**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayechi 5771**

Volume 2, Issue #15

**Chassidic Story of the Week #682**

**The Kohen Pals Meet**

**In the Forbidden City**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 Rabbi Shimon Freundlich, the Lubavitcher 'Shliach' (emissary) in Beijing [once known as the Forbidden City] China, and his wife run a successful and very busy Chabad House catering to the Jews that live, visit or come to do business there. His approach is so genuinely friendly that everyone that comes in contact with him or spends any time in his Chabad House is affected.

 In 2007, while on a visit to New York, he was invited to be the personal guest of honor at the Tish (public meal) of the Rebbe of Satmar in the Williamsburg district of Brooklyn. Satmer is a very large, wealthy, and influential group of Chasidim that was for a long time at odds with Chabad for various reasons. Nevertheless, because of the many Satmar Chasidim that had benefited from the Beijing Chabad House, the invitation was extended.

 Hundreds of Satmar Chasidim were present as their Rebbe whispered something to one of his assistants, whereupon the man pounded on the table and announced: "The Rebbe requests that 'the Lubavitcher' guest should speak."

 Rabbi Freundlich began by thanking the chasidim and their Rebbe for inviting him. He discussed an interesting idea from the weekly Torah portion, as is traditional and then asked permission to tell a story, something that had recently occurred in his Chabad House. The Rebbe nodded yes and he began.

 "A lot of people come to visit our Chabad House for Shabbat, as you know. Well, one Shabbat evening a few months ago, and older man, maybe about eighty years old, who didn't look very religious, appeared in the company of a younger man in his forties.

 "The old fellow found a seat and just minutes after we began the prayers he put his face in his hands and began to cry. He kept it up for almost an hour; he would calm down for a few minutes, dry his eyes and blow his nose and then begin again.

 "I quietly approached him and asked him if everything was all right. He told me not to worry. After the prayers he and his friend joined us all for the Shabbat evening meal.

 "There were over fifty people there. I sat him next to me and after he calmed down he asked if he could speak. He wanted to explain the reason for his weeping.

 I stood, and after only a few words I introduced him. He cleared his throat and began,

 "'My name is Sam Katz (pseudonym). The reason that I want to speak now is because I became very emotional this evening and I want to tell you about it. The last time I was in a Synagogue was over sixty years ago in Poland.

 “I was a young man then when the Germans came and took the entire Jewish population of my city to Buchenwald. I was there for four years and in that time I lost everyone; my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends; all killed, some of them before my eyes. But I survived and when the war ended I spent a few years searching for family or friends with no results. Finally, I moved to Australia.

 "I was totally alone and angry at G-d. I managed to succeed at business and make a lot of money, and to marry and have children. But my wounds and anger were so deep that I swore to never go into a Synagogue or have anything to do with Judaism again. Nothing!

 "But then just yesterday I came to China with my friend and he said we should visit the Chabad House. At first I didn't want to come of course, but he said that he'd been here before and the food is good and anyway there was no better alternative, so I shrugged and agreed.

 "But as soon as the prayers began everything suddenly came back to me. I remembered how good it is to be a Jew; how proud and happy my father and mother were. Suddenly it was as if a wall of ice just melted. That's why I cried. I thought I'd never forgive G-d again, but now I feel like a small child that just wants to be home. All thanks to this Chabad House and the Rabbi here.'

 The crowd clapped, wiped tears from their eyes and congratulated him for the beautiful story. A one woman stood up and asked:
"Tell me Mr. Katz. If you were in Buchenwald until the end, maybe you knew my father. His name is Naftali Kogen (pseudonym); he also was in Buchenwald."

 Mr. Katz's jaw dropped, his eyes bolted open and he held his head in wonder "Naftali Kogen!? What? Naftali is still alive?! Why we were the only two *Kohanim* in the camp and we were always together. We risked our lives for each other, and not just once. We were like brothers! *Oy*! Naftali!

 "There was such total confusion in those days; everything was upside down. We were put in different recovery camps and got separated. I searched for him for a long time after the war but finally I gave up. I thought he was dead. Now you say he is alive and you are his daughter! It's a miracle!!"

 Rabbi Freundlich finished his story by saying that after Shabbat a meeting was arranged between the two old friends, and this is only one example of the miracles that happen in Beijing thanks to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

 At that point, much to everyone's surprise, a head of a *Yeshiva* in the Satmar community by the name of Rav Yaakov Kaplan (pseudonym) who had listened intently to the story called out! He raised himself in his seat a bit and fell back, his face pale as chalk and his eyes staring wildly at the ceiling. The others were startled and those seated near him rose to help him, but he came to himself in just seconds. He stood up to his full height and yelled aloud to all those present, "Tell them that Yaakov is still alive!"

 In the midst of an emotional hurricane, he continued to call out: "There weren't just two *Kohanim* in Buchenwald, there were three! Sam Katz, Naftali Kogan and me too!"

 He was obviously experiencing some sort of emotional hurricane.
"There weren't just two *Kohanim* in Buchenwald." He continued, "There were three; Sam Katz, Naftali and …. Me!

 "We stuck together like brothers…. more than brothers. But just a few days before the end of the war I was moved to another camp. They probably thought I was dead, and I almost was, and I was sure that they were. I never considered it possible that they could still be alive even now!"

 Needless to say, soon after this story there was another joyous reunion.

 Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition on ohrtmimim.org/torah by his friend and colleague Rabbi Tuvia Bolton and from oral reports

 Connection: The Fast Day of the 10th of Tevet is the traditional date for saying Kaddish for Holocaust martyrs whose passing date is unknown.

*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*

**It Once Happened**

**Reb Leib Sarah’s Desire**

**To Settle in the Holy Land**

 Reb Leib Sarah's, one of the greatest of the Baal Shem Tov's disciples, had long desired to live in the Holy Land. After years of struggle, of wandering, of perfecting himself to the utmost of his ability, his deepest desire was to settle in the Holy Land, there to be able to attain spiritual achievements unreachable elsewhere.

 Although he was himself a person of renown, he was also a chasid, and so, he went to his rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov, to ask his permission and blessing for the trip. "Rebbe," he asked, "I request your permission to settle in the Holy Land, which is my heart's desire." But, to his surprise, the Besht's reply was negative. The next year Leib Sarah's again went to his rebbe with the same petition. But, again, the Besht denied his request, without even an explanation. This scenario repeated itself year after year for several years, and Leib Sarah's was deeply disappointed.

 One year he decided that he wouldn't go to his rebbe at all; he just wouldn't ask. The desire to travel and settle in the Holy Land had become so strong within him, that he could no longer deny it. So, Leib Sarah's sat down with his wife and then with his children and discussed the question of moving to the Holy Land, there to perfect his soul in the service of his Maker. His wife and children were all agreeable, and so it was decided to go. Wasting no time, he sold all of his worldly goods save the barest necessities, and gathering all of his money, he bought tickets for himself, his wife and children for the long journey to the Land of Israel.

 When everything was in order, Reb Leib Sarah's packed up his belongings and set off with his family through Russia toward Turkey, whence he would travel to Israel. It was a slow and arduous journey overland with many stops in the small towns and villages through which they had to travel. One day they came to a small town and noticed some sort of excitement in the town. Leib Sarah's inquired of the villagers, and was shocked when he heard their reply. For none other than the famous Baal Shem Tov was unexpectedly visiting the town, and the people were overwhelmed by the great honor of receiving such a personage.

 Leib Sarah's was even more overwhelmed by his own dilemma. He thought of the possibility of not going to greet his rebbe, thereby avoiding any embarrassment because of his disobedience, but how could he not acknowledge the presence of his great rebbe and teacher? He sat in his wagon deliberating, when suddenly he had no choice, for the Baal Shem Tov's carriage pulled up next to his own. Reb Leib Sarah's dismounted and approached the rebbe. The Besht appeared to be surprised and asked, "What are you doing here?"

 "Rebbe, please forgive me for not heeding your words, but I am now on my way to settle in the Holy Land."

 The Besht replied, "Well, if your wish to go is so strong, then go. But now, where are you going to spend the Shabbat?"

 "I am just now searching for a place, but it's difficult since I spent all of my money on the tickets for the journey," replied Reb Leib. The Baal Shem Tov offered to host Reb Leib and his family for the whole Shabbat. When they were in their rooms preparing for the arrival of the holy day, the Besht knocked on Reb Leib's door, asking if he had immersed in the mikva yet. "No," he replied, "I have no money remaining, so I will forego the mikva this week."

 To this, the Baal Shem Tov replied that he would pay the entrance fee for him, and they should go together to the mikva. Reb Leib Sarah's joy was unbounded, for he understood the profound meaning of the immersion and was relieved not to miss his usual ritual.

 Upon arriving at the mikva the Besht said, "Reb Leib, you go first." But, he refused, saying, "Please, Rebbe, you go; you are my teacher, after all." The Besht was adamant, and Reb Leib immersed first.

After the proscribed immersions were completed, he rose from the water, turned to his rebbe and said, "I have changed my mind. I will not go to the Holy Land. I will return to Medzibozh, to you.

