**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayigash 5774**

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**A Slice of Life**

**Identification Please**

**By Boruch Wahrhaftig**

Working in Brooklyn with suppliers in China taught me some basics of cross-cultural trade, but did not prepare me for life in China. Alternating every couple of weeks between New York and Shanghai had unanticipated side effects.

Language was a manageable concern. I got by on translators, hand signals, and a few important words in Chinese. Over time, with more exposure to Chinese ways, I began to feel more secure and had time to look around more. The Chinese have an ancient philosophy emphasizing family, duty, and honor. The Chinese word for "people" (ren) is used to describe feelings of empathy, altruism, and striving for excellence. In Yiddish - being a mensch.

**Honoring Their Elders and**

**Revering Their Ancestors**

A succession of takeovers from the Mongols to the communists did not change some basics of Chinese society. The new leaders continued the old ways, adopting new slogans. Throughout, China went on honoring its elders, revering its ancestors, and celebrating the ancient holidays. To the lands where they traveled, the Jews imported their own traditions - everything from Mosaic Law to the bagel with shmear.

An orthodox Jewish man arriving in the People's Republic, I was more than a large white foreigner. I was an inscrutable mystery. China hosts many American and European visitors, but a Caucasian with a yarmulke and beard was an unfamiliar sight that most resembled a Muslim from China's western provinces. It did not help that removing my glasses for my passport photo gave me a wild-eyed zealous look that made border officials nervous.

Within minutes of reaching China, someone touched my chin and said, "Nice beard." Apparently, personal space is measured differently in China. People asked, "Where from?" but my replies only generated puzzled expressions. By the second visit, I learned to answer, "I am American, from New York," in Mandarin. They shook their heads in disbelief and repeated their question in Chinese. In a cap, I reminded people of Fidel Castro, and they cheered Cuba in my honor. Nobody had any idea where I was coming from.

**Going from Interesting to**

**Amazing in Zero Seconds**

Eventually, I mastered the phrase "wo zai you tai ren", which means "I am Jewish." In China, it was received as if I had said, "I am a famous billionaire," or "I am president of the United States." I went from interesting to amazing in zero seconds. People understood who I am, and they had a near-universal encouraging reaction. Pointing to their head, they would smile enthusiastically and say "hen hao," (very good) with much enthusiasm. This puzzled me.

The Chinese translation of Jewish is 'you tai ren' (pronounced yo tie ren) This refers to the people of biblical Israel, but the literal translation is close to 'people of the truly high place', or 'people of the genuinely exalted nation'. This glowing term made being Jewish in China was an immediate popularity boost. Factories were eager to do business with a member of such a successful heritage. Who was I to argue?

**Jews are Highly Regarded in China**

In general, Jews are highly regarded in China, with a reputation for being intelligent and good in business. Early arrivals to Shanghai created some business and civic landmarks that are active today, such as the Sassoon housing development and the famed Peace Hotel. They were Baalei tzedaka, philanthropists, who supported many causes, such as community health care. Shanghai residents are proud of having provided as a safe haven for Jews during the Second World War. There may be no place where an orthodox Jew is more welcome by non-Jewish locals than Shanghai.

During business meetings, the hosts invariably expected to dine before starting business. My colleagues explained that I would not be able to join their meal because Jews have dietary restrictions. People were distressed when I declined an array of delicacies that stared back at me, but never ridiculed my convictions or attempted to persuade me. They had no problem with me needing to fulfill spiritual or religious obligations.

**Experiencing a Reverse**

**Culture Shock**

Returning to the USA, I experienced a reverse culture shock. After weeks of relatively trim Chinese, the crowd at the airport appeared noticeably overweight. In the states, almost nobody carried their own bag into the store to avoid the plastic bag fee. At coffee shops, people used credit cards to pay for complex drinks, not cash for juice or water. The waiter filled my cup with tepid coffee before serving my elderly father-in-law. I missed attentive service, hot drinks, and deference to age.

In China, I rediscovered the joy of living small and savoring the moment. The ever-present tea among people working long hours reminded me of my grandfather sitting in the room behind his grocery store, sipping a glass of tea as he perused the Yiddish newspaper. He worked very hard, but made time for morning Minyan, afternoon tea, and evenings and Shabbat with the family.

