**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayikra 5774**

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**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov and**

**The French Winemaker**

Once the Baal Shem Tov had a dream in which a deceased man appeared to him. The soul was deeply troubled because his son had forsaken the path of Torah. "I cannot rest because of my son. Please, Rebbe, try to help him."

The Baal Shem Tov lost no time. He harnessed his famous horses and in hours the carriage was standing outside the mansion of the wealthy son in Paris. The Baal Shem Tov's attendant knocked forcefully on the door, but was repeatedly rebuffed. Finally the master and mistress were awakened. The mistress peered into the carriage, and overwhelmed by the stately appearance of the man seated within, she entreated her husband to invite him to stay.

**A Large, Empty House**

"We have such a large, empty house. Please let him stay."

The Baal Shem Tov was given a comfortable room. Word soon spread that a great wonder-working rabbi had arrived. People began to converge on the grand home. The mistress was very curious about the goings on, and engaged many of the petitioners in conversation. People began to speak about the wondrous cures that were effected by the potions and blessings of the rabbi, and the mistress of the house began to hope that she, too, could be helped.

That night she asked her husband to go to the Baal Shem Tov for his blessing and advice. "For so many years we have been denied the blessing of children. Perhaps this holy man can help us."

**The Husband was Uninterested**

Her husband was uninterested. After all, the best doctors on the continent were unable to help them. What could an itinerant rabbi do for them? But his wife was relentless, and in the end, he acceded to her wish.

The Baal Shem Tov received the man and inquired about his business. "I manufacture wine," the man replied.

"Do you make kosher wine?" inquired the Baal Shem Tov.

"No," he answered.

"Well, then, at the next harvest, I want you to make a run of kosher wine. When you bring it to Medzibozh I can guarantee you a good profit."

The man just snorted. He did quite well, thank you, without the bother of kosher wine. Then he made his request to the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov produced several vials of remedies for the man's wife, and promised that in a year she would bear a son. The merchant was skeptical, but at least he had satisfied his wife. His wife was overjoyed and took the medicines at once. The Baal Shem Tov left, and true to his word, within a few months the woman conceived.

**Opted to Make Kosher**

**Wine for the Baal Shem Tov**

The merchant decided that since the Baal Shem Tov's blessing bore fruit, he would make the kosher wine and bring it to Medzibozh. He loaded the barrels of kosher wine onto several wagons and set out with his servant for Medzibozh.

After several days on the road, he lost his way. When the merchant alighted from his wagon to check directions, the driver unwittingly set off without him. Realizing that he had forgotten his passenger, the servant returned and frantically searched for him, but to no avail. He was forced to return to his mistress alone. The wife resumed the search, but was also unsuccessful. It seemed that the merchant had vanished.

The merchant wandered around for some time, and finally found shelter in a small shack. There he found a group of men playing cards and joined them. It wasn't long before he lost not only his money, but some of his expensive garments as well. Dejected, he resumed his travels, searching for someone who might take pity on him.

He wandered for hours until he came to the small cottage of a shepherd and his family. Out of the goodness of his heart, the shepherd supplied him with new clothing, food and drink.

**Wandering for Many Months**

The merchant wandered for many months from village to village in his attempt to return home. It seemed that each time he neared his home some perplexing situation intervened. From time to time he stopped at synagogues and yeshivot where the local Jews extended their warm hospitality. This experience humbled him and he began to examine his own heart as he had never done before. He felt drawn to the Torah that he studied at the yeshivot, especially the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov that some of his followers taught. Eventually, he himself became an ardent chasid of the Baal Shem Tov.

**Offered a Glass of Wine**

It was after many months of wandering thus that the man found himself in Medzibozh at a gathering with the Baal Shem Tov and his chasidim. The Rebbe offered the man a glass of wine. The label on the bottle was that of his own company - a non-kosher wine!

The Baal Shem Tov smiled. "Don't worry about the wine. Although it is your own label, this is the kosher wine that I had requested of you. Your own wagons loaded with the wine are standing just outside the city. Know that it is now time for you to return home. Hurry, for your wife is ready to give birth to your son."

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

**Man of Steel: How a Kosher Slaughterer Turned Knife-Making Into an Art**

**By Shira Telushkin**

*Rabbi Moshe Yurman is one of just three men in America making ritual knives for* **shochtim***. You can guess what’s in his basement.*



Rabbi Yurman holds a ‘chalif’ he has made.(Tablet Magazine)

There are countless ways to [make a mistake when] killing a kosher chicken. You could hesitate, for a moment, halfway through the chicken’s neck—the knife must be drawn across in one fluid motion, and the slightest pause can render the slaughter unkosher. You could accidently tear the chicken’s trachea or esophagus, instead of slicing both in one clean sweep, as Jewish law requires.

Your blade could nick on a grain of sand embedded in the neck—any nick found on the blade invalidates the animal for certification. You could drop the knife, press down too hard, obscure the point of incision, lose control of the bird. While an experienced kosher slaughterer can kill thousands of chickens a day without error, a beginning student might have a success rate of just over 3 percent.