 “Let me tell you what I saw in the mikva during my immersions. As I entered the water I saw a continent. As I looked closely I saw Eretz Israel, and as I looked even more closely I saw Jerusalem. As I narrowed my focus still more, I could see all the parts of the Temple Mount, even the Holy Temple itself. Then I looked inside and saw the Holy of Holies, but though I strained my eyes as hard as I could, I couldn't see the Holy Ark, the Tablets of the Law, or the Divine Presence.

 “In my anguish I cried out, "Where are the Tablets? Where is the Divine Presence? But a Heavenly Voice answered me, saying, 'They are found in Medzibozh.' Therefore, I am following you back to Medzibozh to fulfill my Divine Service. I now see that during the exile, the Divine Presence dwells with the leader of the generation."

*Reprinted from Issue #194 of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization that was published 19 years ago in Parshas Vayechi 5752.*

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**The True Sword of a Jew**

**Is His Power of Prayer**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

 “As for me, I have given you one portion more than your brothers which I took from the hand of [Esav] with my sword and with my bow.” (Beresheet 48:2)

 Feeling that his death was near, Ya’akob sent for his son Yosef, the only one of his sons who held power, and asked Yosef to swear that he would bring him to Eress Yisrael for burial. Later in the perashah, having blessed Yosef’s sons, Ya’akob turned to Yosef and awarded him an additional portion of Eress Yisrael.

 Rashi brings two interpretations of this gift. One of them is the birthright of the double portion that normally goes to the first-born son. Ya’akob rewarded Yosef that his two sons would receive a tribal portion in the land, so Yosef would receive two portions of land.

 Ya’akob got this birthright by taking it from Esav. If so, the words “my sword and my bow” are figurative names for the spiritual weapons that gave him the right to gain the birthright. The Targum says these weapons are the prayers of Ya’akob. In other words, in the spiritual world the real weapons are not swords and bows.

 As a boy, Rabbi Yehudah Tsadkah, who later became the Rosh Yeshivah of Porat Yosef, fell seriously ill one night. He was rushed to the hospital where his condition stabilized, and the danger soon passed. In the morning, his family was visited by the Kabbalist Rabbi Ephraim Cohen, who came to inquire about Yehudah’s condition.

 “How did you know he had taken ill?” he was asked. Rabbi Cohen replied, “Last night, the Ben Ish Hai (who was the great-uncle of R’ Yehudah Tsadkah) appeared to me in a dream. He informed me that Yehudah had taken ill and implored me to storm the gates of Heaven with prayer.”

 Apparently there is a power to a person’s prayers in this world that the saddik in the next world does not possess. This is why the Ben Ish Hai, from his place in the World to Come, had to request that Rabbi Ephraim Cohen pray on the child’s behalf. The power of prayer is the true sword and bow of a Jew, his most potent weapon in any situation.

**Are We Living or Dead?**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

“And Ya’akob was gathered unto his people” (Beresheet 49:33)

 The Rabbis note that it never says that Ya’akob Abinu died. Rather, it says he was gathered unto his people, which means his mission in life was over, and he was no longer functioning. But death is never ascribed to Ya’akob. Although this can be understood on many levels, one lesson to be derived is that certain people live on many years after they leave this world. Indeed, righteous people are considered alive even after death, because their deeds and values continue to exist in their children and offspring.

 We should think about our departed parents and grandparents, to see if they are still living inside of us. I know of several people who, before every major decision, ask themselves, “What would my father or mother do in this case?” Their parents are still alive for them.

 However, the Talmud says that wicked people are considered dead even in their lifetime. That is, they are stagnating and are dead internally as far as their souls are concerned. We must ask ourselves, how alive are we now? Can we be doing more to be even more alive? After 120 years will our impact on our families and community be substantial enough to be called living forever, like Ya’akob?

**Our Interdependence**

**On Others**

**By Rabbi Raymond Beyda**

 While standing on the steps of the Temple Mount and viewing the crowds who came to visit, Ben Zoma remarked, “Blessed is the One Who created all these people to serve me!” This statement could be grossly misunderstood if viewed as a selfish comment by an egocentric individual. But the meaning behind Ben Zoma’s observation is quite different. Ben Zoma was humbly acknowledging the interdependence of human beings. Craftsmen, farmers, technicians, doctors, freight handlers – no one person can do everything alone.

 In order to survive, individuals need a great variety of goods and services which they cannot provide for themselves, either due to lack of talent or lack of wherewithal. Ben Zoma was acknowledging his own shortcomings and his appreciation to Hashem for creating so many different people to provide for each other.

 Life requires that you interact with your fellow man. Think, for a moment, how many different people it takes to provide the food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other goods and services you need just to get through one day. It only takes a little thought to consider that all has been provided for you and to appreciate it. “Blessed is He, Who created all these to serve you!” (Excerpted from Rabbi Beyda’s book “One Minute With Yourself”)

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

**Mark Madoff's Tragedy**

**Or How Words Can Kill**

**By Sara Esther Crispe**

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| Mark Madoff |
| Mark Madoff |

 The headlines scream, "Madoff's latest victim" and indeed it is. Just hours ago we read how Mark, the married father of two children, hanged himself in his apartment while his baby slept in another room.

 I can't imagine how desperate, despondent and hopeless this man could have felt to take his own life while his beloved two-year-old baby was there. Wasn't he concerned that his son could have woken up and found him?

 He did email his wife, who was out of town with his older child, alerting her that someone should check on the baby, but what if she hadn't seen that email for a number of hours? I simply find it incomprehensible. But then again, desperation usually leads to incomprehensible outcomes.

**Suicide is Always Tragic**

 Suicide is always tragic. It is always heart wrenching. And it is ultimately a punishment not to the one who felt he didn't deserve to live, but for all those survivors who have to suffer with the guilt, the "what-ifs" and the lack of closure from such a loss.

 But this particular suicide does not seem like it was an indirect punishment to those closest to him, but rather a very calculated one. By no means do I think it was coincidental that Madoff's son took his life two years to the day that his father was arrested for the biggest Ponzi scheme in history.

 Mark Madoff's lawyer came out with the following statement following the confirmation of suicide:

 "Mark was an innocent victim of his father's monstrous crime who succumbed to two years of unrelenting pressure from false accusations and innuendo," said Martin Flumenbaum, an attorney representing Mark and his brother Andrew.

 I don't know about you, but I don't know anything about Mark Madoff. But I do know that just because his father was a corrupt, dishonest and immoral person, does not make his son one. And I also know that the anger, bitterness and hatred that must have been directed at the eldest son of such a character could not have been easy to live with. Clearly, Mark felt it was impossible to live with it.

**Recognizing the Power of Speech**

 Judaism recognizes the power of speech, both in terms of building a person up and likewise, in its ability to completely destroy. In Proverbs it states: *Mavet v'chayim beyad halashon,* "Life and death are in the hands of one's speech," (18:21). This is why there are numerous laws dedicated to *shmirat halashon*, guarding one's speech. Even more so, the commentaries explain that to publicly humiliate a person is akin to killing that person. For when someone loses their self respect to the extent that he or she cannot face others, that is likened to taking away that person's lifeline.

 It was just a few weeks ago that we read in the Torah portion, *Vayeshev*, of the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Tamar was about to be executed for a crime she didn't even commit. She could have exonerated herself, but in doing so it would have caused grave humiliation to Yehuda. So instead she gave him the opportunity to speak up for himself. From this the Talmud explains that one should go to great extents to avoid embarrassing another.

**The Lesson Taught by Our Matriarch Rachel**

 Another case in which a woman taught us this lesson was with Rachel who was to be married to Jacob. Her corrupt father tried to switch her older sister, Leah, for the bride. Knowing this could happen, Rachel and her groom came up with special signs so that he would know if he was marrying the right woman. But Rachel couldn't go through with it. She couldn't put her sister through the utter humiliation of being detected under the major canopy. It wasn't Leah's plan to marry Jacob, it was her father's, so why should she have to suffer being found out? Rachel knew that embarrassing her sister like that that was tantamount to killing her. And so she had the self- sacrifice to preserve her self-respect, her life.

 Mark Madoff turned his father in. He was never accused of any crime, nor has there been any proof that he was complicit or aware of his father's actions. And yet, time and time again he was brutally accused and blamed in the media. He was an easy target. His father clearly didn't care who he hurt or the pain he caused. His father is sitting in prison and doesn't need to face all those whose lives he destroyed. But Mark had to live out his father's true punishment; the day to day anger and rage that his father caused so many.

 Bernie Madoff was certainly punished today. He lost his eldest son and regardless of how cold and callous he has been, there is no question that the deep pain and void will be overwhelming. But did anyone win? Is anyone satisfied? Did anyone want two little children to grow up without a father and for the youngest to one day realize he was in the next room when his father took his life? That this boy will always wonder how he was not enough to keep his father alive?

**Was Mark Madoof Really the Target?**

 There is no question that every person, reporter, source or writer that lashed out against Mark Madoff was furious. But was Mark Madoff really the target? Was he the one deserving of those comments? We have a judicial system for a reason. And it is predicated on the concept that one is innocent until proven guilty. Not guilty until he can prove his innocence. And even when guilty, it is the court that decides the punishment, not the public.

