**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Mishpatim 5773**

Volume 4, Issue 21 29 Shevat 5773/February 9, 2013

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Simcha (Sigi) ben Haim Baruch Keren on his 8th yarhtzeit which falls out today.

*For a free subscription, please forward your request to* ***keren18@juno.com***

**Ed Koch’s Tombstone**

**By** [**Rabbi Benjamin Blech**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48865417)

*My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish.*

 With the words he chose to be inscribed on his tombstone, [Ed Koch](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/Ed-Koch--Rabbi-Yisrael-Meir-Lau.html), the iconic New York Mayor who passed away last Friday, made it very clear how he wanted most to be remembered.



 And they reminded me of a family disagreement in which I had to acknowledge that I was wrong and my daughter was right.

 It was a number of years ago when my daughter Tamar was making plans to apply to law school. Having gotten a perfect score on her LSAT exam, the highest mark in the country, she wasn’t nervous about getting accepted at one of the top universities.

 But she knew that an important element that would be considered by the very best schools was the essay she had to submit explaining why she had chosen law as a career and defining herself as a person.

**Found Myself Filled with Apprehension**

 When she told me she had finished writing it, I asked if I might see it. As I began to read it I found myself filled with apprehension. Her opening words were “I am an Orthodox Jew.” She continued by linking the Jewish love for law with its divine origin at Sinai. She explained that her love for Torah made her seek a way to seek the betterment of the world through a commitment to legal redress for the innocent and lawful punishment for the criminal.

 Her presentation was masterful, yet I was afraid. Afraid because I was part of a generation that still bore the emotional scars of centuries of anti-Semitism. Afraid because I had lived through the years of the Holocaust and been forced to leave the land of my birth when a Nazi takeover threatened. Afraid because even though I now live in “the land of the free” I still didn’t feel free enough to believe that my daughter could openly identify herself as an Orthodox Jew without subjecting herself to prejudiced repercussions.

**Opting to be True to Herself**

 “I don’t think you should send the essay in the way it is,” I advised my daughter. Tamar thought about what I said. Respectfully she concluded she had to be true to herself. She decided that if by identifying herself through her faith she was closing the door to professional advancement, she would rather not enter those portals. “And who knows,” she added, “perhaps the fact that I take pride in my heritage will be viewed as a positive.”

 Yes, my daughter did get accepted to every one of the top law schools in the country. Now fast forward a decade to learn the real end of the story. I was teaching a class at Yeshiva University when a young man knocked on the door. I immediately recognized him as a former student. Out of breath, he told me he rushed up from Columbia University Law School because he had to share the story of what had just happened in one of his classes.

 The conversation had turned into a discussion about the required essays. Someone asked the professor, “Now that we’re in the school, can you tell us what exactly you were looking for in those essays?” The professor responded that he couldn’t really put it into words but he could only give a general guideline by referencing what he felt was the best essay they had ever received. He recalled that it was written by some girl with a strange last name that’s difficult to pronounce – “something like Blech.”

 “If this is your daughter,” my former student said, “I knew you’d love to hear the story.”

 I assured him that indeed it was my daughter, and that I was so grateful to him for sharing it with me. I also confessed how I almost messed it up by suggesting to my daughter that it was too dangerous to be submitted as written!

**Taking Pride in One’s Identity**



 If taking pride in one’s identity proved to be helpful rather than hindrance to Tamar, it is certainly instructive to learn how much this trait meant to the former Mayor of New York city.

 As the eulogies are offered and the tributes pour in with a lengthy list of Ed Koch’s accomplishments, there are so many things the mayor could have been proud of. Yet what Koch chose to stand in perpetuity as a summary of his life’s meaning were the last words of Daniel Pearl before he was brutally murdered by Pakistani terrorists: [*My father is Jewish*](http://www.aish.com/jw/id/48892307.html)*, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish*

 Two years before his death, in his personal blog in the Huffington Post, *What’s On My Tombstone And Why,* Koch told his readers that this was what he had prepared to be inscribed as his epitaph. So strongly did he feel about the importance of this recognition for every Jew that he added, “I believe those words should be part of the annual services on the Jewish High Holiday of Yom Kippur, and should be repeated by the congregants”.