**The Connection Between Quality of**

**Life and Preservation of Older Ways**

Visiting China made me notice how quality of life and preservation of older ways go together. The latest technology and popular fads are present, but not permitted to displace the tried and true balance of family, community, and heritage. Jews in America and elsewhere with strong connections to our own history and ways can enjoy the fulfillment of balanced spiritual and physical life in the modern world. We are Jews, living our way of life in every time and place.

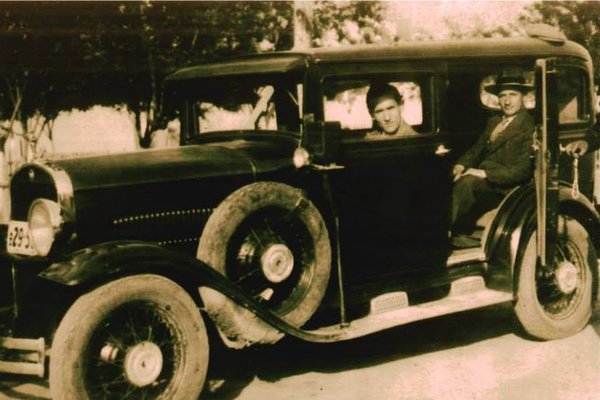
Boruch Wahrhaftig's writings on topics of culture, science, and personal well-being is published in the USA and globally. He is the editor at emesdig.com

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

**Casting Light on Little-Known Story of Albania Rescuing Jews From Nazis**

**By Joseph Berger**

There were a handful of European nations where the Nazi killing machine sputtered, but few seem more remarkable and less illuminated than [Albania](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/albania/index.html?inline=nyt-geo).



**Albanian American Civic League**

**Arsllan Rezniqi rode in the back of a car used to transport Jews from Nazi-occupied Macedonia to safe hide-outs. A truck was also used and over time, Mr. Rezniqi moved 400 Jews to Decan, in Kosovo.**

With ordinary Albanians moving Jews from hide-out to hide-out to elude capture, Albania saved virtually all of its 200 native Jews and 400 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. The country also helped spirit hundreds more over from Nazi-occupied Balkan lands.

“Albania was one of the only European countries that had more Jews at the end of the war than at the beginning of the war,” said Michael Berenbaum, former project director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

A full picture of that rescue emerged only in the early 1990s after the collapse of a particularly opaque and repressive Communist government and was confirmed by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust research institute, in 2007. It will be retold on Dec. 8 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, where speakers will include descendants of Albanian rescuers and of rescued Jews.

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**Felicita Jakoel in 1992 with her father, Josef, who was able to hide from the Nazis because of help from Albanians. (Photo courtesy of the Albanian American Civic League)**

Albania has practical reasons for wanting this story known. The country is seeking membership in the European Union, but its chances are hobbled by a history of ingrained corruption. At a time when Albania has promised to clean up its government, the rescue story not only highlights an episode of Albanian magnanimity, but also shows that Albanians honor their promises.

The story of the rescue, said Ferit Hoxha, the Albanian ambassador to the United Nations, shows that “although we were closed under one of the fiercest Communist regimes, this nation’s people are noble and as able to deliver with courage as anyone else in Europe.”

In much of Europe, the Final Solution was remarkably efficient: 90 percent of Poland’s 3.3 million Jews were killed, 88 percent of Germany’s 240,000 Jews, 77 percent of Greece’s 70,000 Jews, with similarly chilling tolls elsewhere.

The exceptional difference in Albania, experts on the episode say, was rooted in a national creed called besa that obligates Albanians to provide shelter and safe passage for anyone seeking protection, particularly if there has been a promise to do so. Failure to act results in a loss of honor and standing.

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| **spacerAlbanian American Civic League**  **Mustafa-Pashe Rezniqui, an Albanian rescuer, in 2006.** |  |

“It involves uncompromising protection of a guest, even at the point of forfeiting one’s own life,” wrote Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, an organizer of the New York event whose husband, former Representative Joseph H. DioGuardi, visited Albania in the early 1990s and helped unearth details of the rescue.