 Yet in today's day and age we don't need to wait for the courtroom to decide one's verdict. Through the blogsphere, social networking, email and web news we can pass judgment and give a life sentence in seconds. It doesn't take long for a rumor to spread. And yet, it can take a lifetime for the truth to come out and give someone back the dignity deserved.

**The Difference Between Man and Animals**

 According to the Torah commentaries, the distinguishing difference between us and animals is that we have the ability to speak. Human beings are called a "*medaber*" a speaker, for our speech allows us to share our innermost thoughts and feelings with another. Only through speech are we able to connect. Yet we must never forget how powerful our words are and the impact they can have.

 Unfortunately, it seems that it was the misuse of speech that caused unending and unyielding pressure on Mark Madoff. Our words became the judge, jury and verdict. And today unfortunately, we unknowingly and unwillingly gave him a death sentence.

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

**The Secret Brit Milah**

**In Turkey**

By Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu

 (Israelnationalnews.com) Antakya, Turkey was home to about 50 Jews – until last week when a father overcame his fears of anti-Semitism and allowed a secret circumcision on Chanukah of his 30-day-old baby boy, the city's newest Jew.

 Antakya is a Mediterranean coastal city located near Syria. The father, whose identity cannot be revealed, is a “secret” Jew but was afraid his neighbors would discover his religion if he allowed his new-born baby boy to be circumcised, in one of the most ancient and sacred Jewish commandments that is a symbol of the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people.

**A Mitzvah for the Eighth Day**

 Jewish law states that the circumcision – “brit mila” in Hebrew – should take place on the eighth day of a boy's life unless there are medical reasons for delaying the procedure. Circumcisions are performed on older males who convert and on those whose Jewish parents did not observe the Jewish law. The baby in Antalya was 30-days old when he was circumcised.

 The story of the secret Turkish Jew and his newborn son was not even known to the local Chabad rabbi but was related to Rabbi Aharon Kramer, head of the “Covenant of the Fathers’ group that works to make sure Jewish males are circumcised, even if they are adults.

**The Fear of the Father to Light a Chanukah Menorah**

 One of the father’s relatives is Rabbi Shmuel Siman Tov, who turned to Rabbi Kramer. He told Arutz 7 that the father did not want him to fly to Turkey and perform the circumcision before the end of Chanukah, apparently afraid that the rabbi would light the Chanukah menorah, a sign that Jews live in the house.

 Rabbi Kramer said he explained to the family that the circumcision must be done during the daytime, despite the father’s fears that neighbors might peek through the windows and discover he is Jewish.

 The father agreed to Rabbi Kramer's flying to Antalya, where he also met the local Chabad rabbi, who now was privy to the secret. The father took us to his house, Rabbi Kramer related. “I asked him if there were any other Jews in the area, and he used the Internet to find one more Jew, who arrived at the house."

 The father closed the curtains, and Rabbi Kramer performed the circumcision at his house, without a "minyan," the necessary quorum of 10 Jews over the age of Bar Mitzvah. The name of the new Jew was not revealed for publication.

**A Rare Feeling of Sanctifying the Creator**

 “There was a rare feeling of sanctifying the Creator,” Rabbi Kramer said. “In the middle of the circumcision, a neighbor knocked on the door. The father took off his kippa and went to the door, went outside to talk to him and them came back and put his kippa back on his head.”

 The father not only arranged for the circumcision of his son but also lit the candles for the seventh night of Chanukah for the first time in his life. The occasion was so special that he recited a special blessing that is recited only on the first night.

 Despite the father’s fears, apparently an outgrowth of his resistance to letting anyone know he is Jewish, Rabbi Kramer said that he himself freely strolled the streets of Antalya with his long beard and forelocks without detecting any anti-Semitism.

*Reprinted from the December 15th email of Arutz Sheva’s News Report on Events in Eretz Yisroel.*

**The Golden Column**

**Don Hisdai Ibn Shaprut zs"l**

 In our parashah, in the blessings of the tribes, Zevulun, the supporter of Torah, is blessed before the tribe of Yisachar, who sat and learned while being supported at his father's table. For if there is no flour, there is no Torah, and the blessing of Zevulun is a condition and a basis for the blessing of Yisachar.

 Don Hisdai Ibn Shaprut zs"l was one of the great supporters of Torah

of his generation, nine hundred years ago. He lived in Cordoba, the capital of Spain in those days, and he was known for his wisdom and his broad education.

 He was fluent in Greek and he translated many important medical works into Arabic, for the benefit of many. The king of Spain, Abed El Rahaman the Third, valued his wisdom and appointed him the Finance Minister in his kingdom. Therefore, he was granted the title of "Don," which means minister.

**Loving Torah and Valuing Its Sages**

 He loved Torah and valued its sages, and he supported them on his account so that they could learn Torah. In his court dwelled the first grammarians, our Rabbis Menahem ben Saruk and Donash ben Labrat and their students: Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Hiyug, Rabbeinu Yisshak ben Giktiliyah, Rabbeinu Yisshak ben Kafron, Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Sheshet

and others.

 Rabbeinu Yehudah Alharizi wrote about him: "When the sun of praise shines in Spain, the prince Rabbi Hisdai ben Yisshak the Sefardi, will rest in the shade of G-d, for he has given over to those who need him a blessing with no end, for he has drawn, through his generosity, the people of the exile and has called out: Whoever is for G-d, to me! May all genius and all greatness be gathered unto him.

**Using His Many Connections to Aid Jews Everywhere**

 And in his days wisdom spread out in Israel, for he was a friend and

an acquaintance of wisdom." He took advantage of his many connections to aid the Jews, not only in his country, but even abroad. He sent messengers to the Byzantine Emperor to request that he should be good to the Jews in his kingdom, and he sent his agent to Italy to see how he could assist the

community there.

 When he heard that the King of the Khazars had converted to Judaism, along with his whole nation, he sent him letters to encourage and strengthen him in his new path, and he instructed him on the ways of Judaism. He even reached the great sages of the generation in Syria and Babylon, and he invited them to his country, willing to provide for all of their needs. He was a shining example for all, with his care for others and his support of Torah!

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Aram Sobah Newsletter.*

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

**Developing the Proper Attitude Towards Child Rearing**

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| **QUESTION:** |

 What is the best way for a woman to feel good while dealing with the pressures of child rearing and house work?

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| **ANSWER:** |

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Now that's an important question because a great deal of time and effort are invested in that, and it pays to utilize it. First and foremost, to do whatever you do and say, "I am doing it for the service of *Hashem*".

 That sounds queer, people never thought of that. As you pick up a squalling baby, say I am doing it because *Hashem* says *V'ohavtah L'raiacho Kamocha*. I love my fellow man, it's my fellow man, the baby. It's a *Mitzvas Asai*; your fellow man is sad, he's distressed, he's shrieking, and you try to calm him, *V'ohavtah L'raiacho Kamocha*, think about that.

 When you're handing food to the table, your family is sitting at the table, they say, Ma, give us some bread, and you think *Nosain Lechem L'chol Bosor Ki L'olam Chasdo*, I am a *Shaliach* of *Hashem*, they want bread: Here's bread. When you're baking: *Nosain Lechem L'chol Bosor*. When you're doing anything in the kitchen preparing food, you're doing the *Midah* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

 And what's His *Midah*, what's *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* doing? *Yoshaiv V'zun*, He's sitting and feeding the world, *Meikarnai R'eimim V'aad Beitzei Kinim*, from the biggest animal to the smallest insects, *Hashem* is feeding the world. And it's a model for mothers who stand and labor in the kitchen; they're feeding their little world. That's how a person can think.



 Whatever you do in the house, you're washing diapers, it's *L'shem Shamayim*, you’re serving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And therefore, a women if she has the right preparation, with a little thought, she can transform all these menial tasks that a servant girl can also do, and she transforms into *Avodas Hashem*, and let me tell you, it's not less then the *Kohain* in the *Bais Hamikdash*.

 Anybody who serves *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* with a *Laiv Shaleim*, *La'asos Retzono Ulovdo B'laivov Shaleim*, you serve him with a whole heart, *L'maan Lo Niga Larik*, the labor shouldn't be in vain, *Lo Nailaid Labeholo*, it's a pity to waste our lives in taking care of children, in cleaning the house, when we could have done it as people who are working in the *Bais Hamikdash*, and you’re *Meshamesh* like *Leviem* who are sweeping up in the *Azoro* and you're serving *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and everything is transformed into gold, whereas otherwise it remains nothing but tin and waste and a lost life.

*Good Shabbos To All*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller,” based on a transcription of a question to Rabbi Miller and his answer from one the classic Thursday night hashkafa lectures delivered by Rabbi Miller at his Flatbush shul from the 1970’s until his petirah in 2001.*

**The Second Suit**

**By Rabbi S.Y. Zevin**

 A man once came to the Chassidic master Rabbi Yerachmiel of Pshischa with his tale of woe:

"Rebbe, I am a tailor. Over the years, I have earned quite a reputation for my expertise and the high quality of my work. All the nobles in the area order their livery and their ladies' dresses from me.

 "Several months ago, I received the most important commission of my life. The prince himself heard of me and asked that I sew him a suit of clothes from the finest silk to be gotten in the land. But when I brought him the finished product, he began yelling and cursing: 'This is the best you can do? Why, it's atrocious! Who taught you to sew?' He ordered me out of his house and threw the garment out after me.

