**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas vayikra 5775**

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**Simcha - No Matter What**

**By Rabbi Yoseph Vigler**

In honor of the Yahrzeit of Reb Meilech of Lizhensk on 21 Adar, here is a beautiful and classical story about him and his equally famous brother, Reb Zushe of Anipoli. Before they both gained renown, they would wander together in self-prescribed golus disguised as beggars, with the quest to refine their character traits and simultaneously reach out and encourage the hard working poshute yidden in the country side.

On one of their trips a false accusation was leveled against them and they were promptly arrested, They found themselves in a dark filthy prison cell, together with common criminals. Came time to daven and Reb Zusha noticed his brother weeping. “Why are you upset?” asked Reb Zusha. Reb Meilech pointed to the bucket of waste in the middle of the room, which served as a toilet.

“It's assur to daven next to that pail and its repulsive odor. Never have I missed any tefillah in my entire life...not now..."

"That's no reason to be upset", insisted Reb Zusha. “The same G-d who commanded us to daven each morning also commanded us to abstain from davening under such circumstances. In a situation like this, we fulfil His will by not davening!”

Reb Zusha’s words raised the spirits of Reb Elimelech. Together they started dancing, celebrating the opportunity to enjoy an intimate, albeit different, relationship with G-d. Round the pail they danced away and gradually all the inmates got carried away and were swept away too in ecstatic dancing together with the tzaddikim.

The prison warden heard the commotion and furiously demanded “Why are you all so happy?” The prisoners simply pointed to the bucket in the center of the cell. The two Jews are happy about the pail.

“I will teach them a lesson,” shouted the angry warden as he took the pail and threw it out of the cell.

The two brothers turned to each other, “now, we can start davening...!”

Never is there a reason to get upset, annoyed or angry. Whatever happens comes from G-d. Sometimes we see the revealed good and sometimes we do not. But we can always celebrate, knowing that we are in His hands...

That said, may we merit to see His hand in revealed good always!

*Reprinted from last week’s email from Mayan Yisroel in Flatbush, Brooklyn.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Beauty of Simple Jews Learning Torah**

It was Reb Hillel Particher's custom to travel around the villages surrounding Cherson to visit the Jews who lived there. The settlements were comprised of all types of Jews: There were the scholars, who looked forward to Reb Hillel's learned discourses, and there were the simple folk, who understood not a word of his Chasidic teachings. Regardless of their level of learning, however, all of these Jews had been instilled from birth with certain precious Chasidic traits: they loved to do a favor for their fellow Jews; they prayed with true love and fear of G-d; and they lived in general harmony with one another.

Reb Hillel was a man who brimmed over with an overflowing love of his fellow Jews. He was also an extremely humble man. When he looked at even the most simple, uneducated Jew he saw only his pure soul, his neshama shining through; he never focused on the grubby exterior. And when he approached the common people, he never exalted himself over them. It's no wonder that they loved him, too. His arrival was greeted with great excitement in every town and village, and everyone would drop what they were doing to run out to greet him.

Reb Hillel himself was one of the most highly respected Chasidim. On each of his trips, he took the opportunity to explain the lofty ideas expressed in a Chasidic discourse to his listeners. Of course, since Reb Hillel was one of the greatest intellects of the movement, the villagers often comprehended very little of what he said. Once when Reb Hillel arrived in a village, so many people came out to hear him speak that there was no room in the entire village large enough to accommodate everyone. There was no choice but for Reb Hillel to address the crowd outdoors.

The small street was filled to capacity with men, women and children, all waiting in great anticipation for Reb Hillel to begin. As he spoke, Reb Hillel noticed that many in the large crowd were weeping, and it dawned on him that the reason for their tears was that with their very limited education, they were unable to comprehend his words. Their tears bespoke their terrible pain at not being able to understand the profound insights of the Chasidut he was sharing.

When he finished the discourse, Reb Hillel told the people: "To create a letter in a Sefer Torah three things are required: ink, a quill and parchment. If there is no parchment, the letter cannot exist, even if the scribe possesses the finest quill and the best ink. Only when simple Jews, who are compared to the parchment, gather to learn Torah, the Torah scroll can be completed."

