**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Beshalach 5772 & 5770**

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**The Guru and the Hasid:**

***The Stranger-than-Fiction True***

***Story of Swami Vijayananda***

**By Sara Yoheved Rigler**

 One sweltering day in the summer of 2008, near Hardwar, India, the pilgrimage city at the headwaters of the Ganges, an incongruous scene unfolded. Amidst the dhoti-clad men and sari-clad women, two Hasidic men from Israel, with long peyot and black kippahs, strode quickly through the crowded streets.

 When they reached their destination — the ashram of Anandamayi-ma, India’s most adulated woman saint of the 20th century — they hesitated at the entrance to the courtyard. Idolatrous statues dotted the courtyard. As religious Jews, they wondered whether they were permitted to enter.

**The 93 Year-Old Guru Garbed in Robes of a Monk**

 Standing there, they saw the guru, Swami Vijayananda, garbed in the ochre robes of a monk, exit from one of the buildings. He took his seat on a stone bench in order to receive the long line of waiting devotees.

 One by one, they approached the 93-year-old guru, bowed on their knees, and took the dust of his feet — a Hindu gesture of honor, whereby one touches the guru’s feet with one’s hand, and then one’s own forehead. Each devotee had barely a minute of the guru’s attention to ask or utter a few words. Then, still kneeling, the devotee found a place on the ground some distance away to continue to bask in the presence of the guru.

 The two Hasidic men were Eliezer Botzer and his friend Natti, heads of the *Bayit Yehudi*, Jewish Home, a chain of Jewish centers situated throughout India in locations such as Hardwar and Goa, where thousands of post-army Israelis congregate. Although Eliezer and Natti spent a lot of time in India, standing there at the entrance to Anandamayi-ma’s ashram they were as out of place as a klezmer clarinet at a sitar concert.

**Notices the Two Religious Jews**

 After a few minutes, the guru noticed the two religious Jews. The next devotee at the head of the line was about to approach the guru, but he stopped him. He gestured to the two attendants who flanked him to block the line. Then the guru beckoned to the two religious Jews to come to him. While the long line of devotees, many of them Europeans, looked on in surprise, Eliezer and Natti directly approached the guru. No bowing, no taking the dust of his feet, no kneeling on the ground. The guru motioned for them to sit beside him on the bench.

 Eliezer’s question was different than that of the devotees who asked Swami Vijayananda about the purpose of life or the way to higher consciousness. Looking directly at the guru, Eliezer asked, “I heard that you’re a Jew. Is it true?”

**Was Born into a Hasidic Family**

 The guru smiled. Yes, he had been born into a Hasidic family in France. Although his grandparents were Lubliner Hasidim, his parents were more modern, but still fully observant. He had gone to Heder (Talmud Torah) and had been raised with all the devout trappings of Judaism. In his twenties, he told Eliezer and Natti, he abandoned Jewish observance. He became a doctor. Then the Holocaust descended. He told them about his Holocaust experiences, and about how he gave his tefillin away to a religious fellow because he wasn’t using them anyway.

**“Why Did You Come to India?”**

 “Why did you come to India?” Eliezer asked him.

 The guru related that, after the war, he was on a ship bound for the nascent State of Israel. A woman on the ship asked him why he was going from one war to another. “Where should I go?” he asked her. She suggested India, a place of peace, with no anti-Semitism.

 In India, in 1951, at the age of 36, he met Anandamayi-ma. Already at that time, hundreds of thousands of Indians venerated her not only as an enlightened soul, but as an Incarnation of the Divine Mother. He became her faithful disciple, taking on the monastic name of Swami Vijayananda. After her passing in 1982, many Indians and Westerners gravitated to him as their new guru.

 Looking at Eliezer and Natti, he said, “There are two levels of spirituality: a lower level and a higher level. The lower level is religion; the higher level is the recognition that everything is one.”

 Eliezer looked back at him and rejoined: “There are two levels of love: a higher level and a lower level. There is love for every person in the world, and there is love for your own wife and family. If you’re not able to love your own family, your love of the whole world is fake.”

 “I agree,” nodded the guru.

**An Obligation to First Love the Jewish People**

 “So,” continued Eliezer, “You’re Jewish. Before you go out and love the whole world, you should practice loving those who are closest to you, the Jewish People.”

 The guru laughed. That started their discussion. As the attendants looked on nervously and the many devotees in the line fidgeted restlessly, the guru and the Hasids sparred back and forth for a long time. “He was trying to show us that we were wrong,” remembers Eliezer, “that religion is not the Truth.”

 With neither side conceding to the other, Eliezer suddenly switched gears. He asked, “What did your mother call you when you were a child?”

Tears came to the guru’s eyes, and he murmured, “Avrimka. My name was Avraham Yitzhak. My mother called me Avrimka.”

**Starts Singing Eishes Hayil**

 Eliezer continued to probe: “Do you remember a Shabbos table when you were a child?”

 The guru closed his eyes. Then, from out of hazy depths 70 years dormant, he started to sing “*Eishes Hayil*, A Woman of Valor,” the song sung before Kiddush at every Shabbos dinner. With tears streaming from his closed eyes, he sang the entire song, from beginning to end. Electricity filled the air of the ashram courtyard, igniting a charged atmosphere that reached both backward in time and heavenward in intensity.

 The two attendants, who had never before seen their guru cry, became afraid. They moved to eject the foreign men, telling them that their time was up. The guru opened his eyes, suddenly back in the present, and waved the attendants away. (*To be continued next week*.)

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Aish.com and excerpted from Sara Yoheved Rigler’s upcoming book titled “G-d Winked: Tales & Lessons from My Spiritual Adventures.”*

**What is Missing**

**In Beit Shemesh?**

**By Rabbi Yosef Vigler**

 Rabbi Abraham Twerski once shared that his favorite childhood memory was a rebuke he received from his father. He was nine years old and already a talented chess player, so a Rabbi visiting his home on a Rosh Hashanah afternoon invited him to a game of chess, assuring him that it was

permissible. He was a good player, but the young Twerski eventually won.

 That night, his father asked to speak with him and summoned him into his study. Looking up from his sforim, he asked his son softly, “You played chess on Rosh Hashanah?”

**Playing Chess “Es Past Nisht”**

 “Yes,” was the reply, “the rabbi said it was permitted.” His father looked back into his sforim, slowly shaking his head in the negative saying simply, “Es past nisht.” It is not fitting for you. I expect more of you.”

 For the next few minutes, the room was silent as the boy felt acute regret and his father’s disappointment, waiting to be dismissed. Finally, his father looked up, and there was a twinge of a smile and a twinkle in his eye. “But you did checkmate him, didn’t you?”

 That is how one admonishes or chastises effectively.

**A Fascinating Phenomenon**

 Here is a fascinating phenomenon: We can insult ourselves as much as we like and not be insulted. We can think and even tell ourselves, “I am such an idiot, a coward; I can’t believe I said something so stupid,” and we take it like a man. However, knowing ourselves and shortcomings best, our self-inflicted critique is right on target, and still, we manage to brush it off and move on.

 Yet, when somebody else accuses us of the very same fault, we flare up in anger and resentment. We simply cannot bear it, even if we were in the middle of accusing ourselves of the very same fault! Immediately, we retaliate to attack our accuser and defend our pride, or if we work on our character and are more refined, we struggle not to get upset.

 A wife can think her father is a miser and even complain about this to her husband, but Heaven help him if he tells her what kind of miser her father is. What is the difference? After all, self-criticism is much more accurate, sharp, and authentic, so why is it so much less painful?

**The Difference is Simple**

 The difference is simple: I love myself. Nay, I am infatuated with myself. I strongly believe that I am special and good. It so happens that I have a particular fault. But nonetheless, it is just one fault, while the rest of my self is essentially good and lovable. My criticism is minority built on a strong majority of love. The insult is encapsulated in love.

 But when you say I am dumb, I don’t sense any love in your voice. I don’t sense appreciation and respect of my qualities and strong points. I sense that all you know about me is this negative trait, and that is what insults me. That, I can’t handle.

**The Town of Beit Shemesh**

 A town in Israel, Beit Shemesh, is being torn apart by fighting, insult, and accusation between its more frum and less frum inhabitants. Each side is vilifying the other, and the tension throughout the country is rising. Each side has valid claims, arguments, and demands, but they cannot have a civil dialogue. Why? Because they are missing this very point.

 We might disagree about what level of religion to observe, and some of us might be 100% right, and the others 100% wrong, but when these two sides attempt to interact and communicate with each other, there has to be a recognition and a sense that despite our vast differences, kol Yisrael areivim. We are all one entity; we are all one family; we are all one.

**Criticism and Rebukes Must**

**Be Encapsulated by Love**

 Regardless who is right or wrong, criticism and rebuke must be founded and encapsulated by love. A Jew, no matter what, has an inherently holy soul, and is, therefore, one with my own soul.

 The mitzvah, the command, of ahavas Yisrael applies to him just as it applies to my own relatives who think like me and act like me. There has to be a foundation of deep empathy and sensitivity. Without such a foundation, criticism and rebuke will backfire and trigger retaliation, but with this foundation, we can learn from each other, influence each other positively, and ultimately give Hashem the greatest nachas a Father can have.

*Reprinted from the Shevat 5772 edition of “Thinking Chassidus,” a publication of Maayan Yisroel, a Flatbush shul under the guidance of Rabbi Yosef Vigler.*

**Avoiding Anger**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

 The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, Spain-Egypt, 1135-1204), in Hilchot Dei'ot elaborates on the evil nature of anger and the need to distance oneself from this emotion to the farthest extent possible.

 According to the Rambam, one should train himself not to grow angry even over very important matters, regarding which we may have thought it appropriate to respond angrily. And when a person finds it necessary to show anger for the purpose of instructing his children or other people his authority, he should display anger only outwardly, but remain in full control of his emotions internally.

**Emphasizing the Gravity of Anger**

 The Rambam cites a number of comments from the early Sages emphasizing the gravity of anger, including, "Whoever becomes angry is considered as if he worshipped idols." A scholar who becomes angry loses his knowledge, and a prophet who becomes angry loses his prophetic capabilities.

 The Rambam goes so far as to say that "Ba'alei Cheima," people who commonly grow angry, "their lives are not lives at all." Therefore, the proper way to live one's life is to accept insults and harm without responding angrily.

**Obligation to Do Teshuva for**

**Faulty Character Traits**

 Later, in Hilchot Teshuva. the Rambam writes that the obligation of Teshuva (repentance) applies not only to those who have committed forbidden acts, but also to those with faulty character traits. A person with a tendency to anger, jealousy, greed, lust for honor, and gluttony, must repent from the given trait even if he has committed no specific, forbidden act.

