**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Tetzaveh 5775**

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**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov and the**

**Chasid’s Spilled Glass of Milk**

One Friday, the Baal Shem Tov said to his students, "Go out and look for a guest for Shabbat." The students began their search, looked for a long time, but found no one. However, the Baal Shem Tov remained determined and asked them to find a guest.

Half an hour before Shabbat, there was still no guest. So the students went to the outskirts of Mezhibuzh, and waited by the crossroads, until finally they found a Jew arriving with a heavy sack on his shoulder. They asked him if he has a place for Shabbat, and he said no. They suggested that he spend Shabbat with the Baal Shem Tov in Mezhibuzh, and he happily agreed.

**Truly Pleased to See the Guest**

The Baal Shem Tov was truly pleased to see the guest, and it appeared that the holy man was in an especially good mood. During the Shabbat meals, a most joyous and arousing atmosphere reigned. At the third Shabbat meal, the Baal Shem Tov sang niggunim, wordless melodies. In the middle of the meal, he stopped the niggunim and told his students that he wanted each one to share a Torah thought.

Starting from the right, each student shared a Torah thought. When the guest's turn came, the Baal Shem Tov said to him, "Say a Torah thought." The guest responded that he didn't have what to say. The Baal Shem Tov asked him if he could at least say something short. The guest replied that he hadn't really studied much. "Did you learn as a child in cheder? Perhaps you can share a story about our patriarch Abraham."

The Jew, who was a simple person, didn't understand exactly what the Baal Shem Tov was asking. But when he heard the word "story," he figured that he was being asked to tell a story - any story. "I'll tell you a story that happened to me," he said, "if you would like to hear it." The Baal Shem Tov smiled and agreed. "Yesterday, Friday, I was released from imprisonment by a paritz (landowner). For an entire year, he held me in a pit because I owed him rent. In that pit, I heard voices coming out from under the ground. I didn't know if they were voices of people or spirits. I was afraid even to move.

**Got Up the Courage to Bend**

**Down and Question the Voices**

"It was only during my last week in the pit that I got up the courage, bent down to the ground, and asked if they could hear me. They said that they could.

"I asked them if they are people or spirits. ''We are spirits,' they replied.

"I continued to ask them questions. 'I have realized that you have a strange custom that you cry every day of the week, but when Friday night comes, you laugh. What does this mean?'

"The spirits answered: 'We are a group of spirits that live from the sins of one chasid. He fasts every day of the week, going without food or drink. When Shabbat comes, he wants to eat. However, due to his fasting, his stomach has shriveled and he can't eat meat or fish. So he makes Kiddush on wine, and then immediately afterwards, his wife brings him a cup of milk. After he drinks the milk, he waits until he is allowed to eat meat, and only then does he eat his Shabbat meal.

**Making Sure the Wife**

**Would Spill a Little Milk**

"'However, every time his wife brings him the cup, we make sure that a little bit spills, and then he gets angry and annoyed at her. 'I fast the whole week, and you spill my milk!' he scolds her. Sometimes, he even threatens that if the milk is spilt one more time, he will take her to the rabbi. Every week, we make certain to spill the milk, so when Shabbat comes, he will chastise her again. This makes us very happy, because then more sins are created, sins from which we live."

"I asked another question. 'Why did you cry last week twice as much, and when Shabbat came you laughed twice as much?'

"The spirits replied: 'This week, we were in serious danger. The chassid said to himself that from now on, he would not get angry at his wife. "I'll pour the glass of milk in the afternoon, and I'll place it in the cupboard, so when Shabbat comes I'll have a glass of milk ready for me," he resolved. '

"'On Friday afternoon, the chasid poured his cup of milk, placed it in the cupboard, and then went to shul (synagogue) for his Shabbat prayers. Suddenly, his wife heard from outside that someone was selling wood for half price. She began to look in her husband's money compartment. In the meantime, the wood sellers were knocking at the door, saying that they were lowering the price even more. In her haste to find some money, the wife opened the cupboard, and the glass of milk fell out and broke.

**The Chasid Returned**

**Home in a Happy Mood**

"'On Friday night, the chasid came back home very happy."This time, I won't get angry at my wife. Peace and tranquility will reign at home," he thought to himself.

"'The chasid opened the cupboard, and the glass of milk was not there. He saw that everything had spilled. When he turned to his wife for an explanation, she started to apologize. He became furious and said, "Now I understand! Every time, you spilled my milk on purpose! If I had a doubt up until now, now I know the truth. On Sunday, we are going to the rabbi to get divorced..."

