspired by what your husband said at the baroness’s funeral. She felt as though Rabbi Jacobs was talking directly to her, and she decided that the time had come to begin to live her life as a Jewish woman.

“She declared to her daughter, our mother, ‘We are Jewish. Your children are Jewish, and we should live as Jews.’ Although my mother had known that she was a Jew, and had not hidden it from my sister and me, we observed virtually nothing in the way of Jewish life. Now, inspired by my grandmother, my mother began to embrace Jewish observance, and when I was sixteen she sent me to Israel for summer camp. Upon my return, I chose the path of Reform Judaism. That is, until I met you and your husband . . .”

Today, this young man lives a Torah life with his beautiful family in Amersfoort.

**The Third Thread**

Eventually, the story of the young man’s sister came to light as well:

In 1989 she decided to make aliyah. Under the auspices of the Jewish Agency, she was slated to go to a non-religious kibbutz.

Meanwhile, she was working in a shop in the town of Utrecht. One Friday afternoon a few weeks before her departure, a little boy wearing a yarmulka and his bearded father came into the shop. Intrigued, she engaged them in conversation. The father, who was a rabbi, invited her to his home for Shabbat.

She took an immediate liking to the rabbi’s wife, and until her trip to Israel she spent every Shabbat in their home. Inspired by what she saw in the rebbetzin, she altered her plans and decided to spend her time in Israel in a Torah-observant environment. She remained in Israel, married, and together with her husband and children lives as a committed and proud Jew.

**The Fourth Thread—The Rebbetzin’s Story**

One day in 1975, in the middle of the school year, a teenage girl was enrolled in the Jewish Sunday classes Rabbi Jacobs taught. Her parents enrolled her because they hoped that the classes would influence her to move in the right direction. Merely attending classes did not produce the desired results, however. The couple sought Rabbi Jacobs’s guidance, and together they devised a plan.

The Jacobs used to go to London occasionally to visit Blouma’s family, and the rabbi asked the girl if she would join them as a mother’s helper on one of these trips. London sounded exotic, so she accepted the invitation.

A part of the plan was to have her stay at the home of Rabbi Forta, a science teacher in the Lubavitch school there. They hoped that he would have a good influence on this highly intelligent and very confused girl. After many hours of conversation and debate with Rabbi Forta, the girl came to understand the folly of her current ideas and began to explore Jewish values and teachings.

After the trip, she became a frequent guest at the Jacobs’s home on Shabbat. Subsequently, she attended the Chabad Beth Rivkah school in Paris, went on to seminary, and became a Jewish studies teacher. She married an American-born Chabad chassid, had children, and together with her family moved to the town of Utrecht to become shluchim.

It was this girl’s husband and son that the young man’s sister had encountered in the shop that fateful Friday afternoon . . .

Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.



**Parshat Bereishet**

**HIS HANDIWORK**

**By Simcha Groffman**

"Now, boys, step this way and we will enter the antique furniture exhibition."

"Wow, Avi. Isn't this museum great?"

"It sure is, Chaim. We get to see how people lived two hundred years ago."

"Boys, please notice the fine handiwork on these wooden chairs. Each piece is hand carved, finished, and polished."

"Avi, we don't see chairs like that today. Everything is made with machines."

"So true, Chaim. You can judge the skill of [the craftsman](http://ohr.edu/youth/simcha/5761/bereishi/bereishi.htm) by his handiwork. The carpenter who made these chairs must have been very talented. His work is beautiful. Look. Here are more intricate pieces of furniture and fine wood carvings covered with silver."

"You can judge the skill of the craftsman by his handiwork."

 "That's what I said, Chaim."

"It is as true nowadays as is was 5761 years ago."

**That’s Ancient History**

"That's ancient history, Chaim. What are you referring to?"

"The first words of the Torah, Avi, 'Bereshis barah Elokim,' 'In the beginning of G-d's creating.' Wouldn't it have been better to begin the Torah with G-d's name and say, "Elokim barah Bereshis?"

"I guess so."

"Rav Shlomo Efraim from Lontshetz, who is known to us as the Keli Yakar, asks this question."

"What is his answer, Chaim?"

"He explains that we cannot know G-d directly. We can only appreciate who He is by observing his handiwork. Therefore, the word barah comes before the word Elokim. It is only through the creation (barah) that we know Elokim."

**Philosophical, But Also Practical**

"That is very philosophical, Chaim."

"True, Avi, but it is practical also. Just look at the marvels of the world. The majestic mountains, the deep seas, the vegetation, the orbits of the planets, and the complexity of even the tiniest creatures. G-d's handiwork shoes that He is quite a craftsman."