 The Rambam observes that repentance is generally more difficult to accomplish in cases of improper character traits than in situations of a specific act. It is far easier to resolve never to repeat a given action than to change a mode of conduct to which one has grown accustomed, making this kind of Teshuva particularly difficult.

 It therefore behooves us to ensure never to grow angry, and to conduct serious, sincere introspection and Teshuva to repent for all situations where we became angry.

*Reprinted from the email of Dailyhalacha.com from January 30, 2012, featuring the Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series as authored by Rabbi Eli J. Mansour, Rav of Congregation Beit Yaakob in Flatbush.*

**Story #740**

**Steady Hands**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000sfW0:001F9weX00001_Jd&count=1328025003&randid=1079543550&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1079543550##)

 An elderly Jew with a large black Yarmulke once appeared at the Chabad counter in Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. When he was asked if he would like a cup of coffee gratis, he answered that he would, but only if it was full to the brim.

 The perplexed chasidim standing behind the counter did as he said; they filled the cup, with his constant encouragement, to the point that the slightest quiver would cause it to spill. Then to their amazement the old fellow lifted the cup without spilling a drop and drank it.

 When he finished he smiled proudly and said, "I did that to show you how great your Rebbe is!"

**Rabbi Baker is Not a Chabad Chasid**

 "I'm not a Chabad chasid," he explained "My name is Rabbi Baker and years ago I was the Rabbi of a large shul in New York.City. We had a mikva for women and everything. But then, like so many shuls in the U.S.A, the older people either died or moved away and the neighborhood filled with gentiles.

 The board of directors of the shul began hinting that they would like to sell out and make a nice profit, but I strongly opposed it.

 "First of all, it is forbidden to sell a Synagogue and, not only that, men kept coming to Shul and women kept using the mikva. Furthermore, an interesting thing was happening. The lady that was in charge of the mikva told me that almost every evening the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneerson, would call her up, ask her how she was feeling and encourage her work.

 "This continued for several months. Then, one evening while I was in the middle teaching a class in Talmud in the shul, she burst into the room and shouted almost hysterically that someone had put a large lock on the mikva door.

**Trying to Be an Honorable Rabbi**

 "I understood that it must have been the directors trying to discourage women from "I understood that it must have been the directors trying to discourage women from coming but I didn't know what to do. I am not the strongest of people and I held myself to be an honorable Rabbi, certainly not one to go fighting battles.

 "Well, I don't know how I did it but I ran to my car, somehow found a metal saw (to this day I don't know how it got there) ran to the lock and began sawing away in public. A bunch of people even stopped to look but I didn't care. About a half hour later the door was open and the women were able to enter.

**Blessed by the Rebbe**

 "The next day the mikva lady told me that the Rebbe called her the previous night after the incident, and when she told him what I had done, he said, ‘Blessed be the hands that sawed off that lock.’

 "That is what I wanted to show you," the elderly Rabbi concluded. "Today I am over ninety one years old, yet you see that my hands are steady as a youth's. Clearly it is because of the Rebbe’s blessing."

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

 Connections: (1) Weekly Reading, (2) Yud Shvat “when the Rebbe, zt”l, officially assumed leadership of Chabad in 5711 (1951).

 Biographical Note: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (11 Nissan 1902 - 3 Tammuz 1994), became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, passed away in Brooklyn on 10 Shvat 1950.

 He is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Jewish leader of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet.

 His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

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**Helping the Rabbi**

**Work Out**

**By Rabbi Levi Avtzon**

 Russell spends seven hours a day exercising. He earns his livelihood from overweight millionaires and parents who need a babysitter for their five-year-old children. He is a taekwondo trainer.

 I spend seven hours a day praying, learning, teaching and writing. My livelihood is still waiting for its sponsors. I am a rabbi.

**Different Types of Diggers**

 In chassidic lingo, we are both diggers. He digs for the body’s uncovered strength; I dig for the soul’s unlimited resources. For some reason, his digging hits gold, mine barely scratches copper . . .

 Recently, after an hour-long Soul Dig on the weekly Torah portion, Russell turned to me and asked, “Hey, Rabbi, how’s your exercise doing? Been working out recently?”

 Gulp!

 “Um… well, you know.”

 Russell wasn’t going to let that go. “What do I know?”

 I figured I’d try some excuses. “Well, I grew up in an environment where exercise was unfashionable. I hardly ever played sports, never ran, jogged or went to a gym. Working out doesn’t come naturally to me.”

 “With all due respect, Rabbi, do you think *tefillin* comes naturally to me?”

 I thought for a minute. “I guess not.”

 “So, can you explain me why you and all your colleagues are constantly harassing me to put on *tefillin*? Don’t you realize that it doesn’t come naturally to me?”

**Tongue-in-Cheek Route**

 I decided to go the tongue-in-cheek route. “Because it is our job to do so. How else will we make a living?”

 Russell played along. “Well then, it’s my job to make sure that people are healthy and in shape.”

 I tried theology. “Russell, my dear friend, you should know that every Jew has a *neshamah*, a Jewish soul. And *tefillin* is natural to every soul, even if you haven’t been raised that way!”

 He was far from impressed. “Every Jew has a body as well. And maintenance comes naturally to a body, even if you haven’t been taught how to maintain your body. And, Rabbi, doesn’t it say in the Torah that you should diligently guard your body?”

**Afraid of the Idea of Straining His Body**

 Help! How do I get out of this? Just the thought of straining my body even slightly more than schlepping a *cholent* pot makes me jittery!

 Suddenly, a new idea popped into my head. Why hadn’t I thought of it till now?

 With the widest grin, I pulled out my rabbit. “Look at me, Russell. I am way past the quarter-century milestone. How do you expect me to change at such an age? My muscles are low in tone, my *cholent* belly is popping through all my suits, and most importantly, I am too busy.”

 Russell was silent. It was the silence that speaks louder than words.

 And this is what the silence said:

 “You go around the world telling Jews of all ages that age is irrelevant, and G‑d waits with open arms for His children to embrace Him. You put on *tefillin* with ninety-year-olds and teach Hebrew to grandmas; you encourage middle-aged couples with steady jobs and comfortable lives, university students with plans and aspirations, and grandparents whose children are out of the nest, to go on the *teshuvah* roller coaster, reconnecting to their Judaism, shaking up their settled lives.

 “You come up with nice slogans to make the return to a Jewish lifestyle sound easy and fuzzy, while we both know that returning to G‑d is hard work and seriously challenging.

**When the “Talker Doesn’t Walk”**

 “But now, when it comes to changing just one habit, all of a sudden the talker doesn’t walk. Where did the ‘It’s never too late’ go?

 “If you expect us to leave our natural habitats, it’s about time you join the journey. Wobble or hobble, but don’t watch the marathon of change from the sidelines. It’s all about one step at a time towards a life of health, where your healthy soul will marry your healthy body and live happily ever after.’

**Finishing the Silent Speech**

 Finally his eyes blinked. The silent speech was over.

 I had never known that eyes can speak, let alone shout. I never realized that words from the eyes pierce deeper than words from the tongue. What could I respond to an unspoken rebuke? I was forced to internalize the truth that had been coated with ice cream and couch potato for too long.

 Stump the rabbi he did. Anything but raising my white flag would be cowardice.

 “Russell, I want to change my ways. When do we start?”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine. Rabbi Avtzon lives and teaches Torah in Johannesburg, South Africa.*

It Once Happened

**Collecting Funds for the Yeshiva of Volozhin**

 The great yeshiva of Volozhin, like every other Torah institution was supported largely by the donations - large and small - of good-hearted Jews. The charity collector himself was a poor man who made his rounds of the villages, thus making a living for himself as well as the yeshiva.

 Once, when it was time to begin his trip, it dawned on him that he would make a much better impression on his potential contributors if he were dressed for the part. What must people think of him when he comes to their door dressed like a pauper. Why, it even reflected badly on the yeshiva, he thought.

**Suggested the Yeshiva Help Outfit Him**

**With a New Suit and Horse and Carriage**

 With these new ideas in mind, the fund-raiser suggested to Reb Chaim, the head of the yeshiva, that he be outfitted in a respectable new suit. They were quick to agree to that request, but then he had another idea. Perhaps, he speculated, a horse and carriage would also help in his collection, for not only would it give him a better appearance, but it would enable him to get around more efficiently and cover more ground. Again, his point was well taken, and he received what he wanted.

**Feeling an Extra Burst of Energy**

 The charity collector, outfitted like a gentleman now, felt an extra burst of energy as he set on his trip. The first stop he made was at the home of a certain wealthy peasant who had always been very generous with his donations. This time, however, it was a different story: the peasant was closed fisted and refused to give even a penny. The charity collector was baffled; now he was properly prepared for his job, and he met with a cold shoulder.

 Disappointed and confused, the collector returned to Reb Chaim and confessed that his idea hadn't produced the intended results. Soon after, Reb Chaim himself visited the villager. He was greeted with all the honor and respect due a great scholar and he exchanged small talk with the peasant. But then he asked the pointed question which, after all, was the purpose of his visit: "Why have you stopped supporting the yeshiva?"

 The peasant said, "Well, Rabbi, before when I gave money to the yeshiva, I was certain that it was going to a good cause, that I was actually supporting yeshiva students' learning. I felt happy with my deed, for I want to increase the learning of the holy Torah. But now, I see that I was wrong. This time, when your collector came to me, I saw a well-dressed man driving a new carriage. This is not where I want my money to be going, for such unnecessary and wasteful extras!"

**Betzalel’s Special “Spirit of G-d”**

 Reb Chaim shook his head in agreement. "You know, you make sense, and I agree with you, but allow me to explain the true situation to you. You certainly know that it is written about Betzalel, who constructed the Sanctuary when the Jews were wandering in the desert, 'And I filled him with the spirit of G-d, with knowledge, intelligence and wisdom to know...to do creative labor...in gold and silver and copper.'

 "From this verse, you might imagine that all the contributions that were given by the people were used in the actual construction of the Holy of Holies, but that is obviously not the case. The gifts which the people gave were used in all aspects of the building. Betzalel had the Divinely-inspired insight to see the intention of each individual donor.

**The Reward for Purely Inspired Donations**

 Those whose intentions were purely for the glory of G-d's name, merited that their contributions be directly for the Holy of Holies. For those whose gifts were given with the intention of enhancing their own reputations or importance, the donations went for other aspects of the Sanctuary. It all depended on the sincerity and purity of intent on behalf of the contributors.

 "The same applies here," continued Reb Chaim. "Your donation was always made with a pure heart, and so, the money you gave to the yeshiva directly supported Torah study. There are others, though, whose motivations may be a little less pure. Sure, they want to help the yeshiva, but at the same time, they want honor for themselves.

**Defending the Appearance of the Charity Collector**

 It is the contributions of these people which go to support other aspects of the yeshiva management. You see, the appearance of our charity collector and his means of transportation are also important in their own right, even though in a lesser way than the actual maintenance of our students."

