**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Beshallach 5775**

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**When Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was Sitting Shiva**

In Avos D’Rebbi Nosson (14), there is a fascinating story about how Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, who was the spiritual leader of the Jewish people just after the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, was mourning the loss of his son, and how his talmidim tried to console him in his time of bereavement.

Rabbi Eliezer entered and sat down before him, and Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said, “Say something to comfort me, my son,” and Rabbi Eliezer said, “Adam Ha’rishon had a son who died, and he was able to be consoled. You too should be consoled!”

Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Is it not enough for me to be upset about my own tragedy that you also mention to me the suffering of Adam Ha’rishon?”

Rabbi Yehoshua entered next and Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said, “Say something to comfort me, my son,”

and Rabbi Yehoshua said, “Iyov had sons and daughters, and they all died on one day, yet he was consoled over them. You too should you be consoled!”

Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Is it not enough for me to be upset about my own tragedy that you also mention to me the suffering of Iyov?”

Rabbi Yose then entered and sat before his Rebbe. Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Say something to comfort me, my son,” and Rabbi Yose said, “Aharon KaKohen had four great sons and two of them died on the same day, yet he was consoled. You too should be consoled!”

Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Is it not enough for me to be upset about my own tragedy that you also mention to me the suffering of Aharon HaKohen?”

Next Rabbi Shimon entered and Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said, “Say something to comfort me, my son,” and Rabbi Shimon said, “Dovid Ha’melech had a son who died and yet he was consoled. You too should be consoled!”

Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Is it not enough for me to be upset about my own tragedy that you also mention to me the suffering of Dovid Ha’melech?”

Then Rabbi Elazar ben Arach entered and sat before Rebbi Yochanan ben

Zakkai and said, “I will offer you a mashal as to what this matter can be compared to. A king once entrusted one of his valuable and precious gems to a man, and told the man to take good care of his treasure until he asks for it back. Each and every day the man would check on the gem and make sure it was clean and as perfect as it was when he received it because he didn’t know when the king would want his jewel to be returned, until one day, the king finally asked for his gem back, and the man was able to happily return it in perfect condition.

“So it is with you, my master. You had a son who learned Torah, and he left the world without sin. You should be consoled that you returned the gem to the King as perfect and intact as it was when it was given.”

Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him, “Rabbi Elazar, my son, you have consoled me!”

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**SHORT STORY OF THE WEEK**

**One’s Attitude Can Gain a Person a Beautiful Gan Eden**

Rav Eliyahu Lopian, of blessed memory, was once walking down a street in Israel that was being paved by a couple of workers. He stopped one of the workers and asked him what he was doing. The man looked at the Rav incredulously and said, “I’m paving the road.”

Rav Lopian asked him, “Well, why are you paving?”

“You gotta make money,” came the response. “Without money, no one can survive.”

 Rav Lopian thanked the man for his time and continued down the street, spotting another worker, a Yemenite, bedecked in full garb, with long peyos, and a heavy Yemenite accent.

“Why are you paving?” Rav Lopian asked. The man replied, “I’m doing a Chesed (kindness). It’s better for people to walk on even ground as opposed to hiking down the street balancing on differently leveled stones.”

Rav Lopian continued to his Yeshiva where he posed a riddle to his students. How is it possible for two people to do the same action and only one of them gets Gan Eden (reward) for it? He then proceeded to tell them his encounter with the two fellows.

*Comment: We can get a reward for even the menial actions we do if we have in mind holy intentions. We can think, “I’m going to sleep so I can be energized in the morning to serve Hashem and help others,” or, “I’m working out to fulfill the injunction to be healthy” (Devarim 4:9). It’s amazing that everything we do can be a Mitzvah!*

*Reprinted from last week’s parsha sheet email from Rabbi Mendel Berlin.*

**The Power of Tefillin**

The following amazing true story illustrates the power of tefillin to awaken in Jew the love between him and his Creator.

As the Eretz Yisroel-bound El Al plane lifted off the tarmac of New York's JFK International Airport, Shalom realized suddenly that he had left his tefillin in the trunk of his car. In his mind's eye, Shalom could see the tefillin in the trunk of his Chevrolet.

Shalom thought back to his bar mitzvah fourteen years earlier and remembered the pride emanating from his father when he had presented the tefillin to Shalom. His father, Yehuda, had always been very careful to fulfill the mitzvah of tefillin properly and made an extraordinary efforts to obtain the best possible pair for his son.