Reb Hillel continued, "There are no words to describe the tremendous joy created in the highest heavens when this happens. Now, that you, my dear friends, have come here, the Torah can be completed."

Early one morning in the month of Tamuz, the Chasidim of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chasidism, were gathered for the brit of his newborn son. Everyone knew how important punctuality was to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and so, by seven o'clock, they had all assembled and were waiting expectantly for the brit to begin. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, however, didn't come as expected, and the hours began to pass. The Chasidim couldn't understand the reason for the delay, and even as the clock struck noon, there was no sign or word from Rabbi Shneur Zalman.

As they waited, the door to the shul opened and in walked a strange looking man. He was attired all in white, and despite the heat of the day, was wearing a fur hat. As soon as the stranger arrived, Rabbi Shneur Zalman also entered and greeted the man with an enthusiastic, "Sholom Aleichem, Reb Betzalel."

The infant was carried in and Rabbi Shneur Zalman gave the stranger the honor of bringing the child to "Elijah's chair." He was also given the honor of giving the baby a bit of wine to taste. The Chasidim were amazed. Who was this man, whom none of them had ever seen? Why had Rabbi Shneur Zalman honored him and even held up brit on his account? There was only one explanation: He had to be a hidden tzadik!

When the excitement had abated, the Chasidim approached the stranger and asked his name. "Betzalel the Shepherd," was all he replied. This curt answer piqued their curiosity, and they decided to try to speak to him later that evening. When they went to speak with him, however, to their bitter disappointment, the man was gone. Still very anxious to discover the stranger's identity, they went to Rabbi Shneur Zalman himself.

"He is indeed a shepherd," Rabbi Shneur Zalman replied to them. "In fact, he has been tending his flock for some 40 years in a small village near Svitzien. Over the years he has committed the entire Talmud to memory - both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds - he even has memorized many commentaries, including Maimonides!

“But the one accomplishment which has caused his soul to shine as it does is his mastery of the study of Mishnayot, for the letters which compose the word "Mishna" are the same as those which make up the word "neshama," soul. It is his devotion to learning the complete Mishna by heart that has raised him to the greatest spiritual heights."

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Substantial Impact**

**By Rabbi Moshe Rockove**

As I was standing at a family vort the other week, the brother of the kallah, a young six-footer, came by to say hello.

“You look familiar,” he said, with a very friendly demeanor.

The problem was that he didn’t look familiar to me.

“I saw you introduce yourself to my father and heard your name. Did you by any chance once substitute my class?”

This was getting interesting.

“It must have been a while back,” I said, considering his height.

“It was about three years ago.” He quickly added that he had grown a lot since then. Obviously, he was used to not being recognized.

He mentioned his name, which rang a bell.

“So you were in that seventh grade class,” I said, finally chapping.

“Yeah, and I remember a lot of what you had taught us that week.”

Just to double-check, we went through some of the boys in the class, and when enough names matched, we confirmed that we were both talking about the same class.

It was a busy summer Sunday afternoon about three years ago when my good friend Rav Simcha Susna, s’gan menahel of Yeshiva Ketana in Lakewood, called. A rebbi had rushed out of class earlier that day. His father had been critically ill, and the unfortunate had happened. The class now needed a teacher for the week of shivah. Was I available for the rest of the week, through Friday? He’d prefer one rebbi to teach the entire week; it would create routine in an unsettled situation.

I told him that I’d get back to him shortly. Mulling it over, I figured it would be a unique opportunity.

It was, but not in the way I had imagined.

Anybody who has walked into a classroom as a substitute knows to expect the unexpected. The students view it as an off day. They’re not learning their regular curriculum, and the new rebbi doesn’t understand the dynamics of the class. It’s time for the boys to let it out, most often directed at the teacher. It’s not that he did anything to merit their wrath, but since he’s the authority, he’s the target.