**Hasn’t Made a Mistake in Decades**

Rabbi Moshe Yurman, 65, hasn’t [made a mistake when slaughtering] a kosher chicken in decades. He slaughtered his first animal at 18 and has since butchered innumerable goats, cows, chickens, sheep, peafowl, pigeons, bulls, American bison, and buffalo: If it’s kosher, he has probably killed it.

Yurman got into animal slaughter for the knives. In addition to being a shochet, or slaughterer, he is one of only three ritual knife-makers in the United States. There are fewer than 10 worldwide.

The knife, known as the chalif, is the most important tool of the shochet. The chalif must be handmade and kept exquisitely sharp. In industrial kosher plants, a bell rings every three minutes reminding shochtim to check their knives. If a nick the size of a hairsbreadth is discovered, all animals killed since the last inspection are deemed not kosher.

There are different knives for different animals. For chickens, the blade is about five inches long. A lamb, eight to 12. A full-sized cow would need at least an 18-inch blade. The same goes for a bull. A buffalo could exceed 19 inches. The ideal shechitah knife is roughly two-thirds the size of the animal’s neck.

**Fewer than 300 Men in All America**

**Who Slaughter Kosher Meat**

Fewer than 300 men kill all the kosher meat sold in America, and they typically move every few months, working at plants in Iowa and Colorado, or outside the country in Canada, Mexico, and Uruguay. Owning and maintaining a set of knives is a matter of pride for a shochet, and each one—like a high-end chef—brings his own knife to work, no matter how large or professional the plant. The typical shochet can maintain his blade, but if he needs a new knife he comes to Yurman’s home in the Midwood area of Brooklyn. Choosing a knife is intimate business.

It takes Yurman under five seconds to take a bird, slash its throat, and turn its body upside-down into a metal cone to be drained of blood; facts about slaughter he shares without hesitation. But ask him a personal question—like, say, how he learned to slaughter animals—and he will only laugh and wave his hand, refusing to answer. The first time he crafted his own knife? “Nobody wants to know that.” How many knives he owns? “Too many,” he’ll say. “You don’t want to know.”

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“Here, feel this,” Yurman says as he hands me a narrow knife with a 19-inch blade and a beautiful cherry-wood handle. I am in his living room, and the table is spread with knives. They are all different lengths and widths, their handles a range of colors. I take the knife from him. The handle is stamped H.W., the knife-maker’s initials. He died in 1974, Yurman tells me, and now his son makes chalif knives in New Jersey. The son and Yurman are two of the three knife-makers in America; the third lives in Baltimore.

**Examining a Non-Kosher Knife**

The old blade is very narrow, slimmed by heavy use, and clearly too coarse to be kosher. I run the sharp edge along the broad side of my thumbnail, as shochtim are trained to do. Yurman guides me to the top half-inch of the blade, which is in particularly poor condition. It feels rough, like a crumbly Cheerio. He then hands me a newer looking, 12-inch knife, used for goats, sheep, and small calves. “Here, try this one. You’ll see the difference.”

My fingernail glides so quickly across the knife that it feels like ice. There is absolutely no friction. He finds me a piece of untreated steel in the kitchen, to keep as a token. “I was looking for one with a hole, so you could make it a necklace,” he says. He jokingly offers to make me a knife with a pink handle.

**A Home Alive with Knife-Making**

Yurman’s home is alive with knife-making. There are sharpening stones on bookshelves, scraps of steel in the kitchen, and drawers full of knives under the family computer. Yurman and his wife have seven children, all married, and judging from the smiling pictures all around us, a ton of grandchildren. Sitting on a stack of papers is a thick, green piece of curved glass, an old sharpening stand for a razor blade. “That was given to me by an old shochet,” he says. “A curiosity.” Seven knives lie on the lace tablecloth in the living room, next to a stack of sacred Hebrew books. There are 13 more in a nearby drawer.

The knives are kept in an assortment of materials; some blades are wrapped in cloth, others have leather holders, some are neatly bound in paper towels. The colors of the handles are coded to the different types of steel Yurman is testing out: blue, orange, white, wooden, aluminum. His steel comes from Switzerland. A quarry in Arkansas makes his polishing stones; he visited once, to ascertain the quality, and now he orders the stones over the phone.

To sharpen a knife requires between two and seven stones, each one upgrading to a new level of fineness. A perfectly sharp knife could last for more than 20 animals, if it doesn’t hit anything hard, like a bone. The fat in the blood also dulls the blade.

**Comparing sharpening a Knife to**

**Playing a Musical Instrument**

“How difficult is it to sharpen a knife?” I ask.

“How difficult is it to play piano?” he responds. “To play saxophone? To play violin?”

Knife sharpening is so hard because the knife must strike the stone at exactly the same place and same angle every time. Hence the hours of practice for aspiring shochtim.

Yurman makes around 15 knives a year. A five-inch chicken knife sells for under $200, and a full-size beef knife can be anywhere between $400 and $650. I ask how many he sells. “Very few. Very few.” Five a year? He nods his head and shrugs his shoulder. “It is not really a money making-venture as much as it is a service to the community.”

Given the slow pace of sales and the healthy size of his inventory, the community could probably be fine if he stopped for a while. Shechitah has never demanded a specialized knife-maker, only trained shochtim. In Europe, shochtim historically used local blacksmiths.

