**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Toldos 5774**

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**It’s Difficult to be a Foodie When You Can Eat Only at Kosher Restaurants**

**By Lori Gardner**

**My family loved eating out together. But when**

**my daughter became Orthodox, almost all our**

**options got crossed off the menu.**

Five years ago my daughter telephoned from college to inform me that she had made a decision about dining out: Now that she had become Orthodox, she was only going to eat in kosher restaurants.

Tears streamed down my face. I know there are many things that are far worse for a mother to hear. But for a restaurant-obsessed food [blogger](http://beenthereeatenthat.net/) whose identity is strongly tied to dining out, this was very upsetting. Dining out was a shared passion in our family.

I devoted hours of my free time to researching restaurants, as every meal out was an opportunity to be seized. I discovered online communities where restaurants were as hotly debated as politics. I kept a bulging file of reviews from the Washington Post and Washingtonian Magazine and made lengthy lists of restaurants I wanted to visit. My husband, daughter, and son had been the grateful beneficiaries of my efforts.

Until now.

This wasn’t the first change my daughter had announced since beginning her transformation from a Conservative Jew to a more strictly observant one, after she graduated high school. But unlike her other decisions—tossing out her skimpy tank tops in the name of modesty, refraining from turning lights on or off on Shabbat—this one affected not just her, but all of us. And her decision about where she would and wouldn’t eat felt like a dismissal of a family ritual that I had encouraged, one that was particularly dear to me.

Dining out has been an integral part of my life since I was a child. I have fond memories of vacationing with my parents in Southern Florida, where no trip was complete without a visit to the now-shuttered [Wolfie Cohen’s Rascal House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfie_Cohen%27s_Rascal_House). We were herded into a line according to party size and inevitably served by a waitress with big hair who had worked there for 40 years.

We indulged in oversized corned beef sandwiches along with bottomless bowls of sour pickles and pickled tomatoes. Once, we all sat separately at the counter so we could each get our own basket of fresh rolls, most of which we took home to enjoy later. This was our own version of family bonding.

As an adult, I began to pursue more adventurous and innovative cuisine. From the time my kids were young, I schlepped them to high-end restaurants, including some that weren’t really age-appropriate. They grew accustomed to out-of-the way adventures for dining destinations, frequently putting up with my fervent determination to locate just the right spot, even when hunger was making us all cranky.

Neither my husband nor I was raised in a kosher home, but we made a decision to keep kosher when we married. We agreed that while our home would be kosher, however, our bodies were another matter. This resulted in some overcompensating in restaurants. Cheeseburgers, pepperoni pizza, barbecued shrimp, [BLT sandwiches](http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/148518/blt-jewish-ritual) … nothing was off limits.

Still, our days of the family feasting on crabs, or getting our hands sticky with barbecue sauce from grilled pork ribs, were already long gone before my daughter’s phone call. A few years earlier, when she was 17, she stopped eating nonkosher food—although she would continue to eat in vegetarian restaurants.

Around the same time, my husband, then-president of our Conservative synagogue, decided to observe the dietary laws by eating only vegetarian meals or seafood (no shellfish) in restaurants. Next, my nonreligious son declared after graduating college that eating animals—whether they were kosher or not—was unacceptable to him. I dedicated myself to identifying the best vegetarian restaurants in the D.C. area where we live, and while vacationing managed to discover some world-class spots.

I recognized that the day might come when my daughter might make even more stringent moves. For months, I had been trying to comprehend the plethora of new rules she was adopting about everything from time periods when shopping was not permissible to restrictions about dog-walking on Shabbat.

As she stepped out of the halls of her Jewish high school for the last time, something inside her clicked: She believed in G-d, and she would demonstrate this by fully incorporating the teachings of the Torah into her life. She never questioned the sacrifices. But all too often our conversations ended in tears—sometimes hers, sometimes mine.

I perceived each step she took toward more stringent religious observance as a movement away from our family. With family celebrations looming, I wondered if she would be willing or able to participate in these simchas, where the levels of observance wouldn’t be up to her own. Was she headed into black-hat territory? I had many sleepless nights, wondering what would become of the girl I’d known who was a foodie, a funky fashionista, an indie-rock lover, and a TV addict.

I shouldn’t have been shocked by my daughter’s decision to abide by Jewish law. We’d sent her to [Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School](http://www.cesjds.org/) from grades 4 through 12, and she’d been an active leader in B’nai B’rith Youth Organization. We had weekly Shabbat dinners at home and attended synagogue regularly. We bought kosher meat and kept separate dishes and cutlery but weren’t strict about every product being certified. If it didn’t have treyf ingredients, it was acceptable. I hoped my children would adopt some of these practices when they had their own families.

But when my daughter took her observance to the next level, it threw me for a loop. Suddenly our home wasn’t kosher enough and our rituals barely sufficed. My heart sank at the realization that she would no longer want to eat in a home with cheese or bread that didn’t have a hekhsher, or share a Shabbat meal that was prepared after sundown.

Practices that we believed had once demonstrated our commitment to Judaism, and happy occasions celebrated with restaurant meals, were family traditions now in question. Living in Washington, there was a [limited number](http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/122984/dcs-missing-kosher-food) of kosher restaurants, none better than passable. The thought of forever being restricted to these venues was depressing.