**Included an Inscription of the Shema**

 Beneath this powerful expression of identity, Koch commissioned the inscription of the *Shema* in Hebrew and English followed by these words: "He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith. He fiercely defended the City of New York and he fiercely defended its people. Above all, he loved his country, the United States of America, in whose armed forces he served in World War II."

 Koch did not hesitate to define himself in this sequence – a proud Jew, a loving New Yorker and a patriotic American.

 In accord with his wishes, the words by his grave express with pride the last words of Daniel Pearl.

 Is it merely coincidence then that Ed Koch died on the first day of February, the very day on which Daniel Pearl was murdered exactly 11 years ago?

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

**An Unforgettable Friday Afternoon**

**Plane Ride into Shabbos**

**By Deena Yellin**

 As I settled into my seat on Flight 1272 bound for Chicago, I glanced at the passengers filing down the aisle. My Jew-radar immediately went off; in addition to the business travelers toting their laptops and briefcases and the pleasure travelers wearing shorts and Walkmans, I spied several suede kippas, a chassidishe hat and ankle-length skirts.

**They Were Strangers**

 Despite our shared heritage, I didn't bother acknowledging them. They were strangers. And I live in New York, where strangers seldom exchange greetings, even if they recite the same prayers. The plane rolled toward the runway and I waited for takeoff. No such luck. The pilot announced the flight was being delayed three hours due to stormy weather conditions in Chicago. After three long hours, the flight finally took off on its way from New York to Chicago.

 I glanced at my watch nervously. Usually, I avoid flying Friday afternoons for fear I won't arrive in time, but on summer weekends when Shabbos doesn't begin until 8 p.m., I figured I'd be safe. I figured wrong.
But I calculated that I could just make it if I didn't claim my luggage and jumped into a taxi when we arrived in Chicago. I turned around to check on my co-religionists. Two kippas were examining their watches. The chasid was on the airphone.

**The Pilot’s Frightening Announcement**

 A half-hour before arrival, the pilot announced O'Hare Airport was shut down and we were landing in Milwaukee until we could continue on. My stomach sunk. Candle-lighting was an hour away. I'd never make it on time.

 Like most religious Jews who work in the secular world, I'd experienced my share of close calls. But I never knowingly violated the Sabbath. Now, I was stuck. By now, the kippas and religious women with long skirts were huddled in the back of the plane. They had been joined by others. Shabbos was bringing strangers together.

 It was time to introduce myself. We're going to get off in Milwaukee, a young man told me. The chasid had called Milwaukee's Chabad rabbi, who offered to host any stranded passengers for Shabbos.

 'Come with us,' he urged. I nodded with relief but returned to my seat crestfallen since I had planned this weekend with my family for months. My non-Jewish seatmate, noticing my despair, inquired what was wrong.

**His Jaw Dropped When He Heard the Story**

 When I told him the story, his jaw dropped. "Let me get this straight," he said, "You're getting off the plane in a town where you've never been with people you don't know to stay overnight with complete strangers?"

 For the first time that day, it occurred to me just how lucky I was. When the plane landed, the pilot announced we were disembarking for religious reasons. Passengers stared at us, dumbfounded. My seatmate bid me farewell as if he didn't think I'd survive.

 But I quickly realized I was among friends. As I attempted to carry my bags off the plane, a woman insisted on helping me. When we crowded into cabs to take us to the rabbi's house, the chasid insisted on paying for us.

 And when the cabs pulled up at the home of the Chabbad rabbi and rebbetzin, they ran outside to greet us as if we were long lost relatives. The sun set on Milwaukee as they ushered us into their home, where a long table was set for Shabbos with a white tablecloth, china and gleaming kiddush cups. Ahhh, we made it just in time.