Another explanation, Ms. Cloyes DioGuardi says, is that in Albania, a Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox country until Ottoman rule led to conversions to Islam starting in the 15th century, ethnicity has always trumped religion, and piety is less than zealous. “We knew our enemies wanted to use religion to divide and conquer us, but we knew we had the same blood,” said Akim Alickaj (a-LITCH-kye), an ethnic Albanian raised in Kosovo who owns a New York travel agency and whose father helped rescue Jews. “Religion changes, but nation and blood can’t be changed.”

Two other countries saved most of their Jews as well. When German occupiers ordered the deportation of Denmark’s 7,800 Jews in 1943, neighbors, colleagues and activists, in a virtually spontaneous outpouring of help and resistance, transported more than 7,000 Jews, largely by fishing boat, across a channel to neutral Sweden, according to Bo Lidegaard, editor in chief of the newspaper Politiken.

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The New York Times

A full picture of Albania's aid to Jews emerged in the 1990s.

Bulgaria was allied with the Nazis and turned over 11,000 Jews from occupied Macedonia and Thrace for deportation to death camps. But when an order came for deportation of Bulgaria’s own Jewish citizens, members of Parliament and church leaders pressured the government to resist, and 48,000 Jews survived.

When the Nazis rolled into Albania in September 1943, taking the country over from the more lenient Italian Fascists, two Jewish residents of the city of Vlora — Rafael Jakoel and his brother-in-law — met with the mayor there. He told them, according to Mr. Jakoel’s granddaughter, Felicita, “As long as you are here, you don’t have to worry, but Germans are Germans so it’s better to go to the capital.”

Rafael Jakoel and his brother-in-law went to Tirana to meet the interior minister, Xhafer Deva, of what seemingly was a fascist government collaborating with the Nazis. The minister even showed them a list of Jews whom the Germans had asked for. Nevertheless besa was so forceful that he did not turn over the list, Ms. Jakoel said.

“As long as we are here you don’t have to worry,” he told them, according to Ms. Jakoel, who today, like many Albanian Jews, lives in Israel. “But if something happens to us you have to take care of yourself.”

Ms. Jakoel’s father, Josef, who was 18 at the time, and his younger sister and brother were hidden in the home of Vlora’s vice mayor, mingling with his own children. Later the Jakoels hid with a family in the town of Kavaje, scrambling into a garden whenever the Germans approached. When three first cousins were seized, Mr. Jakoel and his brother-in-law returned to Tirana, found go-betweens who had good relations with the Germans and were able to buy the cousins’ release for 3,000 gold coins, Ms. Jakoel said.

**Refused to Give Over a List of Jews**

Many of the rescues took place in Nazi-occupied Kosovo, which is heavily populated with ethnic Albanians and was then part of Yugoslavia. Mr. Alickaj, 59, the New York travel agent, recalled in an interview that his father, Arif Alickaj, was executive secretary of the municipality of Decan and, using popular Muslim names, issued false identifications to allow Jews — many of them refugees from Macedonia and Serbia — to travel to Albania. He too was asked for a list of Jews but insisted there were none, Mr. Alickaj said.

Mr. Alickaj’s friend, Arsllan Rezniqi, a grocer, owned a truck that picked up fruit and vegetables from Macedonia, and over time he transported 400 Jews to Decan. Word had come from ethnic Albanians in Macedonia that their Jewish neighbors were in jeopardy. Mr. Rezniqi’s great-grandson, Leka Rezniqi, 28, an anchor of a television news show in Pristina, Kosovo’s capital, said in a telephone interview that Mr. Rezniqi even built a house in the garden as a shelter for refugees. Albanian neighbors knew Jews were hiding on the property and never exposed them.

“They knew that Arsllan gave them besa so he could not be betrayed,” said Leka Rezniqi.

Mr. Rezniqi’s great-grandfather arranged for havens among the families living in the small mountain villages outside Decan, which he correctly guessed the overstretched Germans forces would seldom visit. “The Germans had checkpoints,” said Mr. Alickaj. “But our local people knew how to avoid them. They always had back routes.”

*Reprinted from the November 18, 2013 edition of The New York Times.*

When G-d Sends You a Message…It Would be

Nice to Have Caller ID.

**By** [**Eric Brand**](http://www.aish.com/authors/186013152.html)

Jake and I were paying scant attention to our pizza because the moment was so exhilarating. We were two scions of pampered home lives in a posh suburb on Long Island, products of a high school known for sending graduates to the Ivy League and after that a life of material success living the American dream.