Then I discovered that Top Chef Season 3 winner [Hung Huynh](http://www.jewcy.com/arts-and-culture/top_chef_winner_hung_huynh_goes_glatt_kosher_nyc) was temporarily serving as executive chef at [Solo](http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/118954/elevating-kosher-food), a high-end kosher restaurant in Manhattan, and I could hardly contain my excitement. I leaped to the phone, tripping over a towering stack of issues of Food and Wine magazine. I inhaled as I called my daughter to see if we could make a trip to New York together, and then called the restaurant for a reservation.

The meal was unforgettable. I was thrilled to be dining at the hands of a Top Chef winner. If I turned my head ever so slightly, I could see Chef Hung in the kitchen. My daughter implored me not to say anything, afraid that in my enthusiasm for meeting the newly minted TV star I would embarrass her.

But then Chef Hung paid us a visit, upon my request. While I nervously toyed with my perfectly cooked Asian-spiced vegetables, I “calmly” tried to explain the significance of our dinner. “She keeps kosher,” I told him, smiling toward my daughter.

“I am a Top Chef-loving maniac who eats almost anything. The fact that you are cooking here is an incredible opportunity for us,” I said, holding back tears. I glanced over at my daughter to check her level of humiliation. She was smiling, and so was Chef Hung. And so was I. Our family ritual would still endure, satisfying my newly observant daughter and her still-discriminating food-blogger mom.

Five years have passed since my daughter’s momentous decision, and we are all still learning to cope and compromise. I’ve given up bringing noncertified food items into our home, and I cook food to bring with us on vacations. I get excited about eating shwarma at the nearby [Max’s Kosher Café](http://www.theshalomgroup.com/maxs-cafe-and-catering).

On Tuesday nights there is an all-you-can-eat Indian buffet at a kosher market that really isn’t bad. And I don’t mind the chicken wings at the [Distrikt Bistro](http://distriktbistro.com/) in the D.C. Jewish Community Center. And when my daughter and I can share a truly positive culinary experience, as we have done on more than one [occasion](http://beenthereeatenthat.net/2013/05/citron-and-rose/), I still rejoice.

But I’ve also discovered a new way to enjoy sharing a meal. My daughter has become, like her father, a competent and creative cook. And so I’ve come to recognize that rather than dining out, all of us occasionally preparing a meal together in our now glatt kosher home can be an incredibly rewarding experience. When it comes to dining, in the end, everything is relative.

*Reprinted from the October 24, 2013 email of the Tablet Magazine.*

**Praying with Mom**

**By Miriam Karp**

Gittel Rivka—Mom’s Hebrew name. During Mom’s last months, last days and hours, it was Gittel Rivka whose hand I held and whom I sat with. Trudy Driker, the articulate, competent persona, was all but gone. Her physical life was pretty much a shell. She was emaciated, hadn’t stood or walked in months, had labored breathing, and could barely speak. But she was there. Her *neshamah*, her soul, was there.

In a way, I shared more of my real self with Mom during those winter and spring months than I ever had been able to before. I shared my real world, which her persona and more conscious self would have dismissed as gibberish—because Trudy didn’t believe in souls or any other nonrational, non-quantifiable beings.

We switched roles. It was my turn to tuck her in, with sweet whispers on the evening breeze. As she drifted to sleep, I sat by the hospital bed (and later the nursing home bed) and sang Yiddishe lullabies—Jewish words and melodies. I sang Shema, the basic prayer we say at the end of each day—and at the end of life—affirming our connection to and belief in one G‑d. I guess I was trying to arouse her soul, to feed it, water it, give it vitamins and nourishment, much as we kept trying to get another sip of Ensure or another spoonful of yogurt into her body.

*Ess, mein kind*—“eat, my child”—the timeless urging of the Jewish mother. As her body was clearly diminishing, coming ’round the curve to the finish line, I wanted to give nourishment to her soul. I wanted to make it feel safe, acknowledged. It was like teaching someone a bit of the language before they take a trip abroad. Her soul knew the language, of course—it’s inherently there—but it had lain dormant for so long that I wanted to befriend it and guide it along. I wanted Mom to be with a loved one, and I wanted to be the doula—coaching and encouraging her as she transitioned to a different realm.

Before, we could only discuss the kids, the weather, books, politics, and other common ground. But now, I could let that superficial veneer go. We could meet on a soul level; this would be our common ground.

Who was running for president, or which book was a *New York Times* bestseller, was irrelevant here, in this bed in this modest room under the alcove, with this wizened woman laboring for another breath.

Her blue-and-gold-striped quilt, a touch of home, had been crocheted by Bubby Faygie. A few other personal belongings were scattered here and there. But the little corner room had few amenities: a bed, an armchair, the oxygen tank and a dresser. More or fewer things didn’t matter at this point. The plant her friends had brought sat forlornly on the windowsill, ignored, unable to give her the desired perk at this late point.

This once-sophisticated woman was now just her bare essence, soon to leave this world from the sparse nursing-home bed. Her carefully chosen art, her lovely furniture back home, were of little use or comfort now. I tried to shower her with the kind of love I could offer: praying, ushering, escorting this rational nonbeliever over the threshold to join her momma and daddy, to let her *neshamah* free.

I held her hand and talked to her as she dozed. I forgave her for whatever hurts I’d held on to, and I asked her to forgive me. My eyes welled up as the words stumbled out.

