**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas toldos 5775**

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**The Fat Jew**

**By**[**Yanki Tauber**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/90/jewish/Yanki-Tauber.htm)

One day, it was revealed to Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov that he had merited that a great soul would be his "roommate" and partner in the World To Come. The identity of his roommate was also revealed to him as being the soul of a certain homesteader in a backwoods village many miles from his home.

Desiring to learn more about his destined partner, Rabbi Israel journeyed to the village and asked after the person whose name he had been given. The man turned out to be a simple and ignorant Jew—it was doubted that he was literate enough to even read the prayers properly or master a few verses of *Chumash*. A few villagers described him as a "boor" and a "glutton."

Rabbi Israel rented a room in the man's house and observed his behavior for several days. Indeed, his destined roommate seemed a very ordinary man, with the mannerisms of a simple peasant. Never did Rabbi Israel see him with an open book beyond a terse dispatch of the requisite daily prayers, nor did he discern any exemplary behavior in any area. The only thing remarkable about him was his diet: the man consumed a vast quantity of food. At a single meal he would down what the average man ate in a week. His girth bore ample witness to his eating habits: physically, at least, he was a prodigious man.

Finally, Rabbi Israel asked him directly. "I have it from a reliable source," he said to his host, "that you are held in great esteem in Heaven. Perhaps you can tell me why this is so?"

"I am a simple, uneducated Jew," said the man, "who earns his living off the land. There is nothing special about me. Maybe you should check your sources again."

"Have you ever, in your life, done a great deed?" persisted Rabbi Israel. "Perhaps you once saved a life, or gave a great sum to charity, or made some other great sacrifice for the Almighty's sake?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," said the man, "but you have the wrong fellow. I've never done anything of that sort—I'm just an illiterate farmer. The only extraordinary thing about me is the amount of food I consume. No one eats as much as I do."

"Why do you eat so much?" asked Rabbi Israel.

"That's because of my father," said the man.

"Your father?"

"My father died *al kiddush Hashem* ("for the sanctification of G‑d's name"). At a pogrom many years ago, he was dragged from his bed and given the choice of baptism or death. When he refused to kiss the cross, they set the barn on fire and threw him into the flames. But my father was a wisp of a man—all skin and bones. In minutes, he was completely consumed by the fire—there was scarcely anything there to burn. So I resolved that, with me, it would never be that way. If it should ever happen that I must burn for the sake of G‑d's holy name, I will burn, burn and burn! Boy will I burn!"

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Jerry’s Answer**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

We will call him Jerry; a twenty five year old, handsome, talented, Jew was driving to a Chabad House early in the morning with his mother to talk to the Rabbi about his upcoming marriage. There were two problems he wanted to discuss.

The first problem was that his mother was driving him crazy. And the second was that the girl wasn't Jewish. "What", his mother kept saying, "After all we suffered, your father and I, in the holocaust … now you're marrying one of them?!"

They arrived. He knocked at the door and entered. The Rabbi greeted him with a warm handshake, showed them in to his office, told them to sit down and closed the door.

"I'll get right down to business, Rabbi" the young man said. "My name is Jerry, my last name isn't important. I met this very nice gentile girl, we love each other and want to get married but my mother doesn't like the idea. In fact she's driving me nuts because she says I'm Jewish and Jews don't marry out.

"So a few weeks ago she took me to talk to a Rabbi, a nice fellow she knows, very impressive and knowledgeable man. He was really convincing! He explained that there was a golden chain of self-sacrifice. For thousands of years, since Abraham, Jews have suffered holocausts, pogroms, exiles and given their lives for Judaism. And now I would be breaking my link in the chain!!

"He was so convincing that when we left his office I even considered breaking the engagement. But that night I thought about it and the next day I decided that, what.. I'm the only Jew in the world? There are a lot of other Jews and Rabbis around … let them keep the chain intact! I'm going to marry this girl.

"But my mom kept nagging and arranged a meeting with another Rabbi that was supposed to be even better than the first.