"Do you know that we refer to this in our [daily prayers](http://ohr.edu/youth/simcha/5761/bereishi/bereishi.htm), Chaim? In the second blessing of the silent Amida we say, 'Who is like You, Master of mighty deeds, and who can be compared to You?' The Rabbis explain that no one is capable of doing as many mighty deeds as G-d, and no one can do even one of them as well as He can. Just think about how many millions, billions, and trillions of things G-d has created and is supporting. Then think about the complexity of even the simplest of them."

"Wow."

"Now you can start to get some appreciation of our Creator."

"Avi, this is truly amazing. Here we are in a museum, looking at antique furniture, and we have turned it into an opportunity to appreciate G-d's greatness."

"Inspiration is everywhere, Chaim. You just have to look for it. This world if full of G-d's handiwork. You have to see it to appreciate it."

*Reprinted from the archives of Simcha’s Torah Stories, a project of Ohr Somayach Institute of Yerushalayim.*

**By What Right Can Jews**

**Live in Eretz Yisroel?**

**By Daniel Keren**

 The following is based on a lecture I heard four years ago from **Rav Eliyahu Zev Brog**, *mora d’asra* of the Bais Yisroel Torah Center, a Flatbush shul established by his grandfather – **Rav Avigdor Miller**, *zt”l*. Rabbi Brog was also a *talmid muvhak* of the famed Mirrer Rosh Hayeshiva – **Rav Shmuel Berenbaum**, *zt”l.*

*Bereishis* is the yesodus of *emunah* (foundation of our faith in Hashem). The **Vilna Gaon** (Rav Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, 1720-1797) writes that everything that has transpired, is currently transpiring and will ever transpire is to be found in the *Chumash* (the first Five Books of the Torah). It can be found in the first *parsha* (portion), the first *pasukim* (verses) and even the first word in the Torah (“*Bereishis*/In the beginning”).

**Every Word in the Chumash**

**Teaches a Jew Another Mitzvah**

 **Rav [Elazar Menachem Mann] Shach** (1894-2001) said that the above knowledge made him personally feel good as he knew that his roots are to be found in the *Chumash*, noting that the Vilna Gaon has said that every word in the Chumash teaches a Jew another mitzvah.

 **Rashi** (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhacki, 1040-1105) in his classic commentary on the *Chumash* asks why didn’t the Torah begin with the first *mitzvah* Hashem gave to the Jewish nation as a whole, the mitzvah (commandment) to determine the new *chodesh* (month)?

 The explanation is that Hashem created the world and first granted *Eretz Yisroel* (the holy Land of Israel) to the *goyim* and later took it back from the *Cananim* and transferred it to the *Yidden* (Jews). The reason the Chumash begins with the creation of the world by Hashem is to give the Jews an answer to the complaints of the goyim who claim that the Jews stole the land from its original inhabitants.

**A Non-Frum Jew from Tel Aviv**

 One time, a non-frum Jew who lived in Tel Aviv came to visit Rav Shach who was the rosh hayeshiva at Ponezvich Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He argued to Rav Shach that the members of the Neturei Karta, a strongly anti-Zionist group in the frum (religious) community that lived in Yerushalayim should have their citizenship rights stripped because of their refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the State of Israel (a government ruled by non-religious Jews).

 Rav Shach asked the man to explain what right he had as a non-frum Yid to live in the holy land of Eretz Yisroel. The man explained that he was entitled insofar as this land was the historical homeland of the Jewish people. The rosh hayeshiva than replied, “Just because your forefathers lived in this land a couple of thousand years ago why does that give you a right to take the land away now from the Arabs?”

**Arguments of Native Americans**

**And Aborinal Tribesmen**

 Rav Shach further noted that maybe the Native Americans should argue that the rest of the people living in North America should leave since America was originally their homeland? Or the aboriginal tribes whose home was usurped by English settlers should demand their land back since it was historically theirs first? We don’t see, the rosh hayeshiva continued, that either the non-Native Americans or the European settlers today have any intention of giving up their homes and properties in either North America or Australia.

 So what right, Rav Shach asked of his non-frum visitor from Tel Aviv does he have to live in Eretz Yisroel, thus taking it away from the goyim?, (i.e. the Arabs) The non-frum Jew had no answer. So he flipped the question and asked Rav Shach, “What’s your justification for living in Eretz Yisroel?”

 Rav Shach replied that he could live in the holy land without any guilt pangs because he believed in the Torah and in the first word of the Chumash – “bereishis” for which Rashi in his commentary explains the rights of the Jewish people. As Rashi writes, our right is based on the fact that Hashem gave us Jews the land in order to better serve Him by being able to more effectively perform and carry out His holy mitzvos as are detailed in the Torah.