"'If we were crying the whole week many times more than usual since we didn't know what to do,' the spirits said, 'on Friday evening, we laughed many times more because we had succeeded in our mission.'"

When the guest concluded his story, the Baal Shem Tov began to sing a niggun. When he finished, it was already after Shabbat, and the study hall was shrouded in darkness. The Baal Shem Tov ordered for light to be brought, and lo and behold, there was the student who sat to his right, on the floor in a dead faint. It was known that this chasid fasted the entire week...

*As told by Rabbi Zalman Notik in Beis Moshiach Magazine*

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

**Healing the Heart of Darkness**

**By Lord Jonathan Sacks**

**Former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth**

Jobbik, otherwise known as the Movement for a Better Hungary, is an ultra-nationalist Hungarian political party that has been described as fascist, neo-Nazi, racist, and anti-semitic. It has accused Jews of being part of a “cabal of western economic interests” attempting to control the world: the libel otherwise known as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fiction created by members of the Czarist secret service in Paris in the late 1890s and revealed as a forgery by The Times in 1921.

On one occasion the Jobbik party asked for a list of all the Jews in the Hungarian government. Disturbingly, in the Hungarian parliamentary elections in April 2014 it secured over 20 per cent of the votes, making it the third largest party.



**Csanád Szegedi in 2009**

Until 2012 one of its leading members was a politician in his late 20s, Csanad Szegedi. Szegedi was a rising star in the movement, widely spoken of as its future leader. Until one day in 2012. That was the day Szegedi discovered he was a Jew.

Some of the members of the party had wanted to stop his progress and spent time investigating his background to see whether they could find anything that would do him damage. What they found was that his maternal grandmother was a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. So was his maternal grandfather. Half of Szegedi’s family were killed during the Holocaust.

Szegedi’s opponents started spreading rumours about his Jewish ancestry on the internet. Soon Szegedi himself discovered what was being said and decided to check whether the claims were true. They were. After Auschwitz his grandparents, once Orthodox Jews, decided to hide their identity completely. When his mother was 14, her father told her the secret but ordered her not to reveal it to anyone.

Szegedi now knew the truth about himself. He decided to resign from the party and find out more about Judaism. He went to a local Chabad Rabbi, Slomó Köves, who at first thought he was joking. Nonetheless he arranged for Szegedi to attend classes on Judaism and to come to the synagogue.

 [c](https://stevendkurtz.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/screen-shot-2014-05-31-at-8-55-19-am.png)

Mr. Szegedi on right wearing a yarmulke

At first, Szegedi says, people were shocked. He was treated by some as “a leper.” But he persisted. Today he attends synagogue, keeps Shabbat, has learned Hebrew, calls himself Dovid, and in 2013 underwent circumcision.

When he first admitted the truth about his Jewish ancestry, one of his friends in the Jobbik party said, “The best thing would be if we shoot you so you can be buried as a pure Hungarian.” Another urged him to make a public apology. It was this comment, he says, that made him leave the party. “I thought, wait a minute, I am supposed to apologize for the fact that my family was killed at Auschwitz?”

As the realization that he was a Jew began to change his life, it also transformed his understanding of the world. Today, he says, his focus as a politician is to defend human rights for everyone. “I am aware of my responsibility and I know I will have to make it right in the future.” Szegedi’s story is not just a curiosity. It takes us to the very heart of the strange, fraught nature of our existence as moral beings.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**The Man Who Didn’t Open Telegrams on Shabbat**

In Halbershdadt, Germany, a Jew by the name of Mr. Hirsch was dealing with copper. He had a big business. In the year 1871 there was a war between Germany and France. It broke out on Shabbat. On Shabbat morning he received a telegram. He didn’t open it. Every hour he received another telegram but only after Havdalah at Shabbat's end did he open all the telegrams.

He read: “The German government needs copper and we’d like to buy copper from you. We offer you 10,000 marks for so-and-so much copper.” Since he hadn’t answered because it was Shabbat, the next telegram said, “We offer you 20,000 marks.” By the end of the Shabbat, the German government was so desperate they were offering him 150,000 marks.

He opened all the telegrams and on Sunday morning he went to the station he had to contact. He told them, “To tell you the truth, I didn’t ignore the telegrams because I didn’t like the price. I just didn’t open them because it was Shabbat. I'll sell you the copper for 10,000 marks.”