“Mom, I probably hurt and disappointed you with my different choices. I chose a life that’s hard for you to understand. I’m not the daughter you thought I’d be. And I know I was too busy with the kids and my world, and I didn’t visit or connect with you enough. But I did it out of love for you, wanting to honor you the best way I knew how, and I hope you will have real *nachat*, real satisfaction and gladness from it.”

My confession tumbled out and surprised me. Someone had advised me to ask for her forgiveness, so I started it somewhat routinely, because it was a good thing to do at this juncture—and then I stumbled into a well of feeling.

I didn’t usually think about her perspective that much, but there must have been a hurt, an empty hole, for many years. I lived far away. My future as a professor or therapist was never fulfilled; I spent my days mumbling ancient blessings and having one baby after another. I wasn’t able to compare notes on travel and shopping. We both shopped, of course, but Mom frequented Saks, so I didn’t think she’d want to hear about my finds at Walmart. I couldn’t even go out to eat anywhere but at the local kosher pizza store, so I couldn’t share Mom’s simple pleasure in enjoying a gourmet meal and fine wine at a great new place.

As my older kids started leaving the nest, I came to know the emptiness that lingered in their space. How much emptier it must have been for her, with both the four-hour drive and the contrasting worldviews that lay between us.

It seemed like Mom squeezed my hand a drop. Perhaps on some level she was acknowledging and accepting my words. I sang Jewish songs, prayers and psalms, mumbling and chanting, hoping that the Hebrew syllables were a balm, a gentle massage to her being. In my extreme mindset, as I sat by her side, every psalm seemed to be full of heightened meaning, alluding to souls coming and going.

“Even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me… Only goodness and kindness shall follow me...”

If this wasn’t the valley of the shadow of death, I didn’t know what was. *Fear no evil*, I emphasized, saying it a bit louder, a bit slower, as though my words were a command to her. Dear Gittel Rivka, sit up and take notice! G‑d is with you, my dear Mommy. *Only goodness and kindness*, only sweetness, for you—an end to the darkness and confusion of this perplexing world. Please G‑d, I begged, shower and comfort and protect this sweet soul in golden, soft goodness.

“The L‑rd bless you and guard you. The L‑rd make His countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you. The L‑rd turn His countenance toward you and grant you peace.”

Please. Pour Your blessings on Mommy, and let her feel Your closeness, Your shining countenance, Your innerness. For some reason, You’ve let me taste a bit of Your presence. It’s time to let her taste and know and get strength and comfort, too.

“Our Father, let us lie down in peace. Spread over us the shelter of Your peace. Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings; and guard our going out and our coming in for a good life and peace from now and for all time.”

The image of men quietly praying under a *tallit* has captured me since I first saw it. I’ve painted the soft folds and mysterious shadows, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) that seems to be hovering under there. That’s something like what I imagine the shelter of Your wings might be like. Just protect and love this innocent little-girl soul; let her sit close to You, like a child in the shadow of her mother’s skirt.

I wanted to be awake and with her when Mom would pass on. She was agitated, and clearly approaching that moment, her breath rattling and irregular. I reached through the bed railing and held her hand—not too tight, but there. Kept dozing off and pulling my eyes back open. But around 11:00 PM, I collapsed into an exhausted sleep in the recliner that I had pulled close to her side.

With a sudden jolt, I sensed the nurse coming to check her at 1:00 AM. One glance and I knew, before the nurse could utter the words.

“She’s passed.”

Mom was gone. That tiny remaining bit of enlivening life force had left.

I was shocked and frozen. She looked like an empty shell, like the newly deceased women I had helped prepare for a traditional burial. I sat there for a moment, then picked up the phone to call Dad, hands trembling.

Almost a year later, close to her first *yahrzeit* (the anniversary of her passing), I had a dream about my mother.

She was dressed like a radiant bride, glowing, yet ethereal. There, yet not quite. She was surrounded by dancing young girls in pastel gowns, who seemed to represent her progeny. I woke up, just knowing. Mom was in a place of truth and light, having *nachat*, reaping from all she had sown. I treasure the soul moments we shared as her life ended. And maybe, hopefully, they helped ease her transition to this good place of truth.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Chabad.Org It was excerpted from Painting Zaidy’s Dream: Memoir of a Searching Soul. Miriam Karp is an award-winning writer, artist, Judaic studies teacher and lecturer. Her paintings explore intimate moments in Jewish life. Miriam lives in Cincinnati with her husband and family.*

**The Golden Column**

**Rabbi Mordechai Labaton zs"l**

Rabbi Yehudah Ssadka, zs"l, related a story about Rabbi Mordechai Labaton ,zs"l, who was the head of the rabbinical court in Aram Soba. When he became old and his strength began waning, he was no longer able to wake up early to go to the Bet Kenesset or stay late. He therefore asked the people in his community to arrange for a minyan to come to his home morning and evening so that he could join a public prayer. And so, the minyan was arranged, and they would go morning and evening to pray in his home.

One day, in the middle of the winter, a furious rain poured down from the skies and the group of men never came. The tzadik was terribly upset and said to his attendant, "Do me a favor, and gather the people together for the minyan."

The attendant agreed, and he went out into the storm and knocked on the people's doors. After a long while he returned alone and reported, "The people will not come in these awful conditions. They told me that today they will pray privately in their homes."

The tzadik responded, "You know that I am not a wealthy man but, over the course of my years, I have saved penny by penny, so that I have enough to pay for scholars to come to my house after my death to learn in my memory. Take this last money that I have prepared for after my death, and use it to pay all the people of our minyan to come here so we can pray together with a minyan."