 The late Rosh Hayeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn (Harav Shmuel Berenbaum, 1920-2008) once said that if all the non-frum Yidden living in Eretz Yisroel would start performing mitvos properly, than all of the false arguments and violent attempts of the goyim in the Arab world, in the United Nations General Assembly and elsewhere to oust us from the Promised Land would automatically cease.

 As mentioned before, Hakodesh Baruch Hu (the Holy One blessed He) created the world and the entire universe only for the sake of bereishis, the Torah and the Jews who will study it and perform Hashem’s mitzvos.

**"This Is My Torah Scroll"**

**By Ruth Benjamin**

Henryk was very young in 1945, when the War ended and solitary survivors tried frantically to trace their relatives. He had spent what seemed to be most of his life with his nanny, who had hidden him away from the Nazis at his father's request. There was great personal risk involved, but the woman had readily taken it, as she loved the boy.

All the Jews were being killed, and Henryk's nanny did not think for a moment that the father, Joseph Foxman, would survive the infamous destruction of the Vilna Ghetto. He would surely have been transferred to Auschwitz -— and everyone knew that nobody ever came back from Auschwitz. She therefore had no scruples about adopting the boy, having him baptized into the Catholic Church and taught catechism by the local priest.

It was Simchat Torah when his father came to take him. The heartbroken nanny had packed all his clothing and his small catechism book, stressing to the father that the boy had become a good Catholic. Joseph Foxman took his son by the hand and led him directly to the Great Synagogue of Vilna. On the way, he told his son that he was a Jew and that his name was Avraham.

Not far from the house, they passed the church and the boy reverently crossed himself, causing his father great anguish. Just then, a priest emerged who knew the boy, and when Henryk rushed over to kiss his hand, the priest spoke to him, reminding him of his Catholic faith.

**Forced to Be Polite to the Priest**

Everything inside of Joseph wanted to drag his son away from the priest and from the church. But he knew that this was not the way to do things. He nodded to the priest, holding his son more closely. After all, these people had harbored his child and saved the child's life. He had to show his son Judaism, living Judaism, and in this way all these foreign beliefs would be naturally abandoned and forgotten.

They entered the Great Synagogue of Vilna, now a remnant of a past, vibrant Jewish era. There they found some Jewish survivors from Auschwitz who had made their way back to Vilna and were now rebuilding their lives and their Jewish spirits. Amid the stark reality of their suffering and terrible loss, in much diminished numbers, they were singing and dancing with real joy while celebrating Simchat Torah.

**Held Himself Back**

**From Joining the Dancing**

Avraham stared wide-eyed around him and picked up a tattered prayer book with a touch of affection. Something deep inside of him responded to the atmosphere, and he was happy to be there with the father he barely knew. He held back, though, from joining the dancing.

A Jewish man wearing a Soviet Army uniform could not take his eyes off the boy, and he came over to Joseph. "Is this child... Jewish?" he asked, a touch of awe in his voice.

The father answered that the boy was Jewish and introduced his son. As the soldier stared at Henryk-Avraham, he fought to hold back tears. "Over these four terrible years, I have traveled thousands of miles, and this is the first live Jewish child I have come across in all this time. Would you like to dance with me on my shoulders?" he asked the boy, who was staring back at him, fascinated.

The father nodded permission, and the soldier hoisted the boy high onto his shoulders. With tears now coursing down his cheeks and a heart full of real joy, the soldier joined in the dancing.

"This is my Torah scroll," he cried.

Abe Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League -- the Avraham in our story -- remembers this as his first conscious feeling of a connection with Judaism and of being a Jew.

*Reprinted from the Chabad.Org website. The article was originally published in Kosher Spirit magazine.*

**Tales from Our Gaonim**

**Causing Rain to Come**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

Once when there was a drought in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *rabbanim* approached Rabi Yochanan Ben Zakkai. “Rebbe,” they said, “please pray to Hashem that He send rain before the people perish from thirst and hunger.”

**Recognizing the Cause**

**For the Deadly Drought**

Rabi Yochanan asked that the man who cuts his hair come to see him. When the man came to the *Bais Midrash*, Rabi Yochanan said, “The drought is on *Eretz Yisrael* because the people are sinning and not doing *teshuvah*. Therefore, go out in the marketplace and shout: ‘My Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai wants to take a haircut, but he is too weak to get out of bed because of the drought. He is weak from hunger.’”

**Inspired by the Cries**

**Of the Barber**

When the people heard the barber’s cry, they were overcome with regret.

They gathered together to cry and pray for forgiveness for their sins. Immediately thereafter, the skies were covered with clouds and rain began to fall.

How great is the power of *teshuvah*!

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