The government was unable to believe Mr. Hirsch's honesty. The story went all the way to the German Kaiser, who asked this man to come before him. The Kaiser said to him, “I have never met anyone as honest as you. I guess that when you keep Shabbat, it makes you an honest person. First of all, let me have the privilege of paying you 150,000 marks, because you deserve it. We want to give it to you. Beyond that, I would like to make you a Baron.”

Everybody has heard of Baron Hirsch.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Chabad of Great Neck, NY.*

**Michael Jackson**

**And My Yarmulke**

**By Rabbi Mayer Fuchs**

**As told to Rochel Leah Fuchs**



It was a warm spring day in 1993, in Hollywood, California. I was 14 years old, headed to one of my favorite haunts, the Golden Apple Comic Shop on Melrose. Back then I was an avid comic book collector and I needed a fix every couple of weeks. As I walked through the door, something was different. There was a charge in the air. I looked around unsure what was going on. The place was mostly empty, except for several men in dark glasses who were positioned throughout the store. Everyone was focused on someone in the back.

I craned my neck and could not believe who I saw. I was actually in the store with Michael Jackson! I quickly glanced at the guy behind the counter who nodded his head at me to confirm. I wasn’t about to let this opportunity slip past.

I tried to play it cool. Here I was, this lanky Jewish kid in high tops and a yarmulke, standing before the king of pop. I took in his famously eccentric attire, the fedora and the bodyguards. “Are you Michael Jackson?” (I figured it was a good opener.) When he responded that he was, I went straight for the gold, asking him for his autograph. He politely obliged, scribbling his moniker on a cardboard comic book protector I had hastily grabbed off a nearby table.

I thought the encounter was over but then he caught me off guard. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Uh, sure,” I responded.

“Are you Jewish?”

“Yes,” I answered, wondering where this was going.

“Why do you wear a yarmulke?” Michael asked.

We shared a shy, sort of sheepish smile together at his knowledge of this insiders-only word, and I tried to think of an appropriate response. I drew on my 14 years of Jewish upbringing and education to muster up the best response I could think of. “We put a yarmulke on our heads to remind us always that there is One above us, and no matter how great we are, He is greater.”

He nodded, accepting the answer, and said it was very nice, but it was hard to tell what he really thought behind those impenetrable sunglasses. After some small talk and a handshake, I left the store, excited about my newly acquired autograph.

The next day in school, all I could talk about was meeting Michael Jackson, and my awesome new autograph got passed around among all my friends.

Years later, a friend pointed out the powerful symbolism: I advised Michael Jackson, who was one of the most famous and successful people in the world, at the height of his career, to be humble and to remember that there was One above him Who was greater than he. Without really meaning to, I told the King of Pop that he wasn’t the King of the universe.

Looking back on the story, I realize that the concept goes even deeper. The yarmulke sits on the head, above the brain. It’s there to remind us that even the things we’ve accomplished with our brains, things we should rightfully be proud of, should not cause us to be haughty because our Creator above is the One who made it all possible. Our brains are responsible for our creativity, our PhDs and Nobel Prizes, our works of art and our literary masterpieces, and yes, our musical hits. But without the Almighty’s help, none of it would be possible.

In fact, the very word “yarmulke” is a combination of the Hebrew words *“Yarei Malka,”* which translates to “Awe of the King.” Yes, I have a good mind and I’ve accomplished much in my life, but I must remember that it’s all a gift from Above.

Michael Jackson’s question got me thinking and all these years later it’s still on my mind. So M.J., thanks for asking.

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

**A Lifelong Love of Books**

**By** [**Rabbi Berel Wein**](http://www.jewishpress.com/author/rabbiberelwein/)

I have always been a lover of books. Even when I was a young student in yeshiva many decades ago I would read books on all sorts of different subjects. Back then I used the meager financial resources at my disposal to purchase books. Prices were different then, and for three dollars I was able to obtain classic books by great Talmudic scholars.

When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach, I often had the experience of finding a pile of Hebrew books on my doorstep, placed there by the heirs of the previous generation. Apparently the children and grandchildren of the deceased had no use for their books and simply disposed of them by leaving them on the doorstep of the rabbi or the synagogue building.

Most of those books I had to dispose of myself. However, in the pile there always was a certain special book, even on occasion a rare one that would so catch my eye and interest that I kept it for myself. I never had the resources or inclination to become a true book collector but I acquired a very large library over my years in the rabbinate.