 "Rebbe, I am ruined. All my capital is invested in the cloth. Worse still, my reputation has been totally destroyed. No one will dare order anything from me after this. I don't understand what happened! This is the best work I've ever done!"

**Remove the Stiches and Sew**

**Them Anew in the Same Manner**

 "Go back to your shop," advised Rabbi Yerachmiel. "Remove all the stitches in this garment, sew them anew exactly how you sewed them before, and bring it to the prince."

 "But then I'll have the same garment I have now!" protested the tailor.

"Do as I say, and G-d will help."

 Two weeks later, the tailor was back. "Rebbe, You saved my life! To be honest, I had little faith in your strange idea. But having nothing to lose, I did as you said. When I presented the result to the prince, his eyes lit up. 'Beautiful!' he cried. 'You have more than lived up to your reputation. This is the finest suit of clothes I have ever seen.' He rewarded me handsomely, and promised to send more work my way.

**What Was the Difference Between The First and Second Suits?**

 "But I don't understand -- what was the difference between the first suit and the second if the cloth was cut and sewn in exactly the same way?"

 "The first suit," explained Rabbi Yerachmiel, "was sewn with arrogance and pride. The result was a spiritually repulsive garment, which, though technically perfect, was devoid of all grace and beauty. The second suit was sewn with a humble spirit and a broken heart, investing in the garment an inner beauty that evokes awe and admiration in everyone who beholds it."

Reprinted from this week’s website of Chabad.Org

**The True Strength and**

**Support Behind Klal Yisroel**

![ATT00020[1]]()

The above “political cartoon” has been emailed to many and one of our readers forwarded the above with its most insightful and powerful message.

**Good Shabbos Everyone .**

**Bag It Again!**

 In this week's parsha Yakov Avinu blesses his sons, the 12 tribes. There are many deeper meanings which are hinted to in the blessings. Regarding the blessing for Yehuda, his father Yakov says, "Red eyed from wine, and white toothed from milk." (Bereishis 49,12)

 The Sages say that in this blessing is hinted to the idea that it is better to smile at someone than to give him milk; meaning that it is even better to be nice to someone than to give them something. The following story illustrates the importance of being kind to others.

 One Friday morning in December 1996, Sheppy Borgen was driving from Williamsburg to Boro Park. The corner of Bedford Avenue and Keap Street is an unofficial meeting place for religious Jews seeking rides to Boro Park. Dozens of people get their rides there every day.

**“Do You Need a Ride?”**

 As Sheppy came to the light at Bedford and Keap, just two blocks before entering the Brooklyn Queens Expressway, he noticed a chassidishe fellow waiting on the corner, peering into each passing car hoping for a ride. Sheppy slowed to a halt, opened the passenger-side window, and called out in Yiddish, "Do you need a ride?" The chassid said “yes,” and Sheppy motioned for him to get into the back seat of his Town Car and told him to make himself comfortable.

 Sheppy, who lives in Forest Hills, Queens, is a tall and imposing fellow with a heart to match. He is admired and liked by everyone. He was president of his shul for many years, has been honored by numerous organizations, and is an easy conversationalist. He and the chassid made small talk as traffic, in a rare departure from the usual, moved swiftly through downtown Brooklyn under the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges past Atlantic Avenue onto the Prospect Expressway. Since it was Friday, the chassid spoke of the upcoming parshah. Sheppy countered with a relevant story from his repertoire of favorite stories.

**Spoke of the Upcoming**

**Wedding of His Daughter**

 The chassid spoke of his children and grandchildren and Sheppy spoke of the upcoming wedding of his daughter in three days. When they arrived in Boro Park the two wished each other "Gut Shabbos" and "mazel and simchas" in each other's families.

 Within minutes of leaving the car, the chassid realized that he had left a bag with very valuable contents in Sheppy's car. He became frantic because he didn't know the driver's name, only that he lived in Queens and was about to marry off his daughter.

 Later that morning when Sheppy came to his office in Long Island City, he emptied the contents of his car and he, too, realized that the chassid had left a bag in the back seat. He looked into the bag and saw that there were numerous brass pipes and tubes that seemed to be of little value. He put the bag in his office and figured he would deal with it when he got back on Monday. He, too, had no idea of the identity of the chassid except that he lived in Boro Park and had nice things to say about the parshah.

 That afternoon, the chassid went to the Skulener Rebbe, Rabbi Yisrael Portugal, and worriedly told his Rebbe of his loss. "Much of my parnassah (livelihood) for the next year is in that bag," he cried. "How can I get it back?" The Rebbe thought for a moment and then called in his gabbai (attendant) and gave him instructions.

**Missing Bag Worth Close to $40,000**

 Rabbi Peretz Steinberg, Rav of the Young Israel of Queens Valley and former president of the Vaad Harabbonim of Queens, was surprised to get a call from the Skulener gabbai that erev Shabbos. "The Skulener Rebbe wants to know if you know anyone in Queens that is making a chasuna for a daughter in the next few days." The gabbai explained that the contents in the missing bag were valued at close to $40,000. It was actually unprocessed gold that would be used for bracelets, earrings, and necklaces.

 "Queens is a big place," chuckled Rabbi Steinberg, "there is Kew Garden Hills, Kew Gardens, Rego Park, Forest Hills, Hillcrest, Jamaica Estates — a Yid from any of those places could have given the chassid a ride."

**A Promise to Try and Find the Driver**

 "The owner thinks that the driver said he was in the chemical soap business. Does that help?" "That helps," said Rabbi Steinberg. "I'll see what I can find out."

 "Please," the gabbai pleaded, "the man is desperate and he stands to lose a fortune."

 Friday night as Rabbi Steinberg peered at the balabatim (business people) in his shul, he noticed Mr. Jerry Meyer.

**Asking Jerry the Photographer**

 "Jerry is a photographer," thought Rabbi Steinberg. "He might know." After davening, Rabbi Steinberg approached Mr. Meyer and said, "Jerry, I'm trying to help a Yid in Boro Park. Are you by any chance doing a wedding for a Queens family next week?" Jerry thought for a moment and said, "Yes, I'm doing a wedding for Sheppy Borgen, Tuesday night in Westchester."

 "Do you know what he does for a living?" Rabbi Steinberg asked anxiously. "Isn't he in the industrial cleaning business or something like that?" asked Jerry. Rabbi Steinberg was elated at the possibility of having solved the mystery so quickly. He couldn't wait to call Sheppy Borgen, who lives a few miles away in Forest Hills.

 After Shabbos, Rabbi Steinberg called Sheppy and, in his usual upbeat cheery voice, wished him mazel tov on the upcoming wedding. Then, laughing, he asked, "Did you by any chance pick up a chassid yesterday in Williamsburgh?" Sheppy laughed, "Rabbi Steinberg, are you a navi - prophet? How do you know? I actually did and he left a bag in my car."

 "That's exactly why I'm calling. It's not some bag. It's got close to $40,000 dollars worth of unprocessed gold in it!"

**Looked Like Cheap Pieces of Piping**

 "What?" exclaimed Sheppy. "It looked like cheap pieces of piping. But okay, if you say it's expensive, I'll bring it back on Monday when I go into the office."

 "No," said Rabbi Steinberg. "I'm sorry to bother you, but it's too valuable to leave unattended for that long. Could I trouble you to get it to me soon as you can, tonight?" When Sheppy readily agreed, Rabbi Steinberg called the Skulener gabbai and told him the good news.

 By Sunday morning the material was in the hand of its rightful owner!  "Mi K'Amcha Yisroel!"  - who is like you Israel among the nations!

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**In the Nick of Time**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 When the Sabbath-observant passengers on El Al’s Flight #02 from New York were informed that they would be arriving in Israel at 3:30 on a Friday afternoon rather than 1:00 as scheduled, they began worrying about where they would spend the holy Day of Rest. This delay, resulting from inclement weather on the East Coast, meant that they had only one hour and ten minutes until the beginning of the Sabbath.

 Their problem was solved thanks to two airline rabbis and scores of generous hosts. Rabbi Yochanan Chayot, El Al’s Director of Religious Passengers Services, and El Al Rabbi Avshalom Katzir set up an emergency service for the 50 passengers who requested it. They were rushed off the plane on a special staircase and hurried through two special border-control lines. In the meantime an appeal was made on a religious radio station for families to host passengers for the Sabbath. Some 80 calls came in response, many more than were needed.

 In a matter of minutes those who lived nearby were on their way home while the others enjoyed the hospitality of families in Bnei Brak, Elad, Kfar Chabad and Shoham. Two other passengers who arrived on another flight only 20 minutes before the holy day began spent the Sabbath at the airport, courtesy of El Al.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Ohr Somayach International in Yerushalayim – Ohr.edu*

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Veyechi 5770**

**Story #631**

**With a Few Drops of Vodka**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 On their way through Ruzhin, a group of Jews from Sanik who were opposed to the ways of the chasidim decided to call on Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin in order to enjoy a little argument with him about what they perceived were the deviant innovations of the chasidic movement.