The attendant obeyed the tzadik's wish. When the people heard how precious public prayer is in the eyes of the tzadik, that he was willing to allocate for this purpose the money set aside for the study of Torah in his memory after his death, they all came to his home, even in the pouring rain, and refused to take a single coin.

They enthusiastically reported this incident from mouth to ear, until the entire community recognized the importance of public prayer and how much one must sacrifice on its behalf. For it is worth far more than any sacrifice we make!

*Reprinted from Parashat Vayera 5744 edition of the Aram Soba Newsletter*

**Emunah in G-d**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

**The Rubles**

Our forefathers were giants when it came to having faith and a belief that G-d would take care of them. Nothing worried them save that they wasted time not studying our holy Torah. They relied on G-d to take care of their needs.

The gaon and tzaddik Rav Chaim of Volozhin, one of the dearest disciples of the Vilna Gaon, established a yeshiva to perpetuate the principles and aims of his teacher. Providing sustenance for the pupils was a difficult task and Rav Chaim often suffered great privations but he never despaired, for he trusted in the L-rd.

Once, during the Franco-Prussian war, a merchant entered the yeshiva and said to Rav Chaim, “Rabi, I have just completed the purchase of merchandise for my business and I still have a thousand rubles left over. I’m afraid to carry it with me for the roads are infested with bandits who wouldn’t hesitate to take my life if they knew I had such a sum with me. Therefore, I would like to entrust it to you to keep until I return next year.”

Rav Chaim took the money and gave the merchant a receipt. The merchant was very happy that he had discovered a Rav who would take good care of his money. Ad times were tough, Rav Chaim was overjoyed at this windfall and he immediately made good use of this money.

**The Merchant Returns**

A number of years passed and the merchant returned to the yeshiva. He approached the secretary, showed him the receipt and asked to have his money returned.

The secretary excused himself while he went to the home of Rav Chaim. “Rabi,” he cried, “the man who entrusted you with his money three years ago has now come back and he is claiming his money. What shall we do? The yeshiva’s treasury is empty.”

“Tell him to return tomorrow,” Rav Chaim answered.

When the secretary departed, the Rav’s wife turned to him and asked, “Where do you hope to get the money by tomorrow? You know we barely have enough money to survive.”

“G-d will provide,” answered the gaon.

Rav Chaim appeared unperturbed. In the morning he arose as usual, said his prayers, studied the Torah and gave his regular shiur to his pupils, continuing as if nothing had occurred.

**Help Arrives In Time**

Towards evening a messenger from the baron appeared at the home of Rav Chaim. “My master, the baron, has a thousand rubles which he desires to exchange for gold,” said the messenger. “He is planning a trip abroad and he needs gold. He knows that you received gold from distant countries and he therefore requests that you write your supporters abroad to send you gold. In the meantime, he is giving you the money to use for the exchange. He realizes that it may take time to accumulate the gold, therefore, I will return in a few months.” Leaving a thousand rubles, the messenger departed.

An hour later, when the merchant entered, Rav Chaim gave him back the thousand rubles he had entrusted to him three years earlier.

To such heights did our sages trust in the L-rd and the L-rd reciprocated.

**Profited On the Wrong Merchandise**

Rav Chaim of Volozhin had a pupil, Rav Yosef Zundil, whose piety and saintliness were legend. He, too, inherited from his rebbe the strong belief in G-d, to trust in Him and He’ll take care of you.

Rav Zundil owned a small shop which his wife took care of. She did all the knitting and repairing while her husband studied Torah day and night. This way they lived a meager and contented life.

Once his wife came to him and said, “There is a large fair opening in the main city where merchandise of various countries will be on display. While I don’t want to disturb you from your studies, if you will visit this fair and purchase a year’s supply of thread and cotton, I’ll never have to waste your time and mine for the next year in purchasing it from our local dealers. Also, we’ll be able to save a lot of money.”

Rav Zundil agreed, and took their life’s savings and started out for the city. When he reached the city he was told that the fair would continue for an entire month.

“Why hurry,” thought Rav Zundil. “I have a full month’s time to purchase the merchandise. In the meantime, I can study the Torah.”

**Yarn Sold Out**

Rav Zundil went to the beis hamedrash in that city and studied Torah the entire month. On the last day of the fair he went to the merchants to purchase yarn. He was shocked to learn that all the goods were sold and none remained. Only one type of thread remained, a very expensive kind that only the very rich could afford.

Having no choice, Rav Zundil purchased as much yarn of this type as his money would permit. He returned home and turned it over to his wife.

She took one look at the yarn and began to cry. “Woe to us,” she moaned, “our life’s savings tied up in this merchandise! Don’t you know that our poor customers could never afford this thread, and we have no rich people in our neighborhood? We are ruined.”

Rav Zundil attempted to calm her.

“Our sages tell us,” said Rav Zundil, “that a person’s sustenance is decreed on Rosh Hashanah for the entire year. Therefore, if it is decreed that we should have a nice income, what difference does it make what kind of thread I purchased? Trust in the L-rd and He will help us.”

Cheerfully, Rav Zundil left his tear-stricken wife and went to the beis hamedrash to study.

**Orders Expensive Garment**

The following day a messenger came to Rav Zundil’s store to order a very expensive garment. The baron’s daughter was to be married and the proud father wanted a garment which contained only a very expensive yarn which no local merchant possessed. Rav Zundil’s wife showed him the yarn her husband had bought at the fair and the messenger jumped for joy.