Yet here we were in a grungy pizza shop in East Jerusalem, Jake in a suit (a suit in August, mind you, and not for a job interview) and beard (this was before John Krasinski and Ryan Gosling made beards cool) and payos (which, despite Matisyahu’s Chassidic phase, are still not cool). And he wasn’t even Jake anymore, he was Yerachmiel, which is a lot more syllables.

We were sitting talking about how he came to be studying in a kollel in Jerusalem when the last thing I’d heard about him was he was sitting on the cold stone floor of an ashram in Brooklyn studying Hinduism, and how I had traveled across half the world to find him when the last thing he’d heard about me was I was in New York writing song lyrics in a Broadway musical workshop

**One of the Most Important**

**Things Anyone Ever Said to Me**

That’s when he said one of the most important things anyone ever said to me, a thing which he later claimed he never said.

“I still don’t understand how you found me,” Jake said. (No, that’s not the Important Thing He Said. It’s coming in a minute.)

I explained, “I called your house after not hearing from you for so long…”

“That was nice of you.”

“You still had my Queen album, and I was having a party. Also, I was wondering what happened to you. So I got your mother on the phone, and she told me you had gotten religious, moved to Israel, and were studying to be a rabbi. That sort of clicked, since I knew you were always searching for answers and meaning and stuff, and I said to your mother, ‘That’s great.’ And she screamed, ‘You think that’s great?!’ Then she said some other stuff about mental illness, and throwing your life away, and thank G-d you didn’t talk to your brother and sister too much. Before I got off the phone, I got your address.”

“Yeah, that sounds like my mother.” (That’s not the Important Thing He Said either. Be patient.)

If I was going to say ridiculous things about religion, I might as well say them out of knowledge, not ignorance.

**Speaking from Knowledge**

**And Not from Ignorance**

A year after the phone call to Jake’s mom, I was on a trip to Israel because a couple of friends from college kept telling me that if I was going to say ridiculous things about religion, I might as well say them out of knowledge and not ignorance. What was I supposed to say to that? “No, I prefer to be an ignoramus”?

So I read a book on comparative religion, and another on [Judaism](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/Deep_Center.html), went to a few services, and talked to a few people. It was all interesting, but in a college course I had learned that a real anthropological study requires immersion in the subject culture. (I think it was Margaret Mead who said it, but that might be because I can’t think of any other anthropologists. Can you?) So I took a trip to Israel, armed with Jake’s address (this was before cell phones, unless you count those walkie-talkie things millionaires carried around in their briefcases).

**Running Through Mea Shearim**

I was worried that Jake’s kollel might keep business hours and would close at 5 p.m., so I ended up running through Mea Shearim – a swarthy guy with a moustache, wearing jeans and no yarmulke, carrying a backpack – it’s amazing someone didn’t assume I was about to hurl the backpack into some shul yelling “Allah akbar!” and shoot me.

Anyway, no one did. I found Jake, and he mumbled something and told me to say “Amen.” He then explained there’s a blessing for seeing a friend unexpectedly after a year, the same one for praising G-d for returning the dead to life – then we went out for pizza and caught up, happy to be back from the dead.

We talked about friends we had or hadn’t kept in touch with from high school. “You know, I talked to Artie right before my trip,” I told him. “He says he went to Hebrew school, already knows all about Judaism, thinks you’re flipping out, thinks I’m wasting my time. But you can’t believe how much I’ve learned in the last couple of months that he has no clue about – about Jewish law, and philosophy, and the meaning of historical events, and the return to the Land, and all that. He thinks because he knows something, he knows everything – and he knows practically nothing!”

Then Jake said, “That’s what I think about you!”

After an awkward pause, I said “Good point,” and we talked some more, and he went back to the kollel and I went back home.

**There was Someone who Knew More**

No matter how much I knew, there was someone who knew more.

Did you catch the Important Thing He Said? Jake told me that no matter how much I knew, there was someone who knew more, no matter how much I improved myself, how much I grew, how much I achieved, there was someone who had grown more, achieved more. Life’s not a contest, and there’s [no room for arrogance](http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/What_Do_I_Know.html). Whenever I start feeling too full of myself, feeling like I’ve finally gotten where I’m supposed to be, I hear Jake’s reality check.