**A Wave of Peace Washed Over Me**

 When I lit the Shabbos candles, a wave of peace washed over me. With all that had transpired, I was warmed by the notion that the world stops with the first flicker of Sabbath light. Over a traditional Shabbos feast, the rabbi enchanted us with tales of the Baal Shem Tov and informed us that our re-route to Milwaukee was due not to the world of weather but of Divine providence.

 We lingered over our meal, enjoying our spiritual sanctuary in time after the stressful day. Zemiros (Shabbos songs) filled the room. We shared disappointments about our unexpected stopover.

 Most of the group was traveling to Chicago for their friend's aufruf ("calling up" the groom to the Torah on the Shabbos before a wedding) and wedding and were missing the aufruf. The chasid and his wife were missing a bar mitzvah. We pondered the meaning of the departure from our journey and marveled at the coincidences.

 I had attended camp with my roommate from the plane, a couple had conducted business with my father, a man had studied in yeshiva with my cousin, the chasid used to work in my hometown of Aurora, Ill., and I had once spent Purim in Crown Heights with my hosts relatives.

**Exchanging Stories About Our Lives**

 Exhausted as we were, everyone was hesitant to leave the table to go to sleep. The next morning, a lively tefillah was followed by a leisurely meal where we exchanged stories about our lives, careers and dreams.

 We nicknamed ourselves the Milwaukee 15 and wondered if future generations would retell the story of the flight that didn't make it in time for candlelighting. Saturday night, we made a regretful journey to the everyday world. But before we began the final leg of our journey, I called my husband to tell him all that had transpired.

 "With whom did you spend Shabbos with?" he asked worriedly. I pondered how to explain who these former strangers were who had given me object lessons in Shabbos hospitality and in the power of Shabbos in bringing Jews together.

**Realizing a Most Incredible Truth**

 And, then as swiftly as a 747 can leave the tarmac on a clear day, I realized the truth: miles away from my parents, husband and home, I had accomplished what I set out to do when I booked my ticket: I had spent Shabbos with family."

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone. The article originally appeared as “Home for Shabbos” on the Chabad.org website.*

**Who's Who: The Ibn Ezra**

 The Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, surpassed all of his contemporaries in Torah scholarship, art and secular knowledge. His influence upon Torah study in Italy, Southern France and England was greater than that of any other Jewish figure.

 Born in Toledo, Spain, in approximately 1092, he travelled throughout Europe, Africa and Asia but returned to Spain before his passing at the age of 75. Although he wrote important works on Hebrew grammar, philosophy and poetry, his most significant contribution was his commentary on most of the books of the Bible. (*Reprinted from this week’s issue of “L’Chaim.”*)

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Reward for Patience**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

 Taking care of his mentally unstable grandmother in the geriatric ward of the hospital was a very taxing task for the young man. Although she was unreasonably demanding and sometimes violently so, he managed to maintain his composure and to treat her with the greatest respect.

 One day, while he was visiting her, she could not find her false teeth. She shouted at him, accusing him of stealing her teeth.

 When he tried to explain that he was innocent, she gave him such a resounding slap in the face that he felt as though he was about to lose his own teeth. He nevertheless suffered in silence and helped her locate the lost teeth.

 A patient in a nearby bed was so impressed with the behavior of this young man that she decided to suggest him as a matrimonial prospect for a relative, a girl from one of the most respected families in Israel.

 The shidduch worked out and on the first day of their marriage the young couple went to visit the grandmother whose patience-inducing slap brought them together.

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

**What’s the Right Thing to Do?**

**Kosher Keeping Pets**

**Question:**

 I recently heard that there is an American company which produces kosher food for dogs and cats. I keep kosher but I can’t understand why my pet has to keep kosher. What’s the right thing to do?

**Answer:**

 Your pet certainly does not have to keep kosher but you do! This includes not deriving any benefit from those foods which the Torah has prohibited us to eat and to derive benefit from.