“This is just the thread we have been looking for!” he exclaimed. He ordered the entire stock for various clothes for his household and he paid very handsomely. The money was sufficient to sustain the gaon’s household for an entire year.

*Reprinted from the July 12, 2013 edition of the Jewish Press.*

**A Chess Story**

**And It’s Lesson**

Rabbi Yaakov Ornstein, a brilliant Yerushalmi scholar, went to visit a friend in the hospital. A patient whom the Rav did not know and who was noticeably worried about his poor condition, caught the Rav’s eye.

Seeing a chessboard near the patient’s bed, he approached the patient and challenged him to a game of chess. In this manner he took the man’s mind off of his condition. (*Love Your Neighbor*, p. 53) Hakhel Note: The Chofetz Chaim writes that it is a **Mitzvah Gedolah** for one to move a person away from his worries and feelings of *tza’ar*.

When one does so, the Chofetz Chaim continues, one not only performs the Mitzvah of *V’Ahavta L’Reiacha Kamocha*--but also gives **Nachas Ruach** to Hashem Himself. For, just as a father with a troubled son in a distant city would very much hope and desire that his son find someone there to give him chizuk and to aid him--so too, does Hashem hope that there are those who will give His children chizuk, take them out of their downtrodden state, and make them feel better….

*Reprinted from the October 25th Hakhel Email Community Awareness Bulletin.*

**Love of the Land**

**Rabbi Chanina ben**

**Tradyon, the Tana**

***“All your actions should be directed to Heaven.” —***

***Rabbi Yossi in Pirkei Avot 2:12***

One should intend to be healthy and strong in order that he should have a spirit capable of knowing G-d, for it is impossible to understand wisdom if one is hungry or ill, or if one of his limbs aches. If he follows this course all his life he is constantly serving G-d, even in his business activities and his marital relations, for his motive is always to achieve the wholesomeness required to serve G-d.

If he sleeps in order to rest his mind and body and so will avoid illnesses that prevent him from serving G-d, his sleep is also considered a positive act of service. As King Solomon wisely put it: “Know Him in *all* your ways”.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**The Power of the Jew**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“The voice is the voice of Ya’akob and the hands are the hands of Esav.” (*Beresheet* 27:22)

The *Midrash* explains this verse by noting that the power of the Jew lies in his voice – that is to say, in his prayer and Torah study. The power of Esav, however, lies in his hands – that is to say, his military strength. When the Jew realizes the source of his strength he need not fear the strength of Esav. It is only when he ignores his own strength and instead usurps that which is rightfully Esav’s that he must be concerned with the might of Esav.

Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum writes that Rav Shlomo Wolbe was asked to comment on the hot issue of Yeshivah students in Israel who do not serve in the army. We should note that Rabbi Wolbe passed away quite a number of years ago and it seems that this issue was contentious even then, as it is today. Rav Wolbe explained that there are various elements employed in fighting a war: the air force, the navy, ground troops, and so forth. Their goal is shared, but they use different means to achieve the goal.

Rav Wolbe said that he had spoken with many groups of soldiers in the IDF, and they repeatedly mentioned that they feel more secure knowing that people are praying and studying for their success. Torah study and prayer are an important means of defense, and the Yeshivah students’ service is no less important than that of the soldiers involved in active duty.

Reprinted from this week’s email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

**Rav Mendel Weinbach and The “Last Jew” in the Family**

**By Dvorah-Leah Garren**

(*Editor’s Note: The following is a tribute to Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt”l, a founding rosh hayeshiva of Ohr Somayach, a baal teshuvah yeshiva in Yerushalayim that has helped thousands of assimilated Jews in the English speaking world discover the joys of a Torah lifestyle*.)

A good friend from college invited me to his wedding at a place called Ohr Somayach. Parked me at the Women's school. (Yes. For a brief and beautiful few years, there was an Ohr Somayach College for Women which later on merged with Neve Yerushalayim.)

Knowing no one; having nothing else to do, I let the girls bring me to class. The learning, with its intellectual vigor and the depth of its relevance to the Human Condition, brought a dimension to our lives undreamt of in college and grad school.

The Em ha Bayit (House Mother), Rebbitzen Feldman (wife of Rav Aaron Feldman) initiated the conversation.

She: Why not stay?

Me: I live with someone in the States.

She: Jewish?

Me: Sure.

She: She can come, too.

Me: I don't think so.

She: Why not?

Me: It's not a She. It's a He.

(Pause)

She: He could attend the Boy's school.

Me: I don't think so.

She: Why not?

Me: He's only eight.

She: Let me get back to you on this.

The following day, I was brought in to meet Reb Mendel Weinbach. His voice was high and soft and sweet. He bade me sit down. For the next half hour, he listened deeply, laughed lightly and easily and, barely looking me in the eye, asked gently probing questions about my background, my (total lack of) Jewish knowledge, my impressions of the Girl's School, my little boy.

My family was so assimilated, I explained, that it had only been by chance that I'd found out we were Jews. My brother had no children. My cousins had all married out. And I was divorced at twenty. My little boy was the last Jew in the family.

Reb Mendel shook his head, sighed. So, perhaps you can bring him here for the rest of the summer? We've arranged a scholarship for him to a day camp, while you continue your learning.