 “We, at least, walk in the path of G-d,” they began.  “We set aside times for the study of Torah; we pray the *Shacharit* morning prayer with a *minyan* at first opportunity, daybreak; and when prayers are over, while we are still wearing our *talit* and *tefilin*, we settle down to study *Mishnayot*.  But the chasidim – not only do they pray after the statutory time, but when they have done their prayers they sit down to drink vodka together.  And then they call themselves Chassidim, which means ‘pious ones,’ and us they call *misnagdim*, their antagonists.  Why, it should be the other way round!” \*\*

**The Rebbe’s Attendant Responds**

 The rebbe’s attendant, who was standing nearby, could not contain himself and came out with his own jocular yet passionate reply:  “You misnagdim serve the Creator frigidly – you are as lacking in warmth as a corpse, G-d forbid.  And everyone knows that after a death the traditional custom is to study Mishnayotfor the elevation of the departed soul.  But when chasidim serve their Maker, be it ever so little, at least they do it with enthusiasm, and their heart is on fire, just as a living man is full of warmth – and doesn’t a living man need a drop of vodka now and again?”

 The tzadik of Ruzhin quickly interjected:  “This answer, of course, is not to be taken seriously.  Allow me to explain.

**Prayers Substitutes for Sacrifices**

 “The fact is that from the day on which the Temple was destroyed, it is prayer that substitutes for the sacrifices which can no longer be offered, as it is written: ‘And our lips will compensate for oxen.’  Moreover, the Sages teach us that the daily prayer services were timed so as to correspond to the daily sacrifices.  Just as a sacrifice is rendered invalid by an improper thought, and becomes an abomination which is not acceptable On High, so too is a man’s prayer invalidated by the admixture of an alien thought.

 “The Evil Inclination therefore devises various stratagems by which to introduce all manner of alien thoughts into the mind of the worshiper in order to distract him.  And that is why the chasidim invented a counter-strategy of their own.  After their prayers they sit down to drink vodka together, and wish each other *LeChaim*; and as each man gives expression to what he most needs, his friends says: ‘May G-d grant your request!’  Now according to the law of the Torah, prayer may be uttered in any language. So the chasid thinks that this toasting is a mere bodily activity and does not even realize that this is prayer!”

*[Freely adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition in* A Treasury of Chassidic Tales *(Artscroll), as translated by our esteemed colleague Uri Kaploun from* Sipurei Chasidim *by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin.]*

\*\* *Editor’s note*:The traditional understanding is the that it is the opponents of Chasidim who first referred to themselves as *Misnagdim* at the same time that they derisively came up with the label of *Chasidim* for the fledging movement.

*Biographical note:* Rabbi Yisrael Friedmann of Ruzhin [1797 - 3 Cheshvan 1850] was a great-grandson of the *Maggid of Mezritch*. At a young age was already a charismatic leader with a large following of chassidim. Greatly respected by the other rebbes and Jewish leaders of his generation, he was –and still is—referred to as "The Holy Ruzhiner." Six of his sons established Chassidic dynasties, several of which —*Sadigora, Chortkov*, etc— are still thriving today.

*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##)

**The Miraculous Story of**

**The Jews of Zakynthos**

**By Leora Goldberg**

 I needed a break at the end of a long and exhausting semester. My family was off to the southern end of the Balkan Peninsula, to an unknown island in Greece. I decided to join them.

 We flew from Tel Aviv to Athens. From Athens, towards the famous sunrise of the eastern isles, we landed on the island of Zakynthos - “Fiore di Levante” (Flower of the East) - which is also known by its Italian name - Zante.

 During the ride, I read the travel guide, and learned a little about the history, the agriculture, the weather and finally about the poetic origins of the national anthem. I did not read one word about what I was really about to discover on the island. The drive from the airport to our villa lasted a few minutes. From the coastal plateau, we drove up through twisted village bends to our destination.

 An old lady, a typical Greek villager dressed all in black, welcomed us with a warm smile into her home. She asked to show us around her beloved mansion. It was obvious that this place was the source of her pride.

 The landlady gave us a short tour of the old-style bedrooms, bathrooms and salon. In the kitchen, we noticed the beautiful authentic Greek dishes that were hanging over her antique-looking stove. All these were for our use.

**Unable to Use Kitchen for Religious Reasons**

 We explained to her that for religious reasons, unfortunately, we would not be able to enjoy using her kitchenware and that we had brought our own.

 This is when it all began.

 She seemed confused. She looked at my dad and suddenly her eyes lit up. She noticed his kippa (yarmulke). We were asked to follow her out to the garden.

 From the high point where we were standing, we saw a fantastic view of the ocean and the ships. But she pointed the other way completely.

 “Look over there!” she said.

 She wanted to know what we saw.

 “Trees, vegetation,” we said.

 “Look again and focus!” she demanded.

 “Something unidentified that looks like teeth, white dots,” my dad said.

 She stared at us for a long moment and said: “That is the Jewish cemetery.”

 I was shocked. We were all astounded. Here were were on an isolated island in Greece. Who ever heard of Jews here?

 I tried reminiscing about stories and experiences I had heard from friends who had visited here. Nothing came to mind.

**Uncovering an Unforgettable Story**

 From this moment on until I left Greece, the relaxing summer holiday drinking ouzo on the beach became a fascinating journey. By the end of it, I uncovered an unforgettable story.

 The next morning, I got on my rented moped and drove to the cemetery. The shudder that went through me started when I first saw the Magen Dovid on the little black gate. The trembling grew as I walked in. It was a huge cemetery containing hundreds of graves from the 16th century up until 1955. The grounds were well-kept and little stones were set on many graves, as if they had had visitors recently.

 1955. I thought for a moment. Whoever knows the history of Greece and its islands even faintly knows that there was no place struck harder by the Nazis.

 Rhodes, Corfu, Salonika, Athens. The loss of Jewish life in Greece was devastating.

 From 1944, there were almost no Jews left even in the bigger communities.

 I did not, however, understand the meaning of the “1955″ grave, and decided to investigate.

 In a small house that stood in the heart of the property, I found the cemetery keeper, a third generation of custodians of the Jewish graveyard in Zakynthos. My inability to speak the language prevented me from having a deep conversation with him.

**Searching for the Town’s Jewish History**

 I sought to continue my search for the Jewish history of this town, and within five minutes I was at City Hall.

 When I told the clerk at the front desk what I was after, he asked if I had already been to the synagogue. The question was posed casually, as though it’s asked on a daily basis.

 “Excuse me?” I thought I hadn’t heard right. “A synagogue on this island?”

 He gave me directions..

 The synagogue was located on a busy road in the center of the island. Off the main street, in a space between two buildings, was a black iron gate, just like the one I had seen not long ago at the cemetery. Above it was a stone arc with an open book.

 It read, in a loose translation from the original Hebrew, “At this holy place stood the Shalom Synagogue. Here, at the time of the earthquake in 1953, old Torah scrolls, bought before the community was established, were burned.”

**Appreciation to a Mayor and Bishop**

 Through the locked gate I saw two statues. Judging by their long beards, they looked to me like rabbis. The writing on the wall proved me wrong: “This plaque commemorates the gratitude of the Jews of Zakynthos to Mayor Karrer and Bishop Chrysostomos.”



Mayor Karrer and Bishop Chrysostomos

 What was the acknowledgment about? Who were these people? Why the statues? What happened here? I had lots of questions. I had to find a lead, if not an answer. I returned to City Hall, excited and trembling.

 I approached the clerk, who already recognized me, and started questioning him about what had happened here. He referred me to the mayor’s deputy on the third floor. I found his room, knocked at his door and asked him if he would spare me a few minutes. He willingly accepted.

**The German Occupation During World War II**

 Half an hour later I came out with this:

 On September 9 1943, the governor of the German occupation named Berenz had asked the mayor, Loukas Karrer, for a list of all Jews on the island.

 Rejecting the demand after consulting with Bishop Chrysostomos, they decided to go together to the governor’s office the next day. When Berenz insisted once again for the list, the bishop explained that these Jews weren’t Christians but had lived here in peace and quiet for hundreds of years.

 They had never bothered anyone, he said. They were Greeks just like all other Greeks, and it would offend all the residents of Zakynthos if they were to leave.

 But the governor persisted that they give him the names.

 The bishop then handed him a piece of paper containing only two names: Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Karrer.

**The Bishop Writes a Letter to Hitler Himself**

 In addition, the bishop wrote a letter to Hitler himself, declaring that the Jews in Zakynthos were under his authority.

 The speechless governor took both documents and sent them to the Nazi military commander in Berlin. In the meantime, not knowing what would happen, the local Jews were sent by the leaders of the island to hide inside Christian homes in the hills. However, a Nazi order to round up the Jews was soon revoked - thanks to the devoted leaders who risked their lives to save them.

 In October 1944, the Germans withdrew from the island, leaving behind 275 Jews. The entire Jewish population had survived, while in many other regions Jewish communities were eliminated.

 This unique history is described in the book of Dionyssios Stravolemos, An Act of Heroism - A Justification, and also in the short film of Tony Lykouressis, The Song of Life.

**Most Jews Left Zakynothos After the War**

 According to tour guide ChaimIschakis, in 1947, a large number of Zakynthinote Jews made aliya while others moved to Athens.