The parshiyos of Shalom's tefillin were written by a G-d fearing soifer who was an expert in all the laws pertaining to tefillin. The batim containing the parchments were also formed by a G-d-fearing expert, one who used all the finest materials. His grandmother had embroidered a beautiful velvet bag lovingly to protect them.

And now Shalom had inadvertently left them in the trunk of his car for the next ten days while he vacationed in Eretz Yisroel. This, too, is for the best, he thought to himself.

 The ten days in Eretz Yisroel flew by, and Shalom had to return to the United States. When he went to retrieve his car from the long-term parking lot at JFK International Airport, Shalom discovered that his car had suffered a break-in. He checked the trunk quickly. His tefillin were gone. Stolen.

Shalom went to the police station and filed a report of the theft, giving the desk sergeant the details of how to contact him should his tefillin ever show up. Then he got into his car and drove himself home to Philadelphia.
       Shalom went to his mother's house for his first Shabbos back from Eretz Yisroel. When he told her about his tefillin, she offered him the use of his father's (who had passed away.) "I'm lending these to you until your nephew Yehuda will be a bar mitzvah in twelve years. It's important to me that, since he is named after Daddy, of blessed memory, he should wear these tefillin. "Guard them with your life," she told him. Twelve years would be plenty of time for Shalom to get himself a new pair of tefillin.

 Six years passed. Shalom came home from work one day and heard a message on his answering machine from the New York City police department. They left a phone number and a request that he contact them as soon as possible. When he reached them later that evening, the sergeant told Shalom that a religious object of his had been turned in. "Please come as soon as possible to reclaim your stolen goods."

 The next morning Shalom hopped into his car, and drove up to New York. After presenting his identification to the police officer at the front desk, Shalom was ushered into an office. The officer introduced himself as Howard and proceeded to tell the following story.

"Three days ago, an elderly Russian gentleman presented himself at the precinct, placed your tefillin bag on the table and told the following story. “I own a pawn shop a few blocks away,” he began. “About an hour ago a man came into my shop and wanted to pawn these.” He pointed to the tefillin lying on the table. “I'm not religious myself, but I recognized immediately that these were phylacteries. Jews call them tefillin and wear them during the morning prayers.

“ I told the man to forget pawning the tefillin, as I was willing to buy them from him. I paid him cash and took the tefillin. My hands began to tremble and shake. I don't know what came over me. Since these tefillin had obviously been stolen, I locked up my shop and came here, to the police station, to see if I could perhaps help return them to their owner. The embroidery says Shalom son of Yehuda Goldberg. Is their any record of this theft?” Asked the Russian pawn shop owner.
       "I picked up the tefillin," continued the police officer Howard, "to see what they were. The strangest thing happened when I held them in my hands. I felt a hot flash and began sweating profusely. My hands were trembling and shaking. Why would a Jewish object cause such a reaction in me, a Gentile? I locked up the tefillin in my desk, planning to investigate their background the next day.
       That night I couldn't shake the memory of my hands trembling and shaking. I wondered again why a Jewish object should make such an impression on a non-Jew. Disturbed, I told my mom the story, asking her what she thought of the matter. She didn't seem surprised at all.

“Howard, when I was a teenager I rebelled and left home to marry your Dad,” she told me. "I never told you that my parents were Jewish, did I? Well, by Jewish law, since I am Jewish, so are my children, Howard, maybe the tefillin had such an impact on you because you yourself are Jewish!”
       Shalom, the owner of the tefillin, was sitting on the edge of his chair by now. "I've often felt like something was missing in my life," the police officer Howard continued. " Apparently, my Jewish soul was hungering for some spiritual nourishment. I am going to start investigating my heritage. Can we keep in touch?" Shalom agreed.

The story doesn't end there. When he arrived back in Philadelphia, Shalom brought the tefillin to Rabbi Shreiber, his soifer, to have them checked. Who knows where the tefillin had been during the past six years and whether or not the letters on the parchments were still intact? Shalom told Rabbi Shreiber the entire story as Rabbi Shreiber opened up the outer boxes.

Rabbi Shreiber checked the parchment and began to cry. "Why are you crying?" Shalom asked. "These tefillin are as kosher as the day they were made," Rabbi Shreiber declared emotionally. "I would like to buy them from you, if I may." "I'm sorry," said Shalom, "but these tefillin are even more precious to me now. They are my own personal reminder of how Hashem runs the world."