So that is how it all began. By the summer's end, Reb Mendel and Mrs. Feldman had arranged accommodations, a living stipend, and a place for Joshua in an excellent school, Horev.

Joshua is no longer the last Jew in the family. His children, raised in the glow of Torah, all speak Hebrew, love chesed, do mitzvoth, and like the tent of Avraham, their house is a place full of guests. Recently they've begun to establish a regular kosher minyan in their home.

We continue to flourish, thanks to Ohr Somayach; snatched from the fires of assimilation and annihilation, by the rebbe with a voice like an angel and a compassionate wisdom and determination to bring home, the generations of wandering Jews "from our space-less boundaries of loss."

*Reprinted from the website of Ohr Somayach.*

**A Kohen’s Dilemma**

**By David Bibi**

I heard the following from Mr. Isaac Schweky. He told me of a true story that took place many years ago.

A couple had been married for a dozen years and they were unable to have children. This was before the more common medical breakthroughs using assisted reproductive technology and in vitro fertilization to assist in the treatment of infertility.

They did what many Jewish couples before them had done. They agreed to divorce and hoped that if they remarried, they both might be blessed with children. And so they met with the rabbis, drew up a get and formalized their separation.

A week later, the woman called her ex-husband and told him that he would never believe it but she just found out that she was 2 months pregnant. As their American divorce was still pending she suggested they go back to the rabbis, remarry religiously and celebrate this amazing miracle. Together and overjoyed they returned to the Rabbi.

He sat them down and explained that at this point they simply could not remarry. The get was delivered and the woman was a divorcee. The man, he explained, as a Kohen, could not marry a divorcee, even his own wife. He hoped that perhaps there might be some error in the “get”, that might help, but there was none. They were in the eyes of G-d divorced and could not remarry.

They were besides themselves. What could be done?

The rabbi had no ideas. He suggested that the husband fly to Israel and go to the Kotel and pray. Perhaps salvation would come.

Depressed and discouraged the husband agreed. He boarded a plane that evening and arrived the next day, dropping his bag with the hotel bellman, and heading straight for the wall. He found a minyan and prayed and then pulled up a chair and poured his heart out to G-d. Within moments, he was approached by a man with a long white beard and deep blue eyes, who tapped him on the shoulder.

“My friend, can I help”, the old man asked. But the husband barely looking back and assuming it was a beggar, pleaded to be left alone to pray. Moments later the old man returned and was shooed away. And then a third time and this time the man praying, stopped and their eyes connected. He decided to pour out his story to the old man. The man smiled and said, “All will be taken care of, go home to your mother, speak with her and G-d will answer you.”

“My mother is 93 years old in a nursing home, how can she help”.

“Trust me”, replied the old man. “But don’t delay. Please leave now, go to the airport and take the next flight out. I assure you that you will find yeshuah and salvation. G-d who loves you will help you.”

Something about the old man was provoking and although it made no sense at all, and perhaps because the whole situation had still left the husband in shock, he went back to the hotel, took his back from the bellman, and without even spending a night returned to the airport arriving in New York the next morning. He took a taxi straight to the nursing home and went to see his mother.

He sat down beside her bed and told her everything that happened. She turned away from him and he asked if she was OK. She turned back, her eyes streaming with tears.

“I promised your father”, she cried. “I promised I would never tell, but now I must”. We never told you because in those days there was a terrible stigma associated. It was the depression. We couldn’t have children, yet women were giving up their babies. I wanted a child so desperately.

“It was 1932 and we adopted you at New York Nursery and Child's Hospital on Amsterdam Avenue and 61st Street. You were so beautiful and your dad insisted that you never learn you weren’t our real child. I was attempted to tell you when you were married and New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center which took over New York Nursery and Child's Hospital has all of the records. I am so sorry.”

“You’re sorry?” he asked. “Don’t be sorry mom, you and dad were and always will be my parents. You gave me a life, but now you’ve given me my wife back and a child too. I love you mom and thanks. I’ve got to tell my wife and the rabbi.”

Obtaining the records through the New York City Department of Health was simple and the next day, the couple remarried in the nursing home so that his mother could be there.

The following morning, the mother passed away and seven months later, a baby girl was born and took her grandmothers name.

So we asked, imagine if he never listened to the rabbi, imagine if he never went to Jerusalem. Imagine if he didn’t take the strangers advice and return that day. Imagine if his mother would have died with her secret. And who was the old man with the long white beard and piercing blue eyes?

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**Paul Reichmann, Who**

**Helped Develop the World Financial Center, Dies at 83**

**By Jonathan Kandell**

Paul Reichmann, the Canadian real estate developer who made and lost billions of dollars while transforming the skylines of Toronto, New York and London, died on Friday in Toronto. He was 83.

His death was announced by a spokeswoman for ReichmannHauer Capital Partners, an investment firm.

Mr. Reichmann and his brothers, Albert and Ralph, led Olympia & York, their family’s real estate development firm, which counted among its greatest projects the World Financial Center in Lower Manhattan and Canary Wharf in London’s East End. At their apex in 1990, the Reichmanns held about 8 percent of New York City’s commercial office space, more than twice as much as their closest rival, the Rockefellers.



**Paul Reichmann, in 1990, made and lost billions of dollars.**

**(Photo by Peter Redman/Financial Post)**

In all, Olympia & York owned 40 major office towers in a dozen cities on both sides of the Atlantic and controlled $20 billion in assets. The net personal worth of the Reichmanns reached $10 billion, making them at one point among the 10 wealthiest families in the world. But in 1992, they ran out of cash while building Canary Wharf, and their real estate business quickly collapsed.