**Complimented by a Teacher**

**At Yeshiva University**

Rabbi Chaim Loike, who sits on the board of the Orthodox Union and teaches shechitah classes to rabbinical students at Yeshiva University, describes Yurman’s knives as a work of art, with all the implications of what this means: appreciated, but something of a luxury. “He really makes his own knife,” says Loike, explaining that many shochtim buy pre-made knives and then shape them into the legal requirements of the chalif. This is precisely what Loike does for his students, ordering knives through a man who gets them from Portugal, and then shaping them to satisfactory sharpness. But Yurman starts from scratch.

Knife-making is a multistep process. Once the basic width of the steel is set, Yurman sends it in for heat treatment, which hardens the steel. Yurman then cuts out the shape of the knife from the steel, handle included. After this, it gets sent to the grinder, who bevels the blade, meaning he indents the sides so they slope inward. Then the polisher polishes it.

**Very Particular About Quality**

Yurman has cultivated relationships with these people for over 20 years, and he is very picky about their quality. “What do I do? I pick the steel, I pick the grinder, I pick the heat treat, I pick the handle, I pick the polisher. The inventory that I keep is all in the basement.”

“Can I see the basement?” I ask.

Yurman laughs deeply. By this point I know what that laugh means: I’m not getting anywhere near that basement.

Being a knife-maker gives Yurman a community beyond shochtim. He attends knife shows, populated by hunters, skinners, and collectors, to make new contacts and meet old friends.

“Everybody, every kind of person is there,” he says. “Some are into martial arts, some are into decorative knives. Are they interested in shechitah? Some more, some less. Some don’t want to talk to you, some aren’t interested in killing animals, some think it’s cruel, some would rather shoot them—they think that’s not cruel—but certain people have their theories, and we discuss theories.

**A Theory to Everything**

“I have one friend, and I say to him, ‘Daniel, we have 200 people in the room now, do you think five of them in the room understand what we’re talking about?’ And he says, ‘Are you crazy?’ We discuss where the soft and the hard should meet in the knife, the balance. There is a theory to everything—I have a whole discussion with various shochtim, which side of the animal should we be standing on when you slaughter.”

At one of these knife shows he was introduced to a doctor who was experimenting with how the material of the knife affected healing rates in human surgeries, comparing grades of steel and obsidian. He asked Yurman to sharpen his scalpels, and together they worked in the hospital, documenting the effect of knives on human skin. “That was exciting,” Yurman tells me.

Another time, he made a connection with Temple Grandin, the famed designer of slaughterhouses, and together they created a knife with a disposable blade for Muslim slaughterers, who are often untrained in knife sharpening. Like all teachers of kosher slaughter, Yurman trains his students in the Muslim-owned poultry shops that dot Queens, Brooklyn, and New Jersey. Once the domain of kosher slaughterhouses (the United Nations is built over a defunct kosher slaughterhouse), New York now has a slaughter industry that is dominated by the Muslim community, which quietly and to little fanfare works out arrangements with the ultra-Orthodox Jewish slaughterers who need space for their students.

**Unable to Answer the Question**

I ask Yurman how he got into slaughtering. “The steel is what really got me into it,” he says. But when I ask what got him into steel, Yurman becomes guarded again: He throws his hands up, raises his shoulder, and shakes his head. Four times he tries to answer but can’t. I wait for 30 seconds.

“Forget about that,” he says. “That, that, that’s, that’s, that’s … we’re not gonna get into that area.”

His voice has gotten smaller and he refuses to look at me.

But not everybody makes knives, I prod. “That’s true. Most people who make knives use one steel; I have a whole fan of different steels,” he says with some pride in his voice. Then shakes his head. “Because that’s just how I do it.”

I ask one more question before I leave: “Why do you make knives?”

This time, he is silent for close to a minute. “Same reason ladies go buy clothing,” he says. “There is always something, next year’s season, next year’s color, next year’s steel. I can’t put it in any other terms.” I leave the knife-maker with his knives.

*Reprinted from the February 25, 2014 email of Tablet Magazine.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Watch Your Step**

The following amazing true story shows how the Shechina escorts even those Jews who are the farthest from Hashem.

A secular Jew in Israel from a Chassidic background once related the following story about his son. The man's son was a commander of a Tank Artillery division. Sadly, the Army commander had become vehemently anti-religious over the years. He even went so far as to complain about a photograph of his grandfather which hung on the wall in his father's house. The photograph of the grandfather, in traditional Chassidic garb with peyos and a long beard, was particularly offensive to the young soldier.

**Upset at His Grandfather’s Photo**

"That man is a barbarian. Take the picture down", he would shriek.

One day, the soldier became religious! What happened? It was in June 1967, the Six Day War, in the Sinai Desert. The tanks were all spread out. If attacked, they would have to regroup and fight together. Suddenly, Egyptian tanks approached. The commander turned his tank around and raced back to the platoon. The fastest way was straight across an open stretch.

Suddenly, he saw an old man davening, enwrapped in tallis and tefillin, right in his path. "Doesn't the fool have any place better to pray than in the middle of the desert", he screamed. "I'm going to run him over." But at the last minute he swerved to avoid the old man.