Years later, when my wife and I took our family to Israel for our son’s bar mitzvah, I told Yerachmiel (couldn’t call him Jake anymore) about the Important Thing He Said, and how grateful I was. He told me he never said it. Moreover, it’s not something he would ever say. “Why would I be so obnoxious, and risk alienating you?”

**G-d Made Me Say It**

When I told him there was no way I could have misremembered, because I’ve kept that statement with me every day since, he said, “Oh. I understand. I didn’t say it, G-d did.” Perhaps the consensus on Yerachmiel was right and he had indeed flipped out.

But he explained, “There are key moments in everyone’s life, inflection points, where G-d sends a message to help them along. Clearly, G-d wanted to send you a message. I was just the messenger.”

Wow. I started combing my mind for other life-changing utterances I’d experienced. There was the first Passover Seder that my wife (then my fiancée) and I attended, at the home of Rabbi Rosen, a very religious man (he had a black hat), Mrs. Rosen, and their dozens of children. We had no preparation, no idea that the Seder was more than 10 minutes of “We were enslaved, we were freed, let’s eat.”

We watched in amazement as he wept over the horseradish and screamed at Pharaoh and the children stood on chairs (the ones who weren’t sleeping under the table or being dragged to and from the kitchen clutching their mother’s ankle). Then he jammed an obscene amount of matzah into his mouth and chewed and chewed, the air filled with crunching sounds and flying matzah flakes. He couldn’t even sit up straight, needed a pillow to prop himself up – and we’d only had a couple of glasses of wine!

**“My wife is the Smartest**

**Person I know.”**

That’s when he said it. Mrs. Rosen had just gone into the kitchen for the umpteenth time, and he leaned over to us surreptitiously, a sly smile on his face, and declared, “My wife is the smartest person I know.”

And there it was. In a single statement, he dispelled one of my big concerns about Judaism, that it was [misogynist](http://www.aish.com/ci/w/). The respect this man had for his wife, the joy he took in telling us about her abilities, was palpable, real. Just last month, I saw him at a wedding for the first time in many years, and recalled the event to him. He literally jumped back in his chair. “I said that? I just volunteered it?”

“Yes, what’s wrong with that? It was great!”

“Because,” he said, “I might think it, but I would never risk embarrassing my wife like that.”

**We All Get Messages from G-d**

We all get messages from G-d. Sometimes the trick is being ready to hear them, sometimes it’s being ready to act on them, and sometimes it’s being able to figure out which is an actual message and which is just an overactive imagination. (Believe it or not, I’ve sometimes been accused of having an overactive imagination. Usually, when explaining my line of thinking to my wife for something that was, in retrospect, really stupid.) The Talmud says, “From the day the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to fools and children.”

I once had an offer from Tom Rose, publisher of the Jerusalem Post, to come and work for him in Israel. I wrestled with the idea for days, the pros and cons balanced, looking for the thing that would tip the scales. On my way to work one morning, I turned on the car radio and immediately heard Tom say, “I’ve really got to get you to move to Israel.” I almost lost control of the car.

In shock, I pulled over and turned up the volume. Tom was on with Don Imus, who often had him on the show to get his perspective on Middle East politics. The invitation was to Imus, not me. But was it? Was this G-d’s way of telling me to make aliyah? Could I make a life-changing decision based on a morning talk show drive-by? My wife, of course, said no (see above comment), and we stayed put – and within the year Tom had left the Post.

But all this has got me wondering. Yes, sometimes G-d might put a thought into someone’s mouth for your benefit. But that person thinks he’s just talking, he has no clue he’s become the Oracle of Delphi. Did G-d ever put words in my mouth for someone else’s benefit when I thought I was just talking? Well, no one ever told me I did. I tell my kids a lot of things that I think are good for them, but so far they don’t seem to have paid any attention.

Being the recipient or conduit of messages from G-d requires some effort. Maimonides enumerates the prerequisites for prophecy, including wisdom, righteousness, joyfulness, and self-control. One of the ways prophets would get themselves in the right frame of mind was by listening to music. I’ve got that down.

I’m working on the other ones.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**It Once Happened**

**Mottel the Bookbinder**

The saintly Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk once recovered from a life-threatening illness. When his recovery was complete, his closest disciples mustered their courage to ask him what he had seen while hovering between life and death.