 The wealthy peasant was well pleased with Reb Chaim's explanation. "Rabbi, thank you so much for telling me this. The truth is that I felt very bad refusing the man, and now that I know my money will be used properly, I am ready to make my usual donation."

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

**A Blast from the Past**

**Expressing Judaism**

**With a Paintbrush:**

**A self-described 'crazy hippie' with a gallery in L.A. creates vibrant Biblical narratives.**

**|By Nicole Santa Cruz**

 Barbara Mendes believes her life has been a series of miracles.

 Certain events have led her to embrace Judaism and paint vividly colored biblical narratives based on Genesis, Exodus and now Leviticus, the third book of the Torah.

 "Vayikra Mural," her newest work, is a 6-by-16-foot mural depicting the book's 859 verses in tiny, intricately detailed pictures.

 Mendes, an Orthodox Jew, said she names her murals in Hebrew to emphasize the language's use in the Bible. The latest mural, on display in her Pico-Robertson gallery, took her more than three years to complete, with the illustrations of each verse numbered so viewers can find it in the Bible.

Barbara Mendes, 61, stands in her gallery in front of her latest work, “Vayikra” (Photo by Glenn Koenig/Los Angeles)

**Artwork Endorsed by Rabbi Marc Angel**

 The artwork, though universal, is a perfect expression of who Mendes is, said Rabbi Emeritus Marc Angel of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City. Mendes calls Angel a mentor; he also serves the same congregation that her great-grandfather, also a rabbi, once did.

 "She is very full of vitality and full of life," Angel said. "She is very imaginative, creative, and she has an eye for color."

 But Mendes, a spunky 61-year-old, wasn't always painting Biblical narratives.

**A Major Member of the Alternative Comics Movement**

 In the 1970s, the New York-born artist went by "Willy." She was one of the only women in the underground, or alternative, comics movement, said Trina Robbins, author of "The Great Women Cartoonists."

 Mendes calls herself a "crazy hippie." But even in her days as an underground comic artist, her work, unlike that of many of her harder-edged counterparts, was infused with spirituality.

 "My stuff was never raw and sexual," she said of her comics. "It was about hippies saving the world through spirituality."

**Not Surprised About Artist’s**

**Journey to Observant Judaism**

 A longtime friend of Mendes, Robbins said she was not surprised at Mendes' journey from secular to observant Jew. As for her art, in one sense, Mendes has just expanded what she did originally, her friend said.

 "Her Biblical illustrations are really like comics," Robbins said. "If you look at them, each picture is told in a separate panel."

 On a recent afternoon in her gallery, Mendes, wearing a rainbow tie-dyed T-shirt, pointed out scenes from her work, her bright pink fingernails matching the art.

 "This is getting down to the nitty-gritty," she said as she explained a verse about dietary restrictions in the richly detailed Leviticus mural. In the work, hatch marks are used to symbolize that something is spiritually impure, and lightning bolts stand for "don't."

 "Her work requires such patience," Angel said. "She doesn't let anything go by. Every letter, every picture, every image is thought through very carefully. It's very cerebral."

 Other paintings in her gallery -- there are more than 150 displayed or leaning against the walls -- also pop with color.

**Art Influenced by Her Involvements in Life**

 A work in progress honors country music with depictions of guitars and singer Taylor Swift; another large painting features scenes of Los Angeles and Oregon, where Mendes once lived. Her work is influenced by her interest in Eastern mysticism in her 20s and African culture in her 30s, she said.

 Mendes said her work reflects her life and what she feels. "I always paint what I'm involved in," she said.

 "Shemot," her mural about the book of Exodus, is on display at the Sephardic Educational Center in Jerusalem's Old City, and "Beresheit," her depiction of Genesis, is permanently displayed at a Jewish community center in Boca Raton, Fla.

**Deep Roots in Sephardic Jewish Tradition**

 Mendes said her family had deep roots in Sephardic Jewish tradition, but it was not until she met Nathan Misraje, the man who would become her second husband, that she became seriously interested in Judaism. She quickly found mentors through Hebrew and Judaism classes.

 But she also believes her journey to the religion was a matter of timing.

 In November 1992, Mendes was painting a tropical-themed mural for a restaurant off of South Fairfax Avenue near Wilshire Boulevard. She was on her knees, with ants biting her, furiously painting a depiction of G-d's eyes when she was approached by a man who asked her to paint another mural -- in a synagogue.

 "It was like my own people reached out to me," she recalled.

 Her reply to the man: "I'll do it; I'm Jewish."

 Mendes said that she loves her religion and that learning to speak Hebrew at 47 was like learning "G-d's secret language." And she says that she can't believe she's made a living from her dream to be an artist.

"I believe G-d made that happen," she said.

*Reprinted from the November 30, 2009 edition of the Los Angeles Times.*

**Rabbi Moshe Wolfson and**

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Zt”l**

**As told by Rabbi Laibl Groner**

**Of the Rebbe's secretariat.**



Rabbi Moshe Wolfson

 This story took place in 2006. A Lubavitcher Chasid was giving a weekly class in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn. The curriculum is based on Likutei Sichot ("Collected Talks") of the Rebbe. After hearing that the Rebbe encouraged the retelling of miracle stories of the Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbes, the Chasid resolved to tell a story of the Rebbe at each class.

**An Inspiring Story About Rabbi Moshe Wolfson**

 The next week, the Chasid told a story about Rabbi Moshe Wolfson. Rabbi Wolfson is the mashgiach ruchani (spiritual dean) of Mesivta Torah Vodaath and rabbi of Beis Medrash Emunas Yisrael in Brooklyn.

 The Chasid began: "Once Rabbi Wolfson was diagnosed with a blocked artery. The attending doctor said that normally he would recommend a stent. But because of the rabbi's weakened state, he could not wholeheartedly recommend the procedure. He would leave the decision up to the rabbi.

 "Rabbi Wolfson chose not to do the operation. He decided that each night he would recite the verse from Psalms (51:12), 'Lev Tahor - G-d, create for me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.' He prayed to G-d that in the merit of reciting this verse, he would not need the operation.

**“Why Didn’t I Ask Him?”**

 "After a number of days passed Rabbi Wolfson chided himself: 'I always ask the Rebbe questions, why didn't I ask him this, as well?'

 "The following Sunday, Rabbi Wolfson came 'Sunday Dollars.' Before Rabbi Wolfson had a chance to say anything, the Rebbe said, 'In the merit of you saying the verse "lev tahor" each night you won't need the operation.' And of course, Rabbi Wolfson didn't need the operation."

 It was midnight when the Chasid finished giving the class and began the drive home to Crown Heights. As he drove, he saw a Jewish man looking for a ride. The man was from Israel but was staying in Boro Park. Although Boro Park was totally out of the way, the Chasid decided to take the man anyway.

 The Chasid mentioned something about the Rebbe and the passenger asked, "You're a Lubavitcher Chasid?" When the driver answered "yes," the passenger started to make derogatory remarks about the Rebbe. The Chasid didn't respond but instead offered, "Let me tell you a story that I just told in the class that I gave." He repeated the story about Rabbi Wolfson.

**Doubts Veracity of Rabbi Wolfson Having a Connection to the Rebbe**

 "I can't believe Rabbi Wolfson has a connection to Lubavitch and the Rebbe! I am praying in his shul in the morning. I'll ask him if this story is true. Give me your number and I'll call you after I speak to Rabbi Wolfson!"

 The next afternoon, the Chasid received a call from the passenger. He sounded extremely agitated. "Rabbi Wolfson told me that the story is very true. He called the Rebbe a gaon olam (universally accepted scholar), tzadik (righteous person), kadosh v'tahor (holy and pure) and more. He said that he had other miracles from the Rebbe, and he told me stories about miracles of the Rebbe with other people as well! What can I do to rectify my mistake?"

**Gives Advice on How to Rectify the Mistake**

 "Add teachings from the Rebbe into the classes that you give. No one even has to know that they are the Rebbe's insights."

 The man readily agreed to the suggestion. He also told the Chasid about his brother. "He is the dean of a yeshiva and I will make sure that he, too, knows who the Rebbe is, changes his ways and rectifies his mistakes.

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

**With New Restaurant**

**At Canyons, Kosher Food Debuts at a U.S. Ski Resort**

**By Matthew Weinstein**

 PARK CITY, Utah (JTA) – Kosher food isn’t something one generally associates with ski resorts, and Utah isn’t a place known for its Jewish population.

 But after Canyons, the state’s largest ski resort, opened the nation’s first ski-area, glatt kosher restaurant this season, the Jews came. And ate. And they were satisfied.

 “Response has been phenomenal,” said executive chef John Murcko, who is the vice president of food and beverage at Talisker Corp., which bought Canyons in 2008 and opened the kosher Bistro at Canyons last December.

**Word of Mouth Has Been Tremendous**

 “We were at 100 percent capacity from the day we opened through the New Year’s Day weekend,” he said. “Word of mouth has been tremendous. Locals are discovering us as well, not just our destination visitors.”

 The restaurant has brought more than kosher dining to the resort town of Park City, but also an eruv and weekly Shabbat services – at least for the ski season. The town already had a [year-round Reform synagogue](http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/01/22/3091294/shul-at-park-city-is-popular-venue-for-sundance-film-festival-and-ski-in-shabbat-services), Temple Har Shalom.



A steak dish from the glatt kosher restaurant Bistro at the Canyons at the Canyons ski resort in Park City, Utah. (Bistro at the Canyons

 Murcko, who was named by Salt Lake Magazine last year as the Best Chef in Utah, said the idea of opening up a kosher restaurant was to stand out.

 “Talisker has always sought to create the finest dining and hospitality experiences – and differentiate ourselves from our competition,” he told JTA. “We knew that individuals and families that keep kosher would enjoy a gourmet bistro in Park City, and that locals who love fine bistro-style dining would, too. We started planning it months ago, and we are very pleased how it has come together.”

**Traveled to New York to Learn Kosher Cooking**

 Murcko traveled to New York to learn kosher cooking, while chef Zeke Wray spent time in Toronto and Los Angeles.

 The cuisine is categorized as "New American Kosher Bistro." Breakfast takes a minimalist approach: bagels and cream cheese, granola, fruit and yogurt for $16. Lunch options are comprised largely of salads and sandwiches, including a kosher Reuben, grilled chicken salad and Israeli couscous on pita.

 It's at dinner that Bistro really cuts loose, starting with the appetizers, including vegetarian chopped liver and seared ahi tuna. There also are plenty of soups – a nice way to end a day on the slopes – but you won't find chicken with matzah balls. If the soup isn’t enough to keep you warm, the main courses will, from the smoked duck breast with ragu of braised red cabbage, fennel, apple and duck confit to ribeye steaks accompanied by roasted squash, sage white bean puree, leeks and warm smoked cherry tomatoes. The menu also features an array of lamb, pasta and fish dishes -- or pastrami sandwiches for those so inclined.