The Egyptian tank in hot pursuit behind him didn't have any such tinge of sympathy. As it ran over the old Jew it exploded into a fiery inferno as it tripped a landmine underneath.

When the soldier visited his father after the war, the photo was still on the wall. Although he had seen it hundreds of times before, the face was familiar in a strange way. He recognized the face of the old Jew who was praying in the desert. "I realized that he was praying for me that I should live", explained the newly religious soldier, "And I want to be like him."

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**Rabbinic Student From Ukraine, 25, Diligent Scholar and Caring Teacher**

**By** [**Menachem Posner**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/12145/jewish/Menachem-Posner.htm) **|**

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| Gedalya Grinzaid ''stood out as someone truly special with a gentle and kind soul.” (Photo: Rabbinical College of America) |
| Gedalya Grinzaid "stood out as someone truly special with a gentle and kind soul.” (Photo: Rabbinical College of America) |

Gedalya Grinzaid, a 25-year old rabbinical student from Ukraine, was killed Sunday after being struck by a city sanitation truck in Brooklyn, N.Y. He was said to be a diligent student and gentle teacher who dedicated his short life to Torah study and sharing Judaism with others.

Grinzaid was born in the twilight years of the Communist Soviet Union to Avraham and Malka Grinzaid in Vinnitza, a small city in western Ukraine. He was an only child.

At the time of his birth the Grinzaids were proud and involved Jews, although not fully observant. His father has served as the longstanding president of the century-old Nikrasova Synagogue for three decades, and the family was said to be positively influenced by their son.

“He was a very special child, with a sincere, gentle soul,” recalls Rabbi Shaul Horowitz, Chabad *shliach* to Vinnitza. “As a student in the local Yad Vaezer and then Ohr Avner Ohr Menachem schools, he absorbed Torah like a sponge, always eager to learn more. Even as a young boy, he insisted on eating only kosher and influenced his parents to keep a kosher home.”

With time, Grinzaid went on to study in Kiev and Zhitomir in Ukraine, and later at *yeshivahs* in New Square, N.Y., and Kfar Chabad, Israel.

**A Truly Special Gentle and Kind Soul**

“Even then, he stood out as someone truly special with a gentle and kind soul,” says Rabbi Mendel Lichtenstein, Judaic-studies principal at Ohr Avner Chabad Jewish Day School Ohr Menachem. “It is not often that a Ukrainian-born boy attains such advanced proficiency in Torah studies. He was comfortable in Hebrew, Yiddish and Aramaic. He taught at a school in Zhitomir for children from Chabad families in neighboring towns. He was devoted to his students, and the children loved him.”

**‘Held in the Highest Regard’**

Beyond the classroom, Gedalya participated in the Merkos Shlichus “Roving Rabbis” program, in which Chabad rabbinic interns visit small, isolated Jewish communities. He traveled from town to town in western Ukraine, sharing his passion for Judaism and love for Torah.

In his 20s, as a student in Ohr Somayach in Monsey, N.Y., Gedalya continued to study Torah and teach others.

“Gedalya had incredible love for people, a love for the Torah and a love for G‑d,” recalls Rabbi Avrohom Braun, director of admissions and education at Ohr Somayach. “Every person who came to *yeshivah*—from a beginner to the most advanced student—would soon be learning with Gedalya, either privately or in a group. He was truly beloved by everyone.”

**His Humble Interactions**

**And Lucid Teachings**

Observing Grinzaid’s humble interactions and lucid teachings, Braun determined that he would make an ideal Chabad *shaliach* and decided that the best place for him to continue his studies would be at Tiferes Bachurim, a division of the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, N.J.

“When he came to Morristown in 2011, he was literally accompanied by an entourage of will-wishers,” says Nissen Goldman, a South African student at Tiferes and Grinzaid’s first roommate there. “They told us that we were getting a special person, and that we should treasure him. It was clear that they held him in the highest regard.”

Soon enough, Grinzaid, who was known for learning aloud in a sweet singsong, would develop a similar relationship with the students in Morristown as well.

“Although we shared the same room, I really never got to know Gedalya,” recalls Goldman. “He would be up early in the morning to begin studying and would continue learning for many hours. I would only see him again late in the evening—hours after the official study sessions had ended for the day. The only time he was not learning was when he was eating or sleeping.”

“For many students he was a pillar of support,” says Rabbi Boruch Hecht, admissions director at Tiferes. “He would seek out the new students and others who were having a hard time transitioning into yeshivah life and set up study sessions, helping them acclimate.”

**Studying for Rabbinic Ordination**

In September, Grinzaid began studying for his rabbinic ordination in Morristown’s prestigious rabbinical training program under the tutelage of Rabbi Chaim Schapiro. He was “refined, humble, and had a great devotion to Torah study,” says Rabbi Schapiro. “He was the first one to show up and never wasted a moment of learning.”

One of the few times Grinzaid would leave the study hall was on Fridays, when he would visit elderly Russian-speaking Jewish people in assisted-living homes. Fellow student Benjy Licht says Grinzaid developed a special rapport with the seniors. “From the way the people talked about him, you could tell that they loved his visits—he would make them *lebedik* [lively].”

