**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeshev 5771**

**Volume 2, Issue #12**

**Chassidic Story #678 from Ascent of Safed**

**Between Miracles**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

Yehuda and Shayna Tilles live in the Old City of Jerusalem. He works much of each day for Chabad of the Western Wall in promoting the mitzvah of tefillin on the men's side of the Kotel. She is the busy mother of two active baby daughters and a certified interior decorator.

Last year, on Monday, 20 Kislev 5770 (Dec. 2, 2010) they, along with their daughters Malka Ella and Chaya Mushka, aged 2 1/2 and 1, drove out of Jerusalem at 2:15 pm in their Toyota Yarris, headed to the wedding of Yehuda's brother Yosef to Naomi Weinstein of London in Tiberias.

**Traveling on Route 90**

They were traveling on Route 90, which stretches from the northern Lebanon border to Eilat and the southern border with Egypt (and which is the world's lowest road when it winds along the Dead Sea). A strong rain was falling after weeks of a long dry spell and their daughters were sleeping.

Around 3:30 pm, Yehuda was speaking on his cell phone to his friend and co-worker at the Kotel (Western Wall), Shmueli Weiss, about the arrangements for a last-minute delivery of a garment of the Lubavitcher Rebbe for his brother to wear under the chupah (a Chabad custom). When it seemed that it couldn't be worked out, Yehuda declared, Nevertheless the Rebbe is definitely with us and is invited to the wedding.

**A Frightening Crash**

Just a few minutes later, in the middle of the Jordan Valley, on a sharp curve, the brakes suddenly stopped working on the slippery road and the driver lost control. The car spun around and around, crashed into a metal railing on the other side of the road, fell into a two-meter ditch and slammed into a large hill.

There was a terrifying silence. Then the kids woke up and started crying. Their parents each exhaled a breath of gratitude. The whole thing took but a few seconds, Yehuda recalled. The car was totally wrecked. I feel like G-d gave us our lives back. Thank G-d the entire family was buckled safely in the car and the children were securely fastened in car seats, said Mrs. Shulamit Tilles, Yehuda's mother. That is the only aspect of this miracle that is according to the laws of nature. The importance of seatbelts can't be stressed enough.

**Doubted That There**

**Were Any Survivors**

Naftali Asulin, who just happened to be not far behind them and witnessed the event from a distance, and who just happens to be a security officer who deals with car crash victims (!), arrived at the scene. Witnessing the destruction of the car, (see top part of photo below), he doubted whether there were any survivors.



Asulin and his wife ran over to Tilles' car. When he heard the children crying he was both relieved and amazed. It is unbelievable you all came out alive, he exclaimed. Based on my experience, I was sure everyone must have been killed.

Later on he confided that when he saw Shayna and her daughters emerge in fancy wedding clothes, he for a moment suspected that the accident had been staged and he had burst into a film production.

Not only were there no fatalities, but no serious or even minor injuries. Aside from being slightly shaken up by the accident, the whole family was fine. Yehuda and Shayna proclaimed themselves ready to continue on to the wedding.

**Drove the Family Directly**

**To the Wedding Hall**

They removed all their possessions from the frightening wreck. Mr. Asulin, who just happened to live quite close to the wedding hall, which was more than fifty miles from the site of the accident, drove the Tilles family directly there in his jeep. They actually arrived before Yehuda's parents. Asulin dropped them off, drove to a nearby shopping center, purchased two pacifiers, and drove back to the wedding to deliver them. He refused to accept any payment for all of his help or even any food from the wedding. All he requested was a blessing from the chatan.

Naftali was sent to us from Above, Yehuda exclaimed.

Marveled Yehuda's father: It was only the next day, when I saw online the photo of the demolished car, that I fully grasped how close to tragedy they had actually been.

**Obligated to Publicize the Miracle**

At first, most of the wedding guests had no idea what the couple had been through. Yehuda and Shayna told only a few relatives and close friends. But then the officiating rabbi, Rabbi Mordechai Bistritsky of Tsfat, told Yehuda that he was obligated by Torah law to publicize the details of G-d's loving kindness to him and his family. At the first lull in the dancing, Yehuda went to take over the microphone from the band. The news of the miracle was received with joy and gratitude, and as a result the already high-energy wedding celebration reached an even greater level of rejoicing.

**Hastening the Redemption**

The word spread fast. Within twelve hours articles on the internet had received thousands of hits and dozens of responses. The Lubavitcher Rebbe often emphasized the importance of publicizing miracles to hasten the Redemption. While everyday examples may be subtle and private, an open miracle that occurs between Yud Tes Kislev (celebrating the miraculous release of the first Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, author of the Tanya, from prison in Russia in 1798) and Chanukah reminds us that we are living in a month, a season and a generation of wondrous events.

From now on, announced Shayna, the 20th of Kislev will be our personal miracle and salvation holiday. Added Yehuda, That means my brother and I will have anniversaries on the same day! one day before my parent's anniversary!

Source: Compiled by Yerachmiel Tilles from interviews and personal observations, and from articles by Miriam Metzinger in Living Jewish and by Menachem Cohen on COLlive.com, from where the stirring composite photo above was produced and posted.

Connection: Seasonal see all the dates in the story!

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed*

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**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**Never Underestimate**

**The Potential of Others**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers*.” (Beresheet 38:1)

In our perashah we read how, after the brothers had sold Yosef into slavery, Yehudah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. The first two sons, Er and Onan, died because of their sins, and then shortly thereafter, Yehudah’s wife died. The Seforno explains that Yehudah was made to suffer in this way as a father, because of the grief which he had caused his own father Ya’akob, by instigating the plan to sell Yosef to the Ishmaelites.

Rabbi Yaakov Haber asks that this judgment of Yehudah doesn’t seem to fit to what actually happened. According to Rashi, Yehudah’s plan to sell Yosef was in order to save his life. According to Rashi, he judged that his brothers would not listen to a proposal to free Yosef completely and return him to their father, so he calculated a compromise proposal that would be acceptable to them. How can this be considered bad? In fact, later on (49:8), when Ya’akob is blessing his sons, Rashi interprets Ya’akob’s words to Yehudah as praising him for saving Yosef’s life! How can we reconcile these two viewpoints? Was Yehudah being bad or good in instigating the sale of Yosef?

The answer is given by Rashi (38:1) that it was both. Of course he did a good deed in saving his brother’s life, but he sinned in trying to judge how far his brothers would be willing to listen to him and how much he should compromise his position accordingly. This is something we should never do, judge someone regarding how far he is willing or able to rise to a challenge, for we are making a judgment on his neshamah, his soul.

**Never Presume to Limit**

**The Capabilities of Others**

We cannot presume to limit what other people are capable of. In fact, Rashi says, if Yehudah had advised his brothers to release Yosef, they would have listened. In fact, later on they had a grudge against him for not doing so.

I feel this is a true picture of our community. A Rabbi should always raise the bar for his people. He should always challenge them to go for a higher religious standard. If not, the people will have a legitimate complaint of why he didn’t tell them the true Torah standard. Our people can reach the highest level given enough time and with gradual steps.

**We Can Trust Hashem to Complete Our Mission**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

Though we Jews are only a small minority of the world's population, we have been assigned the formidable, seemingly impossible task of enlightening the entire world. The sages have given us a hint as to how this is possible. The halachah states that if a person lit the Hanukah lights and the lights subsequently went out, he is not obligated to relight it (although it is preferable if possible). The reason is that “hadlakah osah misvah” - the kindling is the essence of the misvah. This symbolizes that we are charged with the responsibility to start the task of enlightening the world; G-d will see to its successful conclusion.

The lesson is that although we must do our share to promote and preserve Torah observance, and to be an example to the world, we need not be concerned if it seems that the task is not being accomplished. If we do our part, Hashem will intervene and He will see to it that the job is completed. Shabbat Shalom and Happy Hanukah.

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

**Love – Torah Style!**

**By David Bibi**

This past Tuesday evening, our Synagogue’s Sisterhood had their annual dinner honoring our dear members Herman and Rebecca Ovadia. On the way from Manhattan to the restaurant I thought on what I might speak about. I considered the honorees who set an incredible example as a couple sharing common goals, who support and bring out the best in each other, who are partners in all they do and are constantly growing in their learning and love for Judaism.

**A Saturday Night Phone Call**

I reflected on a call I received on Saturday night, which was followed by an e-mail and a text message. A man from out of town had visited our Synagogue regularly, needed to speak with me. He explained that he was having marriage problems and was seeking out the advice of a real “chacham”. I had no choice but to laugh out loud.

Who was he referring to? I suggested that he speak with a marriage counselor or a Rabbi with real experience. I offered to put him in touch with either or both, but I certainly was not the guy to come to. He insisted that he had heard me give speeches in Synagogue and had attended a number of classes and was sure that I could help.

**“I Am Nothing More Than**

**A Human Tape Recorder”**

I explained that I am nothing more than a human tape recorder and that all I can do is playback what I hear from others although I do provide knobs to adjust tone, speed and volume.

But he insisted, so I suggested we set some time to speak on Monday evening. I hoped he simply needed someone to vent towards. And if not, I would give him the advice of a real Chacham, my Rabbi, Asher Chacham Abittan z’sl.

The Rabbi who was the Segan Av Bet Din told us of a man who showed up one day requesting a Get – a divorce. He told the Rabbis that his wife was becoming worse by the week. She now put her hand on the Mezuzah as he left each morning for work and cursed him and he was shaken to the bone and couldn’t go on.

The rabbi continued the conversation with the man and went into some depth about the relationship and at the end asked if the man might try something and delay a month. He suggested that each week, the man bring home some small nice gift for his wife and to try only to speak with kindness and love. At first the man said it would never help, complaining she already bought whatever she wanted on the credit cards, but finally he agreed to try the Rabbis advice, but was certain he would be back in four weeks for the Get.

**The Man Doesn’t Return for the Get**

But four weeks passed and he didn’t return. And eight weeks, then 12 weeks passed too. And then one day Rabbi Abittan saw the man in the Bet Midrash. What happened with the Get asked the Rabbi. And the man hugged and kissed the rabbi for his advice. Once he made the effort and brought some token with kind words home each day and each week, everything changed. Now his wife prayed for him and blessed him as he left each morning. Business improved. The kids were doing great. He couldn’t be happier.

So I figured, I could tell him the story, tell him what we had discussed in class a few weeks back when he was there about a man and wife being two parts of a single soul, about one partner’s behavior merely reflecting the

others, about a wife being ezer kenegdo and what the rabbis teach that when man is worthy his wife is his ezer, his helping partner and when man is not, she becomes kenegdo – against him.

**A Definition of Mazal or Luck**

Maybe I would quote from Rav Arush’s book, The Garden of Peace which I saw work for so many people. Rav Lazar Brody who translated the book was in town, maybe I could send him to hear and speak with the Rabbi.