The Rebbe said that he would tell one thing he learned:

As I walked in the Garden of Eden, I saw among the most honored souls a familiar face. He looked very much like Mottel the Bookbinder. To be sure, Mottel was a G-dfearing Jew, an honest, hard-working bookbinder, but he was otherwise an undistinguished ordinary Jew, not even much of a Torah scholar.

"Is it truly you, Reb Mottel?" I asked the soul as I approached him.

"Yes, it is I," called out Reb Mottel happily.

"But how did you get to this exalted place?" I asked Reb Mottel quite innocently.

"When I was brought before the Heavenly Court, I was asked the usual questions. I had to admit that, regrettably, I had studied very little Torah. I didn't have much of a head for it. Besides, we were very poor, so I had to find a way of earning money to help my parents support the family. I was apprenticed, at an early age, to a bookbinder, I explained to the Court...

"They began the weighing of my mitzvot and sins. On the right side of the scale, angels began putting all my good deeds. Then they pushed the scale down to make it weightier, saying this was for the joy and sincerity with which I performed the mitzvot.

**Too Many Small Sins**

"But then other angels came forward and began to load my sins and misdeeds on the left scale. I watched with horror as my sins were added up. Most of the sins were truly not serious, and they happened because of my ignorance. But, though they were small, they were adding up dangerously, till they tipped the scale.

"As I stood there before the Heavenly Court, trembling and ashamed, an angel suddenly appeared with a worn-out siddur in his hand. Behind him was a line of wagons loaded with sacks.

"I am the angel in charge of stray pages from holy books. I go to every Jewish home, every shul and every Jewish school. I look to see the condition of the holy books. Whenever I see a worn out book, with crumpled pages and loose covers it gives me tremendous pleasure, for this is a sign that the books are in constant use. But when I see that some of these books are tattered beyond repair, I am troubled, for every holy book has a holy soul, and every page has a soul, which must be treated with care and respect.

"In the course of my travels I met this man here on trial. Ever since he was a child, Mottele loved his little siddur and would often caress and kiss it before closing it.

**He Told His Father that He Wanted to be a Bookbinder**

"When it came time for Mottel to be apprenticed, he told his father that there was nothing he would like more than to be a bookbinder.

"'I have never seen a book-binder like Mottel,' continued the angel in my defense. 'He never got any pages mixed up, never missed a stitch, and always used the best materials. From time to time, he would go to the shuls in his town and collect holy books that cried out for attention. He took them home and worked late into the night to restore them, bind them and give them new life. He never charged for this and never even told anyone about it.

"I respectfully request that the Heavenly Court permit me to unload all the sacks of worn-out holy books to which Mottel the Bookbinder has given a second life, and put them on the scale with all his other mitzvot and good deeds.

"The Heavenly Court agreed. Long before the wagons were half unloaded, the scale with the mitzvot clearly outweighed the other side.

"Believe me, dear Rebbe," Mottel concluded, "I was as astonished at what happened before my eyes as you were at seeing me in this place of honor."

"I wanted to ask Mottel a few more questions," explained Rebbe Elimelech, "but at just that moment I began to recover. Reb Mottel's story speaks for itself. But let us also remember," Reb Elimelech enjoined his disciples, "that G-d never fails to give credit and reward for any good deed, even for such a seemingly trivial act as smoothing out a crumpled corner of a well worn page in a holy book.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn. It was originally published in from Talks and Tales.*

**Only the Money**

**Was in Exile**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

The Baal Shem Tov had two grandsons, Rav Moshe Chaim Ephraim and Reb Baruch. Both were pious and well educated in Torah, yet, Rav Moshe lived a frugal and poor life while his brother, Reb Baruch, became very wealthy.

One day Reb Baruch decided to spend Shabbos with his brother. Rebbe Moshe was honored and told his wife to prepare the best of everything in honor of his brother. The poor woman sighed as she counted her few kopeks, but as a dutiful wife she went to the marketplace and borrowed enough money to purchase extra food for Shabbos.

That night, when the two brothers came home from shul, they saw two small candles burning in an earthen dish and a white tablecloth spread out over the table with two small challahs on it. A small bottle of watered-down wine was near the challahs and a wooden bowl with salted herring and onions stood near it.