"He had a different angle. He explained how it is that if I married this girl my children would not be Jewish and would have no connection to me and some ninety percent of all intermarriages end in divorce or tragedy anyway … so I would be left with nothing but heartbreaking regret.

"He really drove his message home with all sorts of charts, graphs and cold logic. But the next day I thought about it and decided that maybe ninety percent end in tragedy … but ten percent work… so maybe I will be in the ten percent! I'm willing to take my chances and marry her.

"So finally my mom says I should give it one more chance and if it doesn't work she agreed to leave me alone. So that's why we're coming to you. Not only that but we heard that Chabad has a different way of looking at things. So I'm giving it one more chance. You're a Chabad Rabbi, right? So tell me why I shouldn't marry this girl."

The Rabbi thought a while and finally said. "Listen Jerry, I don't know what to say. Those other Rabbis gave really good reasons. If they didn't convince you then I don't know what I can add. I mean, you will be breaking the glorious chain of Judaism and opting out for a pretty meaningless future but except for that…"

They sat there in silence… both lost in thought.

Then suddenly the Rabbi turned to Jerry and said.

"Listen, let's go to the Rebbe."

"Rebbe?" asked Jerry. "Who is that?"

"The Lubavitcher Rebbe gives out dollars every Sunday and today is Sunday." The Rabbi explained. "If we leave now we'll get there on time."

A short while later, the rabbi and Jerry were waiting in the incredibly long Sunday-morning line before the Rebbe's headquarters; a large, three story, red bricked building in residential Brooklyn. These thousands of people didn't come for just the dollars the Rebbe handed out to encourage people to give charity. They came for advice or for a blessing or just to see the Rebbe's face in person. And now Jerry was one of them.

It took over three hours but finally the line entered the building, went down a hall, turned the corner and … Jerry was standing before the Rebbe.

He was a bit stunned. He thought he would see an ancient, fragile holy-man. Instead he felt like he was standing before a king…. a very friendly, wise and awesomely Jewish king. The Rebbe handed him a dollar and suddenly Jerry began talking.

"I have a non-Jewish girlfriend and ….. we want to get married."

"I envy you." The Rebbe answered.

Jerry tilted his head, squinted his eyes and looked at the Rebbe in disbelief. Was he joking?!

"I envy you," the Rebbe continued, "because each difficulty that G-d gives is a rung in the ladder of personal perfection and I never had such a test. G-d must have given you a very unique and powerful soul to overcome such a difficult trial. I give you my blessing that you may succeed in all you do and be a good, proud and happy Jew."

The Rebbe gave him another dollar, turned to the next person in line and Jerry was pushed on.

Outside, Jerry was obviously moved. But he had been moved before by other Rabbis. He said goodbye and left without leaving an address or telephone number.

Several months later he appeared in the Chabad House, shook the Rabbi's hand and announced that he broke the engagement with the girl and wanted to buy a pair of Tefillin.

"What did the Rebbe say that convinced you?" the Rabbi asked. "Or maybe it was just because the Rebbe is so special?"

"No," Jerry answered. "The Rebbe is certainly a holy and unforgettable person. But it was his approach that got me.

"The other Rabbis were good but the first one talked about the past… the history of the Jews and all that and the second Rabbi talked about the future; my children, the dim prognosis for my marriage.

"But the Rebbe spoke about the present …. Who I am and how special I am right NOW.

"And that is what knocked me out."

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

**Choosing a Jewish Burial**

**My Sister was Having Second Thoughts About Her Decision to be Cremated.**

**By**[**Kenneth H. Ryesky**](http://www.aish.com/authors/281214491.html)

The first sentence of the Last Will and Testament of my sister, Carol Ruth Ryesky, reads, "I direct that all my legal debts and the expenses of my funeral, including a suitable grave marker, be paid from my general estate as part of the cost of administration as soon after my death as feasible."

This seemingly ordinary provision of the Will reflects and implements one of the most important decisions my sister ever made about her life – and about her death.

Carol had relocated to Florida a few years back. She found the climate there conducive to dealing with her medical conditions, and the condominium apartment she purchased was close to many of her friends. Her relocation also brought about a gradual rethinking of various spiritual issues.