I needed some help from heaven, maybe a little luck here. Well my dad always says to us Luck or Mazal is made of up of the Hebrew words which translate as the right place, at the right time, and doing the right thing. Sunday afternoon we were at an engagement where the rabbi related the love of the couple to the portion we just read where Jacob meets Rachel, where Jacob kisses Rachel and where Jacob falls in love with Rachel.

He was speaking about the Jewish love story and I jotted on a napkin to my daughter the numbers 77 and 13. She understood. Romeo may have been 17 and Juliet 13 when they fell in love in Verona, and Rachel may have been 13 when she met her cousin Jacob, but Jacob was not 17. He was 77!

Still pondering on the drive home, my wife unaware of my dilemma but using her intuition and sixth sense asked me to listen to a message posted by her friend Rabbi Efim Svirsky a therapist and educator.

And the message began by asking, “What is Love”? Referring to Jacob and Rachel the Rabbi explained that at 77 and 13 they certainly weren’t Romeo and Juliet. I was psyched! He knew where I was coming from, now let’s see where he goes with it.

Well one needed to ask if a 77 year old man falls in love, the last thing he is going to do is to delay the wedding for seven years till his 84th birthday. If anything, he would want to marry tomorrow! And then waiting seven years for the one you love must be like waiting an eternity, how could one possibly understand the Torah telling us the years flew by because of Jacob’s love for Rachel?

**Confusing Infatuation for Love**

The world often confuses infatuation and love. Too many people are infatuated and think they have fallen in love. We see someone who we are attracted to and we imagine they are perfect for us. We project onto them all the qualities of our image of the ideal person. We fall head over heels. We scream out that I’ve found her! So they get together and marry!

The problem is when they wake up one day and realize that we create our own false expectations. It was all phony and now we are terribly disappointed and we become depressed. We set ourselves up for a colossal fall. This is infatuation!

**More Problems and Worries**

And today beyond that confusion we have more problems. Some people are lonely and rush to marry before they are ready. So in their search they send two messages to the brain. Find me someone because I am lonely but don’t forget brain that I am really not ready. They end up falling in love with the wrong person. They’ve built walls around themselves because they are afraid of intimacy. They worry about the divorce rate and isolate themselves within the relationship so whatever happens is fake.

And the worst case is caused by rampant low self-esteem. People with a victim mentality who don’t love themselves hear a message directing them to the wrong person often resulting in them becoming victims of abuse and unhappiness.

OK so these are not true love, what is? We saw last week, our forefather Jacob, the choice of the avot, the beloved of Hashem, the scholar and prophet using his prophet’s eyes, sees the other half of his own soul. He sees Rachel, the mother of the Jewish people. And through his understanding he perceives that they need seven more years to arrive at the point they will be ready for each other.

When we have common goals, when we share a joint mission and when we are on the path towards the same end, time flies. We know where we need to get to. So what are the rules in finding a spouse (and this list is the reason for the column because after speaking Tuesday night so many people wanted me to include the speech in the newsletter)? And for those of us married, how can we improve our marriage.

**The List on How We Can Improve Our Marriages**

1. Do we share common goals?

2. Does this person bring the best out in me? Do I bring out the best in my spouse?

3. What character traits do I need and does that person posses them? A secular author wrote, we marry for the features of the face and end up living with the features of the character.

4. Can I truly trust this person? Can I let down my guard? Can I reveal my weaknesses and can my spouse reveal his or her weaknesses confidently to me?

5. Is there chemistry and attraction?

**The Importance of the First Four Items**

Number 5 is often the first we focus on, but in fact without the other four we can be swept away. Without the other four, attraction will over time dissipate and eventually fade away to repulsion.

Rabbi Abittan would tell us that the Torah is the guide to life. If we follow the guide book that the Manufacturer provided, then everything will work and we won’t void the warranty. He would remind us that what we see is often a reflection of what we project.

A home is a mini mikdash where the Shechina resides. But it only resides there as long as there is Shalom, peace and completion. My friend who called for advice should be zoche to rebuild his marriage and we should all be blessed with homes of health, happiness, peace, and tranquility.

May we all be zoche to build a bayit ne’eman beyisrael!

Shabbat Shalom - David Bibi

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

**The Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series**

**The Prohibition of Stealing**

**From a Non-Jew**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

The Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1933-1909), in Parashat Ki-Teseh, discusses the parameters of the prohibition of stealing. He writes that the Torah forbids stealing any amount of property from anybody - Jew or gentile, adult or child. The Ben Ish Hai emphasizes that it is forbidden to steal even from a non-Jew who has been hostile toward Jews. In fact, he adds, stealing from a non-Jew is a more grievous offense than stealing from a Jew.

For one thing, he explains, it is less likely that a gentile victim will forgive a Jewish thief for his crime than a Jewish victim would. Therefore, one who steals from a gentile has virtually no chance of achieving full atonement, which requires the victim's forgiveness.

Secondly, stealing from gentiles empowers the "Sar" - the heavenly angel supervising the gentile nations - to steal from the bounty assigned to the Jewish people. This crime is punished measure for measure, and the blessings assigned to us are instead diverted to the gentile nations.

*Reprinted from the Daily Halacha (The Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series) email of November 23, 2010.*

**Where Are You?**

In 1798, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was imprisoned on charges, put forth by the opponents of Chassidism, that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the czar. For fifty-two days he was held in the Peter-Paul Fortress in Petersburg.

Among the Rebbe’s interrogators was a government minister who possessed broad knowledge of the Bible and Jewish studies. On one occasion, he asked the Rebbe to explain the verse (Genesis 3:9), “And G‑d called out to the man and said to him: ‘Where are you?’” Did G‑d not know where Adam was?

**Merely a “Conversation Opener”**

 Rabbi Schneur Zalman presented the explanation offered by several of the commentaries: the question “Where are you?” was merely a “conversation opener” on the part of G‑d, who did not wish to unnerve Adam by immediately confronting him with his wrongdoing.

“What Rashi says, I know,” said the minister. “I wish to hear how the Rebbe understands the verse.”

“Do you believe that the Torah is eternal?” asked the Rebbe. “Do you believe that its every word applies to every individual, under all conditions, at all times?”

“Yes,” replied the minister.

**A Teaching of the Baal Shem Tov**

Rabbi Schneur Zalman was extremely gratified to hear this. The czar’s minister had affirmed a principle which lies at the basis of the teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the very teachings and ideology for which he was standing trial!

“‘Where are you?’” explained the Rebbe, “is G‑d’s perpetual call to every man. Where are you in the world? What have you accomplished? You have been allotted a certain number of days, hours, and minutes in which to fulfill your mission in life. You have lived so many years and so many days,”—here Rabbi Schneur Zalman spelled out the exact age of the minister—“Where are you? What have you achieved?”

*Told by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l, on 19 Kislev, 5718 (December 12, 1957), on the occasion of the 159th anniversary of Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s release from prison.*

**Biographical notes**: Rabbi Schneur Zalman Boruchovitch of Liadi, also known as the “Alter Rebbe” and “The Rav,” was born in Liozna, White Russia, in 1745. In 1764 he became a disciple of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, the second leader of the chassidic movement after the Baal Shem Tov. In 1772, Rabbi Schneur Zalman established the “Chabad” branch of Chassidism. For twenty years he labored on his *Tanya*, which, published in 1796, became the “bible” of Chabad Chassidism, upon which hundreds of works and thousands of discourses by seven generations of Chabad rebbes and their disciples are based. The nineteenth of Kislev, the day on which he was released from czarist imprisonment in 1798, is celebrated to this day as the “New Year for Chabad Chassidism,” for that event marked the start of a new period of expansion for the movement. Rabbi Schneur Zalman passed away while fleeing from Napoleon’s armies in December 1812.

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

**To Revive Jewish Dishes, Some Cooks Look to the Shtetl**

**By Joan Nathan**

GROWING up in Montreal, Noah Bernamoff had an issue with his mother’s kasha varnishkes.

“My mom’s had so much kasha with a noodle here and there,” he said. “I wanted to reverse the process to make it taste better.”

Two decades later, in his Brooklyn delicatessen, [Mile End](http://www.mileendbrooklyn.com/), he is reinventing this Eastern European comfort dish in what he thinks might be the tradition of his ancestors.

Clearly, his Lithuanian great-grandmother never purchased bow tie noodles at the supermarket, so in his commissary kitchen he pinches dough into butterfly shapes by hand. They will later be tossed with buckwheat groats, caramelized onions and mushrooms cooked in duck fat, with a confit of chicken gizzards gently stewed in duck fat.

For several decades now, many American Jews with a passion for food and a desire for broader horizons tended to explore Sephardic cooking, with its lush Mediterranean accents. Recently, though, cooks have been pouring their energy into old Ashkenazic dishes that had traveled so far they had lost much of their flavor.

**The Search for Culinary Authenticity**

Mr. Bernamoff is one such cook, who wants to preserve the past, but not necessarily the recent past. For some cooks, the search for authenticity begins with ingredients that taste as they might have in Eastern Europe.

A few months ago, near his sukkah in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, Naf Hanau grilled chicken wings and legs for lunch as the hens he raises for eggs roamed around in the backyard. He is the founder and owner of [Grow and Behold](http://www.growandbehold.com/), a small pasture-raised kosher meat company with farms in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. His chicken can be ordered online and shipped all over the country.

“We are producing an old-fashioned chicken for the modern world,” he said. “We are encouraging people to use all of the parts in the way our ancestors did. With every package of livers we sell we include instructions for koshering the liver and a recipe for traditional chopped liver.”

**An Avid Audience, Even**

**At the Premium Price**

Grow and Behold sells chickens for $6 or $7 a pound, a bit above the prices of some of its competitors in the high-end kosher poultry niche like Red Heifer Farm and Wise Organic Pastures. Mr. Hanau says he has found an avid audience, even at the premium price.

Nearby, his wife, Anna, 28, served pickles made with wild fermentation that comes from a saltwater brine rather than the more rapid and stable vinegar cure usually found today.

She started making these pickles when the two were farmers at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, Conn. “It started with five gallons of cucumbers that we started pickling in the old-fashioned way for fun,” she said. Today these pickles, now branded as [Adamah Pickles](http://www.isabellafreedman.org/adamah/harvest#pickles) and produced by the Retreat Center, are sold in the New York area.

Jews are not the only ones taking part in the pickling revival of the past few years, but it often has a special resonance for them.

“When I was a little boy living in Siberia, there was not much fresh vegetables or fruit for vitamin C,” said Samuel Rachlin, 63, a journalist in Washington. “There was not much we could grow there but cabbage grew well,” he said. In Pokrovsk, a town on the Lena River in the northeastern part of Siberia, where Mr. Rachlin’s family lived after being deported from Lithuania during World War II, making sauerkraut was almost a festival, and everyone came out for the fun.

