**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Tzav 5771**

**Volume 2, Issue #28**

**Chassidic Story #694**

Dedicated to the holy martyrs of the Fogel family of Itamar

"May G-d avenge their blood!"

**Purim During Pesach!**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

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This amazing story was told annually by Rebbe Yosef Meir of Spinka, after the Seder on the second night of Pesach. Once, on the second Seder night, after finishing all the hagada and songs, a certain young man was still not tired. The thought entered his mind that as it is written that evil Haman was hanged on the second day of Pesach, it would be appropriate to now read the Megillah (Book of Esther). He decided to do so.

Upon finishing the reading, suddenly a soul of a deceased person appeared to him. "What do you have to do with me and what do you want from me?" he asked it.

The poor soul explained: There are souls that even after being judged and receiving theirs (i.e., their punishment), they are still unable to enter the Garden of Eden until they have a special merit. However, there is one time in the year when anyone can enter, and that is on Purim at the time of the Megillah reading.

“Many months before Purim, there is already a line of tens of thousands of souls waiting for the gates to be opened. Still, the duration of the Megillah reading is only two or three hours. Whoever succeeded to enter attains his place, but the rest must wait until the following year. Every year, I also get on line, but because of the great crowding, the time ends and the gates are again closed before I can get in.

“This year, I decided not to leave the gate; I would wait there until Purim the next year. But after only a short time, a month, I suddenly heard the Megillah being read, on Pesach night! I knocked on the gate of Gan Eden, until the guardian of the gate came out and asked me why am I knocking. I told him I heard the Megillah, so please let me in. He said, true, someone is reading the Megillah, but now is not the time for Megillah.

“I said, if the Megillah is being read, you must admit me. In the midst of this dispute, a member of the Heavenly court came out and asked what we

were arguing about. He listened to our explanations and agreed with the guard that now is not the time for Megillah. But he also said that if I were to go down to that young man who is reading Megillah, and he should decide that I can enter, then I will be permitted inside.

The veteran Spinker chasidim like to point out that whenever Rebbe Yosef Meir told a story about one of the tzadikim, he was always careful to include full details, and especially the name of the tzadik involved. Therefore, if he every year he left this young man nameless, it could not be otherwise than that it was he himself!

**Source:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a submission by Reb Ezra Rebhun.

**Biographic Note:** Rabbi Yosef Meir (ben Rabbi Samuel Tzvi) Weiss (18 Adar 1838- 6 Iyar 1909), founder of the Spinker dynasty, attended the Chasidic masters of Belz, Vizhnitz, Zhidichov and Sanz, and studied under several prominent rabbinical sages in his native Hungary. In 1876 he became a Rebbe in his own right, eventually attracting many thousands of followers including prominent Torah scholars. He authored a number of important books, of which the most well-known is Imrei Yosef on the Torah readings and the festivals. He was also famous as a miracle worker. After many decades of being buried abroad, his remains were brought to Israel in 1972 and reinterred in Petach Tikvah; his body was completely intact!

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**The Secret of**

**The Hamantash**

**By Rabbi Aron Moss**

**Question:**

Why do we eat hamantashen on Purim? I have heard that they are the same shape as Haman’s hat. But Haman was the man who wanted to wipe us out. Why would we immortalize him by eating cookies that bear his name?

**Answer:**

This may be a case of mistaken identity. These Purim cakes were originally called mohntashen, which means “poppy-seed pockets.” Today most hamantashen are filled with jam, but poppy seed used to be the more popular filling. It was a short linguistic jump from mohntashen to hamantashen, as people assumed there was a connection between the food eaten on Purim and the villain of the Purim story.

Jews can always find a food to tell a story

The real reason for eating hamantashen is that they symbolize the very nature of the Purim miracle. If you read the story of Purim, you notice that it was a string of seeming coincidences that saved the Jewish people from annihilation. There were no open miracles, no seas split, no plagues, just some twists and turns of history that, when viewed as separate events, seemed quite natural. Only at the end of the story was it revealed that a miracle had occurred.

Jews can always find a food to tell a story. In this case, it is the hamantash. The outside of the hamantash is just plain dough. The true flavor is concealed inside. Beyond the very ordinary veneer is the heart of the hamantash, bursting with sweetness.

Our lives are much the same. At times it seems that we are being pushed and pulled by accidental forces. Things happen to us that seem haphazard and random; there seems to be no system in place, no direction to this cold and harsh universe. This is not true. There is a system. But it is hidden. Below the surface there is a sweet hand and a warm heart that directs the universe.

Rarely do we get to see this hand. Purim is one day when it was revealed, when a crack opened in the outer shell of nature and we glimpsed what lies beyond. Purim reminds us that all those coincidences are no coincidences, and nothing is random. We are still in the middle of our story, so it is hard to see the full picture. But in the end we will see that it’s all one big hamantash.

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Special Purim Trial**

**Of the Shpoler Zeide**

The charges against Mendel arrived in an official-looking envelope from the Rumanian government. A former friend who had a grudge against him had falsely accused him of absconding from Rumania with government funds, and although he now lived in Russia, they were pursuing their claim against him in a local court. Mendel was in serious trouble and not at all sure of how to exonerate himself.