There was a time when I knew the location of every book on my shelves. Not only did I have books of Jewish scholarship and Torah, I also had books relating to general world history and biography as well as some much lighter reading, which gave me some psychological relief from the pressures of the rabbinate.

When I moved to Israel, I left a substantial part of my library in the United States. My much smaller quarters in our apartment here in Jerusalem did not afford me the space to bring them all with me. There are times now, when I am writing a book or making a presentation or lecture, that I will recall a fascinating insight or anecdote that appeared in one of the books I once owned.

I picture the book on the shelf back in Monsey and I regret that it is not here with me in Jerusalem. This happens to me so often that my level of frustration over it is now much diminished; I no longer expect to be able to find the book here. Sometimes I am pleasantly surprised to find that in fact I do have the book here and am even more amazed that I was able to find it among the book shelves that line my apartment.

All of my bookshelves are full to overflowing and therefore I no longer purchase any new books. There are many I would wish to acquire but practicality dictates that I restrain my acquisitive instincts. Also, the fact that there is an enormous amount of material I can access through CDs I own and from the thousands of books available on the Internet softens the blow that I can no longer, in good conscience, purchase books to bring home.

Jews have always had a reverence for books. There is an anecdote regarding Harry Wolfson, one of the first Jews to acquire tenure at Harvard. This was in the beginning of the twentieth century when academic anti-Semitism in the United States was open and palpable. Wolfson was once confronted by a colleague who said to him: “Why do you Jews think you’re so special?” Wolfson is reported to have coolly answered: “As far as I know, we are the only people who when we drop a book on the floor pick it up and kiss it.”

This attitude toward books is not limited to books of holiness and Torah. Many surveys have shown that Jews constitute a large bloc of the book purchasing public in the United States, far greater than their numbers and population would warrant.

Of course, there are a lot of trashy books in circulation, many of which actually prove more popular and outsell books of greater worth and gravity. So, as with everything else in life, there are positive and potentially negative consequences in acquiring and reading books.

One must become a connoisseur of books in order to obtain the full value of having and reading books. But the old Hebrew adage that “books should be members of your household” still certainly applies in the Jewish world.

About the Author: *Rabbi Berel Wein is an internationally acclaimed scholar, lecturer and writer whose audiotapes on Torah and other Jewish subjects have garnered a wide following, as have his books, which include a four-volume series on Jewish history. Formerly an executive vice president of the Orthodox Union and rabbinic administrator of the OU’s kashrus division, he founded Yeshiva Shaarei Torah of Rockland in 1977 and moved to Israel in 1997.*

Reprinted from a recent email of The Jewish Press.

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**A Jew’s Dedication to Kiddush Levanah**

**By Rabbi Yissochar Frand**

*(Rabbi Yissochar Frand wrote that he received a letter from Dr. Leon Zakarowitz of Far Rockaway, who related an interesting story about his wife's grandfather.)*

Rav Yosef Lichter. Rav Lichter was a descendant of the Rama, and was himself a Dayan in Europe before World War II. Rav Lichter and his three sons survived the war by disguising themselves as Polish peasants, and they apparently were never in the Concentration Camps. Yosef Lichter was meticulous in his observance of the practice of Kiddush Levanah. He used to quote the Segulah that is mentioned in various sources that one will never die an unusual death in the month in which he sanctifies the New Moon. He used to say that Kiddush Levanah is a 30 Day Insurance Policy.

When the Nazis were finally defeated and the Russians moved into Poland, the Russians imposed a dawn-to-dusk curfew, and it was prohibited for anyone to walk in the street after dusk. Rav Lichter did not want to violate his firm practice of reciting Kiddush Levanah, so he took his chances, went outside, and recited the prayer for sanctification of the new moon.

However, he was arrested by the Soviet secret police. They took this poor Jew down to a dimly lit basement in front of a Soviet judge, and they accused him of violating the curfew. The judge asked him in Russian, “How do you plead – guilty or not guilty?”

Rabbi Lichter responded, “Not guilty,” and then he began speaking in Yiddish. He figured he had nothing to lose, so he decided to tell him the truth! He could have lost his life for this, but he felt that he had no choice. He told the judge, we have a mitzvah to say a brachah on the new moon every month. Since the moon is only visible after dark, I had to violate the curfew in order to do this.

Upon hearing his words, the judge ordered all the officers to leave the room. He then turned to Rabbi Lichter and asked, “Do you remember, long before the war, you were once walking home from shul, and there were a bunch of bullies beating up a little Jewish boy named Chaim? You stopped them and yelled at them to leave that kid alone!” The judge then looked at Rabbi Lichter and said, “I am Chaim! Thank you for saving me that day!”