“We would make it in four-foot-tall wooden barrels,” he recalled. “When they cut out the core of the cabbage, we children would eat it. It was a special treat for us. We didn’t have much candy.”

**The Desire for Sauerkraut**

Today, Mr. Rachlin recreates the ancient fermentation methods in his Washington kitchen so he will have sauerkraut on hand when he is not feeling well. “It is swarming with natural bacteria,” he explained. By trial and error, starting in the late 1970s, he has figured out the correct balance of salt and vegetables. Since cabbage is available year-round today, he makes sauerkraut in small amounts, shredding two or three heads whenever his last batch runs out.

“When my Jewish friends taste my sauerkraut, they get excited,” he said. “They remember stories their grandparents told them about making and eating sauerkraut in Russia.”

**A Strong Quest for a Better Tasting Cholent**

Like Mr. Bernamoff of Mile End, Maryanna Walls is on a quest to reclaim the food of her ancestors. In her case, though, what she particularly hungers for is a version of cholent, the overnight Sabbath stew, that can rival the legendary one her grandmother Goldie Levine used to make on the Lower East Side. Cholent is typically started on Friday afternoon and allowed to cook overnight to be eaten at noon on the Sabbath. “It was known that if you wanted really good cholent on Shabbos afternoon, you went to the Levine household,” Ms. Walls said.

**Returning to an Observant Life**

But after leaving the Lower East Side, her family had gone secular. “My mother admitted to me years ago that the big metal pot she made spaghetti and meatballs in was really my grandmother Goldie’s cholent pot,” she said. After Ms. Walls decided to return to an observant life at 19, she began to seek out the Eastern European cooking traditions her family had dropped. In particular, she admits to being obsessed with cholent, and said that she is constantly on the hunt for a recipe as tasty and authentic as her grandmother’s.

Ms. Walls, 31, has settled on a cholent framework that varies from week to week depending on the ingredients brought home by her husband, whom she calls the spice man. For it and other recipes she gleans inspiration from cookbooks like Jamie Geller’s “Quick & Kosher: Recipes from the Bride Who Knew Nothing” (Feldheim, 2007).

Ms. Geller, who also writes recipes for [kosher.com](http://kosher.com), became observant when she married. The new interest in artisanal Ashkenazic flavors “doesn’t mean that kosher cooks don’t want to try new recipes like coconut milk chicken broth for their matzo balls,” Ms. Geller said. “But they want traditional recipes that taste great as well.”

**A Special Aroma of Friday Cooking**

Ms. Walls has a Friday cooking rhythm that fills her kitchen in Potomac, Md., with the aroma of apple cake, challah, kugel and kishke, a blend of celery, onions, carrots, fat and flour or matzo meal that she steams on top of the cholent. Next week her husband, Gedalia, a rabbi and personal trainer, will help out, frying the requisite [Hanukkah](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hanukkah/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) latkes before nightfall for them and their four children.

“Sabbath is the one time of the week when we have no interruptions,” Ms. Walls, development coordinator at the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, said. “We don’t answer the phone, don’t check e-mail, we have no work. It is family day. We put away the outside world.”

Just like her grandmother Goldie.

Reprinted from the November 23, 2010 edition of The New York Times.

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

**Why an Empty Pit is**

**Not Really Empty**

**By Sam Gindi**

“And the pit was empty, no water was in it” (37:24)

The comment of the Talmud (Shabbat 22A) is that “there was no water in the pit, but snakes and scorpions were there.”

The Torah makes a point of telling us that the pit was empty and it didn’t have water in it. If it was empty then why is it necessary say further that the pit was devoid of water?

Rashi explains that the Torah is thereby informing us that the pit did not hold water however it did contain snakes and scorpions.

**Passing the Field of a Lazy Man**

“I passed by the field of a lazy man and by the vineyard of a man lacking heart/discipline. And behold it was all grown over with thistles, its surface was covered with thorns. And its stone fence was broken down. Then I examined and applied my heart/mind. I looked and learned a lesson (mussar).” (Mishle 24:30)

When we pass by the ‘lazy man’s field’ we would expect to see a desolate field since the owner didn’t put any work into it. Shelomo Hamelech enlightens us to the fact that the active result of this laziness is the

growth of thistles and thorns as well as stones all appearing in this field.

The field is our mind, our most prized and holy possession. If we neglect introducing good ideas, Torah thoughts into our mind, the result will not be an empty field.  When the mind is kept in a vacuum it will draw thorns and stones by its nature.

Therefore, when the pit is empty, it is not empty! The pit (mind) is filled with snakes and scorpions.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l.”*

**A Slice of Life**

**The Song of Chanuka**

**By Svetlana Weissman**

Let me share with you my story about the small cruse of oil that has remained pure though hidden in Jewish hearts in the former Soviet Union despite 70 years of communism and oppression.

Our family is typically Russian. My grandparents moved from Poland to the Kuban region of Southern Russia since 1953. My grandparents were devoted communists and they raised my mother to be faithful to communist doctrines as well. My grandmother Larissa Michaelovna was the one who actually educated me, as well, since my mother Olga passed away when I turned nine.

The Best Russian Language Teacher in Town

Grandmother just allowed Russian to be spoken at home. In fact, she was known as the best Russian language teacher in our town. She never spoke about her past. We only knew that she was from Poland. The only time I ever heard Polish was when she would take out her violin and play some old, Polish melodies.

At those times, Grandmother would cry and laugh at the same time. She would gaze up high as if she were in some distant place for, far way, with tears rolling down her cheeks. I would say, "Babushka," over and over again, asking, "Why are you crying?" She would just smile and kiss me the way only Babushka could.

**“Oy Chanuka, Oy Chanuka,**

**A Yontif, a Sheina”**

My birthday was in the middle of December, and my grandmother would always celebrate by taking out her violin and playing a Polish song that she said reminded her of me. "Oy chanuka, oy chanuka, a yontif, a sheina." I didn't understand the Polish words of the song but Grandmother would always look at me as she played and sang, and I knew that it must mean something very wonderful.

Around the time of my birthday in 2001, something happened that changed our lives forever. It was the middle of the winter when she came home with a young look on her face. Even though she was already 78-year-old she looked 20 years younger. I will always remember the look of delight and contentment in my grandmother's eyes when she showed me her shopping bag filled to overflowing. I never saw my grandmother come home with so much food at once. It was around 10-12 kilos of flour, oil, canned vegetables, dried fruit and candy I never saw in our stores.

I was in shock. I knew that on her 3,850 rubles pension she could not possibly afford to buy all at that at once. My grandmother saw my curious look and told me the following.

**Survived the War with**

**An Anger Towards G-d**

"Svetochka, my child, we are Jews. Your real name is Sheine. I asked your mother to give you that name in memory of my mother Sheine who was murdered with my entire family in Auschwitz in 1944. I am not Larisa, I am Leahle. I am not Polish, I am Jewish. You see this tattoo on my arm? It's not just a number; it's my identity. I promised myself after the War that I would forget my past, and start a new life with no oppression. I didn't want your mother and future generations to suffer anymore. I was angry with G-d and I didn't want Him to be a part of my life. My 'religion' became communism.

**Heard the Familiar Jewish**

**Music in the Park**

"But that all changed a week ago. It was when I was taking my regular daily stroll in the park. I heard music. It was the song that I play on my violin for your birthday. My feet had a mind of their own and I began walking toward the music. Right there, in the park in Krasnodar, Russia, I saw them. It was the boys I last saw 60 years ago. They reminded me of my brothers and cousins. They were dancing to the music that came from their car and they were stopping people, asking them questions, and then giving them something.

**“Izvinti, vi Evreika?”**

"'One of them came over to me and asked: "Izvinti, vi Evreika?" (Excuse me, are you Jewish?) I couldn't answer. Tears began rolling down my cheeks. I could only nod my head "yes." He gave me a box, with a tin candle holder. Look, here it is. It is called a menora. And he gave me candles and a volchok (dreidel).

"The package had a leaflet with holiday instructions and contact information. It took me several days before I actually called the number. and Then I was invited to be introduced to Rabbi Shneur Segal, the director of the Krasnodar Jewish Community Center and a Chabad rabbi. He spoke to me in Yiddish. It's been 60 years since I've spoken Yiddish. He asked if he could give me a Chanuka package. It was this bag full of goodies. I declined. I said other people might need and deserve it more than me. But he was insistent. I want you to meet him Sheine. He invited us to the Chanuka celebration at the JCC... I want you to meet him, Sheine.

**“You Must Be a Living**

**Legacy for Our Family”**

As they say, the rest is history. We went to the Chanuka celebration at the JCC. And we started going there for Shabbat and during the week for classes and events. The most difficult part for Babushka was when I went to study in the Machon Chamesh Jewish Institute in Moscow. But she encouraged me to go there. "You must be a living legacy for our family. Go, learn to really be a Jew," she blessed me.

Each year that I was away in Moscow I would make sure to be at my babushka's for my birthday. She would take out her violin and play our special song. But from that Chanuka on, I knew what the words meant. "Oy Chanuka, oy Chanuka, a Yontif, a sheine....' "

*Sheina Weissman, a social worker, lives in Rishon L'Tzion, Israel, with her husband Meir and daughter Rachel. The Krasnodar JCC is a member of the Federation of Jewish Communities of CIS and Baltic States, the umbrella organization for JCCs in 454 cities across the former Soviet Union. They provide religious, cultural, educational and humanitarian aid to Jews throughout the FSU.*

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

**In G-d, Trust We Must**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

"Fortunate is the man who places his trust in G-d and does not turn to the proud liars." (*Tehillim* 40:5)

Our Sages in the Midrash apply this passage to Yosef as a criticism of his seeking the help of an Egyptian in gaining his freedom from prison. They point out that because of this misplaced trust Heaven punished him with an extra two years of confinement.

This lesson at the conclusion of this week's Torah portion serves as a reminder to us in our own times that we cannot reply on the good will of the nations. Just as that Chamberlain of the Cupbearers failed to repay Yosef for his lifesaving interpretation of his prophetic dream, so too have our people been betrayed by all the lands they enriched with their presence.

The current worldwide effort to delegitimize the State of Israel is yet another reminder that only by placing our trust in G-d will we secure Israel forever.

*Reprinted from last week’s website of Ohr.edu, the website of Ohr Somayach International in Yerushalayim.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Chanukah Preview**

Next week we celebrate Chanukah.  Chanukah celebrates the victory of traditional Jewish values over the Greek assimilists about 2200 years ago.  It is therefore ironic that Chanukah is perhaps the most often celebrated Jewish holiday among the most assimilated Jews.