Paul Reichmann, a tall, soft-spoken man who dressed in black suits, white shirts and dark ties, was clearly the family business strategist and chief decision-maker. He and his family were lavish contributors, mostly to Orthodox Jewish causes; they donated up to $50 million a year to yeshivas, synagogues and hospitals around the world.

Despite his austere demeanor, Mr. Reichmann took enormous business risks. He bet that each new development project could exceed the size of the previous one and still attract enough tenants to produce a windfall.

“For Paul, it is like being a gambler, like being a heroin addict — he cannot stop,” Andrew Sarlos, a prominent Toronto investment banker and Reichmann family friend, said in a 1988 article in Maclean’s, the Canadian weekly.

Mr. Reichmann scoffed at that sort of criticism. “You don’t get the returns if you don’t take the risk,” he said in an interview with Institutional Investor magazine in 2000.

For years, Mr. Reichmann’s track record was so impressive that his creditors did not seem to mind his high-roller approach. His sense of timing in the notoriously cyclical real estate market seemed infallible, and he was viewed as a master negotiator with an uncanny understanding of financing techniques.

But the Reichmann empire crumbled in 1992. The immediate cause was the Canary Wharf project in London. With real estate prices plunging around the world, other major Reichmann properties were also in the red, and the family’s stock market investments soured.

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| **http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2013/10/26/business/Reichmann-obit-3/Reichmann-obit-3-popup.jpg**  **In 1980, Mr. Reichmann’s firmwon the right to build the World Financial**  **Center in Manhattan (Photo by Ed Quinn)** |  |

Crushed under debts of more than $20 billion, Olympia & York went bankrupt. The Reichmanns were left with a net worth of less than $100 million — one of the most astonishing financial collapses in history.

Paul Reichmann blamed his own overconfidence. “The fact that I had never been wrong created character flaws that caused me to make mistakes,” he said in 1997.

Mr. Reichmann and his family partly rebuilt their fortune. In a personal triumph, he recovered control of Canary Wharf in 1995, as a minority partner and chairman of an investment group that included George Soros and Laurence Tisch, and then pushed ahead with the completion of the project. He retired in 2005 after an alliance of developers led by Morgan Stanley acquired Canary Wharf.

The strains of commerce and religious orthodoxy were often inseparable in the family’s ventures. For example, Olympia & York closed its construction sites on the Jewish Sabbath, paying overtime for Sunday labor, and during the Jewish religious holidays, as well as Christian ones.

At the height of his business career, Mr. Reichmann sometimes spoke wistfully of the Talmudic studies and religious school building projects he undertook as a young man.

“I think that what I did in those years was a greater achievement than what I’ve done since,” he was quoted as saying in a 1996 biography of his family, “The Reichmanns,” by Anthony Bianco. Paul Reichmann was born in Vienna on Sept. 27, 1930, the fifth of six siblings. His parents, Samuel and Rene, were Orthodox Jews who had moved from rural Hungary to Vienna, where they owned a prosperous egg export business. But Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria in 1938 forced the family to flee to Paris.

Two years later, when the Nazis overran France, the Reichmanns fled to Tangier, Morocco, where Samuel Reichmann became a successful currency trader.

When anti-Jewish riots broke out across the Middle East after the 1956 Arab-Israeli War, the Reichmanns uprooted themselves again, this time going to Canada. The family settled in North York, a suburb of Toronto, where Samuel and his sons, Paul, Albert and Ralph, started a small company producing tiles and other building material, which they called Olympia Tile. In 1958, it became the springboard for Olympia & York, which would erect close to 100 buildings in the Toronto area over the next 15 years.

The most notable of these projects was First Canadian Place, a 72-story office tower in downtown Toronto that was the country’s tallest building. Completed in 1973 after only 16 months and using vast quantities of magnificent white marble, the tower gained the Reichmanns a reputation for quality projects delivered at an accelerated pace.

The success of First Canadian Place also encouraged Paul Reichmann to venture into the United States real estate market. His first foray involved the purchase of eight prime Manhattan office buildings from the Uris Corporation in 1977 for $325 million. At the time, New York City seemed on the verge of bankruptcy, and its office vacancy rates were soaring. But a decade later, the same properties were valued around $3 billion.

By then, Mr. Reichmann and his brothers were heavily involved in their most heralded project, the World Financial Center. In 1980, the still relatively unknown Olympia & York won out over a dozen other developers, most of them local firms, to build six million square feet of office and retail space near Battery Park on land reclaimed from the Hudson River.

The project’s design, by the Argentine-born architect Cesar Pelli, featured four office towers ranging up to 51 stories, on top of a huge base devoted to luxury stores. The centerpiece of the complex, the Winter Garden, was a 130-foot-high, glass-vaulted pavilion landscaped with palms. When the design for the World Financial Center was unveiled in 1981, it was hailed as “the finest group of skyscrapers since Rockefeller Center,” by Paul Goldberger, The New York Times’s architecture critic.

By the end of the 1980s, the Reichmanns were the seventh-richest family in the world, according to Fortune magazine. But they still lived relatively modestly in the same upper-middle-class homes they had built for themselves in their Toronto suburb a generation before.