He then brought the soldiers back in and told them, “This person is a long time Communist from before the war, and he is a good person. Leave him alone, take him back home, and make sure that he is not harmed!”

(Rabbi Frand taught from this story that when someone does something nice or helps another person, it always comes back to his benefit. When someone cares about others, he will eventually be repaid in ways that can save his or her own life!)

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

**The Special Protective**

**Powers of Tefillin**

In an interview about the Holocaust, Mrs. Glatt, a survivor, described an event she remembered from when she was a teenager, and her brother who was a few years younger than her. Her entire family had been deported, and some people ended up in a forced labor camp. When they arrived in the camp, her brother realized that in the great haste of deportation from the larger ghetto, he had left behind his Tefilin, which he had received for his Bar Mitzvah at the outbreak of the war.

He believed with all his heart that if he davened while wearing his Tefilin, he and those few who survived from his family so far would survive the war, because the Tefilin had belonged to his great-grandfather, who was a prominent Chassid, and had been handed down from father to son.

Before his sister had a chance to stop him, he ran back to the large ghetto to get his Tefilin, and upon re-entering, he was caught by the Germans. He was arrested and accused of attempting to steal, and he was sentenced to death.

When the sister heard about this, she immediately ran to the Gestapo headquarters, and pleaded with the commander to free her only surviving brother. The Gestapo commander looked at her with amusement and said, “You are very brave to come here and plead for your brother’s life, but give me one good reason why I should listen to you.”

Without hesitating she said, “There’s a very good reason! My brother returned to the large ghetto to rescue a religious object that has special protective powers. If you release my brother, nothing will ever happen to you on the battlefield and you will return in good health to Germany and will be reunited with your family at the end of the war!”

There was silence in the room after she finished speaking which lasted, to her, an eternity, and the Gestapo commander looked out the window into the distance. Without turning his face to her, he ordered, “Let the young man join his sister,” and the two returned back to the camp together in safety!

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

**[Donald Trump’s Daughter and Son-in-Law Tout Benefits of Shabbos Observance:](http://matzav.com/donald-trump-daughter-and-son-in-law-tout-benefits-of-shabbos-observance-%E2%80%98we-turn-off-our-phones-for-25-hours%E2%80%99%22%20%5Co%20%22Permanent%20Link%20to%20Donald%20Trump%20Daughter%20and%20Son-in-Law%20Tout%20Benefits%20of%20Shabbos%20Observance%3A%20%E2%80%98We%20Turn%20Off%20Our%20Phones%20for%2025%20Hours%E2%80%99)**

**[‘We Turn Off Our Phones for 25 Hours’](http://matzav.com/donald-trump-daughter-and-son-in-law-tout-benefits-of-shabbos-observance-%E2%80%98we-turn-off-our-phones-for-25-hours%E2%80%99%22%20%5Co%20%22Permanent%20Link%20to%20Donald%20Trump%20Daughter%20and%20Son-in-Law%20Tout%20Benefits%20of%20Shabbos%20Observance%3A%20%E2%80%98We%20Turn%20Off%20Our%20Phones%20for%2025%20Hours%E2%80%99)**



Renowned businesswoman and heiress Ivanka Trump and her husband, real estate mogul Jared Kushner praised the benefits of observing Shabbos in the March issue of Vogue magazine, saying it is the one day a week they spend all their time together as a family, Jewish Insider reported on Wednesday.

“From Friday to Saturday we don’t do anything but hang out with one another. We don’t make phone calls,” Trump said. “It’s an amazing thing when you’re so connected to really sign off. And for [my daughter] Arabella to know that she has me, undivided one day a week? We don’t do anything except play with each other, hang out with one another, go on walks together. Pure family.”

Kushner added that his wife learned to cook so she could make Shabbos meals. He said, “for Friday, she’ll make dinner for just the two of us, and we turn off our phones for 25 hours.”

Trump and Kushner dated for two years before getting married in 2009 in a ceremony with 500 guests in New Jersey. Trump converted to Judaism before marrying Kushner and her father, business tycoon Donald Trump, recently joked that while he didn’t plan on having a Jewish daughter, he was “very glad it happened.”

Ivanka said she is always reluctant to discuss her conversion to Judaism in public because it is “such a personal thing.” Explaining their level of observance, she told Vogue that they are “pretty observant, more than some, less than others.”