The reason for this is perhaps the following:  Deep down inside every Jew, there is something that we call in Yiddish the "Pintele Yid"  the little spark of Jewishness that remains alive, indestructible. When we read the courageous story of Channukah of how the Maccabees stood up and fought for their Judaism, we are all inspired to do the same.

This week we continue the amazing true story of Shammai Davidovics as told by his daughter Tova Lebovits. The story illustrates how Jews can motivate themselves to defend the faith.

*continued from* [*last week*](http://www.notspeeding.com/gs/Vayishlach5771.htm)*.* The Jews were safe in Danilev for just one more year. During that time, on his occasional visits, my father tried desperately but in vain to convince his family and townsfolk to flee. He succeeded with but a handful of people, mostly teenagers. The others simply did not believe him. The things he said "will" happen, they argued "could not" happen. And besides, "Where can we run to?!" He offered to get them forged gentile papers, and to help them escape to the forests, providing them with peasants' clothes.

**Feeling Guilt for His Family’s Death**

But to no avail. To them, such acts seemed too desperate. They felt they stood a better chance of surviving at home than in the forest. He felt responsible and guilty for his family's death, feeling he should have somehow saved them.

Almost a year later, the Jews of Danilev were again herded, and this time deported and murdered. This time my father arrived several days too late. There was nothing he could do by then. He was only able to reach one sister in time.

Until his dying day, my father felt responsible and guilty for his family's death. He believed he should have been able to get through to them and somehow save them.

**Special Hungarian Police Force**

When the Nazis occupied Budapest, they made an agreement with the Hungarian authorities, whereby the Hungarians would recruit a special police Hungarian force -- called the Kishket -- that would be in charge of taking care of buildings which the Germans gave political immunity to, such as the Austrian Embassy.

My father and several of his Jewish friends joined this force (as gentiles, of course, since Jews were not allowed). This way, they created an underground that could gather information about enemy activities. (Years ago, Yad Vashem had a life-size portrait of my father in his Hungarian Kishket uniform, as an example of Jewish underground activity.)

By then, Jewish citizenship papers were no longer good enough. My father obtained for my mother and her entire family gentile papers, and later when that became too dangerous, he hid them in an attic. He brought them food and provisions until the remainder of the war.

One day my mother came running tearfully to my father. Her mother (my grandma Cidi) and her uncle (Cidi's brother) had become careless and gone out of hiding for a bit. They were caught by German soldiers and taken to a concentration camp. My father must help. He assumed the identity of the Austrian counsel for 24 hours, and entered the concentration camp. My father found out exactly where they were detained, and with the help of his friends, organized an escape.

**Impersonates the Austrian Counsel in Budapest**

He found out that the Austrian counsel (the Austrian representative in Hungary at the time) was leaving the capitol for a few days. My father assumed the identity of the Austrian counsel for 24 hours. He had friends in a Kishket police car wait outside the camp for him.

The "Austrian counsel" entered the concentration camp. He approached the officer in charge and with perfect Austrian German introduced himself. He was also in charge of the Swiss in Budapest, and said it had come to his attention that through some terrible error, two Swiss citizens had been wrongfully deported and now detained in this very camp. He held their papers in his hand.

The officer in charge said that was impossible, but my father insisted on checking it out, for he had personally promised their relatives he would attend to the matter. So together they went from floor to floor searching for these citizens.

**Finds His Future Mother-in-Law**

On each floor, they announced the names of these citizens. And so they found my grandmother and her brother. They took them out, into the waiting police car, sped away, back into hiding. My father sadly recalled as he walked through the camp, how many Jews begged and pleaded with him: "We too are Swiss citizens. We too are Austrian citizens. Help us." But he could do nothing for those unfortunate people, and he said he would never forget them.

One time in Israel some time after the war, my brother Shmuel got on a public bus with my father. The driver took a look at my father, became very emotional, got up, hugged him hard, and began weeping and crying my father's name, "Shammai, Shammai." He refused to take payment, sat my father in the front seat, and as he drove began telling his tale to the astonished riders. This bus driver told how my father -- disguised as a priest -- came and rescued a young chassidic boy, himself.

Apparently, my father's priestly disguise had become almost his second identity. It enabled him to travel from village to village for weeks at a time on, even entering concentration camps and thus saving lives.

How did this disguise come about? While attending university, he was required to remain in class during Christian prayers and theology classes. He learned his lessons well and was also fluent in Latin. This oddity later saved his life many times, and helped save others. Hashem works in mysterious ways.

**Becomes a “Traveling Priest”**

My father used his black graduation robe from rabbinical seminary as his priestly garb. He became a traveling priest, the kind that kept a special pouch with various relics and talisman, holy to the Christians and especially the peasants, and he knew how to perform the various rituals.

He always had two "altar boys" to assist him, and he would pick them up here and there where he would find lost Jewish children. He would dress them in gentile clothes and teach them their prayers and duties, and they would travel together until he found a way out for them.  This particular bus driver was one of those he'd smuggled out of hell to Israel.

**Reunion in Jerusalem with Someone He Had Rescued**

One day, while my father was living with me in Jerusalem, someone called and asked if Dr. Davidovics was there. When I replied, "Yes," he insisted on coming over with his wife and son. They had just flown in from Hungary and when he entered our home, he ran excitedly to my ailing father, got on his knees and kissed his hands. My father's eyes became red, as they do when he cries tearlessly -- the closest he ever got to crying.

Years earlier, my father had found this orphaned boy, neglected and frightened on the street. He took him in, washed him, fed him, dressed him, and got him new gentile identity papers. Then he took him to a Christian orphanage where he was cared for by nuns. My father told him: "Do as you are told, but never forget who you are. One day you will again live as a Jew." And so it was. They regularly keep in touch and send us cards several times a year. He was thrown onto a pile of other bodies, but through some miracle he crawled away and lived.

Ironically, it was this priestly disguise that had almost left my father for dead. On one of his many trips to the concentration camps, as he forced himself to walk quickly past the human skeletons that were his people, he was seen by a neighbor from Danilev. The man was so overcome with joy that he yelled out, "Shammai! Shammai!" My father tried desperately to signal to him to stop, but it was too late.

My father was taken, and now he too became an inmate. He was tortured and beaten and finally left for dead. His body was thrown onto a pile of other bodies, but through some miracle he crawled away from that hell and lived. He had marks all over his legs for the rest of his life, and sometimes he would get headaches where they had beaten him. But he never complained about anything.

My father had done all he could to reverse the evil. For his family, his townsfolk, and the 6 million Jews, it was not enough. We shall never forget."

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

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**Why Do People Need**

**To Wear Shoes?**

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| --- |
| **QUESTION:** |

Why do people need to wear shoes and animals don't need to wear shoes?

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| --- |
| **ANSWER:** |

|  |
| --- |
| Shoes_iAEC1023178 |

Now that's not only a question for shoes alone, people need many things. A cat can go to the gutter and drink the water; you can't do that. Cats don't wear glasses either. Human beings need many things for a purpose, and the purpose is that they should have to ask Hashem to help them. The purpose is to cry out to Hashem, Hashem help me. When a person would be like a cat, he could be able to dispense with very many things, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants him to be stimulated to cry out. That's why we have illnesses that animals don't have.

We need garments; we cry out to Hashem, Hashem I need a garment. When you get a garment, you have to thank Hashem for it. But suppose fur grew on you and you never had to buy anything, you wouldn't say Malbish Arumim. Now I'm afraid to say maybe even today when you say that Brocho you don't think what you're saying.

We say Malbish Arumim, He clothes the naked, do you stop to think, you have to think. Look how wonderful it is, you have button holes here with a seam around it, you have buttons here, you have pockets that have a lining. This cloth is a wonderful contrivance, it's wool twisted into thread and thread is spun on looms. It's marvelous, and it's also colored - black or whatever it is.

When you study your garments you become more and more happy with them, and that's all included in Malbish Arumim, no matter how much you'll put in effort you haven't fulfilled your full gratitude for your garments. That's why Hashem gave us the garments and He didn't give us a fur coat to grow on our skin. That's why you need everything, human beings need, and human beings are more susceptible to more illnesses then animals, in order they should cry out to Hashem, that's the purpose.

It's a big fundamental principle, our purpose in life is to be reminded of Hashem; and the things that we need remind us of Hashem.

*Good Shabbos To All*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l” based on a transcription of a question asked to Rabbi Miller at his classic Thursday night hashkafa lecture and his answer. To listen to the actual tape portion in which Rav Miller answered this question, please call (201) 676-3210.*

**Why Prison Can Sometimes Be a Good Thing**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

This week we read in the Torah about the imprisonment of Yosef.

We also celebrate the Chassidic Holiday of the 19th of Kislev, when Rebbe Shneur Zalman, the author of the Tanya and founder of Chabad, was released from a death sentence in Czarist prison, and we prepare for the holiday of Chanukah when the Jews were miraculously saved from Greek domination and defilement.

Why were hardship, imprisonment and danger necessary in these three instances? Why couldn't G-d have just made Yosef into a king, the Rebbe into a great Chassidic leader, and the Jews into a joyous, light-producing people, without the troubles and darkness?

I'd like to answer this with a story:

**The Shpola Zeidi**

A Jew once came to a great Tzadik (Holy Jew) by the name of “The Shpola Zeidi” (Grandfather from Shpola) with a desperate request.

He had been falsely accused of cheating the government and stood a good chance of spending the rest of his life in jail. He begged the Rebbe to save him.

"Nu!" answered the holy Tzadik "A month or so in prison isn't such a long time."

"A month!!? " he cried “Rebbe! I'm innocent! I never stole anything in my life!" His eyes were wide in fear and almost fell to his knees as in supplication. Wringing his hands in despair he continued. "Rebbe, Rebbe! You don't know what prison is. I've heard stories! Even one day there will be the end of me! Please, please Rebbe. I heard you can do miracles! Free me completely!" And he burst out in bitter tears.

**Waits Till theChassid Calms Down**

The Rebbe waited until the Chassid had calmed down and replied. "I know exactly what prison is. I myself was there! I was there and I know that sometimes prison can be a very good place! Just calm down and listen.

The fellow sat down and the Rebbe began.

“Many years ago I stopped for the night in an inn in the middle of a long journey.

“I paid the owner, got settled in my room and was learning some Talmud before going to bed when I heard knock on my door. I opened it and there stood the owner of the inn with a religious Jew standing next to him. He apologized for the intrusion, explained that the extra bed in my room was the only one available and asked if I minded sharing the room with this guest for the night.

**Agrees to Share Room**

“It was already after midnight and I wanted to get back to my learning, and the fellow looked perfectly fine; long white beard and everything. So without thinking much about it I agreed.