 In regard to pet food, you must be careful not to feed your pet anything which has a blend of meat and dairy ingredients, something fairly common in commercial pet foods.

 Since many pet foods have grain in their ingredients and are therefore *chametz*, you must be careful not to feed them to your pet on Pesach or even to have such food in your possession.

 In conclusion, keeping kosher is not only what you feed yourself, but what you feed your pet as well.

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

**Ed Koch Told Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau: “I’m a**

**Holocaust Survivor Too.”**

**By** [**Yvette Alt Miller**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=84110707)

 Mayor Ed Koch, who passed away Friday at the age of 88, understood that all Jews are connected. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, the former chief rabbi of Israel tells the story.

 Years ago, [Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau](http://www.aish.com/v/hoi/52829197.html) visited his brother in New York. The two brothers were in Buchenwald together, and miraculously survived while the rest of their family was wiped out. Rabbi Lau, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, became a rabbi, continuing his family’s unbroken chain of 38 generations of rabbis. His brother, Naphtali Lau-Levie, became a noted author and was appointed Israel’s consul general to New York.

**Asked to Be Introduced to Rabbi Lau**



 Ed Koch, New York City’s brash, outspoken, overtly Jewish leader, asked Naphtali to introduce him to the great Rabbi Lau – then Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv – if his illustrious brother was ever in town.

 [Rabbi Lau](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/52820392.html) visited New York and Naphtali arranged a meeting. When Mr. Koch walked into the room, he announced to a surprised Rabbi Lau, “I’m a Holocaust survivor too.” Rabbi Lau turned to his brother in puzzlement; this was not the information he’d received about the American-born Koch.

 Mr. Koch explained. He was born in the Bronx, and grew up an American. He only went to Europe for the first time as a GI.

**Visited Germany as Part of an**

**International Delegation of Mayors**

 Years later, though, after he’d been elected mayor, he had the chance to travel to Germany as part of an international delegation of mayors. There he met with officials in Berlin and was shown various artifacts. One piece made the greatest impression on him: a globe that had once belonged to Adolph Hitler.

 This globe was special. Hitler asked his assistants to determine the Jewish population in every country on earth, and to write this number under each nation’s name on his globe.

 Poland, Hungary, Germany, Austria…. The Jewish population of each country was recorded, waiting – in Hitler’s twisted mind – for extermination. There was even a number 1 written under the city of Tirana in Albania, Ed Koch told Rabbi Lau. That lone Jew in Tirana was offensive to Hitler; even he was worthy of being remembered and targeted by the Nazis.

**Seeing the Special Number – Six Million**

 Ed Koch also saw a number under the “United States.” It was a special number, Mr. Koch remembered: 6,000,000.

 “I was recorded in that number,” Ed Koch said to Rabbi Lau. “I was one of Hitler’s intended victims too.”

 Ed Koch not only acknowledged and felt their pain; he realized that their pain was his pain too. In his mind, there were no distinctions between him and other Jews.

 [Rabbi Lau](http://www.aish.com/ho/p/Rabbi_Laus_Testimony_of_Faith.html) realized that Mr. Koch was right – he was one of Hitler’s intended victims; he was a survivor of the Holocaust too.

 Ed Koch wasn’t just an onlooker; he was a survivor. He saw himself as part of history, as a vital member of the ongoing narrative of the Jewish people. One way to honor his memory is to follow his example, to look at our fellow Jews not as foreigners divided by language, religious observance, geography or time. Like Mr. Koch, let’s try to look at other Jews around the world and see ourselves.

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

**Ofer the Stunt Man**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 Ofer (The name has been changed) was an embodiment of the Israeli dream. He was young, handsome, intelligent, athletic, uninhibited and ‘made it’ in California as a successful stuntman! Money! Fun! Action! Excitement! The world was his for the taking, and he took as much as he could.

 But most of all he loved riding his Motorcycle. Speeding down a desert highway over 100 Mph was what made him really happy. That’s where he wanted to be forever; on the cutting edge.