They made Kiddush and sat down to eat the Shabbos meal. Reb Baruch turned to his brother and sighing said, “Woe is to me, my brother, that I see you in such a poor state. How do you manage to exist in such poverty?”

“Why do you speak this way to me?” Rav Moshe asked. “Is there anything missing here?”

“Everything is missing,” Reb Baruch replied. “In my home we have silver candle holders, beautiful furniture, the wine is poured into silver cups and on the table we have enough food for a king.”

“Where do you get the money to purchase all these ﬁne things?” asked Reb Moshe asked.

“Don’t you know?” replied his brother. “I travel all week from town to town, buying and selling merchandise so I accumulate enough money to buy the ﬁnest things for Shabbos.”

“Then you are worse off than I am,” replied Reb Moshe. “Your gold, silver and money are in your home while you have to wander from town to town as if you are in exile. While my money is in exile, in other people’s hands, still I am at home the entire week enjoying the company of my wife and children and enjoying the study of Torah. Who leads a happier life?”

**The Young Genius**

When Reb Moshe was a young boy he was known as a genius. Many people who opposed his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, would come with difficult questions hoping to outwit him. The Baal Shem Tov would call upon his little grandson for the answer and to the amazement of all he would always know what to say.

One day a prominent rav visited their home and posed the following question:

“Will the Master be able to answer a question I have on this week’s sedra about Korach? The Mishnah in Gemara Sanhedrin (108a) says that the Jews in the dor hamidbar have no part in the World to Come, for it says (Bamidbar 14:35), ‘In this wilderness they shall be consumed and they shall die.’ Rabi Akiva explains the words, ‘consumed’ and ‘die’ to represent death in both worlds.

“Further on Rabi Akiba states that Korach and his group also suffered the same fate as he expounds the sentence in the Torah (ibid. 16:33) ‘and the earth closed upon them’ as referring to this world. ‘And they perished from among the assembly’ refers to the next world. Now the question arises: Why did Rabi Akiva have to repeat the same remarks about Korach when he already deduced that the dor hamidbar, which included Korach, had no part in the World to Come?”

The Baal Shem Tov smiled as he turned to his young grandson and told him to answer the question.

The child didn’t hesitate a minute as he replied, “The answer is simple. The ﬁrst sentence of ‘in the wilderness they shall be consumed and there they shall die’ was referring to the spies. They were punished for bringing back a bad report. The spies represented every shevet with the exception of Levi. Therefore, shevet Levi was not included in this punishment. Korach was a descendant of shevet Levi; therefore, Rabi Akiva had to reiterate that Korach had no share in the next world only because of his sin of revolting against Moshe and not because of the punishment of the spies.”

**Counting Every World In The Portion**

On another occasion the eight-year-old genius was asked why at the end Parshas Miketz there is a line denoting that the parsha contains 2,025 words.

The child replied, “The holiday of Chanukah usually falls at the same time of the year when we read Parshas Miketz. On Chanukah we light the candle, ner, eight times. The letters of the word ner numerically represent 250. Eight times this equal 2,000. The ﬁrst candle is lit on the 25th day of Kislev. Add this to the 2,000 and we have 2,025, the number of words in this parsha. This is a hidden prophecy that the holiday of Chanukah would come out during this week.”

**Waiting 99 Years To Fulfill A Mitzvah**

Once the young genius was asked the following question: The Talmud (Kiddushin 82a) tells us that Avraham observed all the mitzvos of the Torah. If that is the case why did he have to wait until Hashem told him at the age of 99 years, to have a bris milah? Why didn’t he do it in his young years?”

When this same question was put to the Vilna Gaon when he was only a boy of ﬁve, he replied, “Chazal state (Kiddushin 31a) that a person who is told to do something and does it, receives a great reward than one who is not told and does it. Therefore, Avraham waited for this mitzvah until he was told, for he could have redone all the other mitzvos after he was told, but not bris milah. Once performed it can never be repeated.”

However, young Moshe Chaim Ephraim had this answer: “Avraham was able to fulﬁll all of the mitzvos of the Torah, because there was no sin or prohibition attached to their fulfillment. But bris milah would have been a sin if he attempted it before he was told to do so by G-d. For the Gemara (Bava Kama 91b) speciﬁcally prohibits a person from injuring himself. Therefore, unless it was a Divine commandment Avraham was not allowed to circumcise himself.”

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