“The Jew thanked me profusely, came in, put down his bags, prayed the evening prayer, said he was very tired, got into bed and went to sleep while I continued learning. After a while I went to sleep myself.

“When I awoke in the morning his bed was empty and I concluded that he must have left before daybreak and was careful not to wake me up. Very considerate of him!

“I prayed the morning prayer and began packing my bags when suddenly the door burst open revealing the owner of the inn but this time with two huge policemen and a third man with him who was pointing at me and screaming "There! There he is officer! That’s the thief!! Get him!!"

**Police Rush Like Mad Dogs**

“The police rushed at me like mad dogs. One pushed me back to the wall, the other opened my suitcase and turned it upside down on the bed while the man was scurrying around my room, furiously looking in every potential hiding place and corner."

“I was astounded to say the least.  "What are you looking for? What's going on here?" I asked innocently. "Just then, one of the policemen lifted the mattress of the second bed and yelled, "Hey! I think I found something here!""

"AHA! THAT’S IT!! MY SPOON!" Shrieked the stranger.

"The police grabbed me, tied my hands, and began slapping and punching me while the man jumped around in the background screaming, “I knew it! I knew it! You can't trust those Jews! WHERE ARE THE REST OF MY THINGS?"

"Suddenly it became clear to me; that the "nice" man that spent the night in my room was a thief. He had stolen this man's silverware the day before and planted the here hoping they would grab me and stop chasing him.

“Of course they didn’t listen to a word I said in fact every time I opened my mouth to say something they slapped me! So all I could do was silently pray to HaShem for help and hope that somehow it was all for the best.

“They bound me up like a calf, threw me in their wagon, and took me to prison. As soon as we arrived they made me a ten-minute trial and sentenced me to five years imprisonment on the condition that I would tell them where the rest of the loot was hidden. Then I was shown to my cell; a large, dismal, cold room with ten or fifteen other prisoners.

**Threatened by Huge and Fearsome Cellmates**

“It didn't take long for me to find out what prison means. As soon as the guards left, ten of my cellmates, more animal than human, approached me. They were huge and fearsome and who knows what evil thoughts were running through their minds."

“One of them, probably their leader, put his face in mine and said, ‘Listen Jew. You’re either with us or against us! Fifty rubles and you are in, but you have to do what we say. If not, you'll regret it.’

"I took a step back, looked him in the eye and said that I had no money, I wasn't interested in being one of them and in any case I trust in G-d, the creator of the heavens and earth, to protect me or to do with me what He wants.

**Pushed to the Floor**

“Before I could say another word he pushed me to the floor, one of them grabbed my head, others my arms and legs, and another pulled out a long metal bar from under his shirt.

“The one holding my head covered my mouth with a rag so I couldn't scream, and the ‘executioner’, with a strange smile on his lips, raised the bar ominously.

“Suddenly his face contorted in pain, his eyes bolted out in horror as he stared at his upraised and he let out a piercing scream ‘AAAAAhg....it's burning! AAAhh AAAaii hellllp me!!! helllllllllllp!’

"The pipe suddenly became red hot and was burning his hand, but he couldn’t release it; his arm was paralyzed in mid air."

"HELLLLLLP! AAAAAAH!"

"The guards heard the noise and came running, but neither they nor his friends could help him. His hand was locked around the blazing metal and they were afraid to touch it.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" he pleaded to me with beseeching eyes. "Make it stop burning! I'll leave you alone! AAAAAAAHH!!!"

"As soon as he said that, the pipe inexplicably fell from his hand and the guards whisked him out of the room to the hospital.

“As you can imagine, after that everyone left me alone. I spent the days and nights in prayer and repeating the Torah I knew by heart.

**Notices a Young Prisoner**

“But in the course of time I noticed that one of the prisoners, a young fellow that had not been involved in the fight, kept staring at me. I thought he was a gypsy at first, but I got in a conversation with him and he told me he was a Jew. He said that he became an orphan at a young age and wandered around for a few years until he fell in with a group of gypsies. He was agile and clever, and it wasn't long before they revealed his potential as a horse thief.

“They taught him to sneak into farms and ranches and steal horses, and for a few years he was very successful. In fact, he became a rich man with a rosy future awaiting him. But then one day he got caught by the police in the middle of a "job" and was sentenced to twenty years in prison. And that is how he got here.

**Had No Idea of What Being a Jew Means**

“He told me that he had no idea what it meant to be a Jew and he never even cared until the episode with the pipe. When he saw the strange miracle it aroused his curiosity and now he had questions. We spoke for several days and eventually he agreed to put on Tefillin, and in a few weeks I taught him how to read Hebrew and even say some prayers.

“Then one night I had a very vivid dream. Elijah the Prophet appeared to me and said: ‘Tomorrow night take the boy and leave. Just tell him to hold onto your belt and follow.’

“The next morning I told the young man about my dream, and sure enough that night we were following Elijah out of the prison. It was very miraculous; every door that he touched just swung open, and all the guards were sound asleep. We just walked out of the jail to freedom.

“That young boy sat and learned Torah for several years and eventually he became a great Rabbi who today leads a large Jewish community and helps thousands of people."

"So you see, jail isn’t necessarily such a bad place. And I see that, with the proper attitude, you will accomplish a lot there in one month."

This is the lesson of our section, of Chanuka and of Yud Tes Kislev; sometimes the greatest spiritual treasures can only be revealed through suffering, and exile.

Just as diamonds and pearls are hidden deep under the ground and the sea, and can only be acquired by effort and self-sacrifice, so Yosef had to suffer years of imprisonment in order to reveal his true greatness (and eventually save the entire world from famine), the Jews had to overcome the ‘darkness’ of meaningless Greek culture to reveal true meaning in the world and the Rebbe had to suffer to reveal the light of Chassidut Chabad.

**Centering Around the Miracle of Olive Oil**

That is why Chanuka centers around oil and the miracle of finding a bottle of pure olive oil; Just as an olive must be squeezed to release the oil hidden within it, so the Jews had to be oppressed by the Greeks in order to reveal the infinite potential in each of them.

Which is the reason that today, even thousands of years after the miracle, Chanukah observed even by the most "non-observant" Jews… and in the MOST religious way.  Because this potential is eternal and unlimited.

The minimum requirement is to light only one candle every night for each entire household. More religious Jews (mehadrin) light one for each male. But the MOST religious ("mehadrin min ha mehadrin") increase the number of candles each night; as everyone does today! Everyone begins with one light and increases each night.

**The Hidden Blessing in Each of Us**

Because the blessing hidden in each of us can and must always be increased.

That is why Rebbe Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad, had to suffer in prison. His goal was to change the priorities of the Jewish people with the “Chassidic’ teachings of Chabad and reveal something even higher than what was revealed in Chanuka: the light of Moshiach (Moshiach means anointed with oil). And the only way he could do this is first to be ‘crushed’ and ‘pressed’ in prison.

In fact, the entire issue of Moshiach is one of breaking all barriers. (As hinted at in the seemingly out-of-place story in this week's section of Yehuda cohabiting with his past daughter-in-law, and giving birth to "Peretz" which means to ‘break through’. And Peretz is the progenitor of King David and eventually of Moshiach. (See Ruth 4:18))

But now the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l, says with certainty that the terrible sufferings of thousand plus years of exile has been more than enough. The time of ‘redemption has arrived’!

But it all depends on us: one more good deed, word or even thought can tilt the scales for good.

Just like it was with Yosef, the Jews in Chanuka and Rebbe Shneur Zalman…. So we will all be miraculously released from all spiritual and physical limitations by ....**Moshiach NOW!!**

***Reprinted from this week’s email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim on the Parsha.***

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Chanukah and Parshas Vayeshav 5770**

**Story #628**

**Honoring a Broken Bottle**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

This story took place about one hundred years ago in Baghdad at the Shabbat table of Mr. Avraham Pinchas, a rich Jewish merchant.

Usually Mr. Pinchas had a table full of guests but this Shabbat he only had one; a poor man that he had invited from the Beit Knesset (Synagogue).

The guest was awed by the plush richness around him; the thick Persian rugs, gold inlayed dishes and beautifully decorated walls.

Only one thing perplexed him; in the middle of the table stood an old, empty, broken bottle, deeply stained with what appeared to have been oil.

**A Most Fascinating Story**

When Mr. Pinchas noticed how his guest was staring at the bottle he said. “I see that you are wondering about my bottle.  Do you want to hear a wonderful story?” The guest of course nodded ‘yes’ and he began to speak:

My father was a respected businessman here in Baghdad, but he was always busy and he left me in the hands of my grandfather.

Every morning my grandfather would wake me, make sure I washed my hands, said the morning blessings and didn’t forget my lunch.  Then each time, just before I left the house for school, he would give me a kiss on my forehead, raise his hands to the heavens and say:

**“And I, Where Will I Go?”**

“**VA'ANI ANA ANI BAW**”  (lit. "And I, where will I go?!"  (Gen. 37:30)

Later I learned in school that this is what Reuven cried out when he discovered that Yosef was not in the pit and that it was impossible to save him.  But I had no idea what it had to do with me.

Then, when I was about fourteen years old, tragedy struck; my grandfather passed away.

There was no one to take care of me in the morning so I started to go with my father to work.  My father tried to make sure that I prayed and learned a little but he was always very busy, and the business he did fascinated me so I didn’t pay much attention to my studies.

**Tragedy Strikes Again**

Then, two years later, tragedy struck again; my father died suddenly and now, besides the fact that I was alone, there was another problem; what to do with the business?  I was given the choice either to sell it and save the money, or to try my luck managing it for a while and I decided, against the advice of the lawyers, to try the latter.

Well, I took to it like a fish to water.  It wasn’t long before I was making big business deals with the best.  But I began to feel out of place with a kippah and tzizit, and not eating with everyone else, and the keeping of Shabbat prevented me from making big contacts.

So I began to stop being so observant and I discovered that the more commandments I dropped, the more successful I became.

Several years passed and I rose higher and higher until, one day I was walking home after landing a really big deal and I noticed a young Jewish boy, maybe thirteen years old, sitting on the sidewalk crying.

**Asking the Boy “What Was Wrong?”**

You know how it is when you feel happy you can’t stand to see someone miserable, right?  So I went over to him and asked him what was wrong.  "Oh thank you sir," he said "but this is something for Jews, I don’t think you would understand."

When he said those words I felt like someone stabbed me in the heart.  "You should know that I am Jewish," I said to him, "I even learned Talmud in Torah School."

Oh, I’m sorry," he answered, "I didn’t mean to upset you. I feel so bad.  You see at home we don’t have any money." He looked up at me and wiped his eyes with his shirtsleeve, "My father died a while ago and my mother has to work and also feed us, me and my six brothers and sisters, so things are not good.