**A Sunday Morning Tragedy**

On Sunday morning, after spending Shabbat near the Lubavitch World Headquarters in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., Grinzaid was crossing a street at the corner when he was struck by the sanitation truck. He passed away on the spot from head injuries.

Rabbi Horowitz says arrangements are underway to transport the body back to Ukraine, where he will be buried later this week in either Vinnitza or Mezhibuzh.

As news spread of his passing, Rabbis Braun and Hecht say they have been receiving call after calls from former students.

“One person called from as far as Nebraska,” says Rabbi Braun. “He has been living in a very non-Jewish environment, but had been touched by Gedalya during the time they were together in *yeshivah.* He told me ‘if Gedalya is not here anymore, I need to get out of here.’ He has since decided to move back to a Jewish community. Gedalya had that kind of effect on people.”

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

**A Sad, Sad World**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**

There is a well-known anecdote/legend that circulates in the Mussar/yeshiva circles about a young yeshiva student who left the yeshiva world and its environment to find his fortune in far distant fields. At the time that he left the yeshiva he had a beard and dressed modestly as was his Jewish tradition.

**A Chance Meeting on the Street**

A decade later he met by chance on the street the head of his former yeshiva. The former student now was completely clean-shaven and dressed in the most modern and fashionable garb of the time. Nevertheless, the old mentor recognized his former student and engaged him in conversation.

He innocently asked him: “Since I am not a man of the world and you obviously are, would you please answer a few questions that I have about the outside society? Are most people happy or depressed? Are most people satisfied with their wealth or do they consider themselves to be poor? Are most people psychologically well adjusted or are they anxious and sometimes almost insane?

**Taken Back by the Questions**

And finally, are most people physically healthy or are they afflicted with disease, discomfort and some sort of illness?" The student was taken aback by this conversation but he dutifully replied: “Master, I must admit the truth to you. Most people are not happy, they do not consider themselves wealthy no matter how much money they have, many psychologists and therapists are doing a thriving business because a great deal of the world is dysfunctional and even somewhat crazy, and those that are sick and ill, in pain and in anxiety, far outnumber those who consider themselves completely healthy, normal and well-adjusted.” To which the mentor commented: “So for such a sad, depressed, sick, poor world you removed your beard?!”

In our daily prayers we state: “That we should not toil for emptiness and nothingness nor should we have been born to be confused and depressed.” Judaism does not negate the outside world. It is a practical religion that deals with life as it is and does not make unrealistic demands upon its adherents.

**A Religion of Balance**

So even though the outside world may be one of poverty, mental strain, physical pain and suffering and constant frustration; that is the world that we live in. We are not to shut ourselves in lonely solitude and become hermits. But, as I have often pointed out in these columns, Judaism is always a religion of balance.

And the balance here is not to allow us to remove our beard, so to speak, because of the pressures of the outside world and our desire to conform to its current standards and political correctness.

Like hundreds of millions, if not even billions of others. I own a cell phone. I rarely use it and for most of the time it is in the off mode. I do so purposely because I still value human conversation face-to-face. My grandchildren all text – they cannot spell correctly and many times are flustered when having to actually communicate with another human being on a personal and face-to-face basis.

**An Advanced technological**

**World that is Innately Sad**

The outside world tells me that I am a Neanderthal, a relic of a long past era. Maybe so, but I am not willing to ‘shave my beard’ on this issue. It represents to me a very advanced technological world that is innately sad, poor, disconnected and in very many cases very dysfunctional.

Ukraine, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Congo, Zimbabwe, Bosnia, North Korea and a host of other countries on the globe are not pleasant places to currently be in. In fact, large parts of the world and of its billions of people are enveloped in sadness, violence, injustice and death.

If one does not have principles and beliefs that transcend current events and the present situation of the outside world then one is doomed to this constant feeling of depression, tension and enormous frustration. The Torah gave us a set of principles and beliefs in order to be able to live in such an uncomfortable world and yet have a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

The Torah promised us eternal life and unending memory. The Torah deals with the myriad details of daily life and weaves them together into a tapestry of meaningful and satisfying values. The sadness of the outside world can be somewhat ameliorated by a sense of serenity and accomplishment in our inner world. Prayer, study, charity, good thoughts and good behavior are all part of building our inner world and allowing us to successfully deal with that most difficult and sad outer world. This is a daily lesson that should never be ignored.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Rabbi Wein’s article is published courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway (*[*learn@torah.org*](mailto:learn@torah.org) *www.torah.org)*

**The Importance of**

**Being Optimistic**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

The first story I heard from an old Chassid by the name of Rabbi Mendel Futerfass. He had been in a labor camp in Siberia for many years and in general had seen many tragedies in life but never lost his good spirits and optimism.

I once asked him how he did it and he told me a story.

Once there was simple young man that decided to learn to be a wagon driver. Now, being a wagon driver was the least intellectually demanding of jobs involving sitting behind a horse for hours a day but nevertheless it did require some minimal training.

So the young man paid two older drivers to teach him the ropes and when they finished and saw he knew how to drive they decided to have some fun at his expense and give him an oral 'exam' as well. They pulled up a table, sat him down, solemnly sat opposite him and after a minute of pregnant silence began the questioning.