*(Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone. The article originally appeared in the Hamodia Magazine of 29 Teves, 5764/2004.)*

**Emulating G-d in Helping Others to Get Happily Married**

The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edeles, 1555-1631) clearly understands that being engaged in the mitzvah of procreation means more than fulfilling that mitzvah by having children oneself; it includes doing what one can to facilitate the fulfillment of that mitzvah by others, by people who are less fortunate and who may never have the opportunity to get married and perform this mitzvah without the efforts of others.

One who helps someone else get married and thereby enables him to carry out the mitzvah of having children is thus fulfilling this requirement of involvement in procreation.

And this is considered so significant a deed that it is one of the first things one is held accountable for when he leaves this world.

A Roman matron asked Rabbi Yossi how long it took G-d to create the world. He replied: “Six days.”

She asked: ‘What has your G-d been doing since then?”

Rabbi Yossi replied: “Making matches. This man to that woman this woman to that man.”

The Roman matron replied with surprise: “Is that all? Why anyone can do that!”

Rabbi Yossi observed, “It may seem easy to you, but for G-d making a good match is as difficult as parting the Sea of Reeds.”.

But to prove her point, the Roman matron returned home and lined up all her household servants - 1000 men and 1000 women, paired them up and married them off. The following morning they returned to her, one with a black eye, one with a bruised face, one limping, and another wounded, each with its own misery and saying, “This one that you designated for me I do not want.”

The Roman matron sent for Rabbi Yossi and said, “Rabbi your Torah is truth and it is beautiful and praiseworthy. You spoke well in all you said.” (Beraishit Rabbah 68 and Vayikra Rabbah 8)

*Reprinted from an email sent to me by my good friend and long-time subscriber Yisroel Federman.*

**The Day the Rabbi Spoke About Charity To an Audience of Catholic Priests**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

A very talented Chabad Rabbi by the name of Rabbi Shochet, once received an invitation from an organization in Buffalo, New York to speak on the topic of charity before a crowd of Catholic priests and soon-to-be priests.

But he had his reservations about speaking to such a crowd. On one hand he wanted to educate people and speak but on the other hand he wanted to avoid interfaith debates, so he called the office of his Rabbi; the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, and requested one of his secretaries to ask The Rebbe’s advice.

The answer came immediately, The Rebbe said that Rabbi Shochet should accept the offer but he should take care to end his lecture with the story of the ‘Rich Miser of Krakow’.

Although the Rebbe’s insistence on that particular story seemed a bit unusual, Rabbi Shochet threw himself into the task, prepared himself well and when the date arrived he flew to Buffalo and gave a fascinating two hour-long speech describing the unique Torah approach to giving charity.

He explained that ‘Tzadaka’ (Charity) derives from the word ‘Tzedek’ ‘Justice’ implying money is not our own, rather it is G-d’s and charity is nothing more than passing it on to those who justly deserve it.

But after he had made his point, instead of finishing, he said that he wanted to conclude with the story of the Miser of Krakow as the Lubavitcher Rebbe had requested.

“Once in the city of Krakow almost four hundred years ago lived a rich Jew named Yisroel. No one really knew his last name and no one even cared, because this ‘Yisroel’ was an intolerable miser. "He lived in a large, plush home that seemed to invite the poor to ask for help, but if ever an unsuspecting money collector would knock on his door he would receive an abrupt ‘No money!’ and a door slammed in his face.

“Now, although it is forbidden to call people derogatory names, this old man was so flagrantly stingy that eventually everyone began calling him ‘Yisroel Goy’ (‘Goy’ lit. Gentile) because only a non-Jew could be so callous to Jews. But it didn’t help, he remained tight fisted and, unfortunately for him, the name stuck.
“So it continued for many years and everyone almost completely forgot about the old skinflint, until one day the burial society (Chevre Kadisha) received a message for them to come to his bedside. He was dying.

“When they arrived they saw that he was close to death and with his last energy he took an envelope from under his pillow and said to them feebly, ‘Here is two thousand dollars. You’re not going to get another penny from me so don’t ask. I want you to bury me in a good spot, not near the fence or the garbage dump, and write on my tombstone: ‘Yisroel Goy’’. He then said the ‘Shma Yisroel’ prayer, closed his eyes and passed away.