**“Maybe G-d Will Make a Chanuka Miracle for Us”**

Well, this morning my mother said that it is Chanuka tonight and we have to look through the house for money to buy oil so we can light the Menora and that maybe G-d will make a Chanuka miracle for us and we’ll find something.

We looked and searched and were just about to give up when my little sister found a coin behind one of the drawers.  We were all so happy!  So my mother told me to run to the store and buy the oil before it closes. I ran and just as he was closing I got there and bought the oil.

I was walking home, holding the bottle and dreaming.  I imagined how good it is going to be to light the lights, how everyone will smile.  I remembered how the warm yellow light would shine on everyone’s faces and make everyone look so pure and happy.  Maybe we’ll even sing and dance like we did last year.  Maybe

G-d will really send Mashiach this time, like my mother says, and then she will start to smile again.  I was walking faster and faster, I was so excited. It’s Chanuka! It’s Chanuka!!

And then…I tripped.

I fell in the street and the bottle flew from my hands!  I watched in horror as it arched in the air and came down on a stone and broke.  It broke! All the oil spilled out…**'VA'ANI ANA ANI BAW?!**’

**Memories of My Grandfather Return**

The boy began crying again but when I heard those words I suddenly remembered my grandfather and understood what he must have intended each time he said those words.  Somehow he knew or intuited that this would happen.

"That broken bottle is me!" I thought to myself in shock. "The spilled oil is my Jewish soul; I’ve lost my Jewish soul!"

As if in a trance, I took out a wad of money from my pocket, gave it to the boy and told him to go back to the store, knock on the window and just tell him Avrim Pinchas sent you.  "Go! Buy what you want, and have a happy Chanuka! Go!"

When the boy was gone, I lifted the bottle from the street and carried it home, still in shock.  I sent the servants away for eight days and then, when I was alone, I just stood there, looking at that broken bottle and weeping.

**A Jew Can’t Lose His Jewish Soul**

Then the thought struck me, "A Jew can’t lose his Jewish soul. Maybe I ignored it or put it to sleep, but I’m sure it’s still there."

So I took my grandfather’s menorah out of the cabinet, dusted it off, found some oil and a wick and lit the first candle.

The light truly penetrated me. I felt like I was alive again!  I decided right then that I must do another thing Jewish…that I would start putting on Tefilin again starting tomorrow morning!

The next night I lit two candles and decided from now on to eat only kosher food. The following night, that I would begin learning Torah.  The night after that I made the decision to keep Shabbat. Until when on the last night eight candles were burning, I felt that I had become a new man. A renewed man.  The lights of Chanukah had saved me.

"So," he concluded his memorable story, "that is the reason I keep the broken bottle: to remind me where I was and how that miracle of the oil "saved my life."

[Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of his friend and colleague Rabbi Tuvia Bolton, the popular teacher, musician, recording artist and storyteller, in his weekly email for the yeshiva which he heads, Ohr Tmimim (ohrtmimim.org/torah )].

Connections - 2: The festival of Chanukah that begins this Shabbat, and the verse quoted from the Weekly Reading.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed*[*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)[*ascent@ascentofsafed.com*](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000nF00:001F0iDk000029s3&count=1325611907&randid=1833757664&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1833757664##)

**Religion Journal**

**Yes, Miky, There Are**

**Rabbis in Montana**

**By Eric A. Stern**

HELENA, Mont. — In Montana, a rabbi is an unusual sight. So when a Hasidic one walked into the State Capitol last December, with his long beard, black hat and long black coat, a police officer grabbed his bomb-sniffing German shepherd and went to ask the exotic visitor a few questions.

Though there are few Jews in Montana today, there once were many. In the late 19th century, there were thriving Jewish populations in the mining towns, where Jews emigrated to work as butchers, clothiers, jewelers, tailors and the like.

The city of Butte had kosher markets, a Jewish mayor, a B’nai B’rith lodge and three synagogues. Helena, the capital city, had Temple Emanu-El, built in 1891 with a seating capacity of 500. The elegant original facade still stands, but the building was sold and converted to offices in the 1930s, when the congregation had dwindled to almost nothing, the Jewish population having mostly assimilated or moved on to bigger cities.

**More Buried than Live Jews in Helena**

There is a Jewish cemetery in Helena, too, with tombstones dating to 1866. But more Jews are buried in Helena than currently live here.



Officer John Fosket of the Helena Police Department and Miky, a bomb-sniffing dog trained by the Israeli Defense Forces. Photo by Chad Trettin/Helena Independent Record

And yet, in a minor revival, Montana now has three rabbis, two in Bozeman and one (appropriately) in Whitefish. They were all at the Capitol on the first night of [Hannukah](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/h/hanukkah/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) last year to light a menorah in the ornate Capitol rotunda, amid 100-year-old murals depicting Sacajawea meeting Lewis and Clark, the Indians beating Custer, and the railway being built. The security officer and the dog followed the rabbi into the rotunda, to size him up.

Hanukkah has a special significance in Montana these days. In Billings in 1993, vandals broke windows in homes that were displaying menorahs. In a response organized by local church leaders, more than 10,000 of the city’s residents and shopkeepers put make-shift menorahs in their own windows, to protect the city’s three dozen or so Jewish families. The vandalism stopped.

Lately, the only commotion about Hanukkah has been the annual haggling among the rabbis over who gets to light the menorah at the Capitol. (It has since been resolved — at this year’s lighting, on Dec. 16, they will each light a candle; in the future they will take turns going first.)

Last year, the rabbinic debate resumed as the hour of lighting neared and 20 or so Jewish Montanans filed into the Capitol.

One woman could be heard reporting, excitedly, that a supermarket in Great Falls would be carrying matzo next [Passover](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/p/passover/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier); a guy from Missoula was telling everyone that he had just gotten a shipment of pastrami from [Katz’s Deli](http://www.katzdeli.com/) in New York.

The menorah was lighted and Hebrew prayers chanted, while the officer watched from a distance with his dog. He figured he would let it all go down and then move in when the ceremony was done. The dog sat at attention, watching the ceremony with a peculiar expression on its face, a look of intense interest. When the ceremony was over, the officer approached the Hasidic rabbi.

“I’m Officer John Fosket of the Helena Police,” he said. “This is Miky, our security dog. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

**A Police Dog Who Was Trained in Hebrew**

Miky, pronounced Mikey, is in a Diaspora of his own. He was born in an animal shelter in Holland and shipped as a puppy to Israel, where he was trained by the Israeli Defense Forces to sniff out explosives. Then one day, Miky got a plane ticket to America. Rather than spend the standard $20,000 on a bomb dog, the Helena Police Department had shopped around and discovered that it could import a surplus bomb dog from the Israeli forces for the price of the flight. So Miky came to his new home in Helena, to join the police force.

The problem, the officer explained, was that Miky had been trained entirely in Hebrew.

When Officer Fosket got Miky, he was handed a list of a dozen Hebrew commands and expressions, like “Hi’ sha’ er” (stay!), Ch’pess (search!), and “Kelev tov” (good doggy). He made flashcards and tried practicing with Miky. But poor Miky didn’t respond.

**The Policeman Who Needed a Rabbi**

Officer Fosket (who is not Jewish) suspected he wasn’t pronouncing the words properly. He tried a Hebrew instructional audio-book from the local library, but no luck. The dog didn’t always understand what he was being ordered to do. Or maybe Miky was just using his owner’s bad pronunciation as an excuse to ignore him. Either way, the policeman needed a rabbi.

And now he had found one. They worked through a few pronunciations, and the rabbi, Chaim Bruk, is now on call to work with Miky and his owner as needed. Officer Fosket has since learned to pronounce the tricky Israeli “ch” sound, and Miky has become a new star on the police force. The two were even brought in by the Secret Service to work a recent presidential visit.

**Good News All Around**

So all is well in the Jewish community here because the Hasidic rabbi is helping the Montana cop speak Hebrew to his dog. It is good news all around. The officer keeps the Capitol safe, and the Hebrew pooch is feeling more at home hearing his native tongue.

But the big winner is the rabbi, a recent arrival from Brooklyn who is working hard (against tough odds) to bring his Lubavitch movement to Montana. He has been scouring the state for anyone who can speak Hebrew, and is elated to have found a German shepherd he can talk to.

*Eric A. Stern lives in Helena, Mont., and is senior counselor to Gov. Brian Schweitzer. The Beliefs column by Peter Steinfels will return on Dec. 19. This article appeared in December 9, 2009 edition of The New York Times.*

**Weekly Parasha Insights**

**"Yaakob Sought to**

**Dwell in Tranquility"**

**By Rabbi Eli Mansour**

Rashi, in his comments to the beginning of Parashat Vayesheb, cites the following remark from the Midrash: "Yaakob sought to dwell in tranquility, but the anguish of Yosef immediately descended upon him." After many difficult trials and tribulations that Yaakob endured during his life, he had hoped to now spend the remaining years of his life enjoying peace and tranquility.

These hopes were quickly shattered, however, by the "anguish of Yosef," the experience of the sale of Yosef, as Yaakob spent over twenty years mourning for his beloved son, thinking he was dead. the Midrash continues, "The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility, but the Almighty says: Is that which is prepared for them in the next world not sufficient for them, that they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world!"

**Why Deny a Sadik a Life of Tranquility?**

The question arises, why does G-d deny the Sadikim the right to "live in tranquility"? After all, peace of mind is critical for the proper service of G-d. The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, Spain-Egypt, 1135-1204) writes that when the Torah promises health and material success as a reward for Torah observance, this does not mean that these blessings are the actual reward. Rather, good health and prosperity are necessary to help a person continue studying Torah and performing Misvot.

The additional Misvot he is able to perform are the true reward; his good health and material possessions are granted to him to facilitate his performance of Misvot. A person who is ill, or who must worry about his livelihood, does not have the comfort or peace of mind needed to learn Torah or involve himself in Misvot. Therefore, the greatest reward we can earn for the Misvot we perform is health and material success, which enable us to perform more Misvot.

Why, then, does G-d not allow the Sadikim to "dwell in tranquility"?

**Rav Mordechai Gifter’s Explanation**

Rav Mordechai Gifter (1915-2001) explained that the Midrash here does not undermine the importance or value of tranquility. Rather, it means that we should embrace and accept any situation we confront in life. We all must deal with difficult and complex problems at various points, and our instinctive reaction is usually something to the effect of, "I wish things weren't this way."

If we think about it more closely, however, we should not want the situation to change. Any situation in which we find ourselves has been directly orchestrated by G-d. Often for reasons beyond our comprehension, G-d sends us problems and difficulties to help us grow and develop.

For example, He might bring illness upon a person in order to strengthen his commitment to serve G-d under duress. But regardless of the reason, we have to trust that G-d places us in every situation for a specific purpose, whether or not that purpose is identifiable - which it so often isn't. Therefore, we should not wish that the situation was different. This situation has been ordained by the Almighty, so it is for our ultimate benefit.