“I just feel like it’s such an intimate thing for us.” she said. “It’s been such a great life decision for me. I am very modern, but I’m also a very traditional person, and think that’s an interesting juxtaposition in how I was raised as well.”

“I really find that Judaism, it creates an amazing blueprint for family connectivity,” she added.

*Reprinted from the February 19, 2015 website edition of Matzav.com. The article originally appeared in the Algemeiner Journal.*

**Short Story of the Week**

**The Boss’ Greatest Fear**

Rabbi Shraga Feivel Frank was a very wealthy man, especially by European standards where the masses were knee-deep in poverty. Known for his philanthropy, R’ Feivel was quite respected by the great rabbis of his generation. One time, he hosted a meeting for the Gedolei Hador (the major rabbinic leaders of the generation). As everyone sat down around the table, R’ Shraga Feivel rang the bell on his desk to get his servants to bring out food and drink for his distinguished guests. Despite his call, no one showed up. He rang again. Still, no service was rendered.

One of the Rabbis was bothered that the master of the house was placed in an uncomfortable predicament and made his feelings known to R’ Shraga Feivel. The host simply smiled and said he was actually very happy with these developments (or lack thereof). R’ Shraga Feivel related that he was always worried that he transgressed the prohibition of overworking a fellow Jew. “Now that I see how lightly they take me and feel no pressure to follow my commands,” he commented, “I’m no longer worried!”

*Comment: Some bosses would look at that as incompetency, concerned with their bottom line. This story teaches us about a different bottom line to be concerned wih - the: proper treatment of others!*

*Reprinted from last week parsha email from Rabbi Mendel Berlin.*

**Addenda to Shabbos Stories**

**For Parshas Tetzaveh 5775**

Volume 6, Issue 24A 9 Adar 5775/ February 28, 2015

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

**Persecution Defines Life for Yemen’s Remaining Jews**

**By Rod Nordland**

RAIDA, Yemen — About all that remain of [Yemen](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/yemen/index.html?inline=nyt-geo)’s ancient and once vibrant Jewish community are untended cemeteries, dramatic hillside ghetto villages of thousand-year-old stone houses and a few people like Abraham Jacob and his extended family.



**The gate to the compound of the Jacob family, which is near the northern town of Raida.CreditTyler Hicks/The New York Times**

Most of them live near this northern Yemeni town in Amran Province, deep in territory controlled by Houthi militants, whose leaders have made anti-Semitism a central plank in their political platform.

It shows. When Mr. Jacob, 36, came to the souk here Thursday to meet journalists and take them on a rare visit to his community, he rode a battered motorcycle, his long, curly earlocks flapping and making him readily identifiable as Jewish. When traffic stalled for a minute, a khat dealer accosted the visitors’ Yemeni interpreter, Shuaib Almosawa, a journalist.

“What are you doing with that dirty Jew?” the dealer said. “Why are you friendly with him?”

“He’s a human being, after all,” Mr. Almosawa replied.

“No, he’s not,” the dealer said. “G-d has damned him.”

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**The children in the extended Jacob family make up most of the remaining community of 55 Jews near the town of Raida. CreditTyler Hicks/The New York Times**

The last of [Yemen](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/yemen/index.html?inline=nyt-geo)’s once numerous Jews, who predated Muslims by many centuries, have seldom been so threatened and had so few protectors. The Houthis, who now dominate the country, are particularly strong in the two places with confirmed remaining Yemeni Jews: here in Raida, where there are 55 Jews, and in Sana, the capital, where a small number live under what amounts to house arrest by the Houthi leadership.

The two countries that have long facilitated Jewish emigration from Yemen — the United States and Britain — both [closed their embassies](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/12/world/middleeast/sana-yemen-embassies.html) last week, as did most other Western countries. And the Yemeni strongman who for three decades was the Jews’ protector, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, is not only out of power, but also, more recently, out of favor with the Houthis.



**A Jewish mother holding her infant daughter in the old ghetto of Raida, Yemen. Photo by Tyler Hicks/The New York Times**

 “We have no friends,” Mr. Jacob said, “so we just try to stay away from everyone as much as we can.”