As late as a half-year before her passing, she had stated that she wanted her remains cremated and the ashes scattered on the beach near her home in Florida. Though I made known to her my disapproval of that option, I did not press the issue too hard, knowing that Carol was a very strong-willed woman who had come to do things her own way, and that discussion of the issue would only serve to aggravate both of us.

But following the unveiling of our father's *matzevah*, tombstone, the subject of our own respective funeral arrangements had come up in conversation, whereupon I had told her that a Jew who chooses cremation is effectively doing the Nazis' work for them, and handing Hitler exactly what he wanted. I sensed some discomfort in her voice and demeanor when I said that to her.

Not long thereafter, she told me that she was weighing the pros and cons of her decision to do the cremation option. She had gone through a few major medical episodes, and obviously was contemplating the eventuality of her own mortality.

**A Month before Her Death**

In January 2014, my wife and I were in Israel. At 3 AM Israel time, my wife's cell phone rang (my wife, as acting Chair of her hospital department, needed to be available by phone while we were away). It was the Florida hospital where Carol had been admitted in an unresponsive condition. They had found my wife's number on Carol's cell phone, and made contact with us. I authorized the hospital in Florida to administer the appropriate procedures.

Carol did eventually recover from that episode, and from a subsequent hospitalization. During this period she had occasion to mention that she did indeed wish to have a proper Jewish burial.

On the morning of 27 April 2014, at my home on Long Island, I received a telephone call from my cousin in Philadelphia. My mother's telephone call to Carol had gone unanswered and my mother instinctively called the local police in Carol's town. The police in Florida had gone to the apartment and found that Carol had died there.

Our son, who had made aliyah less than a year previously, told us that he intends to stay in Israel, and that we should use what had been his designated burial plot in Philadelphia for Carol. I accordingly arranged for Carol to be transported from Florida to Philadelphia for [*taharah*](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48916392.html) (purification) and burial, and so she was.

But on 2 April 2014, less than a month before her passing, Carol had executed a new Will, which, as already mentioned, specifically provides for a grave marker, thereby definitively reflecting her desire for proper burial in the ground.

On the day of Carol's burial the sky was grey and overcast. My rabbi from Long Island accompanied my wife and me to Philadelphia to conduct the funeral. It began to rain hard just as we were finishing filling the grave with soil, the timing of which we all saw as the Hand of G-d, and which gave my mother a modicum of comfort. Carol had been given a proper Jewish burial.

**Cremation**

Even before the Holocaust, cremation was antithetical to all Jewish values. Cremating the dead only serves to deprecate the value and sanctity of life. It facilitates the denial of death and the afterlife [for the soul](http://www.aish.com/jl/sp/bas/48942091.html). And the benefits touted by advocates of cremation are questionable, including matters of expense, dignity, and environmental impact.

Carol's burial gave her family and friends a level of closure and comfort that could not have been achieved through cremation; indeed, cremation would have further exacerbated some emotional wounds. There is no doubt that having made her decision to be properly buried, Carol removed a great weight from herself in the final month of her life on earth.

But what would have happened had Carol not changed her mind? The medical examiner, satisfied that there had been no foul play involved, did release Carol's remains midday on Sunday 27 April 2014 (and, to the relief of us all, did not see fit to perform an autopsy). Had there been a cremation, Carol would have been transferred immediately to the local funeral establishment and cremated the very next day, which was Monday, 28 April 2014. 28 April 2014 corresponded with 28 Nisan 5774, which happened to be Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. What a cruel irony it would have been had Carol been cremated on that day! This cruel irony would have been exacerbated on Carol's first yahrzeit, 27 Nisan, which will fall on 16 April 2015, and which will be Yom HaShoah 5775.

The decision to have or not to have a proper Jewish burial is more than just a matter of personal preference; it impacts those close to us and, in some ways, resonates throughout the entire world. It is the continuation of a Jewish tradition that dates back to when Abraham purchased the Cave of Machpelah to bury Sarah. And in His own special way, G-d provides support and backup to people who take the initiative to do the proper thing, whether in making their funeral arrangements or anything else. Carol's decision was amply and conclusively validated.