**Trust that What Hashem Does is for Our Best**

We don't know why G-d sometimes denies us - and even the great Sadikim - the "tranquility" we desire. But we should not "seek to dwell in tranquility" if G-d ordains that we should, at any stage, endure a lack of tranquility. Instead, we should accept His decision and trust that it is, ultimately, for the best. And we should embrace and welcome the opportunity granted us to grow and improve, with the belief that it is for this purpose that G-d placed us in this situation.

[Parshah Insights](http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?aid=339693)

**The Lonely Moment**

**By** [**Yosef Y. Jacobson**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=198)

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A rabbi was bothered by the fact that he had never been able to eat pork. He flew to a remote tropical island and checked into a hotel. He immediately got himself a table at the finest restaurant and ordered the most expensive pork dish on the menu. As he eagerly awaited it to be served, he was shocked to hear his name called from across the restaurant. He looked up to see ten of his congregants approaching. Just his luck -- they'd chosen the same time to visit the same remote location.

At that moment, the waiter came with a huge silver tray carrying a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth. The rabbi looked up sheepishly at his congregants and said, "Wow -- you order an apple in this place, and look how it's served!"

**Joseph's Drama**

This week's Parshah tells the dramatic story of how Joseph, as an extremely handsome young man, attracted the imagination of his master's wife. She desperately tries to engage him in a relationship, yet he steadfastly refuses her.

Then came the fateful day "when he entered the house to do his work and none of the household staff was inside. She grabbed him by his cloak and pleaded, 'lie with me.' He ran away from her, leaving his cloak in her hand, and he fled outside."[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a339995');)

Humiliated and furious, she used the cloak as evidence that it was he who attempted to violate her. Her husband, Potiphar, had Joseph imprisoned, where he spent the next twelve years of his life until, through an astonishing turn of events, he was appointed viceroy of Egypt.

**Why Is This Episode Recorded in Detail?**

The question is: why was this episode recorded in detail in the Torah? The objective of these Torah chapters is to relate the story of how the first Jewish family ended up in Egypt. Thus, we read about Joseph's sale as a slave to Egypt, his prison sentence and his encounter there with the king's ministers. This ultimately leads to his release from prison and designation as viceroy of the country in a critical time of famine, which, in turn, causes his father and entire family to relocate to Egypt.

Why did the Torah find it necessary to relate the story of Joseph's ugly struggle with his master's wife? Why is it important to for us to know the detailed episode that caused his imprisonment?

**The Face of Jacob**

The Midrash explains the meaning of the phrase that Joseph "entered the house do to his work and none of the household staff was inside." What type of work did Joseph come to do?

The Midrash says that the "work" Joseph came to do was to yield to her advances. After all of her unceasing pleas, Joseph finally succumbed to her. However, as the union between them was about to materialize, the visage of his father, Jacob, suddenly appeared to him. This caused Joseph to reject his urge and flee outside.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a339995');)

Here again one may ask, what was it about Jacob's visage that inspired Joseph to deny such powerful temptation?[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a339995');)

**The Lonely Slave**

Let us reflect more closely on the psychological and physical condition of Joseph during that day when his master's wife almost lured him into a relationship with her.

Joseph was an 18-year-old slave in a foreign country. He did not even own his own body, as his master exercised full control over his life. Nor did he have a single friend or relative in the world. His mother, Rachel, had died when he was seven years old, and his father thought he was dead. His brothers hated him -- they were the ones who had sold him into slavery and robbed him of his youth in cruel fashion. One could only imagine the profound sense of loneliness that must have pervaded the heart of this young man.

This is the context in which we need to understand Joseph's struggle. A person in such isolation is not only naturally overtaken by extremely powerful temptations, but very likely may feel that a single action of his makes little difference in the ultimate scheme of things.

**Nobody Was Ever Likely to Find Out**

After all, what was at stake if Joseph succumbed to this woman's demands? Nobody was ever likely to find out what had occurred between the two. Joseph would not need to return home in the evening to face a dedicated spouse or a spiritual father, nor would he have to go back to a family or a community of moral standing. He would remain alone after the event, just as he was alone before it. So what's the big deal to engage in a snapshot relationship?

In addition we must take into consideration the power possessed by this Egyptian noblewoman who was inciting Joseph. She was in the position of being able to turn Joseph's life into a paradise, or into a living hell.[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a339995');) In fact, she did the latter, having him incarcerated for twelve years on the false charges that he attempted to violate her.

What, then, was the secret behind Joseph's moral rectitude? What empowered a lonely and frail slave to reject such an awesome temptation? "The visage of his father Jacob"! That is what gave Joseph the extraordinary fortitude to smack his impulse in the face and to emphatically dismiss the noblewoman's lure.[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a339995');)

But why? Jacob was living many miles away, unaware even of the fact that his son was alive. What was the magic that lay in his physiognomy?

**Adam's Single Moment**

The Talmud presents an oral Jewish tradition that "the beauty of Jacob reflected the beauty of Adam," the first human being formed by the Almighty Himself.[6](javascript:doFootnote('6a339995');) Therefore, when Joseph saw the visage of Jacob, he was seeing the visage of Adam as well.

Adam, we know, was instructed by G-d not to eat from the fruit of "the tree of knowledge." His disobeying of this directive altered the course of human and world history forever. Though he did something apparently insignificant, merely eating a single fruit from a single tree, this minuscule act still vibrates through the consciousness of humanity to this very day.[7](javascript:doFootnote('7a339995');)

Why? Because every single human being is part of the knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced. G-d's dream was not to be alone but to have mankind as a partner in the continuous task of healing the world. With every action we do, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil. Something eternal and Divine is at stake in every decision, every word, every deed performed by every single man, woman or child.[8](javascript:doFootnote('8a339995');)

**Reclaiming an Unshakable Dignity**

When Joseph saw the visage of Adam, he reclaimed an inner unshakable dignity like a candle of G-d lit on the cosmic way. Seeing the visage of Adam reminded Joseph how a single act, performed at a single moment by a single man, changed history forever.

This is the reason for the Torah's recording of this story. During our lonely moments of misery, when we, too, may feel that nobody cares for us and we are alone in a huge, indifferent universe, we ought never fall prey to the easy outlet of immoral gratification. We must remember that something very real and absolute is at stake at every moment of our existence and in every act we do.

If you only open your eyes, you will see the visage of your father whispering to you through the silent winds of history that you are not an isolated creature in a titanic world whose behavior is inconsequential. At this very moment, G-d needs you and me to bring redemption to His world.[9](javascript:doFootnote('9a339995');)

Reprinted from Chabad.org

**A Chanukah Postcard**

**By** [**Chanah Zuber Scharfstein**](http://www.ckhwy.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=2771)

It was just a postcard with a simple message, but to me it was a wonderful Chanukah present. My thoughts drifted back to the beginning of the fall term last September.

The first night of classes, I had been looking forward to this course in Spanish Literature and Culture because it sounded so interesting. Besides, it was my final course that would fulfill the license requirements for my job as an "English as a Second Language" teacher.

That very first night, things went wrong. Professor Mendez appeared competent and interesting as he began his introductory lecture. I was surprised, however, that he was addressing us in English, since this was an advanced course. I raised my hand and questioned the professor on this point. The room grew uncomfortably still and then in a stern voice

**The Professor’s Sarcastic Answer**

Professor Mendez sarcastically answered that he was sure we weren't advanced enough to be able to discuss history and literature in Spanish. This developed into a heated debate with everyone vocally taking sides, and of course I was viewed as the instigator. The feelings of antipathy that developed that night grew steadily stronger during the term.

When we had the midterm exam, the professor had his opportunity to pay me back. I prepared thoroughly, but he gave me a "B" and wrote a note explaining that I had misinterpreted a question; I had analyzed the material rather than summarized it. I was really furious but my family felt he probably was an anti-Semite, and anyway my class discussions had certainly placed me in an unfavorable spotlight.

Just about that time a magazine arrived in which one of my stories had been published. It contained some cherished memories of the Holidays from my youth. I brought the magazine to class to show some of my classmates. I had even planned to show it to the professor. That night, we had another disagreement which positively settled the issue. At the end of class I angrily rushed out of the room.

**The Professor’s Most Surprising Question**

Halfway down the hall, and I'll never know why, I turned around and went back. The professor was there gathering his belongings. He looked at me in surprise and I showed him my article. He looked at it briefly, and then quite unexpectedly asked if he could take it home.

The following week, the professor asked me to meet him in his office after class. After we were comfortably seated, he began to tell me how much he enjoyed my article.

"He probably found it unique," I thought. "This might be his first exposure to Jewish life."

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted. "It reminded me of my own youth," I heard him saying. "It was during World War II, and we celebrated the Holidays in secrecy, each year not knowing if there would be another, each year in a different place."

It was a good thing that I was sitting, for his next question really stunned me. "How did you figure out that I was Jewish?" he asked. Professor Mendez a Jew? I just couldn't believe it.

**Escaping to South America and a New Identity**

"My father changed our name during the War," he continued, so we could escape to South America. We trained ourselves to appear non-Jewish. We carefully studied and imitated the native Spanish settlers." We sat in the office and discussed Jewish life and Judaism for a while.

The following Tuesday afternoon, as I was getting ready to leave, one of my daughters presented me with a problem. She had received several Chanukah Menorahs in her school with the instructions to give them to someone who would not otherwise light Chanukah candles.

"You can give me a Menorah now," I told her. "And find some wrapping paper."

When I left for class moments later, I had a neatly wrapped Menorah in the bag with my books.

I remained after class and presented Professor Mendez with the gift. "Is it something special you baked or cooked?" he asked. I shook my head. "Please don't open it until you get home," I said. "And please read the material inside. No matter what, keep it and think about it carefully." As I left, I turned and called, "Happy Chanukah."

**A Most Disappointing Answer**

"Did you light the Menorah?" I asked at the next session. "No," he said, "I told you I am not observant. My life has changed drastically since my early years." He had placed the Menorah on his desk at home, but he had not been interested in lighting it.

"Why?" I asked. "Isn't it time that you took a stand? Light the candle to identify. There is no need to hide anymore. Come forward and find your real self."

"Perhaps some other time," he said. "Not now. But thank you anyway."

**The Beautiful Four-Worded Postcard Message**

And now, a year later, he had sent me a postcard. I re-read the message, and again it filled me with joy. There were only four words in the short message, and that was all. "The candles are burning." And then he had signed his name, Professor Mendez, and under it in small letters, Yehuda Mendelovsky.

There are many kinds of battles and victories. The heroism displayed by you, Professor Mendez is comparable to the battle of the Maccabees of old. When we light our candles tonight, I will think of your new little lights, those tiny flames representing victory.