We learned a different inyan than the regular curriculum, the Gemara and halachos of pas and bishul akum. With Rabbi Susna’s assistance, I even gave a test at the end of the week. Some boys took it more seriously than others, but when promised ices if they would do well, it was at least tempting.

We branched off during the week to discuss a wide-range of topics, some of which included life as a bochur in Eretz Yisroel during the first Gulf War, being a yeshiva bochur in the ancient days before cell phones and air conditioning in the dormitories, and other stories and nuggets that held their attention span.

I often wondered about that class. They were a good group of boys, and we formed a bond during the five days we spent together. We’ve met occasionally since then, a boy here and a boy there. We smile at each other, acknowledging that we had once crossed paths on the street of life.

Until Nosson Meir said hello that night. His vivid details of the discussions we had that week put the role of a substitute rebbi or teacher in a different light.

There’s no way a substitute, who is in one classroom today and another classroom tomorrow, can impact a class as much as a rebbi, who lives, breathes and sleeps his class day after day. Rebbi teaches them the necessary skills to master Chumash, Gemara and anything else, and instills within them by personal example how a ben Torah conducts himself. Rebbi spends hours with parents, figuring out the correct method to connect with their sons.

However, sometimes, with a change of scenery in the front of the classroom, the boys’ guard is down. They know today is going to be different, a bit less structured, and they’re open to different ideas that the substitute can discuss more freely with the class. They would never admit it while talking to their friends and shooting paper airplanes at each other across the classroom, but perhaps they are listening, interested in what the substitute has to say.

So thank you, Nosson Meir, for saying hello and sharing your memories.

And an ode to all substitutes, who get their instructions at the last minute and drop everything to run into a strange classroom: You may never know how substantial an impact you will have on your talmidim of the day.

*Reprinted from the March 4, 2015 edition of the Yated Ne’eman.*

**V’halachtah B’drachav The Ways of Hashem**

**Working on our Middos**

Rabbi Yissochar Frand once spoke and quoted the Medrash in Shemos Rabbah, which relates a story. A person was bitten by an animal, and he ran to the river to wash out the poison from his wound. While at the river, he saw a child drowning, and he jumped into the water and rescued the child.

When the child thanked him, the man responded, “Don't thank me, thank the animal that bit me. It was his bite that sent me to the river in the first place, and that is why I was there to rescue you.”

This is the idea of Mitzvah Goreres Mitzvah, that one mitzvah leads to another. When the Yeshiva in Lublin was about to be built, a certain wealthy Jew, who had been very generous to the Yeshiva, was honored with placing the cornerstone at the dedication of the building.

The Lubliner Yeshiva was one of the most elite and prestigious Torah institutions in the world. Thousands of people, representing the leadership of Polish Jewry and beyond, came to the historic event of laying the cornerstone for the Yeshiva's main building.

The Boyaner Rebbe approached the wealthy Jew who was honored with placing the cornerstone and told him, “I am not jealous of the merit you have for laying the cornerstone, but I am jealous of the other action you must have done sometime in your life that brought you the merit of being able to lay the cornerstone.

The first merit,” the Rebbe told him, “was greater than the "merit" of laying the cornerstone. The zechus of laying the cornerstone comes with publicity and fanfare, which take away from the reward of doing a simple mitzvah. But the original mitzvah that was done privately and without publicity and crowds, the mitzvah which triggered this second mitzvah, is indeed something to be jealous of.” The Boyaner Rebbe told him, “This is the principle of Mitzvah Goreres Mitzvah”!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Yisro edition of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Civil War Synagogue in Upstate New York Marks 150 Years**

**Riveting History of Hudson Valley Congregation in Kingston, N.Y.**

**By** [**Brian Hubert, The Daily Freeman**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/20659/jewish/Hubert-Brian.htm)

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| Assistant Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Itkin in the sanctuary of Congregation Agudas Achim in Kingston, N.Y., which is celebrating its 150th anniversary at a March 8 dinner event. (Photo: Tania Barricklo/ The Daily Freeman) |
| Assistant Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Itkin in the sanctuary of Congregation Agudas Achim in Kingston, N.Y., which is celebrating its 150th anniversary at a March 8 dinner event. (Photo: Tania Barricklo/ The Daily Freeman) |

As it prepares to celebrate its 150th birthday, the Congregation Agudas Achim synagogue in the town of Kingston in New York’s scenic Hudson Valley is honoring the dedication of a community that has helped it persevere since its founding during the U.S. Civil War.