 In 1948, in recognition of the heroism of the Zakynthians during the Holocaust, the Jewish community donated stained glass for the windows of the Church of Saint Dionyssios.

 In August 1953, the island was struck by a severe earthquake and the entire Jewish quarter, including its two synagogues, was destroyed. Not long afterwards, the remaining 38 Jews moved to Athens.

 In 1978, Yad Vashem honored Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Loukas Karrer with the title of “Righteous among the Nations.”

 In March 1982, the last remaining Jew in Zakynthos, Ermandos Mordos, died on the island and was buried in Athens. Thus the circle of Jewish presence came to its close after five centuries.

 In 1992, on the site where the Sephardic synagogue stood before the earthquake, the Board of Jewish Communities in Greece erected two marble memorial monuments as a tribute to the bishop and mayor.

 A few days before I had planned to leave the island and return home, I went into a bank to convert some dollars into euros. But even in a simple place like a bank, I managed to add another piece to this Jewish puzzle.

**Bank Clerk Gives Too Much Money**

 A clerk who had been on the phone and eating a sandwich, called on me when my turn came. When I gave her my dollars to be changed, she handed me the converted money in an envelope without asking for any identification. Later on, when I opened it, I was surprised to see so much money.

 The money that had been put into the envelope had not been counted properly, and instead of changing $1,000, she had given me the equivalent of $10,000!

 This was really no surprise to me, because the clerk hadn’t paid me any attention. Ultimately, however, once the bank realized that the money was missing, it would have no way of reaching me since no contact information was requested.

 The following morning, I called the bank and asked to speak to the manager. I inquired to know if there was a problem with the previous night’s accounts.

 “You must be the woman with the dollars,” he said, immediately inviting me to his office.

**Bank Manager Offers Invitation to Exclusive Restaurant**

 An hour later, I was at the bank. When I walked into the office, the man sitting across from the manager moved to another chair and gave me his seat.

 I shared my bank experience with him, saying how easy it would have been for me to disappear with the money. The manager himself was profusely apologetic about the unprofessional way I was treated and thanked me repeatedly for returning the money.
 To express his gratitude, he invited me and my family to dinner at an exclusive restaurant. I explained that eating out was too complicated for us due to the fact that we were observant Jews.

**Also Rejects an Offer of a Crate of Wine**

 He asked for my address so he could send us a crate of wine.

 “That is a problem too,” I said.

 I told him I had come from Israel a week ago for a holiday, but had gotten sidetracked..

 “A few days after I landed, I was surprised to discover the Jewish community that was here up to 25 years ago,” I said. “You don’t owe me anything. Indeed, you have given me and my people a lot. The least I can do as a Jew to show my appreciation for what you have done for the Jews of Zakynthos is to return this money that doesn’t belong to me and say, ‘Thank you!’”

 There was silence for what appeared to be a long minute.

 The man who had given me his seat when I walked in and hadn’t said a word during the conversation, stood up with tears in his eyes, turned to me and said:

 “As the grandson of Mayor Karrer, I am extremely overwhelmed and want to thank you!”

*Reprinted from The Jerusalem Post*

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**Controlling the Attribute**

**Of Truth and Justice**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Dan shall pronounce judgment on his people as one of the tribes of Israel*.” (Beresheet 49:16)

 Ya’akob Abinu blessed the tribe of Dan with the midah – attribute – of truth and justice. The Gemara (Pesahim 4a) tells of a man who insisted on going to court to settle all his business dealings. He could never negotiate or compromise. The Gemara says he was from the tribe of Dan. He had in his genes this midah of justice and truth. However, we have a question. Ya’akob gave his blessings as a positive and good thing; how did it result in this man having this trait as a source of trouble for him?

**A Priceless Gift**

 Rabbi A. Henoch Leibowitz explains that the tribe of Dan was blessed with a priceless gift. However, this special attribute for justice, like any good thing, is subject to distortion. A person must always be careful to fully understand the good attributes he has, and should not use them for harm. Since this man didn’t make the effort to understand when to apply this good trait, he used it in a way that he could never forgive or compromise when he should have.

**Knowing When to Give In**

 For instance, a shy and reserved person may be fortunate in being able to easily avoid argument, but he must know when it is mandatory that he speak up and fight for Torah causes. The outgoing and friendly person may benefit emotionally from bringing others happiness and reaching out to his less Torah-educated brethren, but he must know when it is best to keep quiet and leave things unsaid. One who is steeped in the ideas of justice and truth must know when to give in, even though he is right.

 Our good traits are like diamonds in the rough that need to be correctly cut and polished. Shabbat Shalom.

**“May Hashem Make You**

**Like Efraim and Menasheh”**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

 Ya’akob told Yosef that all the Jewish people will bless their children with these words, “*May you be like Efraim and Menasheh*. (Beresheet 48:20)” Among the many reasons given as to why Jews should always bless their children to be like these two sons of Yosef and not other great personalities, is that Menasheh, the older brother, did not show any jealousy when he saw his younger brother being blessed with the right hand.

 Usually the concept of sibling rivalry would have caused the older to resent the younger one, but when Ya’akob saw that there was no ill feeling between the two brothers, he told Yosef, this is the example we should have when blessing our own children. It may be suggested that this came about not only because of Menasheh’s superb character, but also because Yosef put so much love into them that each one felt special in their father’s eyes. Hence, there was no room for jealousy.

 We, as parents, must try our best to show as much love and affection as possible to each child so that their self-esteem and self-confidence will be as strong as it can be. This will bring out the best character traits in them and leave no room for jealousy or resentment.

 A tall order? No! This is included in the blessing of Ya’akob that we will be able to bless our children and raise them in such a way to be like Efraim and Menasheh. It’s up to us to try our best; the rest we pray to Hashem for success. Shabbat Shalom.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**The Inside Story**

 It is said that the greatest Tzadikkim (righteous Torah leaders) in each generation possess ruach hakodesh, a divine inspiration, that enlightens them with an uncanny understanding of the past and makes them privy to many of mankind's secrets of the future. Using this power, the righteous can give blessings to those who come to them.

 We see this concept in this week’s parsha Vayechi, in which we read about how Yakov blesses his children. Although the blessings seem somewhat cryptic on the surface, the blessings with which Yakov blesses his children contain some of the deepest mystical secrets of the Torah. We will focus our discussion this week more in general, on the power of the Righteous to give brochos - blessings to people who come to them for such.

 There are those who say that the Chofetz Chaim, R' Yisrael Meir Kagan, of Radin, Poland, possessed the noble attribute of ruach hakodesh – a low level of prophecy. The story begins around the time after the First World War in Zhetel, Poland, the birthplace of the Chofetz Chaim.

**Teaching His Son How to Be a Chauffeur**

 In that town lived a certain R' Zalman who held a rabbinical position in the early part of his career. A citizen of the town, R' Asher, had a nineteen-year-old son who wished to settle in Eretz Yisroel. Aware of the economic difficulties there, R' Asher decided to teach his son a trade so that he could find work in Eretz Yisroel. He bought his son a car and taught him to drive so that he could be a chauffeur. He would pick up passengers from the railroad station in Zhetel, and take them to their destinations.

 Soon enough, he became familiar with the various routes and back roads throughout the major cities of the region. One Friday afternoon, as people were going to shul, they noticed that R' Asher's son was still driving people from the station. It was just moments before Shabbos, and it was quite obvious that the boy, who came from a religious family, would not be home in time for Shabbos.

**Reports of Shabbos Desecration Told to Town Rabbi**

 Although no one actually saw him driving after nightfall, it would have been almost impossible for him to get home before then. In shul, people told R' Zalman what they had seen. After davening, the rav had the young man summoned to his home and reprimanded him. The young man claimed that it was an accident, that he thought he could make it home before Shabbos, but there was traffic, he got lost, and so on. He assured the rav that it would not happen again.

 A few weeks later, he was seen driving on Friday night. This time he was caught red-handed, and the witnesses were infuriated. They hurried to R' Zalman's home to tell him the news. Once again the young man was called in, harshly reprimanded and warned that the community would not tolerate his actions much longer.

**Father Unable to Control His Son**

 The father had no control over his now independent son and soon it became common for the boy to be seen driving on Shabbos. The religious people in Zhetel felt outraged and affronted. They had seen this boy grow up and his open defiance was deeply felt by everyone. Additionally, they felt that such flagrant violations of the Sabbath by one of their own could have a harmful influence on the other young people in the community. They pleaded with R' Zalman to convince the father to send his son away from Zhetel at once. R' Zalman agreed to do so.

 However, before R' Zalman had an opportunity to speak with him, R' Asher had a stroke and was rushed to the hospital. He lay there for some weeks, and although R' Zalman came to visit him a number of times, he felt that it was an inopportune time to discuss the doings of his wayward son. R’ Asher wanted to leave the hospital.

 The doctors, however, insisted that he remain. One night, R' Asher's deceased grandmother came to him in a dream. She told him that he was foolish for staying in the hospital and that he should follow her advice and leave at once. "What you need," she said, "is a brochah from the Chofetz Chaim. Go to him and tell him that you are from his hometown of Zhetel. His brochah will do more for you than all the medications the doctors have been giving you for the last six months."