He decided to present his whole story to the famous tzadik, Aryeh Leib, the Shpoler Zeide, and see what advice the Rebbe could give him. After having listened to Mendel describe the problem at length, the tzadik said: "Don't worry about the trial. Just be sure to have the proceedings postponed until the day of Purim. And as for a lawyer, don't worry about that either, because I'll send a very good one to plead your defense."

**Relief of a Burden Being Lifted From His Shoulders**

Mendel felt the burden being lifted from his shoulders. "Rebbe, how much will I have to pay for this lawyer," he asked with some trepidation. "And, how will I recognize him?"

"There is an orphaned girl whom I'm trying to marry off, and I need three hundred rubles for the dowry. If you give me money for this great mitzva, I'll send the lawyer at my own expense. You will recognize him because he will be wearing a white hat and red gloves."

Of course, Mendel was more than happy to comply. He handed the money to the tzadik and returned home to arrange for his case to be heard on Purim. He was successful in his endeavors.

As for his part, the Shpoler Zeide had a very unique method of influencing the official government sphere. On Purim, he had been known to gather a group of his intimates for a special kind of Purim-spiel or play. This "jest," however, was not meant in humor, but was a serious kabalistic means of affecting the outcome of dangerous legal dilemmas. In the course of the Purim-spiel the case at hand would be enacted by the tzadik and his company, and a positive verdict would be handed down.

**Dressing Up as Court Officials**

On the day of Mendel's court appearance the Shpoler Zeide had his associates dress up as judges and various court officials. One man was instructed to blacken his face in order to act the part of the Rumanian prosecutor, two others were appointed judges, and the local rav was the chief justice. The Shpoler Zeide himself acted the part of the defense attorney, covering up his shtreimel with a white cloth and donning red gloves. The cast was completed with one man taking the part of the informer and another the part of Mendel, the accused.

The Purim-trial began with the reading of the accusation by the Rumanian prosecutor, but whenever he tried to speak the other members of the court laughed at his attempts. Next, the accuser gave testimony. Finally, the Shpoler Zeide rose to deliver his case for the defendant.

**A Most Successful Defense**

His case was stated in a manner which left no doubt as to the innocence of the accused. In his argument he proved that the entire charge was false, and that even if it had been valid, the Rumanian government would have had no legal claim to the money in question. When he finished speaking the judges handed down their verdict: Mendel was acquitted.

Then the Shpoler Zeide and all the other Purim-spielers adjoined to the dining room where they enjoyed the festive Purim meal. Later that night the tzadik received a telegram from Mendel relating the good news and saying that he was on his way to Shpola.

Upon his arrival he went immediately to the Rebbe and related all the details of the trial. What a spectacular delivery the defense attorney made! What erudite arguments, why, the courtroom was spellbound! The chasidim listened with increasing wonder lighting their eyes. The details of the case were amazingly familiar to them. The events of the courtroom mirrored the "script" of the tzadik's Purim play!

**A Most Special Angel**

"Well, Mendel," inquired the tzadik, "so you liked the lawyer I sent?"

"Rebbe, that's what I'm saying. He was wonderful, everyone agreed!"

"Know, then, that he was no human being, but an angel sent down from heaven, created as a result of the tzedaka money you gave for the poor orphan. If you have the merit, you may see him again when you are tried at the Great Tribunal on High, for he will be your attorney when you are called to give an account of your life on this earth."

*Reprinted from Issue #207 of “L’Chaim,” (8Adar II 5752/March 13, 1992), a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**Itamar Residents Celebrate Wedding at Joseph's Tomb**

**By Hillel Fendel**

The army periodically allows and enables Israelis to enter the holy site of Joseph’s Tomb in Shechem (Nablus) – but no previous visit was ever as moving as the wedding there last night (Wednesday, March 16th).

Hundreds of residents of Itamar, still reeling from the Palestinian terrorist massacre of the Fogel family five days earlier, arrived for a special prayer service – highlighted by the wedding ceremony of a resident of an Itamar hilltop, Moshe Orlinsky, and his betrothed, Natalya Zucher.

The two had planned to get married in Itamar, but decided to hold the joyous ceremony at the holy site of Joseph’s Tomb instead – the first wedding known to have ever taken place there. The intensity of emotion left no eye dry.

The officiating rabbi was Itamar’s rabbi, Rabbi Natan Chai, and wedding blessings were recited by Breslov leader Rabbi Shalom Arush, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef (son of Shas leader Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef), Shomron Region Chief Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, Yitzhar Rabbi David Dudkevitch, and the Kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Deutsch.

The ketubah (marriage contract) was read aloud by IDF Shomron Brigade Rabbi Capt. David Feig.



The speeches at the ceremony emphasized the resilience of the Jewish Nation whose faith buttresses them as they swing back and forth between tragedy and great joy. Dozens of youths from Itamar added to the elation with their enthusiastic singing and dancing.