**Special Shabbat Offerings**

 Those looking for Jewish-style cooking should be sure to come on Shabbat. The $85 prix fixe, five-course Friday night dinner includes gefilte fish, chicken noodle soup (still no matzah balls) and a choice of turkey involtini, standing rib roast or chicken schnitzel all served with potato kugel on the side. The $65 Shabbat lunch is six courses built around a hearty flanken cholent.

 The Bistro’s COR kashrut certification comes from the Kashruth Council of Canada, the largest kosher certification agency north of the border. COR certifies more than 1,000 facilities and thousands more products.

 COR Rabbi Tsvi Heber oversees Bistro, and two New York-based rabbis, Yosef Kirszenberg and Mendel Wilmovsky, serve as the on-site authorities.

 Kirszenberg, 46 and originally from Argentina, has been coming to Utah from New York for the last two years to run programs at Canyons. Since the restaurant opened, he has been spending 2 1/2 weeks out of every month in Utah overseeing the Canyons’ kosher dining, examining the 3-mile-long eruv that encompasses the resort hotel area every Friday and leading Shabbat services.

**Built a Shul that Has a Minyan Every**

**Week Since Restaurant Opened**

 “We have a beautiful shul -- it was built especially to be a shul -- in the same building as the restaurant,” Kirszenberg said, adding that Canyons has had a minyan every week since the restaurant opened.

 Kirszenberg, who is a Lubavitcher, now leaves his wife and nine children, aged 1 to 21, at home in New York when he comes to Utah to work, but he says he hopes to be able to move with them to Utah sometime in the future.

 And what about skiing?

 “Not yet, but everyone is pushing me to do it,” he said. “The last time was when I was 9 years old in Argentina.”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Programs) Update. The article was originally published by the J.T.A. (Jewish Telegraph Agency) on January 23, 2012.*

**Sweden to Chabad: No**

**Jewish Homeschooling**

**By Hana Levi Julian**

 Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries to Sweden have been threatened by the city of Gothenburg with thousands of dollars in fines for home schooling their children, as the Swedish government attempts to force this Jewish family to send its children to public school.

 On January 26, Rabbi Alexander Namdar and his wife Leah, representatives of the worldwide Chassidic movement to Sweden for the past 21 years, were served at their home with a notice by the Gothenburg school authorities.



Rabbi Alexander Namdar, his wife Leah Namdar and their new attorney Ulf Tollhage

*Haga Nygata, pedestrian street of the city district Haga, Gothenburg, Sweden (Photo by Erik of Gothenburg, EVL.)*

 According to the notice, four of their children who currently study at [an international online school](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0XFA4F99DC4F3B4DFCE3CE8F93660DE27F931F3BDEB284CD0F35E033445842EB4BB15827E199B575360D983A51873C7143D82E62F03B94258B5CFDE0090C8A982F.htm) must be delivered to a Swedish school by today (Wednesday). Failure to do so could result in a fine of 16000 crown - the equivalent of $2,400 -- per week.

 The children's education is not lacking by any means -- and they are not the first in the family to have been educated at home. Six of the family's 11 children also learned at home in their early years, and now live and study abroad at Jewish high schools, teaching seminaries and rabbinic colleges. All are pursuing careers in education.



*Haga Nygata, pedestrian street of the city district Haga, Gothenburg, Sweden (Photo by Erik of Gothenburg, EVL.)*

**International Online School for**

**Children of Chabad Representatives**

 In addition to the international online school attended by the children -- and 500 of their classmates around the world -- the Namdar children are also receiving private tutoring. Their secular curriculum includes English, Swedish, mathematics, geography, science, music, art and gymnastics. All the children are fluent in English, Swedish and Yiddish, and can read Hebrew by age 5.

 The notice came following a change on January first in Sweden's law that tightened restrictions on home schooling. The amendment permits home schooling only in "extraordinary" circumstances -- and religious issues are explicitly excluded as a valid reason for home schooling one's child.

**Longtime Swedish Ban of Shechita**

 Sweden does not tolerate differences very well, notes Leah Namdar. The longtime ban on shechita (Jewish ritual preparation of kosher meat), and recent laws tightening restrictions on Jewish ritual circumcision are warnings of what Leah Namdar said could become "the last battle against Communism."

 "We're two parents fighting city hall for the right to [give our children a Jewish education](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0XC37195D3A9ED8577C398A2D6C34E9DABD9BF0A159EDE043ED3B54A9E5A2A51B6FBD32FEE71D4B3680D983A51873C7143D82E62F03B94258B5CFDE0090C8A982F.htm)," she told Lubavitch.com.

 The family's lawyer agrees: the Gothenburg v. Namdar case will be a critical test of Sweden's record on religious freedom, said attorney Richard Backenroth.

**Unwilling to Dialogue with European Jewish Congress**

 The lawyer has been careful not to attribute the city's action to anti-Semitism. However, European Jewish Congress president Dr. Moshe Kantor recently noted that Sweden is the only nation within the European Union unwilling to discuss domestic anti-Semitism with the EJC. Anti-Semitism has [risen in Sweden](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0XB911067A37B59E8122282A90A4EA9097C7ED8B641B38F3AC6CABE3B81B83F7603880B3491AFB4A7E0D983A51873C7143D82E62F03B94258B5CFDE0090C8A982F.htm) in recent years, along with a trend towards the extreme right. Jews in the city of Malmo in particular have [begun to flee the community](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0X7E79234E26E0EA8219147D42BA38C4BF52EBD2F415789BC8F6A252BC9541A1A237D4F98CF5014B3E0D983A51873C7143D82E62F03B94258B5CFDE0090C8A982F.htm) as a result of the rising trends.

 Backenroth, who is appealing the notice and the "exorbitant fine" that arrived while the case is still pending, told Lubavitch.com, "Sweden's schools cannot possibly accommodate the needs of the Namdar children with respect to their religious requirements."

 More ominously, forcing the Namdar children -- the only Orthodox Jews in the city -- to attend a Swedish school, could expose them to real danger, the movement warned. Swedish schools are notorious for their bullying problems and the children would become [a certain target for anti-Semitic harassment.](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0X97526F423871BF90DFA4B0EB15421A6DDC9A2B5D378B0FB9B5ED25519DC126A7304C0D0F86641C350D983A51873C7143D82E62F03B94258B5CFDE0090C8A982F.htm)

**No Real Need for Namdar Children**

**To Attend Swedish Schools**

 Guy Linderman, a Jewish citizen of Sweden, agrees the Namdar children need not attend Swedish schools.

 Active in politics while living in Sala, he told Lubavitch.com he had originally supported the new law when it was drafted years ago, but believes it should not be applied to the Namdars. The law, he said, was intended to ensure that Sweden's immigrant population was educated, "many of who... had grown up illiterate, incapable of signing their names."

 The Namdar children, who he knows well, "are more educated than their Swedish peers," Linderman said.

 "This is a stain on the reputation of a country that takes pride in equality as a fundamental value," said Rabbi Namdar. Both he and his wife said they regard education as their "highest priority."

*Reprinted from the February 1, 2012 email of Arutz Sheva (IsraelNationalNews.com)*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The “Eyes” Have It**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 The current wave of anti-Semitism in Europe lends special relevance to a little-known Holocaust story which appears in the latest volume of "*Aleinu Leshabeach*" in Hebrew.

 A Nazi officer decided to have some fun together with his comrades at the expense of a Jewish prisoner. He called him into the room where the group was gathered and said to him:

 "When I was young I had an eye removed and replaced with a glass one. The surgeon did such a masterful job that no one was ever capable of detecting which of my eyes was real and which was glass. If you can correctly identify which is the glass eye you will live, but if you fail to do so you will be shot on the spot."

 While all the officers chuckled with sadistic pleasure at what they viewed as an exercise in futility, the Jew marched towards his one-eyed tormentor and correctly pointed to the glass eye. When asked by the surprised Nazis how he had managed to succeed where all others had failed, he offered this explanation:

 "Your hatred of Jews is so intense that it is reflected in your very eyes. When I failed to see this hatred revealed in one of your eyes, I realized it couldn’t be your real one!"

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

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

**How Could the Jews Have Seen G-d at Krias Yam Suf?**

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

How can you say that the Bnei Yisroel at Yam Suf [the splitting of the Sea of Reeds] saw Hakadosh Baruch Hu? Doesn't it say Lo Yirani Ha'adam V'chai, a man cannot see Me when he is alive?

|  |
| --- |
| ANSWER: |

|  |
| --- |
| splitting_the_red_sea2 |

In this world you **could** see Hashem, no question about it. It's up to us to try more and more, because the world was made for the purpose that we should recognize Hashem. And that's called “seeing”. Because actually, there is a big kasha on Moshe Rabbeinu. Why did he say “Har’eini Nuh Es Ke’vodecha - show me Your glory”? Did Moshe Rabbeinu think that with his eyes he could see Hashem? The Rambam asks the kasha in Moreh Ne’vuchim. What did Moshe Rabbeinu want?

 If somebody would say, “show me, I want to see electricity”. Tell him it's impossible, you can't see electricity. You can see the light that electricity causes. You can hear the noise that electricity causes in the batteries and so on. It gives energy to the tape-recorders, but you can never see electricity. Because electricity is something that the eyes are not made to see. Eyes cannot see Hashem! Hashem is a sort of energy that's the secret of all the energies of the world. He's Kail. Kail means energy, Koach. He's the energy that's the secret of all energies, and therefore it's a kind of electricity that's the **heart** of the electricity. You can never see that.

So what did Moshe Rabbeinu ask to see? That's a kasha, a big kasha. And the Rambam asks, he knew he couldn't see Hashem. He asked, “give me more awareness of You. Such awareness that it'll be the end of my career, I shouldn't have to look for more awareness than I can get in this world, I know I can't get everything. When I'll be in the next world I'll have different kind of eyes. My eyes will be capable of seeing something I can't see in this world now. But in this world, let me see as much as I can”. So Hashem said, “No, I won't let you. I want you to labor all your life, try more and more”. And each person has to labor all his life. Even the greatest man, Moshe Rabbeinu, is never finished. You have to try to see more and more, and gain more and more Dei’ah, and clarity of Hashem all his days.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l” from a transcription of questions that were posed to Harav Miller by the audience at the Thursday night lectures. To listen to the audio of this Q & A please dial: 201-676-3210.*

**Az YaShir**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Ani**

 When the Torah discusses the Jews' song after the splitting of the Reed Sea, it changes tenses and says that they "will sing" (i.e., rather than they "sang") this song to Hashem.

 Or HaChaim says that this shows us that the ability to perceive Hashem's greatness and sing his praises is not limited only to those who traversed the Reed Sea.