"What would you do if one of the wheels fell off the wagon?" They asked. The young man was nervous and sweating but after a few torturous moments of racking his brain … he remembered and gave the right answer.

"And what would you do if the horse began to make problems like going too fast or too much to the left or bucking up and down?" Again, after straining his memory to the edge he answered properly.

**The Last Question**

One of the old fellows then pinched the other under the table and, feigning great seriousness, cleared his throat leaned forward narrowed his eyes and asked quietly. "And what would you do if all the wheels fell off, the horse went insane and dragged the wagon into quicksand leaving only your seat and the horse's head sticking out of the mud?"

With only a few seconds of thought the young man smiled, sat upright and answered in a ringing voice. "I would jump from my place to dry land, run around in front of the horse, look him in the eyes and LAUGH as hard as possible!!"

The two older drivers, astounded by the speed and certainty of his stupid answer stared at him in wide eyed silence.

"Where did you get that from?" One of them asked. "What good will it do if you laugh?!" asked the other in disbelief.

The young man smiled even wider and replied, "If I cried, would it help?"

The second story is about the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe; Rabbi Menachem Shneerson.

**The Rebbe’s Severe Heart Attack**

In 1978 in the middle of the 'Simchat Torah' holiday festivities in his massive synagogue in Brooklyn N.Y. he suffered a severe heart attack. Suddenly thousands of Chassidim were ordered to clear out of the room and say Psalms.

Doctors arrived and the reports became more and more serious. The Rebbe's life was clearly in danger. Huge crowds stood outside in the cold weeping and praying. Then the Rebbe sent his first message to the Chassidim. Those interested in his recovery should be happy and DANCE, and the joy would break all harsh decrees.

And it worked!!

The next morning the Doctors announced that the Rebbe had passed the crisis and that if the Chassidim had any idea how severe things had been (the Rebbe's heart actually ceased to work for a while) there wouldn't be enough vodka in all New York to celebrate the miracle.

But the strain on the heart had been very severe and the doctors said the road to recovery would be long. They forbade the Rebbe exertion of any type including public speaking and hinted that he retire.

**Never Taken Even One Vacation**

After all, he was seventy five years old and had been working non-stop, over twenty hours a day for the last thirty years attending the needs of hundreds if not thousands of followers, He had never taken even one vacation and received more mail than the President of the U.S.A. He deserved a rest.

But the Rebbe did not agree; just months later he resumed speaking from his room and within two years he had returned with increased vigor to his original grueling schedule of 'Farbringins' (public speeches), answering letters and pushing his followers to improve the world.

Once, one of the doctors that had treated him attended one those Farbringens and saw how the Rebbe spoke for hours with only short breaks between speeches.

This doctor had been given a seat of honor near the Rebbe and in one of these breaks, when the thousands of Chassidim would sing and the Rebbe would nod to them and say "LeChiam', he leaned over and said quietly, "Rebbe, you should not exert yourself; there is a thirty five percent chance of a heart attack recurrence."

**Did Not Respond to the Doctor’s Remarks**

The Rebbe did not respond at all, so the Doctor leaned a bit closer and raised his voice over the noise.

"Rebbe, you shouldn't be speaking for such long times. There is a thirty five percent chance that you can have another heart attack!"

But the Rebbe seemed not to have heard again. After all he was an older man etc.

So the Doctor put his hand on the Rebbe's arm to catch his attention and spoke even louder, "Rebbe, did you hear what I said? I said that ….."

The Rebbe turned to him with a smile and said, "Yes, I heard. You said that there is a Sixty Five percent chance that there is nothing to worry about."

After the Farbringen the Rebbe told one of his secretaries that he doesn't want that doctor to treat him again; doctors must be optimistic.

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

**How to Get On Top Of, And Stay On Top Of, Pesach Cleaning**

**By Pnina Baim**

People like to say that dirt isn’t *chometz*, but as Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky says, if dirt isn’t *chometz*, how can you tell? Besides, are you really going to take apart the whole closet and then not wipe it down before you put everything back? If you’re not going to clean the mess now, when will you?

Some people have this misconception that I love cleaning and therefore relish the upcoming holiday of *Pesach*. They assume that because I write about organizing – it must mean I spend the whole day dusting and mopping.

**Love Relaxing with My Family in**

**A Clean, Airy Organized Space**

Sadly, that is not the case. In fact, I do not enjoy scrubbing until my skin falls off (I really should invest in gloves), or sweeping the floor for the fifth time in one day, or wiping the accumulated salt-encrusted snow from my mudroom floor. On the other hand, what I do love is relaxing with my family in a clean, airy, organized space, where I can find what I need, when I need it.

When the time comes to clean, I do it by keeping my eye on the prize of a relaxing environment even as I mumble to myself over the inability of skirts to hold their shape while ironing the pleats of my daughter’s uniform skirts over and over.

**Avoid Clutter and Grime in the First Place**

So if I love the end result of an organized, clean house, I will find the easiest way to achieve that goal. Can you guess what that would be? That’s right: avoid clutter and grime in the first place. This is a method that takes practice before it comes with ease, but with *Pesach* a couple of months away, this is the best time to begin perfecting good habits.