Rabbi Levanon blessed the couple by first reading aloud verses from the Book of Jeremiah, regarding the consoling prophecy of Yosef’s mother Rachel when the Jews were driven into Exile: “A voice is heard, bitter weeping; Rachel is crying for her children, refusing to be consoled… G-d said: Stop your voice from weeping and your eyes from tearing… your children will return to their borders.”

The local IDF commander, Shomron Brigade Commander Col. Nimrod Aloni, wished the young couple a “Jewish home full of joy, faith, and warmth.” Shomron Regional Council head Gershon Mesika noted the residents’ emotional roller-coaster of late, and said:

“The prophet says, ‘With your blood you shall live – unfortunately, we had to go through five ‘bloods’ [the five murdered Fogel family members – ed.], but in the merit of this exalted occasion, it will strengthen all of us – the people of Itamar, the residents of the entire Shomron, and all of Israel; we will gather the broken pieces together and we will become stronger.”

**Yosef's Pursuit of Unity Supports the Jewish Nation**

Rabbi Chai said, "We thank G-d for giving us the fortitude to carry on… and we thank IDF Commander Nimrod Aloni, who made great efforts to enable us to hold this chupah here … It was near this spot that Yosef said, ‘I seek my brothers,’ and this pursuit of unity and love for Israel is what unites us and gives us the strength; Yosef had a coat of many colors – symbolizing that there are many aspects to the Jewish People, and each tribe has its place, but they are all unified.”

Other blessings were offered by Yesha Council head Danny Dayan, Rabbi Dudkevitch, and IDF Commander Maki Siboni. Musician and actor Golan Azulai provided the music, at no charge.

*Reprinted from the March 17, 2011 email of Arutz Sheva.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**“Are You Jewish?”**

This week's parsha begins with the word Tzav. Rashi explains that "Tzav" indicates "zerizus" - alacrity. Alacrity - moving quickly - is an important aspect of serving Hashem. Because, one who does mitzvahs with an eagerness, will be able to do more mitzvahs and do the mitzvahs more completely.  Furthermore, one who is lazy in his spiritual life, will accomplish little.

Rabbi Schuster is one Rav who exuded "zerizus" throughout his 40+ years in Kiruv - bringing Jews back to "the fold."  Rabbi Schuster and his Rebbetzin, the former Esther Garfinkle of Monticello, New York, were married in 1967, six months after the Six Day War. Three months later, in March 1968, they came to Israel, for a year of Torah study in the Mir Yeshiva. As if to foreshadow the kind of impact the Schusters would eventually have on so many young Jews, they decided to extend their stay—for four decades! The Schusters settled in the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Jerusalem and had four children.

Not long after moving to Israel, Rabbi Schuster and his old friend Chaim Kass were at the Kosel where they a saw a young man wearing a backpack who was obviously deeply touched by his encounter with the Wall.

Reb Chaim went over to the young man and asked if he would be interested in learning about Judaism, and the young man responded that he was. Unbeknownst to anyone at the moment, that young man who had been moved to tears at the Kosel, represented the beginning of a revolution.

For the next two weeks, Reb Meir and Reb Chaim kept returning to the Kosel to try to interest more people in exploring Judaism. By nature, Rabbi Schuster is particularly quiet and reserved, an introvert not naturally given to conversation, and so Reb Chaim initially did the talking. Within a couple of weeks, however, Rabbi Schuster began to take the lead, and he never, ever looked back.



Rabbi Meir (left) talking a young Jewish man at the Kosel (Western Wall)

Rabbi Schuster, in his unassuming yet confident way, would walk up to people and begin by engaging them with the simplest of questions; “Are you Jewish?”

These questions became doorways to conversations that eventually led to other questions; “Have you ever experienced a Shabbos meal?” “Would you like to meet a wise man?” And so Rabbi Schuster would meet people—first dozens, then hundreds and eventually thousands—and he would arrange for them to be hosted for a Shabbas meal, or to take their first taste of Judaism at Aish HaTorah, Ohr Somayach, Neve Yerushalayim, Dvar Yerushalayim, the Diaspora Yeshiva or wherever he felt was the appropriate place for that particular young man or woman.    
 For forty years, day in and day out—day after day and night after night—Rabbi Meir Schuster was a fixture at the Kosel.  The following is a true story told in the first person by one person whose soul was touched by Rabbi Schuster...

"As part of a trek across Europe, I detoured to the Middle East, wandered through Israel and made my way to the Kosel one summer afternoon. In the Kosel Plaza area, I was confronted by a friendly, rather thin gentleman who spoke somewhat hurriedly and asked me just one question, "Are you Jewish?”

To this day, I do not know why I felt so secure in answering that question, considering how Orthodox he looked with his long, wiry beard and his jacket draped over his shoulders. But I answered in the affirmative and before long we were chatting about Toronto, from where I hail. Eventually, he asked me if I'd be interesting in having a Shabbat meal the next weekend. I accepted the offer thinking that it would be one of those experiences I could share with my friends and family back in Canada. ("Hey, I had a Shabbat meal with a real live Orthodox family!") I must have changed my mind a dozen times before Friday came along. When it finally did, I felt I had no choice but to show up.