Rabbi Yitzchok Hecht, who has served as rabbi there since 2001, said the congregation will mark the anniversary on Sunday, March 8, at the Seven21 Media Center on Broadway. The rabbi and his wife, Leah, are co-directors of Chabad of Ulster County in Kingston, where he also leads the synagogue. He is assisted by Rabbi Avrohom Boruch Itkin, who is also co-director with his wife, Binie, of Chabad-Lubavitch of Greene County in Kingston.

During the event, the traditional congregation that follows Jewish law and offers Chassidic teachings will present the Jewish Community Award to Barbara Blas, a longtime congregant of the synagogue, and its Humanitarian Award to former Ulster County Clerk Albert Spada, who is not Jewish, said Hecht.

He adds that it’s a great honor to be serving the congregation at such a significant milestone.



Rabbi Yitzchok Hecht, the synagogue's leader and

co-director of Chabad of Ulster County in Kingston

“It’s a long time, but we also have to remember those who came before us, and to recognize we are building on their success,” said Hecht. “We’re only here because of them.”

The synagogue was built during a difficult time for the United States as the Civil War between North and South raged, he explained.

“At the end of the Civil War, they came together to build a place for peace and spirituality, and a place for home and community,” he said. “And to think, 150 years later, we’re still here, doing the very same thing, that’s awesome.”

Started in a Private Home

Agudas Achim was founded by two Jewish men who emigrated from Amdur in Belarus and found their way to Kingston’s Rondout district, then a village in its own right.

The story of the founder’s journey to the United States and Kingston started in Amdur when a non-Jewish resident was killed by a cart, he said.

Soon, residents cast blame for the incident on Amdur’s Jewish community, he said. The community was heavily Jewish—perhaps 80 percent—at the time, according to Hecht.

After the incident, two men fled to America and found their way to Kingston, he said.

“When authorities asked for the whereabouts of the men, members of the Jewish community simply said they fled,” he said.

Family after family followed, and Congregation Agudas Achim was founded in 1864 in Kingston’s Rondout neighborhood.

It started in someone’s house, Hecht said. Later, it moved to yet another space.

By 1892, according to a document written for the congregation’s 100th anniversary by a historian by the name of Raphael Klein, it had moved to the corner of West Union and Post streets, where it remained for decades, through two world wars and the Great Depression.

While many of the congregation’s families had moved to the United States before World War I, Agudas Achim couldn’t escape the horrors of the Holocaust.

“Many still had family in Europe,” said Hecht. “Amdur was almost totally wiped out in World War II.”

For many, however, the United States served as a safe haven. A number of members of Agudas Achim were so thankful that they enlisted to serve in the war, Hecht said.

During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, life for members of the congregation revolved around the synagogue. “People were going seven days a week, especially the old-timers,” said Hecht.

But by the end of the 1960s, with the population shifting, and the urban-renewal project that forever changed the fabric of the Rondout getting underway, a decision was made to move to the congregation’s present location on Lucas Avenue.

The move was complete by 1972, he said.

Many congregations disappear when neighborhoods change, but that was not case with Agudas Achim. Instead, said the rabbi, the congregation endured, and Hecht knows of several families who have been coming for generations.

Agudas Achim’s 150 years have been filled with many ups and downs, he said, adding that there were talks of closing its doors more than once.

One of the toughest times for the congregation was the late 1990s, he said. After IBM closed in the town of Ulster in 1995, the numbers in the congregation kept shrinking, until his arrival in 2001.

“There were only three to four women, and seven to 11 men when I arrived,” he said.