 Jews are always capable of raising their spiritual visions to the level of song first experienced by their ancestors at the Reed Sea.

 And that is why we say this prayer every day.

 The future tense of **Az YaShir** gives us the spiritual energy to sing and thank Hashem just liked our ancestors did at the Reed Sea.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Rabbi Shmuel Ani, director of the Sarah Dabah Elementary School and the Madison Torah Center in Flatbush.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**A Good Word**

 Dr. Abraham Twerski, the noted mental health expert who is a practicing orthodox Jew, was once lecturing to a mixed audience of Jews and non-Jews alike. During the course of his technical and scientific discussion, Dr. Twerski mentioned something about the soul. One of the surprised listeners piped up and asked, *“Dr. Twerski, do you mean to suggest that you have a soul?”* *“No,”* said Dr. Twerski. *“I am a soul.”* (Heard from Rabbi Label Lamm)

**The Jewish Soul is a Holy Spark**

 As we have mentioned several times, the Jewish soul is a holy spark of the Eternal One from Above. The body however is made up from the dust of the earth. After the soul leaves the body, the body returns to its source in the ground and the soul returns to its source in Eternity.

 The focus of our lives as Jews is therefore the spiritual growth of the eternal soul. *By investing in the soul, we invest in Eternity.* The highlight of the Jewish soul in this life is Shabbos. On Shabbos the *neshomah* – soul experiences a taste of the eternal bliss of the World to Come.

**Hashem’s Good Gift is Shabbos**

 Hashem tells us: *“I have a good gift in my storehouse, and its name is Shabbos.”* (Shabbos 10b) As we read in this week’s parsha *Beshalach*, Moshe tells the Bnai Yisroel *“See, Hashem has given you the Shabbos.”* (Shemos 16:29)

 Every week Jews around the world celebrate the gift of Shabbos with uplifting prayer, sumptuous meals, song, inspiring words of Torah and rest. The more a Jew separates himself from weekday activities, weekday thought and weekday speech on Shabbos, the more he will feel the special happiness of the Holy Day.

 On Shabbos we have the custom of greeting each other with *“Good Shabbos”* or *“Shabbat Shalom.”* Whatever greetings we may use during the week, such as *“hello,” “good morning,”* and *“good night,”* etc., are replaced by *“Good Shabbos.”* The holiness of Shabbos pervades the Jewish world on the seventh day.

**The Power of Calling Out “Good Shabbos”**

 The following beautiful story shows the power of a *“Good Shabbos”* to awaken the Jewish soul.

 It was close to midnight on a cool Shabbos night as two new bochurim (Yeshiva students) slowly made their way through the streets of Ezras Torah in Jerusalem, on their way back to Yeshivas Ohr Somayach. *"That was a long meal,”* said Jeff.\*

 *"Yeah!"* replied his roommate succinctly *"I don't know where all those kids sleep in that small apartment.”* David added in wonderment. The silent night was interrupted by a sudden call: *"Good Shabbos, boys!"* Jeff turned to his long-haired friend. *"Did you hear someone calling us?"*

**Again the Voice is Heard**

 *"I don’t know, it looks like we're the only ones on the street.”* Again they heard the voice calling them. This time they saw that it came from the balcony of a first-floor apartment. *"Up here! Good Shabbos."* All they could make out was a bushy beard and a big smile. *“Are you boys planning on walking all the way back to the yeshivah so late at night?"* Asked the bearded man.

 *"We really don't have much choice.”* Jeff replied.

**Offers the Boys a Guest Room**

 *"It is much too late to walk back tonight. It's cold, too. Come on, I have room for some guests. You can spend the night here, and I'll walk you back to Ohr Somayach tomorrow morning.”*

 The boys did not need much convincing. They gratefully accepted their new friend's hospitality. The nameless savior escorted them into the shadowy *"master bedroom”* as he called it with a wry grin: two fold-out cots in the middle of the living room. The entire apartment didn't seem much bigger than the dorm room the pair currently shared. Wishing them good night, their host disappeared into his bedroom, while his guests quickly sank into a deep sleep.

 David awoke early in the morning, and in the daylight, he took stock of his surroundings. The apartment seemed even smaller than last night. A nondescript small room with an old couch, somewhat worn dining-room table and chairs.

**Stunned by the Valuable Items in the Home**

 The china closet against the wall suddenly caught his attention. There were some valuable silver items there: four Kiddush cups, a menorah, a silver Megillah holder; and a large and really beautiful Seder plate. David looked around and noticed an antique candelabrum on the dining-room table. He was amazed that the host would take the two boys into his house and trust them with all the valuable items lying around. The sincerity and warmth of the host made an impression on David and his friend.

 David lay back in his bed and stared at the ceiling. He had a lot to think about. For years he'd read in the American newspapers how awful *"those ultra-Orthodox Jews"* were. Yet here was a man - a total stranger - who had trusted him implicitly on sight. David drifted back to sleep, thinking.

**The Power of Those Friendly Words of a Stranger**

 David ended up staying at the yeshivah for many months, during which time he thought long and hard about the decision to become observant. He attended countless classes on Jewish philosophy, Law, and Chumash. He went on a trip to Massada, hiked around Ein Gedi, and took a three-day tour of the Golan. He examined empirical evidence for the existence of G-d and the requirement of a moral imperative. But what made David into a baal Teshuvah and a Shabbos observer was the *"Good Shabbos"* that he heard from a tiny balcony. (\*names have been changed. True Tales from Two Cities, R. Zev Roth p.117)

 We see from this beautiful story the power of Shabbos to waken up the Jewish soul. We can be inspired by this story and by the holiness of Shabbos, to make sure always to say with a smile.

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

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Beshallach 5770**

**Earthquake and Tsunami:**

**Why Do They Happen?**

**By Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski**

**

 The recent tragedy in Haiti has elicited a number of comments. People question why G-d permits such catastrophes to happen. Others ask, why go to places of worship to pray for the victims to the G-d who smote them? Some people see such tragedies as expressions of G-d’s wrath, but, are the victims of earthquake, tsunami and tornadoes to be considered the most sinful people in the world?

**The Torah is Natural Law**

 My understanding of these happenings is based on the statement of the Zohar, that the Torah was the “blueprint” according to which G-d created the world. In other words, Torah is Natural Law, according to which the world operates. The Law of Gravity is Natural Law and is inviolable as are other physical laws, and so is the Natural Law of Torah. If the physical law that keeps the moon in its orbit were somehow suspended, the moon would crash into the earth, but this would not be a punitive act by G-d. If someone puts one’s hand into a fire, one gets burned, but that is not a punitive act of G-d. Rather, it is the result of Natural Law that fire burns.

 According to the Torah, there are seven Noahide Laws that are binding on all human beings, and these constitute the Natural Law according to which the world operates; these are:

 (1) Prohibition of idolatry

 (2) Prohibition of murder

 (3) Prohibition of theft

 (4) Prohibition of promiscuity

 (5) Prohibition of blasphemy

 (6) Prohibition of flesh taken from a live animal

 (7) Requirement to have just laws.

 All human beings, religionists and non-religionists are required to abide by these laws, which underlie the Natural Law according to which the world operates. Violation of these laws is tampering with Natural Law, whose consequences can be catastrophic.

 The world is a closed system. When a butterfly flaps its wings in Norway, it affects the ecology in Australia. When the Natural Law is intact, the earth’s crust and the atmosphere are stable. When air pollution tampers with the ozone layer, or sulfur dioxide pollution causes acid rain, the effects may be felt hundreds of miles away from the perpetrators. The people suffering these effects are not being “punished” by G-d, but are the victims of the reckless behavior of other people.

**Victims of the Reckless Behavior of Other People**

 Is this an injustice? Yes, just as it is an injustice for a pedestrian to be killed by a reckless driver. Such happenings occur because G-d does not interfere with the free choice and behavior of human beings. Just as we do not fault G-d when an innocent person is killed by a reckless driver, we should not fault G-d when innocent people, victims of hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and tsunami, suffer from the reckless behavior of those who violate the Natural Law.

**No Indiviudal or Group Can be Singled Out**

 No one is singled out to suffer the consequences of tampering with Natural Law. Violation of the seven Noahide Laws by people on one continent may result in a disruption of the Natural Law according to which the world operates, and the consequences of such disruption may occur on a distant continent. The disruption of the Natural Law which affected Indonesia and Haiti may have been caused by violations of the Noahide Laws by people the world over. No individual or group of people can be singled out as responsible and as being punished.

 The seven Noahide Laws are the basis of decency and morality. Every human being should behave according to them.

*Reprinted From the Matzav.com website as Featured Opinion on January 27, 2010*

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**Important Lesson**

**From the Mann**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Behold – I shall rain down to you food from the heaven.*’” (Shemot 16:4)

 Our perashah speaks at length about the daily miracle of the mann, heavenly bread, that came down from heaven. It came down for forty years while the Israelites were in the desert. Our sages make a startling statement: “The Torah was given only to those who ate the mann.” This is a very perplexing statement; surely the Torah was also given for all generations, including our own, who must earn their bread through sweat and toil.

 Harav Eliezer Ashkenazi z”l writes, in Maasei Hashem, that he understands this statement of our Sages to mean the following: The Torah was given only to those who consumed their entire portion of mann each day, without concern for what they would eat the next day. It was forbidden to leave over mann for the next day. This teaches us the crucial attribute of histapkut, feeling satisfied with what you have.

**A Trait that Makes Us Worry Free and Tranquil**

 The Torah was given to those who devote themselves, not to the relentless pursuit of wealth and material needs, but to the basic necessities of one day at a time, and for those who find happiness in their families and satiate themselves with spiritual endeavors. This trait of histapkut makes us worry free and tranquil.

 The current financial crisis is threatening to deprive many families of funds for basic necessities like food, rent, utilities and tuition. It is our obligation to do everything we can do to come to their aid. For many others, it means a crimp in a once-more-comfortable lifestyle, and the need to rethink or delay the non-essential purchases. For those families, the mann delivers a powerful message. Many components of our contemporary lifestyle actually add to our worries, and disturb our tranquility. In addition to tefillah for parnassah, rethinking our priorities and what currently brings us happiness may help us deal with the woes of the economy.

**How to Improve the**

**Taste of Manna**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

"*And [the Manna] tasted like honey*" (Shemot 16:31)

 The Rabbis tell us that the Manna tasted like whatever a person wanted it to taste like. If he thought about meat, it had a meat taste; if he had dairy in mind, it had a dairy taste. Rabbi Shimon Schwab z"l once visited the Hafess Hayim in 1930 and heard him ask the following question: "What if a person had nothing in mind when he ate the Manna? What would it taste like?" The Hafess Hayim answered, "If a person had nothing in mind, then the Manna would taste like nothing."