*Reprinted from Chabad.org*

**It Once Happened**

**On the Fifth Night of**

**Chanuka in Siberia**

Life in the Siberian work camps was generally difficult for the Jewish prisoners, but during the holidays it was even more so, because it was nearly impossible to perform the mitzvot (commandments) of each holiday under those terrible conditions.

Reb Asher Sosonkin was exiled to Siberia for the "crime" of spreading Torah throughout Russia. Even under the harsh conditions of the work camp, he did his best to continue to observe the Torah and mitzvot. In the camp with Reb Asher was a Jew by the name of Nachman Rosemann. He had been brought up in an observant home, but when he grew up he became an ardent communist, rising in the ranks of the Russian army. After serving in the army, he was arrested for illegal business dealings, and was sentenced to 25 years of hard labor in Siberia.

**A Renewed Interest in Judaism**

It was there in the work camp that Nachman felt a renewed interest in Judaism, and this led him to befriend the devout Reb Asher. Nachman was determined to learn all he could from Reb Asher, and to do the mitzvot as carefully possible.

Chanuka was approaching, and Reb Asher asked Nachman to get a tin can to use as a menora, in order to fulfill the mitzva of kindling the Chanuka lights. Reb Asher emphasized that it should be small, so that their activities wouldn't be noticed by any of the labor camp officials.

"On Chanuka we celebrate a tremendous miracle, the triumph of the small Jewish army over the enormous Greek army. It is the victory of the spiritual over the physical. To simply make a menora out of an old can wouldn't properly honor this holiday. I'm going to order a beautiful menora!" Nachman proclaimed.

**A Most Amazing Determination**

Reb Asher was amazed at his determination. Nachman found a prisoner who happened to be a tinsmith and paid him several rubles to make a beautiful menora. He did this knowing that if the authorities found out, he would be punished severely. And on the day before Chanuka, Nachman approached Reb Asher with a big smile. In one hand he held a menora, and in the other hand he held a bottle filled with oil.

On the first night of Chanuka, Reb Asher and Nachman placed the menora by the door post of their barrack and prepared a cotton wick. The other prisoners watched curiously as the two men commenced this "dangerous" act. Reb Asher recited the three blessings over the lighting of the menora, and lit the wick with tears of joy and gratitude.

They continued to light the menora in this way until the fifth night of Chanuka. Just as Reb Asher and Nachman had lit the menora, an armed guard appeared at the entrance of the barracks, announcing roll call. The prisoners were stunned. Roll call had never been announced at that hour before! The other prisoners told Reb Asher and Nachman that someone must have reported them, which would explain the unusual roll call. They advised the two men to hide their menora in the snow, before the officer arrived. They refused to bury the menora.

**Anticipating the Worst**

When the officer entered the barrack, everyone stood still, anticipating the worst. After the officer finished counting the prisoners, he noticed the menora.

He stared at it for a moment, and then he asked Reb Asher, "Five?" "Five," replied Reb Asher, confused. The officer nodded his head, and without another word, turned and left the barracks. The prisoners were shocked. They were all wondering the same things: Who was the officer? Why did he come to them at such an unusual hour and ask about the candles?

Reb Asher was sure that the "officer" was none other than the Prophet Elijah.

*Reprinted from this week’s issue of L’Chaim, published by the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**The First Chanukah Light**

**In Begen Belsen**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

Chanuka came to Bergen Belsen. It was time to kindle the Chanuka lights. A jug of oil was not to be found, no candle was in sight, and a Chanukia belonged to the distant past. Instead, a wooden clog, the shoe of one of the inmates, became a Chanukia, strings pulled from a concentration camp uniform, a wick, and the black camp shoe polish, pure oil.

Not far from the heaps of bodies, the living skeletons assembled to participate in the kindling of the Chanuka lights.

The Rabbi of Bluzhov lit the first light and chanted the first two blessings in his pleasant voice, and the festive melody was filled with sorrow and pain. When he was about to recite the third blessing, he stopped, turned his head, and looked around as if he were searching for something.

But immediately, he turned his face back to the quivering small lights and in a strong, reassuring, comforting voice, chanted the third blessing: “Blessed are Thou, O L-ord, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and has preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.”

**A Passion for Discussing Matters of Faith and Truth**

Among the people present at the kindling of the light was a Mr. Zamietchkowski, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Bund. He was a clever, sincere person with a passion for discussing matters of religion, faith and truth. Even here in camp at Bergen Belsen, his passion for discussion did not abate. He never missed an opportunity to engage in such conversation.

As soon as the Rabbi of Bluzhov had finished the ceremony of kindling the lights, Zamiechkowski elbowed his way to the Rabbi and said, “Spira, you are a clever and honest person. I can understand your need to light Chanuka candles in these wretched times. I can even understand the historical note of the second blessing, “Who wrought miracles for our Fathers in days of old, at this season.”

“But the fact that you recited the third blessing is beyond me. How could you thank G-d and say “Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and hast preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season”? How could you say it when hundreds of dead Jewish bodies are literally lying within the shadows of the Chanuka lights, when thousands of living Jewish skeletons are walking around in camp, and millions more are being massacred? For this you are thankful to G-d? For this you praise the L-rd? This you call “keeping us alive?”

**“You Are a Hundred Percent Right”**

“Zamietchkowski, you are a hundred percent right,” answered the Rabbi. “When I reached the third blessing, I also hesitated and asked myself, what should I do with this blessing? I turned my head in order to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and other distinguished Rabbis who were standing near me if indeed I might recite the blessing. But just as I was turning my head, I noticed that behind me a throng was standing, a large crowd of living Jews, their faces expressing faith, devotion, and deliberation as they were listening to the rite of the kindling of the Chanuka lights.

**Such a Nation at Times Like These**

“I said to myself, if G-d has such a nation that at times like these, when during the lighting of the Chanuka lights they see in front of them the heaps of bodies of their beloved fathers, brothers, and sons, and death is looking from every corner, if despite all that, they stand in throngs and with devotion listening to the Chanuka blessing “Who performed miracles for our Fathers in days of old, at this season”; indeed I was blessed to see such a people with so much faith and fervor, then I am under a special obligation to recite the third blessing.”

Some years after the liberation, the Rabbi of Bluzhov received regards from Mr. Zamietchkowski. Zamietchkowski asked the son of the Skabiner Rabbi to tell Israel Spira, the Rabbi of Bluzhov, that the answer he gave him that dark Chanuka night in Bergen Belsen had stayed with him ever since, and was a constant source of inspiration during hard and troubled times.

From Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust by Yaffa Eliach

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Holiday Card

A Small Chanukah Miracle for A Lonely Jewish Soldier in Iraq.

By Kaila Lasky

It was our first big celebration as a family since our son's bris, eight years earlier. Our daughter Aliza was becoming a Bat Mitzvah. We had a fun idea for how to celebrate it: We had been married years earlier on a boat in Manhattan, and since Aliza was born on our first anniversary, we thought we would do it again.

So we hired a boat and invited a small group of mostly relatives and classmates. In planning the food and the flowers and the music, there seemed to be something missing. We had the “bar,” but where was the “mitzvah”? Aside from my daughter's Dvar Torah (“the speech”), what could we do to elevate this gathering from being just another birthday party?

**Sending Chanukah Cards to Jewish Soldiers Overseas**

Providentially, there was a request in our synagogue to pray for a local soldier who was being deployed to Iraq. The idea was born; let's have all the kids at our simcha (celebration) make Chanukah cards to send to Jewish soldiers overseas. Nothing earth-shattering, just a way to inject some meaning into the festivities.

The date arrived and our ship sailed. God granted us a picture perfect September day and when Aliza's carefully prepared speech blew overboard, she adlibbed admirably. The Chanukah cards were written and colored and decorated. A lovely time was had by all. And the next day, the cards were mailed out with heartfelt wishes and love to our Jewish brothers and sisters. End of story.

Or so we thought.

Six months later, when the bat mitzvah was a fond, distant memory, there was a knock on my door in the middle of the day. Bravely, I unlocked the door, even though I didn't recognize the voice on the other side. A pleasant twenty-something man greeted me:

**Feeling Pretty Left Out and Lonely**

"I'm Lt. Steinberg, and your daughter sent me a Chanukah card when I was in Iraq."

Well, you could've blown me over with a feather.

But wait -- it gets better.

Apparently our few dozen cards had been thrown in with the hundreds and thousands of cards sent to celebrate that other December holiday. The chaplain showed up one day at the army base with an enormous sack, filled to the brim with cards and letters. As he passed out handfuls of cards to the grateful troops, Lt. Steinberg was hanging back, feeling pretty left out and lonely.

Suddenly amidst the celebratory crowd, the company captain noticed our soldier. "Steinberg, why are you so quiet? How come you’re not opening any cards?"

Oh brother, Steinberg thought, don't they get it? "Captain, I'm Jewish, remember?"

"C'mon, Steinberg, don't be a spoilsport. Take a card."

Steinberg tried to shrink himself into invisibility. But the captain wasn't having it. "Let's go, Steinberg. These people were nice enough to write to us. NOW TAKE A CARD!"

**Stop Being the Center of Attention**

By now the captain had everyone's attention and Steinberg was getting pretty uncomfortable in the spotlight. Quick, he told himself, just grab a Christmas card and you’ll stop being the center of attention.

Steinberg reached deep into the sack, pulled out a card and looked at it. To his complete and utter shock the return address said Wesley Hills, New York. Steinberg is from Wesley Hills.

Hands shaking, he tore it open and found a beautiful hand-made Chanukah card, signed by my daughter Aliza, the Bat Mitzvah girl herself. Steinberg was dumbfounded by the providence of it all. He broke out in a huge grin and proudly showed the card to the captain and the entire platoon. Everyone understood the small miracle they had just witnessed.

Standing there in my Wesley Hills home, with my mouth gaping open and tears in my eyes, I begged Steinberg to come back and retell the story when my children were home. Indeed, he returned the following week with a friend and a camera. For our family, it was an incredible inspiration to see so clearly the power of our "little" mitzvah.

**Not the End of the Story**

But that’s not the end of the story. Just this past September one of the chaplains I had contacted about sending those cards asked if I could help arrange kosher meals and snacks for troops in Afghanistan for the High Holidays and Sukkot. I organized some people in my community and we sent 144 kosher meals to Afghanistan. Aish HaTorah’s Project Inspire got involved and sent dozens of personal cards and honey sticks for Rosh Hashanah and then chocolates for Chanukah to troops in Afghanistan, Iraq, Italy and Kuwait.

The story of Lt. Steinberg continues to bear more and more fruit. May all my daughter’s mitzvot enjoy such success!

(The story is true; Lt. Steinberg’s name has been changed.)

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