The rabbi had set me up with a young family of ba’ale teshuvah living in the Ma'alot Dafna area of Jerusalem, with whom I spoke for hours that night, while enjoying the heimishe food and lovely hosts.

That led to my visiting Ohr Samayach for a few days the next week before resuming my trip across Europe. But the die had been cast. Little did I know when I left Israel that I'd be back in yeshivah the next year and, in time, living an Orthodox life in Israel and helping out in the area of outreach as well. And all because someone had the strength, conviction and courage to ask me one simple but profound question: "Are you Jewish?"

For years, I enjoyed bumping into Reb Meir at the Kosel and telling him what I was up to, reminding him of his part in all that I was doing - including raising my own Torah-observant children and affecting others through my writings and lectures. In typical Reb Meir fashion, he would smile and encourage me but gave all the credit for his accomplishments to G-d. I also delighted in hearing him lead a minyan which he did with all the energy he had, unabashedly letting G-d know how much he loved Him and appreciated all that He did for him.

Rabbi Schuster has unfortunately ceased his outreach efforts of late. He needs a refuah sheleima - a speedy and full recovery from a debilitating disease that has crippled his mind and body, Hashem should protect us all.  Please daven for Reb Meir Tzvi ben Merka!  For more information and to help support his family: see <http://www.rebmeirschuster.org/>

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

**Giving a Victory to**

**Hitler (G-d Forbid)**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

**In loving memory of the members of the Fogel** **Family of Itamer**

**who were brutally murdered by Amalek**

Next week, we will celebrate the holiday of Purim, when the Jews fought and defeated the forces of Haman some 2,500 years ago.

These 'forces', called 'Amalek' (Ex. 17:8) are the same that attacked the Jews a thousand years earlier when they left Egypt and exist today in the form of anti-Semitism in the world and within each of us.

Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe once said that we cannot defeat the 'Amelek' outside until each of us defeats the little Amalek from within.

According to Chassidic teachings each of us has a small 'Amalek' within and according to Jewish tradition ONLY the Moshiach can eradicate both the Amelek within and without.

Here is a story that will illustrate

A holocaust survivor called Oscar Liff. It was Lifshitz before he Americanized it in an attempt to sever from the Jewish people. But one could hardly blame him after what he had been through.

He was born in Warsaw in the late 1920s into a traditionally Jewish family and when the Germans took over Poland he was in his early teens. His parents thought that Germany only wanted more land and that in the end it would be good for everyone. After all, they said, the Germans were a cultured, educated people, if anyone could refine the boorish Poles it would be the Germans.

**Oscar Didn’t Trust the Germans**

But Oscar thought differently. He didn't trust the Germans. He didn't like the way they strutted around and their anti-Semitic slogans he had seen. Against the wishes of his parents he joined the Polish underground and fought the Nazi invaders - and in the end that is what saved him.

It wasn't long before his father died from a heart attack. Then, shortly thereafter, one afternoon as he happened to be on the roof of his apartment looking down at the street he saw the Germans escort his sister and brother out of the house into the street with several others and shoot them dead. Minutes later a wagon laden with corpses came to take them away.

Next his mother and other sisters were taken to Auschwitz and finally, in April of 1943, the entire Ghetto was destroyed and all its remaining inhabitants were exterminated.

**Fighting for Revenge**

Now Oscar fought for revenge. True, the Polish themselves were no less Jew haters than the Germans but luckily for him, Oscar didn't look Jewish so the Poles let them join their partisan fighters and left him alone.

Nevertheless when the Russians invaded Germany Oscar joined their forces and finally 'merited' to be among those that liberated Auschwitz in 1945. But what he saw there would haunt him for the next thirty years.

**The Horrors of What He Saw**

There were emaciated, inhuman filthy Jewish bodies dead and the alive everywhere, staring insanely at nothing. This is what they got for being Jewish! For a week he wandered the camp day and night searching madly for his mother and sisters and found nothing.

He ran from the army. The war was over, and they wouldn't let him kill any more Germans. He crossed border after border until finally he was on a ship to America.

He was alone, no roots, no past, no friends, no family and not much future. Only one passionate desire burned in his heart; to get as far from Judaism as possible, He moved to Los Angeles, changed his name to Leff. He Learned to speak English and threw his heart and soul into business every minute of the day. He would forget the past.

But when he would come home at night and it was still...he would remember. The memories were hell. So every evening he would turn on the T.V. and watch it till he fell asleep. That way he would never have a quiet moment.

**An Old Rabbi on**

**The Television Screen**

Then one evening in 1976 after a hard day at work, just as he was drowsing off in front of the T.V. something startled him. There, before him on the TV screen was an old Rabbi speaking in Yiddish.

At first Oscar couldn't believe his eyes. Who would want to watch a thing like that? His first impulse was to turn it off but he waited a few minutes to see if something would happen. It didn't. The Rabbi just kept talking and an English translation rolled across the screen below him. All the hatred Oscar had for Judaism welled up inside of him again like a flood.