 He went on to explain that the Manna is symbolic of everything spiritual; whatever we put into spiritual things determines what the taste of the outcome will be. If a person learns Torah or does misvot with enthusiasm, then his enjoyment and fulfillment will be apparent. However, if a person does it as if it is a chore, with no feeling, then it will be dull and tasteless. Just as we plan a vacation or something exciting with feeling and enthusiasm, so too we should approach our spiritual involvement. Then we will have a sweet taste in everything we do.

*Reprinted from this weeks South Jersey Torah Bulletin email.*

**Story #635**

**A Stunning Fruit Basket**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 It was the night of Tu B'Shvat, and a large gathering of chasidim surrounded the table of Rabbi Yosef Meir of Spinka. At the head of the table sat the Rebbe, explaining the significance of the New Year for trees. He spoke of the things that men and trees have in common.

 With great effort and the investment of much energy, one can help a tree grow -- even a crooked one that has lacked nourishment and water. Sometimes, through devoted and persistent care, we can turn a stunted tree into a blooming one.

 At that moment, a bearded and well-dressed Jew entered the room. He walked over to the table and set down a gigantic basket bulging with choice fruits. Looking up, the Rebbe spotted the guest and broke into a broad smile. He invited the man to sit beside him and showed him the most remarkable warmth all through the evening. None of the chasidim knew the stranger's identity. Who was this man who had brought such a stunning fruit basket and had been honored by such tokens of the Rebbe's affection?

 Afterwards, the chasidim heard the story from the guest himself.

 I was born in Germany, he said, and arrived here only a few years ago. The education and upbringing I received at home were completely divorced from any connection to Torah and mitzvot. My father and grandfather identified with the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement in Germany, and raised me accordingly.

**Opens a Textile Factory**

 On my arrival here, I opened a textile factory. At first I sold my goods only in the surrounding area, but success soon smiled on me and my business expanded greatly. I sent my merchandise to every part of the country and even to neighboring countries. Everything was wonderful.

 Then tragedy struck one morning. I purchased an enormous quantity of raw material at an exceptionally low price, and was already mentally counting up the tremendous profits I expected to make from the deal. I paid for all the materials in cash and returned to my office. I was sitting there, dwelling pleasurably on the successful deal I had just concluded, when the supplier of the materials suddenly walked into my office and demanded payment for what he had sold me.

 At first I though he was joking. Very soon, however, it became clear that I had fallen into a trap. I remembered that the man had not signed a receipt for the money I had paid him. What remained was the contract, signed by me, authorizing the materials to be transferred and obligating me to pay for them.

**Feeling Frustrated and Helpless**

 Furious, I threw the man out of my office, but he was unmoved by my anger. Before he left he informed me that he planned to sue me in court. I sat slumped in my seat, feeling frustrated and helpless. It was clear to me that he would win the case in court, and instead of the vast profits I had anticipated, I would soon be a poor man. In very low spirits, I went outside for a breath of fresh air.

 In the street, I ran into an acquaintance and told him all about the misfortune that had just occurred to me. He suggested that I accompany him to see his Rebbe and ask for advice. In my despair, I was ready to agree to anything.

 I'll never forget the glow in the Rebbe's eyes on the evening I was first privileged to enter his room. I could not conquer the tears that insisted on coursing down my cheeks, and managed only with difficulty to tell the Rebbe what had befallen me. When I finished my story, the Rebbe turned to me and asked if I was Shabbat observant. I barely knew what Shabbat was, and did not attach much significance to his question. I explained that a good deal of my business was done on Shabbat, making it impossible for me to refrain from working on that day.

 The Rebbe went on to ask if I was careful to eat only kosher food. I answered in the negative, justifying myself by saying that my many business pressures prevented me from paying attention to such details.

 Then the Rebbe asked if I at least put on tefilin. Once again, my answer was no. The Rebbe began to try to persuade me to put on tefilin every day. 'If you agree to put on tefilin each morning,' he said, 'I guarantee that you will emerge from your trial having won your case.'

 After much inner debate, I agreed to the Rebbe's request and left him with a lighter heart. And from that day on, I began to faithfully put on tefilin every day. It wasn't easy for a man like me, and sometimes I nearly stopped -- until I remembered the Rebbe's promise. One mitzva pulls another in its wake, and the mitzva of tefilin dragged me along to begin observing other mitzvot.

**“My Day in Court Arrived”**

 My day in court arrived. It was Tu B'Shvat, exactly one year ago today. My chances of winning the case seemed nil, but I went to court in comfortable spirits, inexplicable placing my trust in the Rebbe's promise.

 The supplier portrayed me as a cheater, a man who had taken his material and then refused to pay. To back up his claim, he presented the contract I had signed. I then took the stand and told the truth, that I had paid but had not received a receipt. I don't know how to explain it, but the judge was persuaded of the truth of my story, and acquitted me of any wrongdoing.

 From that day on, my offices are closed on Shabbat. Not only has this not harmed my interests, but business has boomed! I have begun to live a full life of Torah and mitzvot, though I am not an actual chasid.

**Reborn Because of the Rebbe**

 The man smiled joyously at his rapt audience. Today, on the anniversary of the day when I won my court case because of the Rebbe -- and when I was, so to speak, reborn -- I thought it proper to bring the Rebbe a basket of the best fruits.

[Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Stories my Grandfather Told Me (Mesorah) by Zev

Greenwald]

Biographic note: Rabbi Yoseph Meir (ben Rabbi Samuel Tzvi) Weiss (18 Adar 1838- 6 Iyar 1909), founder of the Spinker dynasty, attended the Chasidic masters of Belz, Vizhnitz, Zhidichov and Sanz, and studied under several prominent rabbinical sages in his native Hungary. In 1876 he became a Rebbe in his own right, eventually attracting many thousands of followers including prominent Torah scholars. He authored a number of important books, of which the most well-known is Imrei Yosef on the Torah readings and the festivals, and was also famous as a miracle worker.

*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##)

**It Once Happened**

**The Chasid Who**

**Was a Burgomaster**

 Reb Aryeh, a Chasid of the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism), had been appointed by the authorities as "burgomaster" of his town. As chief magistrate and official record keeper for the government, Reb Aryeh was responsible for keeping track of all marriages, births and deaths (G-d forbid) in the Jewish community, entering them in a special register.

 It happened once that a local gentile converted to Judaism. This was a grave offense in those times and in that place. Anyone even remotely suspected of having helped in the conversion process was subject to stiff penalties. This being so, Reb Aryeh was asked to conveniently "forget" to record the name of a certain Jew who had just died. The convert, who was approximately the same age as the deceased, would be given the dead man's papers and assume his identity.

**A Clever Plan Foiled by an Informer**

 It was a clever plan, and it might have worked if not for the informer who brought the plot to light. The burgomaster was caught and a trial date was set. Reb Aryeh was in grave danger. Being a true Chasid, he went to the Alter Rebbe and explained his predicament. The Rebbe advised him to postpone the trial, and it was rescheduled for a later date.

 When the second trial date rolled around Reb Aryeh returned to the Alter Rebbe. Again, the Rebbe advised him to defer it. This happened several times, until finally Reb Aryeh was unable to push it off any longer. At long last the burgomaster would be tried for his "crime." The Chasid begged the Alter Rebbe to save him.

**Invited by His Rebbe to a Grandchild’s Wedding**

 Oddly enough, the Alter Rebbe responded by inviting Reb Aryeh to his grandchild's wedding, which was about to take place in the town of Zlobin. It was a union between two rabbinical dynasties: The Alter Rebbe's grandchild was marrying the grandchild of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. "Why don't you come and present your problem to Reb Levi Yitzchak?" the Alter Rebbe suggested. "I'm sure that he can help you."

 Reb Aryeh traveled to Zlobin, but getting in to the see Reb Levi Yitzchak was very difficult, as thousands of other people had arrived with the same idea. Unwilling to give up, Reb Aryeh decided to come back in the middle of the night and stand outside Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's door. The following morning he would be first in line.

 That night, Reb Aryeh positioned himself outside Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's room and peeked inside. What a strange sight met his eyes! On one side of the bed of the tzadik (righteous person) stood a gabbai (synagogue official) with a volume of Mishna; on the other side stood a second gabbai with the holy Zohar. Both men were reading aloud - at the same time - while Reb Levi Yitzchak appeared to be sleeping. Yet when one gabbai mispronounced a word, the tzadik turned and protested, "Nu! Nu!" This continued for some two hours, after which Rabbi Levi Yitzchak arose from his "nap" and Reb Aryeh was allowed to enter.

**Asked Who Had Sent Him**

 The first thing Reb Levi Yitzchak asked Reb Aryeh was who had sent him. "My Rebbe," the Chasid replied.

 "And who might that be?"

 "The Alter Rebbe," Reb Aryeh answered.

 "Ah, him!" Reb Levi Yitzchak exclaimed. "My in-law is your Rebbe? Such a tzadik and scholar, such a holy man of G-d!" He continued in this vein for some time, praising the Alter Rebbe to the skies. "So tell me," he said fondly, "what can I do for you?"

**“What Does that Mean?”**

 Reb Aryeh explained that he was the burgomaster of his hometown. "A burgomaster?" the tzadik repeated after him. "What does that mean?"

 The Chasid described his various duties and responsibilities.

 "You mean to say that a Jew is in charge of the whole town?" Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asked, duly impressed. "How can that be?"

 "To tell you the truth," Reb Aryeh replied, "the only reason I took the job was that the Alter Rebbe urged me to do so."

**“You Have Nothing to Worry About”**

 "Ho!" the tzadik declared emphatically. "My in-law - the sage, the saint, the learned scholar, the righteous one - guided you to take this position. In that case you have nothing to worry about. G-d will surely help and guard you from all harm."

 Reb Aryeh went back to the Alter Rebbe and related his conversation with Reb Levi Yitzchak. "So what do you think?" the Alter Rebbe asked. "Did I give you good advice?" He then repeated the question. "I gave you good advice, didn't I?"

 On the day before the trial was due to begin, a fire broke out in the courthouse. All the important documents in the building were completely burned - including the official indictment against Reb Aryeh. With no other record the case was dropped, and that was the end of the accusation.

Reprinted from the archives of L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization of Brooklyn, NY.

**One Woman's Legacy**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 In an age of birth control and zero population growth, it is comforting to see that there are still heroic women who endow their people with a bounty of offspring.

 Yitta Schwartz passed away recently in the Satmar community of Kiryat Yoel in New York at the age of 94, leaving behind five generations of descendants – at least 2,500 people!

 A survivor of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp, she moved to Antwerp with her husband and their six children after the war before settling in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. She bore 11 more children after the war and had about 170 grandchildren, all of whose names she knew.



**By Rabbi Eric Coopersmith**

Rav Noah zt"l would expect us to use his first yahrtzeit to grow in our commitment to fight for the Jewish people.