**Sneaking Out of the Hospital**

 The next morning, R' Asher got out of his hospital bed unobserved, took his crutches and hobbled somewhat unsteadily down the back corridors of the hospital and made his way outside. He went home and began to prepare for his trip to the Chofetz Chaim. In a few days he was ready to begin his journey to Radin.

 While R’ Asher was traveling on a train to Radin, the Chofetz Chaim himself along with R’ Zalman (the Rav from Zhetel who was supposed to encourage R’ Asher to send his son away) were traveling home to Radin from a rabbinic conference in Vilna. R’ Asher happened to meet up with R' Zalman in the train station. R’ Zalman directed R’ Asher to the Chofetz Chaim’s train car. R’ Zalman was hoping to reach the Chofetz Chaim before R’ Asher so that he could tell him about R' Asher's son. Perhaps, thought R' Zalman, if the Chofetz Chaim would admonish R' Asher about the matter, R' Asher would then try to influence the wayward young man. They entered the train and walked through the corridors until they came to the car where the Chofetz Chaim had just finished Shacharis and was putting his tefillin away.

**Waiting to Talk to the Chofetz Chaim**

 Respectfully, they waited at a distance until he finished, and then R' Asher hobbled to the Chofetz Chaim and began talking before R' Zalman had a chance to say anything.

 As R' Asher began talking to the Chofetz Chaim he burst into tears, describing his illness and lengthy stay in the hospital. "I am from Zhetel, your hometown," said R' Asher gasping from his exertion. "My grandmother, who was a deeply religious woman, came to me in a dream and told me that I should come to you for a brochah."

 The Chofetz Chaim looked up at the man and said, "Yisroel Meir is not a brochah-giver. What can I do? How can I help you?" (The Chofetz Chayim often referred to himself by his first name Yisroel Meir.) The man pleaded and begged.

**Shabbos the Source of Blessing Must Be Happy with You**

 Finally the Chofetz Chaim said, "We say every Friday night: 'Let us go towards the Shabbos and welcome it, for it is the source of blessing.' If Shabbos, which is the source of blessing is happy with you, then I too can be happy with you."

 "What do you mean, Rebbi?" asked R' Asher. "Well," said the Chofetz Chaim, "if Shabbos is observed in your home by the members of your family, then Shabbos will bless you. But if your son drives on Shabbos, and your daughter combs her hair in a manner forbidden on the Shabbos, then Shabbos is not happy with you. If so, what kind of brochah-giver is Yisroel Meir?"

**Shocked by the Tzadik’s Insightful**

**Words of Admonishment**

 The man was shocked by the insight of the Chofetz Chaim's words and he promised that he would make every effort to see that his children would become true Sabbath observers. How did the Chofetz Chaim know these details about R’ Asher’s family? (p. 171 Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks.)

 Our righteous Torah leaders are conduits through which flows the divine goodness from above. By going to a Tzaddik, a righteous Torah leader, we can tap into this conduit and benefit from their blessings.

 Let us all be inspired by this week’s discussion to seek out our Righteous Torah leaders and flock to them to seek their brochos. Then we will all merit living happy and healthier lives.  Good Shabbos Everyone.

*Reprinted from this week’s Good Shabbos email*

**It Once Happened**

**The Punishment**

**Of Self-Exile**

 It was already the middle of the night when the stranger appeared in the doorway, a thin figure dressed in rags. Obviously exhausted, the traveler looked ready to tumble to the ground.

 The innkeeper, a warm-hearted, G-d-fearing Jew, immediately invited him in and sat him down. After bringing the stranger a warm drink to revive him, he served him an entire meal and sent him off to bed.

 The next morning the traveler was much revived from the food and the good night's sleep. After praying the morning service and eating breakfast, he packed his meager belongings into his knapsack, thanked his host for his hospitality and prepared to leave.

 The innkeeper, sizing up the man's outward appearance, stuck his hand into his pocket and offered him a handful of change. To his surprise, the stranger politely refused. Thinking that perhaps he had offended him by offering too little, the innkeeper added another few coins, but the man was adamant. "Thank you anyway," he said, "but I really don't need it."

**At a Loss for Words**

 The innkeeper was at a loss for words. "What do you mean you don't need it?" he asked after a few seconds.

 "I'm not your usual door to door beggar," the man explained. "You may not believe it, but I'm actually very wealthy. In my hometown I own many properties, fine houses, fertile fields and abundant orchards."

 By this time the innkeeper was completely confused. He demanded that the stranger give him a more detailed explanation:

 "The whole thing started a little over two years ago," the stranger began, "when a large sum of money was stolen from my home. After the initial investigation, suspicion fell on one of the servants, a young orphan girl who was in my employ. I insisted that she be taken to the town magistrate, who would soon get to the bottom of the matter. But the policemen who led her away were very cruel, and they struck her repeatedly. As a result of the beating, she passed away a few days later. Till the very end she maintained her innocence.

**The Real Thieves Were Apprehended**

 "A few weeks after this happened, the real thieves were apprehended and the money was recovered. I became almost insane with remorse. My conscience would not allow me to live. Not only had I shamed the poor girl, but I had inadvertently caused her death. How could I ever expiate my sin? In my sorrow I turned to the tzadik (righteous person) Rabbi Meir of Premishlan for help.

 "The tzadik's face turned grave when he heard my story. He looked deep into my eyes - into my soul - before speaking. 'You must choose one of three ways of doing teshuva [repentance],' he said. 'The first choice is death. This will save your portion in the World to Come. The second choice is illness, in which case you will need to suffer for three years as atonement. Or, you can choose to go into exile for three years. This is the punishment for taking a person's life accidentally.'

**Each Alternative Was Too Much to Bear**

 "I asked the tzadik for several days to make up my mind. Each one of the alternatives seemed too much to bear. I just couldn't decide. A few days later I started to feel terrible pains all over my body. A doctor was summoned, and he diagnosed me as having an incurable illness. I understood that the tzadik had chosen the first option - death - for me, as I seemed incapable of making a decision.

 "With my last ounce of strength I went back to Rabbi Meir and asked him to pray for my recovery. I was ready to accept exile.

 "The tzadik set several conditions. 'The first stipulation is that you must leave all your personal belongings with me,' he said. 'From now on you must only wear clothing that is old and torn. You must never spend more than one night in the same place. And when you are hungry, you mustn't ask for food but wait until it is offered. For three years you are forbidden to return home, but once a year you may stand at the entrance to your city and send word for your wife to bring you your accounting books. Come back to me when the three years of exile are over, and I will return all your possessions.'

**“I Don’t Know What to Do”**

 "I accepted my fate and set out, and for the past two years I have obeyed the tzadik's words to the letter. Just recently, however, I learned that Rabbi Meir of Premishlan passed away, and I don't know what to do. How can I go back to him if he is no longer alive? I've decided to go to Rabbi Chaim of Szanz for guidance." With that, the stranger concluded his tale.

 The innkeeper, who was a follower of Rabbi Chaim of Szanz, insisted on accompanying him. When they entered the tzadik's chamber, Rabbi Chaim began to speak before they could even state why they had come. "Go home," he instructed the weary traveler, "but make sure you pass through Premishlan. Go to Rabbi Meir's grave and tell him that the Rabbi of Szanz has ruled that two years of exile are enough, for you have fulfilled them with true self-sacrifice."

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of L’Chayim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

The Christmas Tree

**By Jonathan Rosenblum**

A Jewish family comes home to discover their house festooned with holiday lights.

 Rabbi Berel Wein was once invited to a meeting with the editor of the Detroit Free Press. After introductions had been made, the editor told him the following story.

 His mother, Mary, had immigrated to America from Ireland as an uneducated, 18-year-old peasant girl. She was hired as a domestic maid by an observant Jewish family. The head of the house was the president of the neighboring Orthodox shul.

 Mary knew nothing about Judaism and had probably never met a Jew before arriving in America. The family went on vacation Mary's first December in America, leaving Mary alone in the house. They were scheduled to return on the night of December 24, and Mary realized that there would be no Christmas tree to greet them when they did. This bothered her greatly, and using the money the family had left her, she went out and purchased not only a Christmas tree but all kinds of festive decorations to hang on the front of the house.

**The Family Returns from Vacation**

 When the family returned from vacation, they saw the Christmas tree through the living room window and the rest of the house festooned with holiday lights. They assumed that they had somehow pulled into the wrong driveway and drove around the block. But alas, it was their address.

 The head of the family entered the house contemplating how to explain the Christmas tree and lights to the members of the shul, most of whom walked right past his house on their way to shul. Meanwhile, Mary was eagerly anticipating the family's excitement when they realized that they would not be without a Christmas tree.

**Praising the Maid for Her Efforts**

 After entering the house, the head of the family called Mary into his study. He told her, "In my whole life no one has ever done such a beautiful thing for me as you did." Then he took out a $100 bill -- a very large sum in the middle of the Depression -- and gave it to her. Only after that did he explain that Jews do not have Christmas trees.

 When he had finished telling the story, the editor told Rabbi Wein, "And that is why, there has never been an editorial critical of Israel in the Detroit Free Press since I became editor, and never will be as long as I am the editor."