“No one knew exactly how old he was, maybe ninety, maybe more, but one thing for sure; no one wept at his funeral, in fact almost no one attended, and they also didn’t bury him exactly where he wanted.

But they did write what he wanted on his tombstone: ‘YISROEL GOY’. And that was the end of a sad, unfortunate episode in the history of Krakow.

“Or so they thought.

“One cold afternoon, about one week later, the Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman Heller (author of ‘Tosfos Yom Tov’ on Mishna) heard a knock on his door and opened it to see some fifty hungry faces greeting him with pleading eyes. ‘Yes, can I help you?’ he asked incredulously, ‘Who are you? Where are you from?’

“‘We are from here, from Krakow.’ One of them cried out, ‘and we are hungry, we haven’t eaten anything all day.’ ‘For two days!’ Someone else yelled out.

“The Rabbi didn’t understand what was going on but he invited them all in, arranged places for them to sit and while his wife was preparing something for them to eat, he heard the following story.

“It seems that these paupers had been going to the grocery store every day for as long as they could remember, taking what they needed, they only had to sign, and that was it. But since yesterday the grocery owner refused to give them anything, so they were all hungry.

“’Very strange’ thought the Rabbi to himself. ‘So many hungry people! And all from here, Krakow! Could it be that they are lying? I must get to the bottom of this.’

“He waited for them to finish eating, told them to come to his home again tomorrow morning, put on his overcoat, told his wife that he would return shortly and walked out the door in the direction to the home of the town treasurer. From far away he could see that there was a crowd of people gathered at the treasurer's door as well and as he approached he could hear the treasurer trying to make some sense of the chaos that was prevailing.

‘Oy!! Am I glad you are here!’ The treasurer shouted out when he saw the Rav. ‘Look inside, my house is filled too, there must be three hundred people here, and this is the second shift, a big group just left!!’

“‘I know, the Rabbi answered, they came to me also, different people that is, but hungry and all of them say that they are from Krakow and they've been eating for free for years, maybe twenty or thirty years. I simply don’t understand it.’
“After everyone had been fed and the treasurer distributed some money for tomorrow’s meals, both he and the Rav walked to the house of the Grocery store owner. “‘Sure,’ he answered, ‘I used to give everyone food. They would sign and I’d give the bill at the end of each week to that old rich guy that just died, the one they called Yisroel Goy.

"'I mean, it’s been going on for, I’d say forty years, maybe more, even before I owned the store. I mean he was my best customer that old man. But what… he kept warning me not to tell anyone, even my wife. Every time he would pay he said if he heard that people knew he was paying, he’d stop. I don’t know why he didn’t want me to tell. So I didn't tell anyone.

“’Did you see at his funeral? It was terrible; he almost didn’t have a minyan (ten people)! I guess he only cared about those poor people. But now that he’s not around well, what can I do? I can’t give food for free! I mean I have a wife and family too. Maybe I can give something, but he used to give thousands each week! I can’t give thousands like him. I hope that’s not the reason that you came to my house. I’m sure willing to help, but what can I do?’

“When the Rav and the treasurer heard these words they looked at each other and began weeping. They had made a terrible error in judgment. The Rav declared a day of fasting and repentance for all the Jews of Krakow.

“The word spread like wildfire and everyone gathered at the Shul to say Psalms, they realized that they had made a big mistake. After several hours the Rav stood at the podium and announced that they were all going to the graveyard.

“It was a strange site to see so many people walking somberly like a funeral with no coffin. But they all poured into the graveyard and gathered around Yisroel Goy’s grave. For some reason the tombstone was covered with a large cloth but everyone’s attention focused on the Rabbi as he stepped from the crowd, stood at the foot of the grave, back to the crowd, and began to speak to Yisroel Goy.

“‘Yisroel, Yisroel! We’ve come here today to say we are sorry.’ He paused; the silence was broken by some muffled weeping from the crowd. ‘I know you don’t need our apologies but we are sorry! We’re sorry that we were so cruel, crueler than we accused you of being. And we’re sorry that no one was your friend and that no one really cared.’ Now the cries were louder, almost everyone was sobbing.