**Had Nothing to Do with G-d or Judaism**

 Of course in the true Israeli tradition he had nothing to do with G-d or Judaism. “In fact” he often quipped, “If I thought that religion was like Marx said, the Opiate of the masses, I might have tried some.” But it was even more meaningless than that.

 Until his accident.

 One beautiful summer day on a lonely highway somewhere in Nevada he hit about 130 when suddenly, from nowhere, a huge semi-trailer truck appeared in front of him. It took him a second to realize that it wasn’t a mirage and then it was too late. He smashed into the front of it and flew into oblivion.

 When the police arrived they had to search for a while till they found his broken body several hundred feet from the scene of the accident. He was still alive, but they had seen a lot of accidents and they were sure he wasn’t going to live.

**A Desperate Plea to G-d**

 “This one is for sure a goner” was the last thing he heard as they pushed him into the ambulance and closed the doors. He thought to himself, “I don’t want to die; I’ll do what You want. PLEASE, G-d, Save me!!!” And everything went black.

 When he woke up it was dark. He couldn’t move. Was he dead? No, he was alive. Why couldn’t he see or move? Then suddenly he realized what happened; “My G-d - I’m buried alive!! They buried me!!”

 He was sweating; it was getting hard to breathe. He tried to get up but he couldn’t, he couldn’t move. He started to scream, “Please G-d - Please, HELP ME!! I’M SORRY!! G-D, HELP ME!!!

 Suddenly he was blinded; it was so bright! The florescent light flickered on. He was in a hospital.

 “Doctor!! Doctor!! Come fast!!! He’s conscious!!”

 He had been in a coma for over a month. He couldn’t move because he was in a body cast from head to toe; almost all his bones had been broken. Even the policemen that were at the accident had never had seen anything like it, it was clearly a miracle. But the miracles didn’t stop.

**Forgetting His Vow After the Miracle**

 It took a lot of physical therapy and a lot of prayer but in one year he was actually back on his feet, completely recovered! He even went back to work as a stuntman, bought a new bike. And …………….completely forgot his vow.

 Although it sounds a bit hard to believe, a year later the same thing happened again!

 Speeding like the wind through the desert, he lost control on a curve, destroyed his bike, broke his neck and skull and on the way to the hospital made another vow to G-d before losing consciousness.

 A year and a half later after another miraculous recovery, he was back on his feet and back to his old lifestyle like nothing had happened.

 [When I first heard the story I also didn’t believe it, until I remembered that the exact same thing happened with the Israelis after the Six-Day war, and again after the Yom Kippur war (and yet again afterwards after the Gulf war); everyone forgot the miracles and secular life continued as usual.]

**Things Were Looking Up**

 He even set his sights on a promotion. He had caught the attention of a very influential manager in Hollywood and was on his way to getting some really big-time jobs with opportunities to do some serious acting. If it worked out he could be earning more than a million dollars a year! Things were looking up.

 There was only one drawback; the manager was a missionary.

 Now really the fact was that Ofer could have cared less. Religion meant nothing to him. He read the missionary books the manager kept giving him because he wanted to keep on good terms and even went attended a couple of ‘friendship’ meetings with him. Everyone there was friendly, the lectures were nice, but it was like water off a duck’s back. Ofer was interested in having a good time.

 And it would have remained that way if his manager would have left him alone, but he didn’t. He kept shaking up Ofer’s indifference with strange interpretations of the Torah and ideas about sin and salvation that he had never thought about.

 He didn’t know what to do. On one hand he wanted the big bucks and really couldn’t find anything wrong with the Manager’s line of thought. But on the other hand, maybe it was just his Israeli egotism or Jewish stiffneckedness. For the first time in his life Ofer felt that he was a Jew and someone was trying to take it away from him. He had to defend himself!

**Not Knowing Enough Torah to Argue Back**

 The only problem is that he didn’t know enough about the Torah to argue back.