I’ve spoken many times before about the ability to stay on top of household chores by developing a daily and weekly schedule which includes doing laundry, washing dishes and sweeping, setting aside a fixed time to mop and clean the silver, etc., and making sure to include all the children, thereby instilling in them not just the important *midda* of responsibility, but also granting them the gift of organization.

There are a few areas that can quickly become a gathering place for dust and clutter. Here are some specific ways to deal with them:

Mail: With the advent of e-mail, most snail mail these days consists of bills, junk mail, solicitations, and invitations from those who have not embraced the ease and economics of e-vites.

.[](http://www.jewishpress.com/sections/magazine/for-the-home/how-to-get-on-top-of-and-stay-on-top-of-pesach-cleaning/2014/02/21/attachment/baim-022114-dvds/)

**1. Junk Mail** should be chucked while you are still standing at your door or, even better, *write return to sender, wrong address* on the envelope and put it back in the mailbox.

**2. Bil**ls can be easily disposed of by going paperless. Most, if not all, companies sending you a paper bill have an option for paperless, and allow you to sign up online for monthly reminders to view and pay your account. Some companies even offer a financial incentive for having an online account, as this saves the company a lot of money, not to mention trees. Being able to view your account online has many other benefits as well – you no longer have to go hunting for the paper bill that corresponds to that month; you can simply click on the billing cycle of that month, and *voilà*, the list of expenses appears.

**3. For solicitations**, I recommend deciding which organizations to donate to, and then calling them up and asking them to send you an e-mail request instead of a paper one. This will save them money, thereby making your donation go even further. For those organizations that you are not interested in donating to, call them and politely but firmly ask them to remove you from their list.

**4. Finally, for invitations**, RSVP right away and put a reminder with the address of the event in your cell phone calendar.

Groceries, overnight bags and suitcases, and clothes shopping: In short, unpack right away. I would even suggest not putting down the bags at all, as they can easily get pushed aside, causing clutter and the potential for someone to trip over them. Instead, carry the bags straight to their destinations and unpack immediately. In addition, leaving the groceries out is an invitation for little hands to get curious. A better choice is to put away your newly acquired purchases, or packed suitcase, and take a couple of minutes to organize your pantry or closet at the same time, which brings me to…

**Closets and dressers**: Over the years, it’s so easy to accumulate a large amount of rarely-worn clothes. When the time comes to organize and purge those items we haven’t worn in years, we feel that tinge of “perhaps I will wear it someday” and we put the item right back where it came from.

Here’s a handy tip: Hang your hangers the opposite way and turn items in your dresser inside out. After you wear an item of clothing, put it back the proper way. Next year (which will be here in an instant), see which clothes are still backwards or inside out and find them a better home promptly.

**Important papers**: Every home needs a file cabinet to hold important papers such as passports for every member of the family (you never know when crazy flights to Israel will come around), leases, warranties and the like. The crucial part is to not let that file cabinet overflow. Every time you add another paper to the file cabinet, take a few minutes to make sure all the other documents are still relevant. For example, there is no need to keep maintenance manuals on a vacuum cleaner that you no longer have.

**Pesach cleaning**: Count how many rooms you have in your house and begin cleaning that number of weeks before *Pesach*. Each week, tackle one room and finish all of it before beginning the next week. This year will be the ninth *Pesach* I will be making, and as far as I know, that is the only way to make *Pesach* cleaning stress-free.

As a postscript, this past weekend, I took the plunge into *Pesach* cleaning and tackled the kid’s room. However, before I began, I took my own advice, and after rubbing Vaseline all over my hands, put on a pair of long yellow rubber gloves. The warmth created by the cleaning helped the moisture repair my poor abused skin, and three hours later, I not only had a *Pesach-*cleaned bedroom, but soft hands.

Enjoy your fresh, clean, happy space!

*Reprinted from the February 25, 2014 email of The Jewish Press.*

Interview with Burt Siegel:

***Leader of Popular NYC Congregation Makes Radical Reforms in Personal Religious Life***

**By Baila Olidort**



Rabbi Burt studying at the Chabad Upper East Side Kollel with Shmuly Silcove

On a life-long spiritual quest, 72 year-old ***Burt Siegel***, the much beloved leader of the Reform Shul of New York (on the Lower East Side) has finally dropped anchor at Chabad of the Upper East Side. There he found a tradition that has given him “a sense of the depth of Jewish spirituality that I only knew about vaguely.”

While he continues to lead the popular liberal congregation he founded 14 years ago, Burt davens with the 7:30 Shacharit minyan at Chabad of the Upper East Side every morning. After wrapping his tefillin—a proud new acquisition from a reliable sofer—he joins the small Kollel of young Chabad rabbinical students where he studies Talmud, Tanya and Chumash with his chavruta study partner, ***Shmuli Silcove***.

Soft-spoken but energetic, Burt, or Simcha Bunim, as he likes to be called, met with ***Baila Olidort*** on a recent Monday afternoon following his Kollel session at Chabad.

**What’s it like for you to daven here?**

When I daven from the siddur I have a sense of being linked to the tradition that goes back thousands of years in a way that I hadn’t experienced before.