A Jewish mother holding her infant daughter in the old ghetto of Raida, Yemen. Photo by Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

They have more to fear than bad words. The encounter in the souk took place a short distance from where a Yemeni Air Force pilot in 2008 accosted [Moshe Yaish Nahari,](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=newssearch&cd=7&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CD0QqQIoADAG&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ynetnews.com%2Farticles%2F0%2C7340%2CL-3637452%2C00.html&ei=Iw_eVLruFaLP7gbr0IDwCA&usg=AFQjCNFa29wk402nHXVzq2TQQPNDQQtfYg&sig2=goGCriwn99VpYMFv0mdjyw) the brother of a prominent rabbi and the father of eight children, as he stepped out of his home. The assailant coldly said, “Jew, here’s a message from Islam,” and then fatally shot Mr. Nahari, who was unarmed, five times with an assault rifle, according to Yemeni news accounts.

The pilot was convicted and sentenced to death for murder, but Mr. Nahari’s family, pressured into accepting blood money from the killer’s tribe to spare his life, [left Yemen](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=newssearch&cd=3&ved=0CCsQ-AsoATAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ynetnews.com%2Farticles%2F0%2C7340%2CL-4267604%2C00.html&ei=Iw_eVLruFaLP7gbr0IDwCA&usg=AFQjCNFFlTsA3y1HySCPrwWRPl339CXfeQ&sig2=6sLnLCG0nUW-bwtLu0Wf-w) as soon as possible.

In the next few years, nearly all of Raida’s Jews followed. Among the exceptions were Abraham Jacob and eight other interrelated households, 55 people in all, most of them children, according to Suleiman Jacob, 45, Abraham’s eldest brother and the community’s unofficial rabbi and kosher butcher.

Like the men, most of the boys in the Jacob family wear earlocks, a proud sign of who they are in an otherwise Muslim society.

Now Suleiman keeps his earlocks thin and long enough so that when he goes out he can tuck them out of sight under an Arabic-style head scarf, which also covers the skullcaps (or kipas) that the men and boys all wear. “It’s a shame that we have to do that sometimes, but we do,” he said.

Abraham says he refuses to hide his earlocks: “I fear none but G-d.”

Yemeni Jews, like those in other Arab countries, have suffered wave after wave of persecution. Originally many of them lived in Saada Province in the north, which was predominantly Zaydi, members of an offshoot of Shiite Islam that historically were anti-Semitic. The Houthis, whose base is in Saada, embedded that attitude in their slogan, “Death to America, death to Israel, damnation to the Jews.”

The Houthis fought a succession of wars with the central government beginning in 2004, and in 2007, a Houthi representative in Saada gave Jews there an ultimatum: Leave in 10 days or face attack. Yemen’s president then, Mr. Saleh, though a Zaydi himself, became a champion of the Jews from Saada. At government expense, Mr. Saleh relocated them to a gated community in Sana next to the American Embassy.

That place is known as Tourist City, and as recently as 2009, there were 400 Jews [reportedly living](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/yemenjews.html) there under the former president’s protection. Now there are said to be only 20 to 40. Many of them have reportedly cut off their earlocks after one of their number was killed in 2002 just outside Tourist City’s gates by a Muslim who accused the victim of ruining his life through witchcraft.

One of the Jews still there, Yahya Yousef, who described himself as the Sana rabbi, expressed eagerness to be interviewed when contacted by telephone but said he could not do so unless the Houthi-dominated security office in the Interior Ministry gave formal permission. Repeated requests over a week for such permission were unsuccessful. Army guards at the community’s gate refused entry to journalists.

In Raida, Abraham Jacob shrugged off his neighbors’ anti-Semitism, saying, “There are good people, and there are bad people.” But it is harder to overlook the Houthis’ slogan, which is chanted at all Houthi rallies, broadcast on television and painted on what seems like every blank wall space in areas they control.

“We know there are Houthi people who are understanding and tolerant, and we have not been harmed by any of them,” Mr. Jacob said. “But this cursing us to damnation is distressing and hurtful to us.”

“Honestly,” his brother Suleiman said, “we are a little afraid of the Houthi takeover and don’t know what to do about it.”

Their family’s choice would be to emigrate to the United States, rather than Israel, Suleiman said, “because America is quieter, and we’ve had enough problems already.”

Despite the embassy closings, he said he remained hopeful that his son Jacob, who will turn 13 late this year, can celebrate his bar mitzvah outside Yemen. The boy has already been memorizing the Hebrew verses that he will have to chant for the occasion. “He is my best Hebrew student,” Suleiman said.

The neighborhood still has young children and their parents, as well as elderly people, but there are few single adults of marriageable age. Most have emigrated. The last wedding took place two years ago, Abraham said. The newlyweds left Yemen and never came back.