 This continued for several months until one Friday morning he happened to be walking downtown thinking about some of the things his manager said when someone called out to him, “Excuse me sir, are you Jewish?” “What?” he replied as he turned around and saw a young Chabadnick standing behind a small folding table filled with pamphlets and holding a pair of Tefillin. “Are you Jewish? Come put on Tefillin, it will only take a minute. Have you got a minute?”

 It wasn’t long before Ofer was sitting in the Chabad house pouring his heart out to the ‘Shliach’ (the Rabbi in charge) about his missionary friend.

**Now He Was Ready**

 Now he was ready. The next time the manager brought up the subject, Ofer wrote down all the quotations, thinking he would defeat them. But the more he read from the Torah and the prophets afterwards to prepare his rebuttals, the more he realized that he himself knew nothing about Judaism.

“My advice to you” said the Shaliach a few days later, “is to write to the Lubavitcher Rebbe for advice and a blessing."

 “A blessing?” Asked Ofer incredulously, but he wrote anyway and in two weeks he received a reply. The Rebbe told him to concentrate only on strengthening his own Judaism through learning the Torah and doing the commandments and forget the debates.

 Today Ofer is a Chabad Chasid and lives near Sefad with his wife and seven children.

*Reprinted from last week’s email on the parsha from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Chassidic Story #793**

**The Guru That Did**

**Not Follow Torah**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000lh00:001H4ZZ000003GV_&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1360160662&randid=372816530&content=central##)

 Avigayil (fictitious name) wasn't like the other thousands of confused post-army Israelis searching the world for their 'real' selves. She had found what she was looking for.

 After experiencing a variety of what India was famous for: drugs, gurus, yogis and other beckoning lifestyles, she was just about to give up, when she heard about a small secretive group that was different, deep in the forests of India.

**The Guru Had the Same Fire**

**That was Burning in Her Soul**

 It took her several weeks to find them but when she did she immediately sensed that this was for her. True, she had thought so tens of times before but this time it was real. Their guru was humble and calm, yet she sensed an inner fire burning; the same fire that was burning in her soul!

 The group was very reluctant to admit new members, which made it all the more appealing. She made up her mind; she had to join no matter what. Finally her life would be worthwhile.

**A Difficult and Demanding Initiation**

 The initiation was difficult and demanding, but she passed and threw herself completely into a new life of purification and meditation. For months she rose higher and higher in devotion and spiritual purity until her instructor recommended to the head guru that, considering her amazing progress, she was ready to take the next big step: she had merited to be anointed as a priestess! Avigayil was headed for a life of bliss and total surrender to the eternal!

 Interestingly, throughout this time she had managed to find a few minutes each week to call her parents in Holon, Israel. Although she usually kept the conversations short and vague, this time she couldn't contain her joy.

 A priestess? Her parents, although they were not religious Jews, were aghast; they never dreamed it would come to this! But their protests only aggravated her. She had her own life to live and her own soul to save.

 After all, what did they have to offer? Money? Television? Marriage? Feh! She had found the truth and nothing would stop her.

**Her Beloved Grandmother Had Passed Away**

 But as 'fate' would have it, exactly at this time her beloved grandmother passed away in Israel; one day before her next call home. The bad news shocked her and when her parents suggested that she return she agreed and asked them to delay the funeral until her arrival.

 She took the first plane out and made a point of buying a round trip ticket for two weeks; she would use the opportunity in Israel to say her last good-byes to everyone she knew before turning over her life to the guru.

 But her parents thought otherwise; they were determined to do get this crazy idea out of her head. The day after the funeral they initiated a stream of rabbis, professors and even a psychologist or two. But they had underestimated her convictions. She remained untouched. Nothing they said or did had any effect whatsoever -- and the days passed like minutes.

**Father Asks Her to Speak to Local Rabbi**

 On her second Shabbat, the day before her flight back, her father requested that she accompany him to the local Chabad synagogue and speak to the Rabbi; Rabbi Meir Halperin.