The numbers have rebounded after he introduced new initiatives that include Friday-night and Sunday-morning services, in addition to the traditional Sabbath-day service on Saturday mornings.

Hecht has also added programs for women, men and teens, viewing the synagogue as both a spiritual and physical place for people of all ages.

However, he acknowledged, finances remained pinched. Unlike other religious entities, there is no central organization they can depend on for financial support.

While organizations like the Orthodox Union and Chabad-Lubavitch provide resources, he said they have to rely on being self-sufficient, even as charitable giving shifts.

“In recent years, charities have seen donations sliding away from religious congregations, and moving more towards colleges and the arts,” he said.

And it can be a challenge to raise money in Ulster County—money remains tight among a hard-working, mostly blue-collar work force, he said. “While unemployment numbers are down, people are not making a living wage,” noted the rabbi.

Hecht said he faces the same challenge that churches in the 21st century face, keeping faith relevant in today’s fast-paced world, where there a lot more competition for people’s time.

“We have to remember that spiritual and physical are not two separate worlds,” he said.

He said he strives to create a bridge between those two worlds and tries to make his teachings as relevant as possible.

Hecht, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., said he loves Kingston and Ulster County, which he calls a “very friendly community to everyone.” While many rabbis move around throughout their tenures, he said he wants to stay right there in the Hudson Valley.

Standing in his study at the congregation’s building on Lucas Avenue, the rabbi shared a story of how he moved with his family into an apartment in Kingston on Sept. 11, 2001. “It was a very difficult time for us, and myself, being a fifth-generation American,” he said. “This was terrible time in our country.”

He said that fact has never left his conscience, and he said it’s shaped his outlook on the world ever since. “The best way to fight darkness is to add light,” he said. “The way to fight negative is to do more positive.”

To that end, he said, he’s always endeavored to make each day better than the last.

“Today should be a better day than yesterday,” he said. “And tomorrow should be a better day than today.”

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine. It was adapted with permission from The Daily Freeman of Kingston, NY.*

**Older Singles in the**

**Shidduch Crisis.**

[**By Jack Botwinik**](http://www.aish.com/search/article_search_results.asp?article_author=Jack+Botwinik&title_text=&date_amount=&date_option=year)

 At 50, Benjamin's soul aches. Day after day, not only does he encounter people younger than he with kids, but the kids themselves are starting to have kids. He is happy for them and dances joyfully at their *simchas*. He saves his complaints for G-d.

 "There are times when I feel so angry at G-d, so downtrodden. Dear G-d, You give me so many talents, but you don't give me the opportunity to serve my wife with them."

 If Benjamin had some significant shortcoming his circumstances would be more understandable. But he doesn't.

 A vigorous man with a youthful air and good sense of humor, Benjamin has been steeped in Jewish culture, languages and identity. Since his late 30s, he has been religiously observant, having become so gradually over the years through his involvement with Aish HaTorah.

 Benjamin longs to invite his friends to his wedding -- and he has many friends. His gregarious nature and very caring personality have earned him a high profile in Toronto's Jewish community. Notwithstanding his rich social network, numerous people have tried to set him up over the years. Even more have expressed bewilderment that such a wonderful man is still single.

 You'd think he was fussy, but Benjamin's list is short. He's clear on what he wants, and it hasn't changed significantly in the past ten years.

 Benjamin's situation is heartrending. He is Mr. Community -- and the quintessential victim of an ever-growing *shidduch* crisis, a societal calamity that needs to be understood and addressed.

**Chasing delusions**

 A new ethos has taken hold in the West. It's called 'now-ism'. Overlaying the self-centered, serve me attitude that's been around since the '70s, people today have less patience and lower tolerance for shortcomings than in the past. Maybe it's our fast food, jet travel, instant messaging culture. We want the perfect date *now*, we want to fall in love immediately, and we don't want to expend a lot of effort getting to know a person's character, goals and values -- factors that greatly determine the long-term success of a relationship.