The Rav waited for silence, dried his eyes and continued.
“‘I know you wanted the words ‘Yisroel Goy’ written on your tombstone. Well I’ve done something that I hope you won’t mind …last night I had the stonecutter add a word’. With this, the Rav pulled away the cloth to reveal that the inscription now read:

‘YISROEL GOY… KADOSH’   (Israel, a Holy Nation.)”

Rav Shochet had finished his lecture and the crowd showed their satisfaction with rounds of applause. After he had finished shaking hands and was making his way out the door one of the young men studying for the priesthood approached him and asked if it was possible to speak to him alone.

There was something strangely sincere in the young man’s eyes and Rav Shochet set an appointment for the next morning in his hotel room. The young man appeared on time and after sitting down requested that the Rabbi repeat the story he told, and then when he finished, requested an explanation on several points. He listened deeply to the answers, hey shook hands and parted.

Years later Rav Shochet, on a visit to Israel, was praying at the Kotel (Wailing Wall in Jerusalem) when a young, religious, bearded Jew approached him and shook his hand warmly. “Do you recognize me?” he asked, “I am the priest that visited you years ago in your hotel room.”

Rav Shochet stared at him and was so astounded he couldn’t speak.

“Yes,’ the young man continued ‘you don’t know what that story you told about the miser did to me. You see, my mother was Jewish but she didn’t tell me. She kept it a secret. She escaped to America from Poland in the war and there she married a devout Catholic. You see, it wasn’t so easy being a Jew in those times.

"Just before she died she told me that story, the same story you told, and added that we are related to that holy generous Jew that supported hundreds of people anonymously in Krakow hundreds of years ago.

"But I pushed that episode out of my memory. Rabbi, your story woke something that was sleeping in my soul and now I’ve returned to my self.

Rabbi Shochet now understood why the Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted on that particular story.

*Reprinted from last week’s email from Rabbi Tuvia Bolton at Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**A Business Collapse Froze His Income, And Then the Pharmacy Bills Came**

**By David W. Dunlap**



Moshe Orlansky, a retired doughnut maker, outside his home in Far Rockaway, Queens. The Community Service Society of New York helped him pay more than $2,000 in pharmacy bills. Credit Josh Haner/The New York Times

When you are glazing doughnuts, they have to be really warm, just moments out of the fryer, for the glaze to coat them properly.

Sometimes, as he stood on the bakery floor, Moshe Orlansky, proprietor of the Donut Delite Baking and Processing Company in Far Rockaway, Queens, simply could not turn away from the stick that held a dozen freshly glazed doughnuts.

“I could eat a whole stick,” he allowed with a rapturous look, leaving a visitor to dream hungrily of honeyed surfaces on cloud-soft confections.

“There were good years in this business,” Mr. Orlansky, 62, said.

And there were some really awful ones, too. In 1990, he recalled, vandals tossed a Molotov cocktail down a vent shaft into his bakery and retail shop on New Haven Avenue. The first attack failed, but they came back a week later and burned the place down. He moved the business to Cedarhurst.

In 2001, he brought Donut Delite back to Far Rockaway, taking over an abandoned warehouse on Redfern Avenue, not far from the flood-prone Motts Basin.

He gave up retail to concentrate on supplying kosher doughnuts and muffins to food distributors. It was a niche market, to be sure, but there was enough demand nationwide to keep him busy. On good days, Mr. Orlansky said, the plant turned out 150 to 200 dozen doughnuts and muffins.

What makes a doughnut kosher? “There’s nothing inherently traif about them,” Mr. Orlansky said, referring to food forbidden under Jewish dietary law. But to achieve certification by rabbinical supervisors as “pareve,” his doughnuts could not contain any trace of dairy products or meat.

Among other restrictions, Mr. Orlansky said, that meant that he was prohibited from buying his vegetable oil shortening from a company that also produced lard, “in the remote chance that there was a drop of lard in a humongous tanker truck.” It also ruled out the use of blueberries, lest they be infested. “We’re not allowed to eat bugs,” he explained.

Another awful year was 2012. October, to be more specific.

“What did me in was Sandy,” Mr. Orlansky said. His plant was flooded with five feet of water and his equipment was destroyed. He could not afford to walk away, however, with four of his 10 children still in school. Persuaded that Donut Delite could rise again, he acquired a plant in Inwood, Long Island.

This time, he said, he faced neighborhood opposition and official intransigence.