 When they arrived the Rabbi was in the middle of giving a class on the commandment of retuning lost objects (*HaShevat Avaida*). He cited several essays of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to illustrate his point: although this commandment seems to be logical, it really isn't and must be done only because it is the will of G-d.

**Disagrees Vehemently with Rabbi’s Statement**

 Avigayil exploded! "What!" She exclaimed. "What is wrong with doing good because it makes sense? Do you think people are so bad or stupid that they don't know to return things? And who says G-d gives commands anyway? Maybe your G-d does, but not my god! My god is nature! Spirit! When one is in harmony with nature, one will automatically do good!

 After the class she calmed down and they spoke for a while. Although the Rabbi said some interesting things, especially about how nature without the Torah can bring man to be an animal or worse, Avigayil was unimpressed. She longed for her guru and the forests of India. The next day she boarded the plane and flew back...for good.

 The ritual began early in the morning and was to reach its grand finale on the top of a high mountain at sunset. It was a clear, beautiful day. The previous night she had purified herself through fasting and prayer and now, along with five other prospective priests, she was slowly ascending the mountain led by their holy guru and several of his assistants, leaving the mundane world far below.

**The Guru Spots a Wallet on the Ground**

 About an hour before they reached the summit, something on the ground caught the guru's eye. It was a wallet. He gracefully and swiftly bent down, picked it up and put it in the small pouch he had strapped to his side.

 But Avigayil happened to notice. She quickened her pace till she was next to him and softly suggested that he look in the wallet to see if there was identification.

 "No" he answered calmly, looking at her with deep all-knowing eyes. "If god has caused it, then so it shall be. The ways of god are unfathomable."

 Avigayil continued in the procession but she was shocked. The words of Rabbi Halperin kept ringing in her mind: 'Man without Torah can be like an animal.' The response of the guru just didn't ring true.

**The Time for a Lifetime Commitment**

 Finally they reached the top. A large bonfire was burning, it's light was flickering off their faces and white robes with the darkening sky in the background.

 The guru broke the silence. "Are you all willing to take the most important step in your lives?" he said majestically looking at all of them with compassionate eyes.

 "Yes!" they all answered stoically, almost in unison -- except for Avigayil.

 The Guru turned his gaze to her. "And what about...?"

 "NO!" She yelled out. "NO NO!!"

 The guru calmly answered. "Very well, we cannot accept one who is not certain. Let you return to the city and when you are sure, we will return here."

 Avigayil descended the mountain with one of the guru's assistants and early next morning took the first plane out, which happened to be to Australia. Her outlook had changed completely. She just wanted to get away; she didn't really care where to, just so long as it was as far away as possible from the idolatry, impurity and lies of India.

**Finding in Judaism What She Was Looking for**

 She stayed a while with friends and it was there she met another Chabad representative, Rabbi Eli Riskin. This time she *really* found what she was looking for; Judaism. And it stuck.

 The guru was right about one thing: the ways of G-d are indeed unfathomable.

 *Source*: Edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation/adaptation of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton (// ohrtmimim.org/torah) of the report by Rabbi Eli Riskin in *HaGeula* #237)

 *Connection*: Weekly Reading--Ex. 23:4

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of the Ascent of Safed.* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)



**It Once Happened**

**Honest Meir**

 In a small village in Poland there lived an unassuming and pious Jew named Meir. While he was by no means well-to-do, his family never wanted for their daily bread. Each day on his way home from the synagogue Meir passed through the farmers' market, buying produce and poultry which his wife sold from a small store attached to their house. The prices were always fair, and they earned a reputation for honesty.

 Meir stood out from the other buyers at the market, for he would never haggle over prices. Meir had his one fair price, and that was that--he would never budge. Eventually the farmers came to respect him and would even seek him out when they had some special goods for sale, and he became known to everyone as "Honest Meir."