 Instead we focus on the superficial or the transient: A Hollywood waist size, a kippah versus a black hat, Ivy League graduate vs. regular graduate -- such considerations detract from what is really important about a person. "Women," says Benjamin, "often interview me on the very first date, and make snap judgments."

 Materialism is rampant. Expectations of an expensive engagement ring, visions of a lavish wedding and a luxurious house. Benjamin says that some women attempt to figure out his income bracket within the first 15 minutes of meeting. He feels like bantering, "My income runs in the six figure range -- but that includes a decimal point..."

 Among the more religious, there's *yichus*, an unyielding pressure to marry into a blemish-free family with prestigious lineage. It's been mused that if our patriarchs were living today, they'd easily fail the *shidduch* test: Abraham's father was an idol worshipper, Isaac had an Arab brother, and Jacob's twin was evil.

 Many people think of an eligible single as having a certain 'market value', which takes into account health, beauty, income level, social skills, education level, and so on (the weight of each factor differs between men and women, and is culturally dictated). This market value is above, below or approximately what we ourselves are 'worth'. The goal, simply speaking, is to secure the best deal we can.

 Problem is, relationships don't work that way. Love doesn't work that way. We're not in competition with anyone; and even if we think we are, the factors that cause two people to want to or not want to sustain a relationship are too complex, too elusive and too subjective to be able to plug into some formula and test for 'market value compatibility'. Doing so can lock us into singledom: the desirable will be unobtainable, and the obtainable undesirable.

 As for perfection, it doesn't exist. Moreover, imperfection is what a marriage thrives on -- it provides space for self-improvement and allows each partner to make a unique and meaningful contribution to the other's growth. Compatibility, while critical, is only one key determinant of a happy marriage; another is the effort both partners put into continually nurturing their relationship after the *chuppa*.

**Doing our Part**

 There are many things we can do, as a community and individually, to help the growing numbers of dejected singles find their *bashert*.

 Rabbis recommend that people take pre-marriage classes when they get engaged. Why not design a pre-*dating* course that will teach young people what to look for in a spouse? Such a course could be offered in Jewish high schools, and cover the religious as well as psychological aspects of dating.

 How about establishing a *shidduch* committee in synagogues that would be dedicated specifically to addressing the needs of local Jewish singles? Even better are community-wide *shidduch* organizations that would recruit volunteers, raise funds and help singles meet -- much like a *gemach* or other *chessed* organization in the city.

 Communities should try to organize innovative singles events; for example, having a trained facilitator or a married couple present to help with introductions, or inviting a rabbi to give an interesting talk at the event (e.g., about what to look for in a spouse).

 At the individual level, maintain contact with your single friends after you get married. While interests change, responsibilities multiply and you have less in common with singles, a 15-minute call on Chanukah or Pesach can boost your old buddy's sense of worth and feeling of connectedness to the broader community. Offer moral support and guidance.

 Keep a readily accessible notebook. Dedicate one column for eligible men and another for eligible women you know. Include telephone number, city of residence and age (be sure to date the entries). Jot down a few pertinent facts: a medical condition; vegetarian; wants to move to Israel; and so on. Every time you meet or think of new singles, enter them in the appropriate column and scan the other column for a possible match.

 Invite singles for Shabbos or Yom Tov. Host them individually in order to get to know them better, or have a mix of singles and married couples at your table. However, don't invite only two singles and try to set them up in your home, unless you first informed them of your intention.

 Include singles in your prayers. Besides the power prayer has in affecting change, doing so will secure them a place in your consciousness, making it more likely that you will recognize, and follow up with, any match-making opportunities that may arise.

 For Benjamin, as for countless others who long to build a family of their own, time is running out. Still, he is positive and optimistic. What's kept Benjamin going is that he firmly believes G-d must have someone very special lined up for him to have made him wait so long.

 Benjamin is doing his part. Let's make sure we do ours.

Published: Sunday, December 09, 2007

(*In going through my list of emails to delete, I came across this article written back more than six years ago by Mr. Botwinik. I can’t recall where it was published, perhaps Aish.com It is my hope that Benjamin has since found his bashert.)*