 The shul president's reaction to Mary's mistake -- sympathy instead of anger -- was not because he dreamed that one day her son would the editor of a major metropolitan paper, and thus in a position to aid Israel. (Israel was not yet born.) He acted as he did because it was the right thing to do.

 That's what it means to be a Kiddush Hashem, to sanctify G-d's Name. It is a goal to which we can all strive.

*Reprinted from this week website of Aish.com*

**A Quick Departure**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 Arranging an appointment with the very wealthy potential donor in a foreign land was no easy matter, even for someone so greatly respected as Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, founder of the Ponevez Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He finally succeeded thanks to the strenuous efforts of a former student who lived in the man's city.

 When, upon arriving from the airport, the rabbi and his student knocked on the door they were greeted by the man they wished to meet, only to learn that he was presently involved in a business transaction, and they would have to wait for a quarter of an hour. When that time passed the host excused himself and said that it would be another hour until he was free to see them. At this point Rabbi Kahaneman picked himself up, said goodbye to his potential donor and departed for the trip back to Israel.

 The student was shocked that his rav who had made a special trip to encourage this fellow to support his major Torah institution was ready to leave and asked for an explanation.

 "You told me that once our meeting was over you had a learning session with a partner," came the answer, "and I am not prepared to let you lose that opportunity to learn Torah. As regards the needs of my institution, I am sure that Heaven will take care of them if I do what is right."

Reprinted from this week’s Ohr Somayach Yeshiva of Yerushalayim’s website.

**Apology Accepted**

**By** [**Mirish Kiszner**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=13564)

 Darkness had descended on the small town of Gostynin. All the inhabitants were fast asleep, their doors and shutters closed tightly against the frigid night. For the traveler arriving to the town, this was a most unwelcoming sight. Tired, weak and hungry, he had nowhere to turn, no place to rest his weary head.

 Suddenly, from afar, he noticed a light shining in one of the windows. Sighing with relief, he hurried in that direction and knocked on the door, hoping to be allowed to stay for the night. It was the home of Rabbi Yechiel Meir of Gostynin.

 A smile lit up the face of Reb Yechiel Meir as he opened the door. "*Shalom aleichem, Reb Yid*! Welcome!" he called out as he ushered the stranger inside.

Filled with joy, the host rushed about to serve his guest

 Quiet reigned in the little cottage; all the household members had long since retired for the night. Filled with joy, the host rushed about to serve his guest a glass of warm tea and pastry. However, when the visitor had downed the last of his drink and nary was a crumb left on the plate, Reb Yechiel Meir, perceiving that his guest was still hungry, searched about the house for some more food. To his delight, he found some raw oats and a saucepan of cooking fat. Never having played his hand at cooking before, the host placed it inside the oven and then, with his face wreathed in smiles, served the dish to his guest. While the visitor polished off the food, the host stood by, beaming with pleasure.

 When the meal was over, Reb Yechiel hastened to prepare the guest a warm bed, his own, for the little house boasted no spare bed. While the traveler slept soundly, the host pored over his Talmudic volumes all through the night, learning with increased enthusiasm.

 In the morning, the traveler awoke from his restful sleep and went to the synagogue. After prayers, in the course of conversation with the townsmen, he discovered that his host was no other than the illustrious Rabbi Yechiel Meir of Gostynin. Utterly ashamed and distressed, he approached the *tzaddik,* the holy man, to offer his apologies.

 "I refuse to accept an apology from you," came the reply.

 "But," the traveler protested, "I had no idea whose house it was, or whose bed I'd slept in. Had I known, I would never have put the tzaddik through such troubles."

 Rabbi Yechiel Meir remained unfazed, but the traveler, eager to be forgiven, persisted in his explanations.

 At last, Reb Yechiel Meir declared, "If you promise to do as I tell you, I will accept your apology."

 For a slight moment, the traveler hesitated. Perhaps the tzaddik had looked into his soul and discerned some sort of reprehensible sin that needed rectification? Would he be able to carry out a strict regimen of repentance that the tzaddik might require of him?

"Anything the tzaddik will ask of me, I am ready to fulfill"

 No matter, he decided, with a shake of his head. If amends needed to be made, he was ready, come what may. As long as Rabbi Yechiel Meir would accept his sincere apology, it was worth everything.

 "Anything the tzaddik will ask of me, I am ready to fulfill," he solemnly promised.

 The rabbi smiled. "Well," he said. "This is my request to you. Every time you pass by the town of Gostynin, you will come to my home and be my guest. For when do I ever get a chance to fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality, *hachnasat orchim*, as I was able to this time? My townspeople spoil it for me!"

*Reprinted from this week’s Chabad.Magazine (Chabad.org) website*

**Learning from Yosef How to Survive**

**The Ordeals of Suffering and Exile**

 What lessons can you take with you from a STOP sign? After thinking of at least three, please see the following note.

 With the conclusion of Sefer Bereishis, we take leave of the Avos, and even of Yosef, whose life took a good part of the last four parshios. What was that special quality, the unique aspect, of Yosef which made him so deserving of our attention -- as the successor to Yaakov Avinu, and the Avos, and as the fitting person with whom to conclude Sefer Bereishis--which is also sometimes known as Sefer HaYoshor (our Guidebook for Proper Conduct)?

 There are obviously many different aspects of Yosef’s tzidkus -- his righteousness. We recently mentioned his enormous concern for the humiliation, disgrace and embarrassment of another human being. HaRav Matisyahu Salomon, shlita, however, focuses on a common theme which extends through various events described in the Torah about his life.

**A Bed of Roses**

 First, we find that Yosef was taken down to Mitzraim in a “bed of roses” -- not in the typical slave-trade manner, but amongst sweet smelling spices. Why? Because Yosef, even in his forlorn state, could still appreciate a pleasant aroma or a calming scene. Later, we find that Yosef, while muddled in a deep-and-dark dungeon kind of setting (the Torah states that he was in a bor--a pit--not exactly like the prisons of today) asks the ministers placed there with him: “Why do you not look good?”

 Is Yosef’s line of questioning a logical one? The answer seems to be a resounding -- Yes, to Yosef, it was quite logical--because of Yosef’s true equanimity, his presence of mind, and his clarity of thought. He was simply telling those ministers -- do not sulk over your state; do not overindulge in self-pity, for it will get you nowhere. Maybe I can help you in some way…

**The Triumph of Clarity of Mind**

 Then, when Yosef is taken out of the pit/prison to be admitted to Paroh’s presence after not one, two, or even three or four -- but twelve years --, Yosef does not start running head first towards the palace. Instead, despite the fact that “VaYeritzuhu -- they rushed him” from the pit to bring him to Paroh, nevertheless “VaYegalach VaYechalef Simlosav” (Bereishis 41:14) – Yosef -- by himself and for himself -- shaved and changed his clothes, for, as Rashi (ibid.) teaches, it would simply not have been “Kavod HaMalchus” -- the proper respect due to a king, if he had presented himself before Paroh in his prison garb and appearance. Yosef’s clarity of mind and spirit once again triumphed over his erstwhile instinctive reactions.

 What follows next is--rather than Yosef ingratiating himself to Paroh, or accepting any form of aggrandizement--he tells Paroh “Biladai -- it is not me” whom you should attribute anything to, I am truly only a Hebrew slave -- it is all up to Hashem. I have no special secrets, powers or even sagacious advice -- anything and everything I do or say will not come from me. Once again, his menuchas hanefesh overcame any of the easily-attainable ambitions before him.

**Aware of Hashem’s Direction**

 Finally, in the end, Yosef explains to his brothers that he is not angry with them; as it is obvious that Hashem directed them in their mission to send Yosef to Mitzraim -- and, in Yosef’s words “Al Tirau... -- fear not, I will sustain you and your young ones. He spoke to them and comforted their hearts” (Bereishis 50:20, 21).

 The Menuchas HaNefesh, the calmness and clear thinking Yosef exhibited even in difficult situations, is, HaRav Salomon states, the hallmark of true bitachon -- faith. A wonderful by-product of this bitachon is that Yosef is able to keep his hopes and spirits up in all situations -- ranging from the dark dungeon to the viceroy’s palace.

 With the opening of Sefer Shemos next week, we quickly find ourselves as “The Jew in Galus.” It is apparent that the Torah, by providing us with the model of Yosef, is

teaching us how to best survive the ordeals of suffering and exile. The Ramban (in Parshas Vayechi) writes that our current Galus, Galus Romi, is a mirror of Galus Mitzraim, and explains why (see there). We should, then, take some time out from the lessons of Yosef’s life to help us better manage our current Galus Romi, as well.

**Search for the Positive in Our**

**Own “Negative” Life Events**

 Perhaps one can try to take a seemingly “negative” event that has occurred, and try to look at it in a calm and reasoned light--recognizing the positive--the sweet aroma or the silver lining--that may be found in Hashem’s guiding hand. If this is difficult to do on your own, one can attempt to do so with a relative or friend.

 May the lessons from Yosef in bitachon building help to bring us out of the Galus -- and into the Geula that we will B’Ezras Hashem be witnessing -- as the parshios of the coming weeks unfold upon us!

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