May the memory of Carol Ruth Ryesky, Bracha bat Aharon, be for a blessing!

*Reprinted from last week’s website of Aish.com*

**Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380-1444) And the Disputation of Tortosa**

**By Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

Rabbi Albo's was born in Monreal del Campo, a town in Aragon, Spain.  He was the student of the famous Sephardic rabbi and philosopher Hasdai Crescas. Rabbi Albo was the author of a very important book: Sefer ha'Iqarim, The Book of Principles.  Among other things, in this book he reformulates the thirteen principles composed by Maimonides into three main "roots" or foundations.

These three "roots" are

1. Belief in the existence of G-d.

2. Belief in revelation (that the Torah is the word of G-d).

3. Belief in Divine retribution, as related to the idea of the immortality of the soul.

The difference between Rabbi Albo's "roots" and Maimonides' principles is basically technical.  Rabbi Albo also mentions the beliefs in G-d's unity, incorporeality, G-d's independence of time, and God's perfection. But he considers these to be branches of the first principle, not roots.

Sefer ha'iqarim also delves into the subject of the extent of our knowledge (=epistemology).  In his words:  "human intellect cannot attain perfect knowledge and ethical conduct, since its power is limited...  therefore, of necessity, there must be something above human intellect through which knowledge and conduct can attain a degree of excellence that admits of no doubt." That "something" is of course, Divine revelation, i.e., the Torah.

**The Disputation of Tortosa**

Rabbi Yosef Albo is also remembered for his participation in the infamous "Disputa de Tortosa".

This theological "debate" took place in the city of Tortosa,  Spain. It lasted for 67 sessions, between February 7, 1413 and November 13, 1414.  The debate was organized by the initiative of Pope Benedict XIII, also known as "Papa Luna".

Twenty-two rabbis, representing the main communities of Aragon were compelled to attend the dispute, which was held entirely in Latin.  Rabbi Astruc haLevy, Rabbi Moshe ben Abbas and Rabbi Yosef Albo were among these sages. Rabbi Albo represented the Jewish community of Monreal del Campo.

The main speaker among the Jewish sages was Rabbi Vidal Benveniste, who was fluent in Latin.

The man responsible to carrying out the dispute from the Christian side was Jeranimo de Santa Fe, an apostate Jew who converted to Christianity. He aimed to demonstrate that the Talmud supported the idea that the Messianic prophecies were met with the coming of Jesus.  To sustain these absurd claims, Jeanimo would use forged Talmudic texts and interpret the Midrashim arbitrarily.

Soon, the rabbis found out that the idea of a disputation was a farce. The rabbis were not allowed to defend themselves. When the rabbis tried to expose the forgeries of Jeranimo, the arbiters would claim that Jeranimo, a former Torah scholar,   was considered by them as the greatest expert in Talmudic literature.

At one point, the Pope himself confessed to the rabbis that they were not expected to defend the Jewish faith and cause troubles to the Christians. They were brought there to be indoctrinated in the true Christian faith, so at their return to their cities, they will be expected to instruct their community members to embrace the Catholic faith.

While all these tortuous sessions were taking place, and taking advantage of the absence of the religious leaders, the Christian missioners would go to the Jewish cities and proclaim that "the rabbis were defeated". In the Kingdom of Aragon, the most notable missioner was the infamous anti-semitic Vicente Ferrer (canonized as a saint in 1455).   Jews were asked to choose between the sword and the cross. The Jewish neighborhoods were looted, thousands of Jews were killed and many more were forced to convert to Christianity.

Finally, Jeronimo claimed victory. And his triumph, certainly, was endorsed by the arbiters and the Pope.  Following the Disputation, the Pope signed two edicts (bulls) 1. "Against Judaeos" to encouraged the forced baptism of Jews and 2. "Etsi Doctoris Gentium", an executive order to burn all Jewish books, especially the Talmud.

In conclusion, far from being an objective theological debate, the Disputation of Tortosa was a cynical propagandistic attempt of the Church to  loot and convert the Jews of Aragon.