“There isn’t a single one of us here who doesn’t want to leave,” Suleiman said. “Soon there will be no Jews in Yemen, inshallah,” he said, using the Arabic expression for “G-d willing.”

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**Quote of the Week**

**“The best way to get something done is to begin.”**

“We’re constantly looking for the perfect moment, but we all know that time will never come.” The “Path of the Just” (Chapter 7) says there’s nothing as dangerous as procrastination. The author tells us we need to act at the earliest opportunity or risk losing the chance forever.

**R**[**emembering The Master Historian Sir Martin Gilbert**](http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/remembering-the-master-historian-sir-martin-gilbert/2015/02/12/)

**By** [**Jerry Amernic**](http://www.jewishpress.com/author/jerry-amernic/)

He didn’t have to be helpful. He didn’t know me or anything about me, only that I had an idea for a novel about the last living survivor of the Holocaust, and wanted to speak to him. He was intrigued, so he agreed to sit down with me after his lecture at the University of Western Ontario in London. Make that London, Ontario, a Canadian city of 350,000 people 120 miles west of Toronto.

Sir Martin Gilbert, who passed away last week at the age of 78, was one of the world’s eminent historians and quite likely the leading chronicler of the worst human catastrophe we have ever seen. The official biographer of Winston Churchill and author of some 88 books, many of them on the two world wars and Jewish history, he had been knighted in 1995 for “services to British history and international relations.”

His epic work, *The Holocaust – A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, a book of almost 1,000 pages that I read and reread and marked up with highlighter and post-it notes ad infinitum, was what finally moved me from the research phase into the actual writing of my own book. The only other book of history that had such an effect on me was probably William Shirer’s*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Martin on three occasions, the first time at the university in London. He said that he lived in two Londons – London, England, and London, Ontario, where he was a guest lecturer. There we were, along with his wife, Esther, sitting in a university cafeteria, surrounded by a throng of students who didn’t seem to know him from Adam. I told him about my premise – a novel set in the near future about a 100-year-old Holocaust survivor who is caught in a world that is woefully ignorant of the past century.

Did he think it far-fetched? No, not at all. And then he offered me this tidbit: “Why don’t you have an event in the year 2030 that would *eclipse* the Holocaust?”

Hmm. What a thought. And that’s exactly what I did.



**Sir Martin Gilbert**

Gilbert’s book, the quintessential treatise on the genocide of Jews during World War II, should be required reading for any history course on the 20th century. His website describes it this way: “A comprehensive history of the Holocaust, stressing the human aspect, and telling the story of the deliberate murder of six million men, women and children through the words and experiences both of the murderers and of their victims.”

In typical Martin Gilbert fashion, the book also includes “34 photographs and 23 maps, each map specially prepared by the author to locate every place mentioned in the book, and every phase of the Holocaust.”

To call him meticulous would be an understatement.

Of course, he also wrote other books like *The Righteous – The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*, an examination of non-Jews in Europe who risked their lives to help save Jews.

Churchill aside, he wrote biographies on such dignitaries as Lloyd George and Anatoly Sharansky, and in addition to Jewish history he wrote books about British history and European history. He also put together vast collections of photographs, documents, maps, and letters that would more than arm any prosecutor in a modern-day Nuremberg trial.

The contribution this man made to history is beyond measure. He wrote about Soviet refuseniks and was known to be a devout Zionist, but he was also part of a not-for-profit think tank committed to improving conditions for Palestinians on the West Bank.

A master documenter of events who would leave no stone unturned, he brought a sense of purpose and balance to everything he wrote.

I still have the e-mails he sent me in response to my question about finding child survivors of the Holocaust. He was quick to provide names and organizations. More recently, he was in town to do a book signing for *Will of the People – Winston Churchill and Parliamentary Democracy*, and asked how my novel was proceeding.

The third time I saw Gilbert was when I attended a lecture in which he talked about his childhood, and how he was evacuated to Canada during the war when he was 4 years old. I brought my wife and daughter along to that one. He said he always had a soft spot in his heart for Canada.

Sir Martin Gilbert mixed with opera stars like Placido Domingo, and he knew a number of world leaders, presidents, and prime ministers alike. Gordon Brown, when he was prime minister of Great Britain, had asked him to serve on a task force looking into the Iraq war. While comfortable in these circles, he was also a most generous man, and I had the pleasure of learning that first-hand.

He will be missed.

**About the Author:** Jerry Amernic is a Canadian writer of fiction and non-fiction books. He is the author of the new Holocaust-related novel “The Last Witness.”

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