But something stopped him from just changing the channel.

The Rabbi had a unique look about him with unusually deep and powerfully kind eyes. But what could he possible have to say that was so important?

**“Giving a Prize to Hitler”**

Again he leaned forward to turn it off when suddenly the Rabbi said, "Any Jew after the war that runs from Judaism is giving a prize to Hitler." Oscar stared at the translation as it moved across the screen.

"The Germans tried to destroy the Jewish people and our best revenge to the Germans is to strengthen and continue Judaism."

He sat as though struck by lightning. He didn't remember a word of what that Rabbi said afterwards. Just that those eyes and words woke something deep in his soul.

**Unable to Sleep that Entire Night**

A telephone number floated across the screen and Oscar wrote it down. When the speech ended he called the number. It was the middle of the night but someone answered and they made an appointment for the next morning. That entire night he didn't sleep; he lay in bed and wept.

The next morning Oscar found the address. It was a Chabad House in Los Angles. There he got a written summary of the speech and spent the entire day just going over that sentence; "One who runs from Judaism gives a prize to Hitler."

The next day he went to the printers and ordered new business cards with the name Lipshitz and then went back to the Chabad House and ordered his first pair of Tefillin since his Bar Mitzva. Then he made a vow to begin being an observant Jew.

Oscar had defeated Hitler.

**The Eradication of Doubt**

This is what we celebrate on Purim… the eradication of doubt. The Hebrew word 'Amalek' is the same numerical value as 'doubt' (Saffek=240).

The Jews are G-d's chosen people: chosen to inform the world that G-d creates, loves, provides for and enlivens each human being constantly.

But when the Jews have doubts within themselves about this, then Amalek rears his ugly head without.

That is the story of Purim. One Jew: Mordechi HaYehudi, not only refused to bow to Haman but he infused this certainty into all the Jews of his generation as well. The result was "The Jews had Light, Joy, happiness and glory." (Esther 8:16)

And so it will be to us. We must read the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (see your local Chabad House for details). This will give us a new certainty and power to defeat all doubts and fears.

Then it is very possible that if we do just one more good deed, say one good word or even think one good thought, it can tip the scales and bring universal peace, joy, blessing and meaning with...Moshiach NOW!

*Reprinted from this week’s email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Eretz Yisroel.*

**Parsha Tzav 5769**

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

This week's parsha begins with the word Tzav. Rashi explains that "Tzav" indicates "zerizus" - alacrity. Alacrity - moving quickly and with enthusiasm- is an important aspect of serving Hashem. Because, one who does mitzvahs with an eagerness, will be able to do more mitzvahs and do the mitzvahs more completely. The following story illustrates the power of doing Mitzvahs with enthusiasm.

Every Friday evening, just before sunset, Monica stared longingly at the parade that passed by the window of her home in Bat Yam. Everyone was going the same way – to shul. She saw fathers, in their best suits, along with sons, neat and clean, with shirttails firmly tucked in. Some were accompanied by freshly-scrubbed little girls wearing party dresses, and teenage daughters conscious of their new dignity as young women.

The stores were closed, and traffic had dwindled. During this peaceful, weekly hush, Monica would step out outside and greet the people in the parade. "Shabbat Shalom! Shabbat Shalom!" she said to each one, beaming because she always received an answer.

Soon after she was done wishing everyone "Shabbat Shalom" She herself also joined the festive march to shul. As the sun sank, Monica drank in the singing that poured out from the brightly-lit synagogue as the congregation welcomed the Sabbath. Then she would go home where she encountered a completely different atmosphere. Her parents were totally secular, so when she asked for a white tablecloth and Shabbos candles, her request was met with great surprise.

Her mother had been raised by parents who severed their connection with the past. No trace of Judaism “sullied” their home. They had even opted to send their daughter to a convent school in Jaffa. As a result, even if Monica's mother had wanted to guide her daughter towards Judaism, she was completely ignorant of her heritage. Monica's father, too, was surprised by his daughter's request. To him, Shabbos was just another day of the week.

One Friday night, surprised by her own daring, she knocked on the door of  Yemenite family which she had regularly wished "Shabbat Shalom." "May I see the Shabbos?"  she asked.  The cordial Yemenites welcomed her into their dining room, where her eyes lit up at the sight of the beautifully set table. The Shabbos candles glowed peacefully as she listened to kiddush, and then enjoyed a sip of the sweet wine.

She thanked her hosts and left, but did not go home.

Instead she took a walk, for she felt as if she were in a different world. Not heeding to where she was going, Monica wound up in Bat Yam's Kiryat Bobov, a religious neighborhood comprised exclusively of Bobover Chassidim. The streets were empty and silent, but joyous singing resounded from each house she passed. From one dwelling came a particularly beautiful melody sung with enchanting harmonies.