 It has been one year since the passing of the beloved Rosh Yeshiva and founder of Aish HaTorah, Rabbi Noah Weinberg zt"l.

 The day after Rabbi Weinberg was diagnosed with an extremely aggressive, life-threatening form of lung cancer, he told me that he was not afraid to die. But he was not ready to leave this world because he did not see who was going to take up the fight for the Jewish people in his stead.

**Lived with the Reality of Two Existential Threats**

 Rav Noah lived with the reality that the Jewish people were at war, confronted by two existential threats. One is the spiritual threat of assimilation. The other is a physical threat of radical Islam in general, and in particular Iran's determination to build a nuclear weapon to, G-d forbid, destroy the State of Israel.

 There are many who recognize these threats and are working tirelessly to address them. I believe however that Rabbi Weinberg was unique in his perception that this is tantamount to war, and he lived his life accordingly. Day in and day out, he dedicated every fiber of his being fighting the battles of the Jewish people.

 I was privileged to know Rabbi Weinberg for over 30 years, and worked closely with him for the last 22 years. I have no doubt that he would expect us to use the occasion of his first yahrtzeit to make an effort to grow in our commitment to fight for the Jewish people. Therefore, I would like to present what I believe to be amongst Rabbi Weinberg’s core ideals that served as the foundation of his commitment and confidence that we can, with G-d's help, make the difference for the Jewish people – which Rav Noah so badly yearned for during his lifetime.

1. **There is no hierarchy to taking responsibility.**

 Rabbi Weinberg always taught that each and every one of us needs to say, "The world was created for me." He explained this to mean that each of us is obligated to view the world as our personal responsibility. From his perspective, a person’s responsibility for a problem begins the moment that he becomes aware of the problem's existence. This responsibility applies regardless of one’s position, resources or abilities.

 In Leviticus ch. 10, we read about Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron the High Priest who were struck down after offering a “strange fire.” The Sages explain that at least in one aspect, Nadav and Avihu were even greater than Moses and Aaron. However, the Talmud portrays Nadav and Avihu in a far less flattering manner.

 The Talmud relates that Nadav and Avihu said, “When are these two old men (Moses and Aaron) going to die, so we can lead the Jewish people?” (Sanhedrin 52a)

**Two Aspects of the Same Situation**

 Rav Noah explained this seeming contradiction as two aspects of the same situation.

 Nadav and Avihu saw a deficiency within the Jewish people that Moses and Aaron did not perceive, hence the characterization of them as greater than Moses and Aaron. The Talmud is focusing on their improper response to this insight. Fundamentally, their mistake was to incorrectly think that a person is only responsible to address a problem once they are given the position or authority to do so. The Torah approach is to understand that responsibility begins the moment we perceive it. In other words, there is no hierarchy to responsibility. We are all responsible to confront the problems we perceive, regardless of our station in life.

**A Hierarchy Towards Implementing Responsibility**

 Although there is no hierarchy to responsibility, there certainly is a hierarchy to its implementation. For example, Nadav and Avihu should have gone to Moses and Aaron, the leaders of the Jewish people, and explained to them the problem that they perceived. They could offer a proposed solution, and then take responsibility to implement that solution under the guidance of Moses and Aaron.

 This approach empowers people to take responsibility, without creating anarchy in the Jewish community.

 This was always Rav Noah’s approach. Each and every person he met was encouraged, inspired – and often demanded – to take responsibility for the entire Jewish people, regardless of their background.

**2. To truly make a difference, you need to care.**

**That means you need to cry.**

 Rav Noah often told the story of Sara Schneirer, the founder of the Beis Yaakov girls’ schools at a time when assimilation was threatening the Jewish community of Europe. Rav Noah zt"l would question how it was possible that an uneducated woman had such an enormous merit to start the revolution that literally saved the Jewish people? He explained as follows:

 Living in early-20th century Poland, Sara Schneirer was a seamstress who made beautiful clothing for Jewish girls. In her diary she wrote that although she made clothing to cover their bodies, in talking to them, she realized that their souls were naked because they were estranged from Jewish values. And she would cry for them.

 Rav Noah would point out that this is the secret to her success. She made the effort to identify with these girls, and appreciated the consequences of their being so distant from a Jewish life -- until it pained her so much that she cried for them.

 That willingness to face the problem and feel the pain is the engine that drives anyone who undertakes to accomplish for the Jewish people.

 Applying this concept to today, we have to face up to the individual and collective tragedy of the vast majority of Jews being estranged from Torah and a relationship with God. This realization will undoubtedly bring us to accomplish many good things. But in order to really make a profound difference, we have to feel it so deeply that we cry.

3. **Nothing can be accomplished without G-d's help.**

**But we need to take responsibility in order to get G-d's help.**

 The Almighty could save the Jewish people in an instant. He does not do this because He wants us to take the responsibility.

 Rabbi Weinberg zt"l would illustrate this point through the biblical Yaakov, who – in returning to the Land of Israel – made preparations to confront his wicked brother, Esav.

**Preparing in Three Ways**

 Yaakov prepared in three ways: He divided the camp (which demonstrated his readiness to go to war), he prayed to G-d, and he sent gifts as an act of diplomacy.

 Rav Noah would ask: Why did Yaakov first divide his camp? Shouldn’t he have first prayed?

 He would answer that prayer is only effective when it is not used as an escape from responsibility. So before Yaakov could pray, he had to be willing to take as much responsibility possible. Only then could he turn to the Almighty to save him.

 When the Jewish people are being threatened, as they were during Yaakov's return to Israel, and as they are today, every individual needs to develop within themselves the willingness to go to war, if necessary. This is the litmus test to know if we are truly taking responsibility.

 This is the enormous level of dedication that Rav Noah felt was necessary in our times. He did everything in his power to live with that commitment and to inculcate it into his students, staff, and almost anyone he came in contact with.

 He was confident that if enough people took this message to heart, then we could bring back the entire Jewish people. As Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler writes in the introduction to Michtav M'Eliyahu, "In war time, promising candidates are taken from the ranks of ordinary soldiers, and by prodigious expenditure and skilled instruction, they are turned into officers in a fraction of the time normally required.

**Divine Assistance Heaped Upon an Individual**

 "So too in times such as ours when capable men are scarce, anyone who shows willingness to tackle a vital problem has Divine assistance heaped upon him. He turns the incapable into successful men – not because they deserve it, but because the world needs them."

 Our generation needed a leader like Rav Noah. Now that he is gone, the most appropriate way for each of us to honor his memory is to step up and fill the void to the best of our abilities – to truly take responsibility.

*Reprinted from this week’s Aish.com website.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Roming Air Time: Part One**

 In this week's Torah portion Beshalach the Torah tells us how Moshe Rabeinu (Moshe our teacher) instructs the Jewish Nation on the observance of Shabbos.

 We distinguish Shabbos from the other days of the week by sitting down to festive meals with our family and enjoying the spiritual recharge of this special day.  Anyone who keeps Shabbos can testify to the beauty of this special day.  There are those who claim to "observe" Shabbos "in spirit."   But in truth, only those who keep the Shabbos properly according to halacha, will reap the spiritual recharge which the special day has to offer every Jew.

 This week, for the first time in the eleven year history of this publication, I will tell a story which happened about me, your beloved author of the “Good Shabbos Everyone.”

 A few years ago, I met a Jewish lawyer in court, let’s call him Shraga Feivel.   Shraga Feivel and I have a lot in common and we and our families became fast friends, Boruch Hashem.  For the last couple of years, Shraga Feivel and I spoke about taking a trip together to Eretz Yisroel. The only time we could both realistically take off from work would be around December 25th, at which time business is generally slower.

**Flight Schedule to Land in Eretz Yisroel**

**On Friday Morning at 9:30 A.M.**

 Finally this year, our schedules worked out and we reserved plane tickets to fly out Thursday, December 24th at 4 pm from Newark International, planning with Hashem’s help to arrive Friday morning in Eretz Yisroel at 9:30 am, with plenty ‘o time to rent a car and get to Yerushalayim for Shabbos Kodesh.

 For months we spoke and planned the trip. We had planned to stay in the Meah Shearim area for Shabbos and possibly daven at the Kosel Friday night and go see the Toldos Avrohom Yitzchok tish, etc. To say that we were looking forward to the trip, would be an understatement.

 Our wives, the Aishes Chayels that they are, agreed to stay home with the kinderlach, so that Shraga Feivel and I could maximize our time in the Holy Land.  Fast forward to Thursday, December 24th… as we sat down on the airplane, we discovered that our neighbor sitting next to us, was also a Jewish lawyer who worked in the criminal law field. This was the first of many interesting “coincidences" we experienced throughout our journey.

**An “Unexpected Landing” in Rome**

 After davening Maariv on the plane, we all eventually dozed off. At about 4:30 am, I looked out of the window and saw the sun beginning to rise on the horizon. Soon after, I got up out of my seat, to begin my “preparations” for davening the morning prayers. As soon as I got up, a flight attendant called out over the “p.a. system” that everyone must take their seats because the airplane was going to make an “unexpected landing” in Rome. In order to keep everyone calm, they called it “unexpected” instead of “emergency.”

 “Oh boy, here we go…” I thought to myself. Here we were, erev Shabbos, being delayed in Rome, on December 25th! On the flight update screen the languages changed to Italian and English and the distance to destination changed dramatically.

**Everyone Uttered Prayers in Their Own Languages**

 Immediately, the plane made a swift descent.  The pilot announced that we should not be alarmed if we saw fire engines and emergency personnel waiting on the runway. I had images of sliding down those yellow slides. Everyone uttered prayers in their own languages.

 Soon after, Boruch Hashem, we made an uneventful landing at Fiumicino - Rome International Airport. But now what were we going to do? The pilot informed us that there was no Continental staff to greet us in Rome because it was December 25th and they would have to wake up the staff, (and it would take long for them to sober up and make their way to the airport!)

 Once we were off the plane, the 25 or so religiously observant passengers formed a minyan and we davened Schacharis. Shraga Feivel and I began trying to desperately find another flight to Eretz Yisroel. We actually passed through security with El Al, but alas, the Italians told us it was too late to purchase a ticket. There was nobody there to guide us and we tried to speak to anyone who would help. Very few people spoke English, and nobody from our group spoke Italian, which of course complicated things. Our cell phones and internet did not work. I did not have any Euros to use the payphone. Everything was hectic and we were afraid to separate ourselves from the group as we did not want to miss any updates about our flight.

**The Plight of Our Wives Back Home**

 Our poor wives were already expecting to hear from us that we had landed safely in Eretz Yisroel. However, when they called Continental, they were told at first that there is no information about our flight, which was not very reassuring. Only later, they were told that we had landed in Rome.