Complicating matters was his failing health. With diabetic ulcers on his feet, Mr. Orlansky could no longer work standing up. A kidney had failed. Stepping out of the shower one evening, he went into cardiac arrest. (Mr. Orlansky credits a member of the [Hatzolah](http://www.hatzolahems.org/hatzolahs.html) ambulance corps with not giving up trying to revive him, even after four fruitless defibrillations, because the volunteer fondly remembered the old Donut Delite shop.)

Rather than fight the increasingly daunting odds, Mr. Orlansky said he sold his business to an investor from Baltimore for an upfront payment of $65,000. The rest was to come from future revenues, in installments of roughly $100,000 a year for 10 years, Mr. Orlansky said. “This was what I was going to live on,” he added. Instead, the crippled business collapsed.

That left Mr. Orlansky and his wife, Shoshana, with a teenage child still at home, living on his $814 monthly disability check and his wife’s $15,000 annual salary as a part-time first-grade teacher.

So the letters that came in March 2014 from the Oxford insurance plan and a collection agency working for Oxford were especially unwelcome. Mr. Orlansky learned that Oxford had mistakenly paid 17 pharmacy claims, totaling $2,532.38, in April 2013, after Mr. Orlansky’s Oxford coverage had ended and before [Medicare](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/medicare/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) had kicked in. Now, Oxford wanted its money back.

But the Oxford letter also included a telephone number for Community Health Advocates, a program run by the [Community Service Society of New York](http://www.cssny.org/pages/mission-agenda), one of the seven organizations supported by [The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund](http://www.nytimes.com/column/neediest-cases). Mr. Orlansky contacted the society and was put in touch with Katie Engst, an associate supervising attorney.

She said Mr. Orlansky was not alone in failing to understand how to make a seamless transition from private insurance to public health insurance. “It’s very common that people can’t figure out what they need,” Ms. Engst said.

Of course, that did not diminish his responsibility for paying the bill. In September, Community Health Advocates gave him $2,532.38 to do just that.

Though the book has pretty much closed on Donut Delite, Mr. Orlansky seemed happy to answer a doughnut fan’s question: How do you get the filling inside?

To begin, he said, the dough is cut either into rings or solid discs, about one-quarter-inch thick. Before being fried, the forms spend about 15 minutes on racks in a warming and moistening device called a proofer that allows the yeast to ferment and the dough to rise. “It’s air that makes it a doughnut,” Mr. Orlansky said.

After being fried, he said, there is an air pocket in the discs large enough to be filled, by nozzles, with jelly or custard or Bavarian cream. Which brought up another lifelong mystery: What exactly is Bavarian cream?

“It’s pretty much the same as custard,” Mr. Orlansky said. “It’s just a fancier name.”

*Reprinted from the January 15, 2015 edition of The New York Times.*

[**Temimah Zucker Consumed By Mission of Tackling Eating Disorders in Jewish Community**](http://matzav.com/temimah-zucker-consumed-by-mission-of-tackling-eating-disorders-in-jewish-community)

**By Maayan Jaffe**

Temimah Zucker, 24, is a modest young woman with an equally modest frame. But her smile, vitality, and drive fill a room. Her message and mission-that eating disorders are an expanding challenge in the Jewish community and need to be tackled head on-is not always a popular one, but it is a calling for which she has an intense passion. It is also a fight she knows could save lives.

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, according to the Journal of American Psychiatry. A report by the Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders states that as many as 20 percent of people suffering from anorexia will prematurely die from complications related to their eating disorder.

Zucker was almost part of that statistic. She developed anorexia at 18 when she left her Teaneck, N.J., home to attend college in the New York City borough of Queens. Before starting college, she had experienced several social-emotional traumas, such as her grandmother’s passing, betrayal by one of her best high school friends, and a difficult breakup with another friend. The youngest of three children, she had never been away from home and wasn’t sure she was ready to grow up or that she could handle the responsibility.

In a matter of months, Zucker had started restricting her food in what she described as an effort to “take control.” It wasn’t a conscious decision, she says, meaning she didn’t wake up one morning and decide to become anorexic. Rather, she calls it a “natural progression of not feeling hungry, and then this full-blown development of a clinical eating disorder.”

Within months, Zucker’s weight had dropped (she doesn’t give out numbers), and she became irritable and withdrawn. Finally, her parents confronted her and “forced” her to see the doctor.