Like metal drawn to a magnet, Monica was pulled to the door. She knocked timidly, but with a great thirst in her soul. "May I please join you for your Shabbos meal?" A smiling Chassid led her to the table, where she was seated among several other young girls.

Needless to say, Monica soon added to her weekly routine. She bought a small set of candlesticks with money she had saved from her allowance. Every Friday afternoon, before she went out to greet the families on their way to evening services, she would light her Shabbos candles. Once out on the street, she would remain there waiting for her Yemenite neighbors, to hear kiddush as she had that first, daring evening. Then she would set off for her Chassidic friends in Kiryat Bobov to join them for the Sabbath meal.

Monica’s parents weren’t disturbed by the Shabbos routine. “It’s just the fleeting fancy of a little girl," they thought. "When she reaches her teens, she’ll forget it." The years went by. When Monica asked to attend a religious high school, her parents refused. She begged, pleaded and wept, but without success. She even arranged for rabbis to visit her parents, to outline the curriculum of the school she wished to attend. Her parents remained adamant.

No school with even the slightest hint of religion was acceptable to them. They enrolled her in the nearby secular high school, but Monica refused to give up. She continued to attend lectures on Torah. She joined a group that studied Pirkei Avos, and continued as usual with her Shabbos routine. Clearly, her school environment was the antithesis of her real interests in life.

Little by little, Monica became more and more observant, despite her parents' opposition.  She met a young man Dani, who was not so observant himself.  After Dani attended an [Arachim Seminar,](http://www.arachimusa.org/) he became closer to Torah and Mitzvahs. Monica and Dani were married and Dani served in the Israeli Navy in Haifa.  Soon, Dani and Monica were living a fully Torah observant lifestyle together.

When Dani's tour of duty in Haifa ended, he was offered a position with a navy project in central Israel, enabling the couple to move to Kiryat Sefer. "Everyone is religious here," says Monica. Dani replies, "Isn't this what you wanted?" She looks at him and answers, "When I was very young, I would dream that one day I would hear the knock of a timid, little girl at my door, asking, 'May I come in and see the Shabbos?'"  Good Shabbos Everyone.

**PESACH/PASSOVER**

**Shabbat Hagadol**

**As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**By Sam Gindi**

  The most basic idea of Passover is that Hashem took us, His Nation, out of 210 years of bondage in Egypt. As the pasuk states "*Asher hotzetecha me’eretz mitzrayim*.” However, the *pasuk* continues “*lehiyot lachem Lelokim*", which means, in order that you will serve Me. From this we see clearly that Hashem took us out of slavery from Egypt in order to serve Him.

The primary lesson and *yesod* (foundation) which manifests itself on *Pesach* and on which our Torah is built is Gratitude, *Hakarat Hatov*. Recognizing and acknowledging all of the tremendous gifts of kindliness that Hashem is bestowing upon us and our families.

This underlying principle is realized right in the first of the Ten Commandments which was heard by our Nation directly from Hashem. "I am Hashem your G-d that took you forth from Egypt from the house of slaves."

The question is asked, why didn't Hashem introduce Himself as "the Creator of heaven and earth"? The answer is that the *Bnei Yisrael* did not witness the Creation of the Universe. We did experience slavery and brutal treatment at the hands of the Egyptians for 210 years. The scars were still fresh on our backs and on our children.

It is for these reasons, and in order to teach us the great principle of feeling gratitude to the Benefactor who has redeemed us, that Hashem connects the time of the birth of our Nation and our redemption from Egypt to the First Commandment.

*Hakarat Hatov, Gratitude, is at the root of all true service of Hashem.*

Just keep in mind that your body, your mind, your parents and children and wife, all of your possessions, the ability to make a living and your soul/life have all been given to you as a gift from Hashem.

For the purpose of recognizing these special gifts, scrutinizing them as you would any diamond. Now you are ready to thank Hashem every day for 120 years in many ways, the minimum being through observance of His Torah and mitzvot.

**About New York**

**On Staten Island, a Jewish Cemetery Where All**

**Are Equals in Death**

**By Jim Dwyer**

Two shovels were planted in the mound next to the open mouth of the grave. “For those of you who don’t know about this,” said the rabbi, Shmuel Plafker, “let me show you.”



Rabbi Shmuel Plafker at a funeral service for Jeffrey Lynn Schneider at a plot owned by the Hebrew Free Burial Association on Staten Island. Mr. Schneider, 54, committed suicide a week ago in Midwood, Brooklyn. (Photo by Kirsten Luce for The New York Times.)

He lifted the first pile of dirt with the back of the shovel. “To symbolize that we really don’t want to do this,” Rabbi Plafker said.

It was a perfect early spring day: acres of blue sky, the lightest of breezes moving past the graves of Mount Richmond Cemetery on Staten Island. Here, 55,000 Jews are buried in plots owned by the [Hebrew Free Burial Association](http://www.hebrewfreeburial.org).