*Reprinted from the November 5, 2014 email of the Shehebar Sephardic Center.*

**Story #884**

**Long-Time Guests**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

**Reb Baruch-Mordechai of Warsaw** had an open house to anyone who wished to enter. People came and went as they pleased, never asking permission, taking everything for granted. They really felt at home there.

And R. Baruch Mordechai did not care. That is how he wanted it!

Reb Shabsai Yofel of Slonim described it well: "When R. Baruch Mordechai takes a nap on a couch at home," he commented, "it is not as if it were his couch. Rather, it is because he happened to find it unoccupied first, before anyone else lay on it."

R. Baruch Mordechai himself came and went just like the others. He had no special place at the head of the table. He was served his meals just like the rest. He did not want anyone to make of fuss over him.

Small wonder, that when a poor man came to this house and stayed for several weeks, he did not even recognize R. Baruch Mordechai as the master of the house. He thought he was just another guest! Once this poor man turned to R. Baruch Mordechai and asked innocently, "I see that you are a steady guest here. You probably know what is customary here better than I do. Tell me, do you think that they would mind if I stayed a few weeks longer?"

R' Baruch Mordechai shrugged his shoulders and reassured him, "No. I am sure you are welcome to stay on. I have been living here - eating and sleeping - for a long time and no one has ever said anything...."

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "Tales of Tzaddikim" by G. Matov [Mesorah]

Connection: The *mitzvah* of **hospitality** is featured in last week's Torah reading, both at the beginning and near the end.

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**The Stoliner Rebbe’s Advice To a Childless Couple**

**By Rabbi Yechiel Spero**

Rabbi Yechiel Spero once related the following powerful story. Ruchi Friedman was married for seventeen years and was not yet blessed with children. She spent many nights crying to Hashem for a child, but over all those long years the brachah did not come. One Shabbos, her husband Boruch had come home

earlier than usual and had found her crying on the couch. She had always tried her best to hide her tears, but now she had been ‘caught’.

Boruch felt terrible for her, and suggested that they go again for a brachah, so he set off to visit the Stoliner Rebbe. The Rebbe greeted Boruch warmly and

listened to his story, then he thought for a moment. He looked up and told Boruch about the zechus of answering “Amein” and “Amein Yehei Sh’mei Rabbah”, and then he suggested something very unusual.

He said, “If one Yehei Sh’mei Rabbah can destroy an evil decree, then just

imagine what many of them can do.” Boruch did not understand. The Rebbe explained that there is nothing more precious to Hashem than the sounds of Amein from little children. He then told Boruch to prepare little packages of candy, and any child who would answer Amein loudly, would be given a package after davening, and in that zechus, maybe they would merit being blessed with a child.

Boruch and Ruchi took the advice of the Rebbe, and with tears in her eyes, Ruchi put together thirty little paper bags filled with candy. That Erev Shabbos, Boruch walked into Shul with the large bag of candy. Little notes had been given

to the children in the neighborhood telling them how they could earn a bag of candy for answering Amein as best as they could, with as much Kavanah as they were able to.

At davening, the chazan began to say the first Kaddish and the congregation erupted with Amein Yehei Sh’mei Rabbah! The adults seemed to have been inspired by the children’s excitement, and joined in responding slowly, loudly, and with concentration.

The singing of Lecha Dodi that night was even more meaningful and beautiful than usual, and at the end of Maariv all the children lined up to get their candy. Boruch left the Shul that night smiling, and he went home and described the

davening to his wife.

Could a few children’s Amein’s really make a difference? One year later, amazingly, Ruchi and Boruch were blessed with a baby boy, and the Stoliner Rebbe was invited to be the Sandek at the Bris. This is the power of Amein!

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**The Greatness of Charity**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

Our sages teach us, “Great is charity and great is its reward. He who gives charity to the poor, his prayers will be answered *midda keneged midda*. He heard the cries of the poor, so G-d will hear his prayers when he cries.”