**Only One Regret in Life**

 Meir had only one regret in life--his business took time away from his beloved Torah study. One day he decided that he would work only half as much, and spend the time saved learning Torah. His wife was worried by his decision, but he calmed her saying, "Don't you think that G-d can send us enough in those three days?" She wanted to reply that of course He could, but would He? But she stopped herself and decided to wait and see what would happen. As it turned out, their income was the same and her husband thrived on his Torah learning.

 One day his wife came to Meir to discuss the marriage of their daughter, Mirele. "G-d has been good to us, and we must certainly be grateful, but our daughter isn't getting any younger, and the time has come for us to start saving for her dowry."

**Trust in Him (G-d) and Stop Worrying**

 Meir looked at his wife and replied, "G-d has taken care of us so far. Trust in Him and stop worrying."

 But his wife couldn't rest. "Meir, we aren't supposed to rely on miracles. Maybe you should go out and work like you used to."

 Meir replied, "What you're saying may seem true, but don't forget my 'silent partner'--G-d. Haven't you seen with your own eyes that since I've spent extra time with my 'partner' we have lost nothing. I can not stop my Torah studies, especially now when we need Him even more." There was nothing more his wife could say except a heartfelt "Amen."

**A Peasant Looks for Meir to**

**Buy a Large Honeycomb**

 A short time later a peasant showed up at the marketplace with a large honeycomb encased in a block of wood. Several prospective buyers approached him, but he refused them, saying, "I will sell only to Honest Meir." And there he sat and waited until finally, late in the afternoon someone told him that Meir wouldn't be coming to market that day.

 The peasant made his way to Meir's house where he was greeted by his wife. "My husband isn't at home now," she told him, but she asked him to wait while she ran to fetch her husband.

 Meir measured the honeycomb and lifted it; then he made his offer, "Judging by its size and weight, and even allowing for the wood, there should be a lot of honey in it." The two men agreed on a figure which seemed fair to both. The only problem was that Meir didn't have such a large sum. Meir's wife interrupted, saying: "I will try to borrow the money from some of our neighbors."

 Meir served the peasant a cup of tea, and then he questioned the man: "Tell me, how did you come to have such a strange honeycomb?"

**Noticed Bees Buzzing Above**

 The peasant replied, "I was walking through the woods collecting fire-wood. When my cart was full, I got inside and fell asleep, but it seems that my mare wandered a bit, for when I awoke, I found myself in a different part of the woods, in front of a tree stump. Looking up, I noticed bees buzzing, and being something of a beekeeper myself, I hopped out of my cart and with a long thin twig I removed the queen bee from the hive. I tried to take out the honeycomb, but it was impossible to do so without breaking it. That's when I got the idea of sawing off the stump."

 By the time the peasant had finished his tale, Meir's wife had returned with the money. Meir gave it to the happy peasant who went off feeling very pleased. Meir's wife began to extract the honey. She pulled out two and then three heavily laden honeycombs and reached in with a deep ladle for more, when she found there was nothing there but a deep, empty hole. The poor woman was horrified. They were now in debt, and for nothing but a bit of honey and a piece of wood!

**Screams for Her Husband**

 She screamed for her husband, who was equally shocked at the find. "What will we do now?" his wife wailed. Meir was also at a loss, but not willing to give up he said, "Go fetch your longest cooking spoon and maybe we can salvage something from the bottom."

 Meir dipped the spoon into the wooden cavity, and lo and behold , the spoon was filled with a pile of golden coins and jewels! His wife almost fainted from the shock, but when she recovered she asked her husband, "Do you think G-d had the bees produce this treasure for us?"

 Her husband turned to her, smiling, "Possibly, but I think there's a simpler explanation. Probably someone hid this treasure years ago and had to abandon it for some reason. Then the bee colony settled in the trees stump and built their hive on top of the treasure.

 “Now, it seems that G-d must have decided there was no longer any reason to leave it hidden since we need the money to marry off our children and do other good things. So, you see, the peasant was rewarded for his labor, and we were even more richly rewarded for our faith and trust in G-d."

*Reprinted from the archives of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn (Issue #201 from Parshas Mishpotim 5752 – 1992.*