 Shraga Feivel and I began to consider the option of spending Shabbos in Rome, being that we had no idea if or when our plane would continue on its way to Eretz Yisroel. It was about 9 am at that point and Shabbos was to begin in about 6 hours from then. The flight itself to Eretz Yisroel takes two and a half hours from Rome.  There was still time, but with every advancing minute, the situation looked grim.

**The “Almighty” Dollar Doesn’t**

**Work Like It Used to**

 In any case, I approached a police officer who seemed kindly and I asked him in Spanish, the closet language I know to Italian, if he would let me use his cell phone. I had managed to get the number for Chabad from a fellow passenger, and I wanted to call them to get an idea about the possibility of staying in Rome for Shabbos. When I asked the officer to use his phone, he showed me the international symbol with his thumb and fingers for “it costs money.” I had several hundred dollars in cash, but apparently the “almighty” dollar is not what it used to be, because when I showed a wad of singles to the officer, he still wouldn’t let me use the phone!!!

**Music and Dancing in the Airport**

 At about 9:30 am, two Jewish musicians from the group [“Simply Tsfat”](http://www.simplytsfat.com/) who were on our plane, began to play in the airport. One played the guitar and one played the violin. We Jews had a unstoppable urge to dance to the music, and what do you know? In no time, we formed a ring around the musicians and were dancing up a storm.

 A large crowd of people including non-Jews from our flight and passengers in the Airport gathered around to watch and take pictures. It is told in the name of the holy Baal Shem Tov, that when one dances with Simcha – happiness, one can sometimes achieve more than  with prayer!  Sure enough, soon after the music stopped, they announced to our group that the plane was fixed and ready to continue on its way. Cheers erupted from the group, “Hurray, Boruch Hashem!”

 They announced that the flight would take off at 11:00 a.m. (12:00 p.m. Eretz Yisroel time), it would be tight, but we were going to make it!  Or so we thought at that time…

**A Short-Lived Simcha**

 Shraga Feivel and I were relieved, but our simcha quickly eroded… There was one solitary airport employee who was checking the passports of 250 passengers one by one.  Every time someone asked the airport employee a question, she stopped checking the passports and the line was delayed. Soon it was well past 11:00 a.m and the line was not moving.

 Finally, with great exasperation, the airport employee flew up her hands and announced that everyone could go onto the plane, without checking the passports. Not knowing whether to be relieved that we were finally getting on the plane or worried about the compromised security, we quickly made our way onto the plane and took our seats.

**Even More Delays on the Plane**

 By the time we were all settled into our seats it was probably about 11:40. The pilot explained what was the cause of the “unexpected” landing; namely, smoke was detected near the video system. The pilot told us further that they had disabled the video system (thankfully, in light of the trash they showed there) and we were to take off shortly. “Shortly” turned out to be another 20 minutes or so.

 It was then about 1:00 p.m. in Eretz Yisroel, and Shabbos was to start just after 4:00 p.m. and the flight was supposed take about two and a half hours from Rome.  The pilot announced that he could not guarantee exactly what time the plane would arrive in Eretz Yisroel, and therefore, anyone who was concerned about arriving on time for Shabbos should consider deplaning and remaining in Rome, although Continental would not take any responsibility for anyone who chooses to do so... *Next week we will continue this exciting true story...* Good Shabbos Everyone.

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

**Trading Places with a Holocaust Prisoner,**

**British Soldier Honored at Special Event**

**By Avi Meir**

 Imagine for a moment the following scenario. An opportunity arises for you to switch places with a Jew imprisoned in a Nazi death camp. You would take his place and he would escape the destiny that lies ahead for him. Would you do it?

 Well, Dennis Avey, a British prisoner of war, did. This remarkable story just came to light recently and was highlighted on Holocaust Memorial Day this week in Nottinhamshire in England.

 As a British prisoner of war captured by the Nazis, Dennis Avey risked his life by swapping clothes with a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz. He switched places with Ernst Lobethall, a German Jew from Bresslau, who passed away in 2002. Dennis is now 91 years old and lives in Derbyshire.



**Photo of Dennis Avey taken in 2011**

**An Inspiration and Hero**

 "He's an inspiration; a hero who richly deserves recognition for his selfless actions. At a time when most would place their own survival above all, Denis had the inner resource to show humanity toward others," remarked Dr. James Smith,

chief executive of the Holocaust Center un Nottinghamshire. His remarks appeared in a story about Holocaust Memorial Day in the Jerusalem Post.

 Avey had a remarkable story. He was fighting in a British special forces unit against Nazi General Erwin Rommel's Africa Korps behind enemy lines in the desert. Rommel was known as the “Desert Fox” and rumor has it that the Britis issued a special order not to pronounce his name alone, on account of the fear that his name evoked. Avey was wounded then captured by the Germans. The ship transporting to him to captivity, however, was sunk. Avey escaped into the sea and survived depth charges exploding nearby.

**Recaptured in Southern Greece**

 After twenty hours in the water, Avey made it to land in southern Greece. He then hiked the length of the Peloponnese but was soon recaptured. He sent to Germany as a POW. After two spells in a punishment camp and being sent to work down a mine, he was transported to a compound for British prisoners connected to a sprawling concentration camp. Avey was now in Auschwitz.

 He made the switch which allowed the Jewish prisoner to recuperate. British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs was present at the presentation. Avey is being considered as a Righteous Gentile at Yad Vashem in Israel. ♦

*Reprinted from this week’s 5 Towns Jewish Times (published January 28, 2010)*

**Project Inspire Shabbaton Brings**

**Unprecedented Kiruv Experience**

**To Flatbush Community**

**By Boruch Shubert**

 In an event that can be genuinely described as an unprecedented display of achdus between the established frum community and fellow Jews who are still searching for their heritage, Project Inspire combined forces with a dedicated group of local women to create a kiruv-inspired Shabbaton on Shabbos Parashas Sh’mos that is still reverberating among the hundreds who attended at multiple locations in the heart of Flatbush.

 With its combination of fervent tefillos, emotionally charged singing and dancing, inspirational talks, and festive seudos, the Shabbaton vividly demonstrated the importance of outreach and motivated many of its “not-yet-frum” participants to strive for greater affiliation with Torah and mitzvos.

**The Result of a Women’s Group that**

**Meets to Learn Ahavas Yisrael**

 The planning for this unique event began with a large group of women who meet twice a week in Flatbush to learn about the importance of ahavas Yisrael. Motivated by a similar Shabbaton that had been organized by Project Inspire in conjunction with the Five Towns–Far Rockaway frum community, a nucleus of five women from the group—Etty Poznanski, Liba Schwebel, Shulamis Zakutinsky, Rekki Elbogen, and Miriam Gross—coordinated with the leadership of Project Inspire to present an experience wherein 100 people of secular background — students of Aish HaTorah Philadelphia and the Aish Center New York, along with individuals connected with frum Project Inspire activists — would share a Shabbos in Flatbush with local frum residents.

**A Grassroots-Led Effort**

 This grassroots-led effort, with 45 homes taking in guests and local balabustes preparing the communal meals entirely on their own, featured numerous highlights. There was Carlebach-style Friday night davening at the Poznanski home followed by an oneg Shabbos with Rabbi Yaakov Salomon speaking on “How To Get Your Prayers Answered,” and a tish featuring Rav Twersky, both at the home of Avi and Riki Hager. Shabbos morning tefillah took place at Rav Goldwasser’s shul.

 A Shabbos afternoon shiur was given by Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein on “Jewish Unity.” There was a simultaneous men’s shalosh seudos at Rav Twersky’s shul and women’s seudah at the Zakutinsky home featuring popular speaker Mrs. Rochel Chafetz. A gala melaveh malkah took place at the Poznanski home and there was a Sunday morning breakfast with guest speaker Charles Harary.

**The Guests Were Totally Blown**

**Away by the Spirit of the Shabbaton**

 “I can tell you that the guests whom Aish HaTorah brought in were totally blown away by the spirit of this Shabbaton,” enthuses Mrs. Poznanski. “We had planned to have about 80 guests on Friday night, but there was such an amazing response from the community that we ended up with more than 200 people in our house. The dancing that went on by Kabbalas Shabbos was so intense. It was something that you would experience at the Kosel.” Mrs. Poznanski notes with even greater incredulity that well over 300 people attended the melaveh malkah, where they all sat riveted as the special guest speaker, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, spoke movingly about the importance of seeing Hashem’s guiding hand in our daily lives, as well as about the responsibility every Jew must feel for the welfare of K’lal Yisrael. The evening also featured a spirited kumsitz with live music provided by Rabbis Salomon and Milstein.

**Diverse Level of Religious**

**Observance Among the Guests**

 “There was such a diverse level of religious observance among the guests,” Mrs. Schwebel marvels, “but they all saw that we really care about them. And the truth is that, as much as they learned from us, we were the ones who benefited from seeing their excitement and desire for authentic Yiddishkeit.”

 According to Mrs. Zakutinsky, there was a “magical atmosphere” throughout the weekend, pointing in particular to a special moment at the tish when Rabbi Twersky’s loving embrace of a decidedly secular-looking young man seated next to him elicited tears of joy from his new “friend” and deeply touched everyone present. “We had so much good energy going on the whole time,” Mrs. Zakutinsky states proudly, “that none of us wanted it to end. And in fact, it really has not ended, as many of us are continuing to keep in touch with our guests. We’re even hearing about the different mitzvos and Torah learning opportunities some of them are getting into as a result of their experience here.”

**Kiddush Hashem of the Highest Order**

 “This event was a kiddush Hashem of the highest order,” asserts Rabbi Salomon. “It gave the frum people of Brooklyn, who often do not get to spend time with secular Jews, the chance to be involved with them and engage together in meaningful Torah-based activities. And the non-frum visitors saw that we’re really not so different from them, except that we live with a bedrock of Torah values.”

 The positive ramifications of this Shabbaton were apparent to others who took part as well. “We were quite pleasantly surprised to see how open the Flatbush community is to doing outreach,” relates Rabbi Yakov Couzens, director of Aish HaTorah Philadelphia. And Mrs. Poznanski’s husband, Avrohom, commented at the end of the weekend, “The funny thing is that the Aish HaTorah Philadelphia group actually has their own community, which brought our Flatbush community together.”

 According to Rabbi Chaim Sampson, director of Project Inspire, the Shabbaton epitomized the true meaning of ahavas Yisrael by enabling those who are not yet frum to feel like they are part of the family of Torah-observant Jewry. “I truly believe that the ahavas Yisrael and achdus generated in these Shabbatons between all elements of our people are surely rebuilding the Beis HaMikdash,” he declares.

 Rabbi Sampson notes that a similar event is being planned in Flatbush in the near future, “to offer this experience to more of the frum community and share the beauty of Shabbos with more of our less-affiliated ‘family’.” Additionally, Project Inspire is planning other such events in Woodmere, Cedarhurst, and Monsey, b’ezras Hashem.

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