**When was the first time you actually put on tefillin?**

When I was in Israel, about 8 months ago.

**That’s surprising—you’ve been living in Manhattan for so many years, haven’t the Chabad students somewhere on the city streets ever approached you?**

Many times. I tried to avoid them. I never agreed to put on tefillin.

**Why?**

We were taught that tefillin was to be understood as a metaphor, that the words “you shall wear them as a sign between your eyes and on your arm” was an abstraction.

**Where was that?**

At HUC [Hebrew Union College] in Cinicinnatti.

**What is the experience of tefillin like for you now?**

I always thought that my hands would do good and my mind would turn to thoughts of kindness and love. But it was just in my mind, very abstract. Now, when I feel the tefillin on my head and hand, there is a reality about it. My thoughts feel deeper, stronger and grounded.

**You were always on a quest for spiritual meaning.**

I was always a stranger looking for some kind of spirituality that would endow my life with meaning. I traveled to India to visit Hindu Ashrams. I’d go to temples and attend classes there, but it didn’t touch me. So I kept going back. Thirteen times.

**But you studied, and were ordained at HUC?**

Yes, Bible was studied in terms of the Documentary Hypothesis, in historical terms, but not as a source of Divine inspiration. It really was devoid of a sense of spirituality. It was not about supporting people in their spiritual search or teaching people in any way how to connect with Hashem. They told us that Talmud was irrelevant, archaic and anachronistic.

**And now you're studying Talmud with Shmuli, your chavruta. What’s that like?**

Yes, we’re learning tractate Pesachim. At first I felt it was anachronistic, but I continued studying because of the way it linked me to a tradition that was so rich, that went back thousands of years, a tradition that really celebrated life, and I fell in love with the tradition.

Studying Talmud, I started to appreciate seeing things from different perspectives. I began to appreciate the legitimacy of holding two different opinions and striving to find the authenticity in both.

**You are studying at this Kollel of Chasidic rabbis who are in their 20s, young enough to be your grandsons. And yet you seem so comfortable here.**

When Rabbi **Benzion Krasinianski** invited me to join the Kollel of young 22-23 year old students, it was awkward because these young Chabad rabbis live very different lives from me. But I stayed because I wanted to learn the texts. Lectures about [Judaism], books about [Judaism] are one thing. But I needed the texts.

By now, they are my friends. They made me feel that I fit right in. They recently celebrated my birthday with a farbrengen. I came to see that these guys have really internalized the Chasidus. And they are real, sincere, and happy. I felt, “my G-d I have the privilege of being with a group of people that are smart and happy, what more could I want?”

**How did you come to make this radical change at this point in your life?**

At some point last year I began to feel a yearning for a richer Jewish life. On a deeply personal level, I realized that what I had wasn’t the Jewishness that I wanted to live on a day-to-day basis.

I felt a deep desire to study Torah texts in Jerusalem. The last time I was there was 30 years earlier. I wanted to study in a real yeshiva, but most of the places I called made an issue of my age. But I wouldn’t give up. I was relentless. Then a friend told me about Yeshivat Simchat Shlomo in Jerusalem, and that’s where I went. It was a beautiful experience. That’s where I put tefillin on for the first time in my life.

**What happened when you came back to New York?**

I kept putting the tefillin on and I was thinking, ‘how can I get to a more traditional life?’ And I’m trying to put this together with being a Reform rabbi because it’s kind of at odds with what Reform teaches about tradition. I was reflecting on all this and I had a thought that I really didn’t anticipate. I began toying with the idea of going to Chabad. But I had negative ideas of Chabad.

**Such as?**

Well I thought it was intrusive and rude. Then I heard it was a cult. But despite it all, I went in there one Shabbos morning. I was nervous about it. But the moment I stepped in, I felt at home. Like I belonged. Rabbi Krasinianski had no idea who I was, yet he came up to me and asked me if I knew the blessings on the Torah and he invited me to have an aliyah. That was such a loving gesture.

I’ve since fallen in love with Chabad. Chabad opened a door to spirituality for me that I was seeking all my life. It just resonated with me because one of the purposes of my life was to find G-d in the everyday. This is what Chabad teaches. My whole life has now become permeated with a sense of the G-dly in a way that I never had. Every moment is now an opportunity to feel the presence of G-d in my life on a personal level.

**Does your congregation know about the reforms you’ve made in your own religious life?**

I’m sharing my journey with my congregation openly and honestly. They know that I come here every day, that I daven, put on tefillin and learn in the Kollel. I tell them that I’ve found a new and deeper sense of appreciation for tradition. I talk about my spiritual journey.

**Is it strange for you to be doing this while leading your congregation?**

I don’t feel any disconnect between serving my liberal synagogue and my growing traditionalism. My spiritual journey has actually helped me bring even more spirituality to my wonderful members. I’ve decided to send a weekly email to my congregation with some of the spiritual teachings derived from my studies here. I hope my new Jewish life will be a source of spiritual blessing to all whose lives touch my life and especially to my loving and beloved congregation.

**What are your thoughts about your future?**

I was going to experiment with this. From an experiment it has become an experience that I will stay with for the rest of my life. Where it will take me I don’t know.

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