“The doctor told me that based on my blood work, that I was hours if not a day away from slipping into a coma that I probably would not have woken up from,” Zucker tells JNS.org. “I was a walking shadow.”

Zucker entered treatment and worked through her challenges in a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings, but she says the turning point for her was watching the Orthodox Union-produced documentary film “Hungry to be Heard.”

“I realized I was not alone,” Zucker says.

Today, Zucker hopes to inspire others in a similar way to how the documentary motivated her. She is a walking message board, boldly conveying the point that eating disorders exist in the Jewish community-but if treated, they can be managed and even overcome.

A student at Yeshiva University’s Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Zucker now shares her personal story at day schools, synagogues, and community centers, and has started a peer support group for Jewish teens recovering from anorexia. She says she initially went public with her story because she had a dream of inspiring others. Now, she says it is more about “showing people there is hope” and raising awareness. The Jewish community, she says, must unite around this issue and talk about what many consider an entire faith’s preoccupation with-and disordered relation to-food.

“When I meet people in the Jewish community and tell them I work with eating disorders, they say, ‘Me too! I never stop eating!’ There is an understanding that food plays a central role in Judaism. People overeat, emotionally eat, and it can be life-threatening,” says Zucker, explaining there might be challenges specific to Judaism, and especially Orthodoxy, that drive eating disorders.

There is enormous pressure in the Orthodox Jewish community to marry young and immediately start a family, and an understanding for many women that they will be forced to balance a career with being a consummate homemaker and cook. An eating disorder delays all that. Matchmakers often ask questions about women’s waist size; it’s understood that desired dimensions are 23-27 inches.

Further, like many other challenging issues-sexual abuse, divorce, and mental illness, to name a few-people don’t like to talk about eating disorders or admit that they occur in the Jewish community, and so the reality of the problem is covered up. While the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) reports as many as 24 million people of all ages and genders suffer from an eating disorder, there are no definitive studies about eating disorders in the Jewish population. A 1996 study of an Orthodox high school in Brooklyn found 1 in 19 girls had an eating disorder. A 2008 study of Toronto teens found that 25 percent of Jewish girls suffered from the illness.

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, author of the 2001 book “Starving to Live,” has been a leading voice for the recognition of eating disorders and their proper treatment in the Torah-observant community for more than 15 years. In the book, he describes situations in which parents have chosen against treating their children out of humiliation. Understanding the severity of the disease, such actions could be tantamount to murder, he believes.

Goldwasser notes that eating disorders are rarely about being thin, but as NEDA explains, they are “complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors.” Goldwasser advocates for a 12-step program that he has modified from a Jewish lens to help people in their recovery. He says spirituality is an essential component of recovery.

“Everyone needs … a connection with a higher level, with God, to feel that the world itself is run by Divine providence and there is substance to my life, even if I don’t feel like a worthy person right now,” Goldwasser tells JNS.org.

Indeed, there might be some hope in the quest to treat eating disorders. On Jan. 1 in Israel, a law went into effect that aims to prevent fashion models from losing weight to the detriment of their health and the wellbeing of others inclined to follow in their footsteps. The law stipulates that fashion/commercial models should have a body-mass index of at least 18.5 and that computer-generated changes to make models appear thinner need to be noted along with the images.

Additionally, several treatment centers have started to offer kosher food at their clinics over the last decade, and a clinic catering to young women from the U.S. opened in Jerusalem in 2010.

Zucker recently raised more than $6,000 to fund her “Tikvah v’Chizuk” (Hope and Strength) non-profit organization, which will center on a website (now under construction) that will provide resources, articles, and forums to support people with eating disorders.

Greta Gleissner-a New York-based eating disorder therapist and co-founder of Clinical Recovery Specialists, an eating disorder concierge service that provides in-home eating disorder recovery support nationwide-has gotten to know Zucker through the office space they share in Manhattan. Zucker works as a counselor at Eating Disorder Treatment of New York - Monte Nido Treatment Center. Gleissner praises Zucker for proactively talking about her recovery. Gleissner, herself a recovered bulimic, says she finds that, “It is helpful for clients to know that you have walked in their shoes.”

Gleissner tells JNS.org that Zucker has “drive” and is “passionate about helping others and spreading the message of recovery.”

“There is hope,” says Zucker. “I think that is the most important thing.” *JNS.ORG*

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