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**In Mount Richmond Cemetery, 55,000 Jews are buried in plots owned by the Hebrew Free Burial Association. (Photo credit – Kirsten Luce for The New York Times.)**

These are the graves of the poor, which, under Judaic law, do not differ from those of the rich. The ritual of burial is a rope across time: families who lived a century ago at 108 Orchard Street on the Lower East Side — now known as the Tenement Museum — are buried at Mount Richmond. The maternal grandparents of [Mel Brooks](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/mel_brooks/index.html?inline=nyt-per) are down one row. In another corner are 23 of the girls and boys who were killed in the [Triangle shirtwaist factory](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire) fire in 1911.

On Tuesday afternoon, in Section 35, it was the time to lay Jeffrey Lynn Schneider to rest, in a box of raw pine, the lid barely held on with three wooden pegs.

As the rabbi worked, a man named Stanley Weinstein, a cousin of Mr. Schneider’s, picked up another shovel and pushed earth into the hole. A spray of cousins and friends stood around the grave, a dozen or so, waiting their turn. After a minute of work, Mr. Weinstein drove the shovel back into the mound. “We don’t hand it off to the next person, to show that we don’t want to pass on death,” Rabbi Plafker said.

It was the rabbi’s third funeral of the day. At the first two, for elderly people, he and three men who work in the cemetery were the only people at the graveside. The rabbi said the prayers; the men performed the ritual with the shovels.

“We are the only friends all the time for poor people,” said Joe Shalem, the superintendent of the cemetery, nodding to the two gravediggers, Cesar Bustamante and Wilson Montes Deoca. The free burial society began in 1888, after the first waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe. The society bought the 23 acres on Staten Island and began burials at Mount Richmond in March 1909. The aim is to provide traditional Jewish burials to people who cannot afford them, said Amy Koplow, the society’s executive director.

The thumps hitting the pine box became more muffled as the mourners piled dirt upon dirt. The first person of Creation, Rabbi Plafker said, was Adam, whose name comes from the Hebrew word “adamah,” meaning the ground. Thus, he said, the body is returned to the earth as it came, washed and wrapped in a shroud with no pockets.

Mr. Schneider was 54. He grew up on East 17th Street in Midwood, Brooklyn, a bright boy who went to a yeshiva and then [Stuyvesant High School](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/stuyvesant_high_school/index.html?inline=nyt-org), mastering chess and backgammon. “He would prefer to read than go out to a restaurant,” said Carol Metrick, a cousin who as a child lived in the same house as Mr. Schneider. He went to the [University of Arizona](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/u/university_of_arizona/index.html?inline=nyt-org) but gave it up after a freak snowstorm.

For a while, he worked on the crews of television shows. He ran a car service. He owned homes in Rockland County, but sold them under financial pressure. He had girlfriends but never married, Ms. Metrick said, and seemed easygoing at family gatherings. Physical ailments led to a hermetic existence, the family said.

“He had disk problems of some sort, which isolated him from a lot of things,” Mr. Weinstein said. “I’d call him on the holidays. I’d offer to take him out to dinner. He said he couldn’t because his back hurt.”

His parents died nine years ago. He moved back to Midwood around 2004, with no apparent source of income. By February, he faced a Housing Court judgment of $24,000, Mr. Weinstein said, and told a friend he was going upstate.

Instead, he drove back to 17th Street, parked across the street from his boyhood home, got in the back seat under a blanket, and shot himself in the head. His sister tried to track him down and Mr. Weinstein filed a missing person’s report. Six weeks of parking tickets were stuck on the windshield when his body was found last Thursday.

The rabbi recited a prayer. The family members, clasping each other, walked to the cars. Mr. Shalem and his gravediggers filled the hole, then raked the ground to smooth it.

*Reprinted from the April 1, 2009 edition of The New York Times.*

**The Amish Get a**

**Chaimish Welcome**

The city's ultra-Orthodox Jews took the Pennsylvania Amish on a walking tour of their world Tuesday, saying their communities are naturally drawn to each other with a commitment to simpler lifestyles.



Anna Stoltzfus, left, talks with her husband Matthew Stolzfus in front of a portrait of the late Lubavitcher Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, while taking a tour at a museum Tuesday in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Photo: AP

Dozens of Amish residents from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, toured a Hasidic neighborhood in Brooklyn's Crown Heights to learn more about their culture.



Ephraim Zook, center, of Lancaster County, Penn. talks with Aaron Ross, right, while touring a Hasidic neighborhood Tuesday. Photo: AP

Rabbi Beryl Epstein called the experience "living Judaism."

"It's reinforcing to the Amish community to see us Jews living the way the Bible says Jews are supposed to live, and have lived since the time of Moses and Abraham," said Yisroel Ber Kaplan, program director for the Chassidic Discovery Center in Brooklyn. "The Amish are also living their lives as the Bible speaks to them."

The neighborhood is home to an ultra-Orthodox Lubavitcher sect born about 200 years ago in Russia.

Today's Lubavitchers wear the black hats and beards of their 18th-century forebears, speak Yiddish and refrain from using electricity or driving cars on Shabbat, whereas the Amish get around in a horse and buggy, living off the land.