The Midrash tells the story of a pious person who gave a lot of charity. His name was blessed by every poor person in the country. However, the wheels of fortune turned, and this pious man lost all of his riches and became very poor.

One day his wife said to him, “We have eaten the last morsel of bread. What will we feed our children tonight?”

The man looked at her with a pitiful expression. “My dear wife,” he said, “We have no money. I do not know what we can do!”

His wife had a beautiful head of hair – her crowning glory. In desperation, she cut off her hair, sold it, and purchased a measure of fine flour with the money. With this flour she baked a large challah.

Placing it on the table, she asked her husband to watch it while she went to pick up their children from school.

While she was gone, a poor man knocked on the door and begged for some food. “Please give me something to eat,” he cried. “My wife and children are starving. We haven’t eaten for three days, and they are too weak to walk out of the house.”

The pious man didn’t hesitate a moment. He took the challah and gave it to the starving man, who began to cry from happiness.

After he departed, the man began to worry how his wife would react when she heard that he gave away their last piece of bread. He went to shul and began to *daven* and cry until he fell into a deep and exhausted sleep.

While he slept, he dreamed of Eliyahu *HaNavi*, who was trying to awaken him from his sleep.

“Wake up, my good man,” he was saying, “G-d has heard your prayers. He will reward you with interest for the challah you gave away. Accept this payment without fear, for the principle of the deed is very great, and it will be saved for you in the World to Come.”

He awoke with a start and left the *shul*. At the door he found a bag containing 1,000 gold coins, with no identification. Happily, he took it home and, after buying food for his family, he invested the remainder wisely and he once again became wealthy.

Thus it says, “The good deeds of a man will reward him in this world and will pave a pathway for him in the next world.”

**Charity Saves From Death**

There was once a *tzaddik* who was married to a very pious woman who gave every kopek she earned to the poor. They themselves lived a poor life and the wife washed other people’s laundry to get by.

Her husband was a brilliant man, well-versed in the sciences and astrology. He was able to foretell coming events. One day he read in the stars that his wife would fall off the roof and be killed. He dreaded the coming of that day and he worried continuously while he kept the secret to himself.

On the fateful day, he begged her not to go outside of the house. “I’ll collect your wash today, just promise me you will not go out of he house.”

Seeing how anxious her husband was, she agreed. Before he left, her husband gave her a loaf of bread and a container of cheese so she wouldn’t have to go to the store to purchase food.

The wife kept herself busy all morning washing clothes. Mid-afternoon, she decided to hang up the clothes, forgetting her husband’s admonitions. Walking outside, she saw that the line that had been attached to the roof of her house was torn.

**Poor Man At The Door**

Pulling a ladder to the house, she began to climb it. Halfway up, she heard someone knocking at the front door.

“Who is there?” she shouted.

“I am a poor person who has not eaten all day. Could you spare some food?” was the reply.

She thought to herself, “I have more than enough food for myself in the house. Surely I can spare some of it.” She climbed down the ladder, entered her house, and divided the food, giving half to the poor man.

When the man departed, she again began to climb the ladder. Again she heard a knock on the front door. When she climbed down, she saw it was another poor person.

I have not eaten for two days,” he wailed. “Unless you give me something, I’ll faint from hunger.”

“I’m not hungry anyway,” she thought. “I’m so busy all day that I won’t even have time to eat. When my husband comes he’ll bring with him enough food for supper. This poor man needs it more than I do.”

She then gave him the remainder of her food. When he departed, she climbed to the roof, fixed the line, and descended without incident. She then proceeded to hang the wash to dry.

**Good Deeds Saves the Wife**

At the end of the afternoon, her husband returned and was amazed to see all the wash dry and folded.

“How did you manage to hang the wash today?”

“I fixed the line,” she answered. “I climbed to the roof and repaired it.”

“Tell me, what good deed did you do today?” he asked her in amazement at seeing her alive.

She then told him of her experiences with the two poor people.

“Those two good deeds of charity saved your life,” he said to her. He then told her of the terrible forecast about her which had been revealed to him. As it says in *Tehillim*: “Charity saves from death!”

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