Paul Reichmann’s wife, Lea, occasionally complained that her husband was too involved in his business and not spending enough time with his children, Barry, Henry, Vivian, Rachel and Libby. But he was home every Sabbath and holiday, joining his family and neighbors as they walked to the nearby temple for services.

In 1988, Mr. Reichmann took the greatest gamble of his life by committing Olympia & York to build Canary Wharf. The completed project was supposed to have 24 buildings and 12.5 million square feet of office space at an estimated construction cost of $8 billion.

Despite generous subsidies and rent cutbacks, only a fraction of the commercial space was occupied. By late 1991, Canary Wharf was paralyzed by a lack of further financing. And early the next year, Olympia & York announced that it had run out of cash.

Many of the family’s other real estate holdings were also in trouble because of high office vacancy rates in a number of North American cities. The Reichmanns filed for bankruptcy protection in London, Toronto and New York simultaneously.

Only three years later, Mr. Reichmann regained the helm at Canary Wharf, which finally gained nearly full occupancy in 2000 thanks to a booming real estate market in London. By 2000, the Reichmann family’s net worth reached $1 billion. But in an interview with Institutional Investor that year, Mr. Reichmann said his business accomplishments had never given him the sense of fulfillment he experienced as a youthful religious social worker and teacher in North Africa. But “what could have been is a silly way to look at things,” he said. “You are what you are.”

*Reprinted from the October 25, 2013 edition of The New York Times.*

**The True Test**

Avraham was but three years old when he recognized his Creator. He destroyed the idols in his town and embarked on a bitter struggle with his family and community. On account of his faith, he was cast into the fiery furnace, sat in prison and was tested with ten tests, passing each one flawlessly. He spent his life gathering assemblies of people, calling in the Name of Hashem, invited guests and teaching them how to thank the One Whose food they enjoyed and through Whose grace they live each day. In the end, the Almighty informs him that the divine love is given to him. For what? Not because he dedicated his life for God, but "For I know him [Rashi: i.e., I love him] on account of the fact that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will observe the path of Hashem to do kindness and justice."

Was all the love for Avraham - the father of all believers, the forerunner of spiritual excellence, the quintessential servant of the Almighty - only because he would steer his children in the proper path? Didn't he deserve the divine love in merit of his own work in the service of Hashem?

The answer will be understood through a parable told by the author of "Teshu'ot Hen" zs"l. There once lived a professional carpenter who excelled head and shoulders above the rest in his field. He manufactured the most elegant and magnificent furniture of all designs and made will all different types of materials. His work became the pride and joy of his customers.

As his reputation quickly spread, distinguished officers and dignitaries ordered from him closets, cabinets and bookcases and paid him generously for his labor.

Once, a group of friends were sitting and talking, and their conversation gradually moved to the subject of the remarkable success of this particular carpenter. They made no attempt to hide their jealousy at his wealth and prestige.

Finally, the wisest among them remarked, "Listen, friends, don't be jealous of him."

They turned to him curiously and asked, "Why not?"

"Do you guys know his son?"

"Yes," they answered, "his father opened a shop for him at the marketplace."

The wise friend continued, "So you see my point."

Nobody understood. "Sorry," they said, "we don't see what you're saying."

He stood and invited them to join him. "Come, my friends, walk a little with me." They stood and began following him. They reached the market and headed towards the son's shop. The wise man greeted the son who politely returned the greeting. "I have a question for you," said the man.

"Please, ask," responded the young merchant.

"Your father," said the man, "is a renowned, professional carpenter, who has achieved widespread recognition for the furniture he designs. He does very well, earning a highly respectable living. Why, then, did you choose a different profession? Would it not be preferable to become a distinguished manufacturer of furniture, rather than a small merchant in the market, just one of many other salesmen?"

The son answered frankly, "Now that you asked, I will tell you exactly what happened. When I asked my father what career he suggests that I pursue, he told me to be whatever I want, only not to be a carpenter. I asked him why not. After all, he established for himself quite a successful career in the field, and his wealth was the envy of many.

“He answered, 'You are just like all those who just look at the price, paying no attention whatsoever to the difficulty involved in the labor. The easiest part of the work is that you have to stand on your feet the entire week. Not to mention the grueling process of dragging the wood and carrying the heavy blocks. And don't forget all the sawdust which you breathe all day, all the cuts, bruises and splinters which you suffer on a daily basis.

“But these are just the minor inconveniences, before you get to the actual work itself, which demands strength and stamina, concentration and precision, and is fraught with tension and anxiety. The wood cracks; the door gets scraped; the wood is just too small or just too large. No, my son. I began my work when I was young and I aged together with my career. It is too late for me now to give it up. But you have your whole life in front of you - find yourself a simple, easy job.'"

The wise man thanked him for his response and turned to his friends. "You see, you have no reason to be jealous of the wealthy carpenter. I realized this the moment I heard that he bought his son a shop in the market rather than teaching him to continue his own work."

Similarly, the Almighty says, Avraham worked his entire life to do My will. But when will it become perfectly clear that he has no reservations about the path he chose, that he is totally confident in his decision? When he educates his children in the same direction, when he trains them in his trade!

We see today with our own eyes that those who truly aspire to fulfill the divine will train their children likewise, enrolling them in Torah educational systems. In this way they demonstrate their conviction that the path they chose is the correct one, and with a full heart they choose this direction for both themselves and the next generation!

*Reprinted from a recent email of the Aram Soba Newsletter.*