However, both groups use one modern amenity - cell phones - which kept ringing as they wandered through Crown Heights. And the Hasids ironically operate the famed B&H electronics retail store [Editor’s Note: This enterprise is owned by a member of another group of Chasidim distinct from the Lubavitchers] in Manhattan that serves customers from around the world.

At a workshop where a young man was touching up a Torah, a scroll of the holiest Jewish writings, Epstein told the group how a Jew in wartime Germany had rescued the sacred scroll by wrapping it around his midriff under his clothes as he fled to safety.

The Amish listened, commenting to one another in Pennsylvania Dutch, a dialect of the German of their ancestors.

When Epstein, a native of Chattanooga, Tenn., had first greeted the Amish with the Yiddish "Zei gazunt!" - "be healthy" - they understood. After all, the expression is derived from the German phrase "sei gesund."

As the two groups walked side by side on Brooklyn streets, Crown Heights residents did double-takes; the Amish could be mistaken for Lubavitchers at a quick glance. But their hats are more square and their ruddy complexions from working outdoors contrast with the pale faces of the studious, urban Lubavitchers.

Hasidic children in Crown Heights begin their formal schooling at age 3, and by age 5 are studying many hours a day. At the headquarters on Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway each day, dozens of men gather to pore over religious books, with little boys dashing around as their fathers fervently debate fine points of the texts - sometimes sounding more like spirited poker players than religious faithful.

John Lapp and his wife, Priscilla, brought their three children on the tour. John Lapp said the between to the communities might be more surface than substance.

"In some things we are alike, like our clothing and our traditional beliefs," he said. Priscilla Lapp added, "And in some things we are not. The biggest thing is that “J----” is our savior."

The groups also toured a Jewish library and a "matzo factory," where round, unleavened bread was being made for the Passover holiday.

There, a cross-cultural misunderstanding caused one of the Jewish men to look at the Amish, and ask, repeatedly, "Are you from Uzbekistan?"

An Amish man, also confused, asked, "Afghanistan?"

Finally, as they were leaving, another Amish man announced to the matzo-makers: "We're from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania!"

(Editor’s Note: The above story written by the Associated Press was distributed to subscribing English-language newspapers around the world. The above version was published in The Jerusalem Post on April 1st).

**JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

“*And you shall celebrate it as a festival for Hashem for your generations, you shall celebrate it as an eternal statute*” (Shemot 12:14)

The holiday of Pesah comes once a year. It is a busy and beautiful time. We celebrate our nation being born, born out of a wretched situation of slavery that brought us to the lowest physical condition possible. The Torah commands us to celebrate this milestone for all generations to come.

However, one who sees this occasion as commemorating only an emancipation from physical bondage will wonder, why celebrate now? What does it mean for us today? But, if one sees this also as a celebration of being released from a spiritually impure situation, to one of spiritual holiness, he has cause to celebrate even today as we dwell in exile. As the verse quoted above states, it is a festival for Hashem. We rejoice in our spiritual redemption to serve Hashem. Therefore, it is a celebration for all generations.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller learns a great lesson from the verse, “And Hashem will pass over (upasah) the door and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to smite (12:23).” He explains, (as quoted in the weekly Torah message from Sam J. Gindi) “Pesah (the passing over) symbolizes the eternity of the loyal Jewish people, whose progeny will continue until the end of days and whose souls are rewarded forever. Thus the miracle of the Pesah was not only for this occasion, but it teaches us that Hashem will always cause the destroyer to pass over his loyal ones in all generations.

Our people have faced their enemies in Nazi Europe, and we face our enemies in the Arab world today. We should not fear, because Hashem has said He will not allow the destroyer to destroy us, not then and not now.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"*G-d has bestowed many favors upon us*." (Passover Haggadah)

Gratitude and appreciation are virtues that are not simply praiseworthy, they are essential traits. On the Seder night we are enjoined to recount the many wonders and miracles that Hashem wrought for us. Ibn Ezra contends that appreciation goes a step further. We are to remember how it used to be, how we suffered, the pain and affliction to which we were subjected, the thirst and hunger which accompanied us and the depression and hopelessness that ruled our lives. Hashem rescued us from all that. He took us out of misery, granting us the opportunity to live as free people.

Harav Mordechai Gifter, shlita, explains that one must appreciate and give gratitude where it is due. Does one, however, analyze the good that he has received? Does one ever think about what life would have been like had he not been saved? Do we ever really evaluate the good? Do we simply say, "Thank you," and continue with "business as usual?"

One must remember what it had been like; think back to the days of misery and pain, feel some of the frustration and grief that used to be so much a part of his life. Then and only then will he truly understand the essence of the favor he has received. All too quickly we pay our respects to our benefactor and forget about him. If we pay more attention to our past we might more fully appreciate the present.

This, according to Harav Gifter, is the purpose of the Dayenu format of the Haggadah. We must delve deeper into the "good" that we have received, reviewing it, analyzing every aspect of it, so that we will experience greater appreciation at the present time. Let us appreciate all that we have so that we may merit to be blessed continuously.

Happy Pesah.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka