**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Shoftim 5772**

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**A Woman Who Trusted in Hashem More than the Advice of the Doctor**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*You shall be wholesome [in your faith] in Hashem*.” (Debarim 18:13)

 What does it mean to have wholesome faith in Hashem? Rashi explains: Walk with Him with wholeheartedness, trust in what He has in store for you. Do not delve into the future, but rather whatever comes upon you accept with wholeheartedness, and then you will be with Him, and of His portion.

**The Reward for Having**

**Complete Trust in Hashem**

 Rashi tells us at first that we should have complete faith and trust in Hashem. But, then he finalizes his words by saying you will be with Him. What does that mean? Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi explains that Rashi (based on the Sieri) is telling us that there is a misvah and there is a reward. One who doesn’t try to find out the future and trusts Hashem will be rewarded in a way that Hashem will be with that person and help him. Perhaps even in extraordinary ways, as the next true story relates (by Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum).

 There was a pious couple who lived in a little village in Lithuania with their ten children. While pregnant with one of the younger children, the woman’s doctor perceived a serious problem with the baby and recommended she terminate the pregnancy.

 The woman’s faith in Hashem was strong and she refused to listen to the doctors. Eventually she bore a healthy baby boy.

 During the Holocaust, eight of the children perished, and only one daughter and a son survived. The son, who would carry on the family’s name, was the same child the mother refused to abort.



 The child grew to become Rav Elazar Shach, one of the leading Torah authorities in our generation. Rav Shach would often comment that a person must always maintain faith in Hashem and leave the results to Him.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Holy People**

 ...More this week from the amazing spiritual survival story of Reb Yitzchok Zilber, of blessed memory.

 When Rabbi Zilber was in the Siberian labor camp, Rosh HaShanah prayers were conducted quietly and secretly with a few Jews. One year, towards the end of the services, a fire broke out in the camp, and in order to prevent the prisoners from escaping they were all pushed into a smoke-filled room and the door was locked.

**The Reality of Death by Fire**

 The words of Unesaneh Tokef, which had been said just a short while earlier, suddenly became very real: "Who will live, and who will die ... who by water and who by fire..." The fire continued raging around them. Huts collapsed and people died as Rabbi Zilber and the Jews who were with him miraculously survived the blaze. Yom Kippur he also secretly convened a minyan for a short, half-hour service. They really made it count in that half an hour!

 In that way, Rabbi Zilber succeeded in organizing tefillah, even in a Siberian labor camp! Rabbi Zilber's job at the labor camp was to bring the water, an exhausting job that he had actually chosen in order to refrain from Shabbos desecration. It also allowed him to find a few spare minutes to pray learn secretly. "If I was davening when the supervisor appeared I would stop and resume carrying water later." Rabbi Zilber would say.

 Rabbi Zilber tells how he was once summoned to the camp commander while he was in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei (silent prayer). He didn't respond. They came again to call him, shouting this time, but he continued standing. One of the soldiers then commented: 'If he can stand like that (while davening), then even if they kill him they won't be able to move him.' Having no choice, the soldiers waited until he finished davening!

 After being released from the labor camp and running away to Tashkent, Rabbi Zilber was very afraid of the authorities and thus preferred to daven with a private minyan that didn't include informers. Only after some time did he begin attending the unofficial shul, which was less safe. One day the official shul in the Chimgan neighborhood contacted him and asked him to come to read the Torah for them because they had no one else to do it.

**A Shul Teeming with Informers**

 The shul was teeming with informers, and Rabbi Zilber's acquaintances warned him not to go, but he was made of stronger stuff. He didn't heed their warnings and pitied the good Jews who would be left without anyone to read the Torah for them. On Shabbos he came to read the Torah, but when he began, he heard talking in the background. He stopped reading and only continued when quiet reigned.

 Within a few weeks he succeeded in conveying the importance of the matter to the congregants, and no one dared speak during the Torah reading anymore. After some time, he began saying a dvar Torah after davening, and wonder of wonders — no one informed on him!

**Trying to Convene a Minyan**

 Whenever he could, Rabbi Zilber tried to convene a minyan to daven. But in Tashkent, which was full of dogs, his hurried-running worked against him because the dogs would often chase him. One day he was missing a tenth man for Shacharis, and Rabbi Zilber decided to go to call a friend. He ran to his friend's house and knocked on the door, but no one answered. He decided to enter through the porch, but was attacked by two dogs, one of which bit him viciously.

 The friend, who heard the commotion, rushed out in alarm to see what was going on, and Rabbi Zilber explained what he was doing and urged him to come along to complete the minyan. Rabbi Zilber was bitten several other times while running to do mitzvos and needed shots to treat the dog bites.

 Rabbi Zilber hurried to always do another mitzvah, to accumulate another zchus-merit, but he didn't always spend a long time actually davening. In truth, it is almost a miracle that Rabbi Zilber left a written testimony of his unbelievable life story. This humble man would never have written down memoirs of his miraculous life, but Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, ztz"l, who was amazed by what he heard, instructed him: "Tell!"

 Hashem tells us in last week’s Parsha (Re'eh), "For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people, from among all the peoples on the face of the earth." (Devorim 14:2) One of the definitions of the word "holy" is "separate, set apart." We are truly a nation which enjoys a supernatural existence, with an extra special supervision from above. By acting according to the Torah, we demonstrate our membership in the Chosen Nation.

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

**Staying Out of the**

**Public Limelight**

**By David Bibi**

 I spent last Shabbat in Deal [New Jersey] and one subject came up a number of times and that was bad publicity. Unfortunately too many people are for all the wrong reasons getting their name out in public. A foolish incident with a New York officer on a Manhattan side street gets a million hits on UTube. Two young men in the community get into a disagreement over an employment contract and instead of settling it within the community; it finds itself on page 6. A young lady gets herself in trouble and it finds its way to the front page of a section in the Times.

**What Ever Happened to**

**Modesty or Even Shame**

 Children are doing stupid things and then bragging about it. What happened to a sense of privacy, modesty or even shame?

 Why don’t we learn that any personal publicity is bad?

 Where are the parents? Have they forgotten their responsibility? Are they too busy partying?

 We need to reign these kids in! We need to remind them to lay low.

 Our forefathers, our leaders and our rabbis have reminded us for thousands of years to stay out of the limelight.

 As Raymond Beyda writes, the Torah tells us, And Yaakov said to his sons: “Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?” (Beresheet 42:1)

 When Yaakov’s sons were about to leave to purchase food in Egypt he offered his sage advice, “Enter Egypt through separate gates. Do not all enter together because you will be noticed.” The Gemara (Taaneet 10a) elaborates. “Don’t show yourselves as satisfied and healthy in front of Esav and Yishmael for they will become envious” Rashi adds that Yaakov was fearful of the evil eye that may fall upon them if they were seen together as an impressive group of strong healthy men entering the city together.

**The Destructive Power of Jealousy**

 Yaakov taught us the destructive power of jealousy from personal experience. He had given some special amenities to Yosef his son from Rachel and it created jealousies amongst the brothers that lead to the sale of Yosef to a caravan to Egypt.

 The Gemara says: A person should never treat one child different from another and describes the chain of events that followed Yaakov’s special favors to Yosef. (Shabbat 10b) The Rabbis went further and say that one should avoid any behavior that will create jealousy between two people. For example: One should not praise a person in front of another who dislikes him.

 A man was fortunate to be blessed with twin boys. He invited Rav Shach zt’l –Rosh Yeshivat Ponovetz - to serve as Sandak (The one upon whose lap an infant is placed for the circumcision ceremony). When twins are circumcised each gets his own berit milah ceremony. Tradition has it that the sandak for each should be a different person.

**Rav Shach Stayed to be**

**Sandak for the Second Twin**

 After the first bris was done Rav Shach remained in his seat and sat for the second boy as well – not in keeping with the custom to have someone else sit for the second child. After the circumcision Rav Shach explained his break with tradition. “I imagined these boys 15 or 20 years from now and thought perhaps one may taunt the other saying, “My sandak was Rav Shach – who held you? I did not want to be the vehicle to create jealousy between the brothers.”

 A person should try to blend in with the scenery as Yaakov Avinu a’h suggested. In our times too many strive to outdo others in dress, automobiles, homes and parties. This competitive spirit can breed envy which can result in being subjected to the dangers of the evil eye.

 One of the greats of the last generation was Rav Yaakov Kanievsky zt’l – known as the Steipler. His vast Torah knowledge and his uncanny ability to see beyond what the eye can see are legendary. In his old age he fell ill. A colleague visited and told the Rav, “Tomorrow is Rosh Hodesh – I intend to go to the graves of tzadikeem – the righteous – and pray on behalf of your recovery.”

 “Don’t bother going” replied the weak patient, ‘’I know why I am ill. You see there is a Rabbi in America who has written several books and he praises me in them. I told him it is better not to write about me but he insists that it will encourage others to go in the ways of our Torah. Even though his intentions are pure –THE PUBLICITY IS NOT HEALTHY FOR ME”

**Keeping a Low Profile**

 The lesson Yaakov Avinu taught his sons is a timeless one that all should heed. Don’t try to stand out and impress. In fact, the opposite is recommended. Keep a low profile in all that you do. “Why make yourself conspicuous?” Jealousy is a powerful negative force that can cause great harm. The less publicity – the better.

 In Pirkei Avot we read, "And see to it that your name be not known to the government." According to some, the word Rashuth means not the government but publicity, and the passage is to be construed thus: If one's friends say publicly in the market: "May God protect so and so; to-day he brought into his house many measures of wheat and barley," etc., etc., robbers may hear of it and come in the night, surround the house, and take away all he possesses, and in the morning he has nothing left. Of him it is said in Scripture: "When one saluteth his friend with a loud voice," etc.

**The Glory of the Princess is Modesty**

 Finally Rabbi Pinchas Winston quotes King David in Psalms, “The entire glory of the daughter of the king lies on the inside”. This is a message of modesty.

 The prophet Micha wrote: He has told you, "O man, what is good! What does G-d require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and walk modestly with your G-d." (Michah 6:8)

 When it comes to working on important matters for the Jewish people, it is important to avoid unwanted publicity. As much as our egos crave attention and appreciation, if we are truly committed to redemption and being a part of it, then we want to avoid attention, for it is such attention that lands the Sitra Achra on our heads and who makes it his business to interfere with those involved in the tasks of geulah. Receiving public attention means getting his attention as well.

 What a scary thought. Any attention we attract gets the attention of Satan as well. If great Rabbis feared this attention, if our forefather Jacob who was as much like an angel as he was a man feared it, shouldn’t we. And if not for ourselves then at least for our kids.

 Maybe if we gave our own children more attention, not lip service, but real time and effort, they wouldn’t need to be looking for it outside. And the scary part is when we consider that perhaps all this trouble they are getting into is not to get the public’s attention. Perhaps the cause is to get the real attention they crave, the attention of us, their families.

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

**Deathbed Confession**

 “Water!” the invalid rasped in a whispery voice. The astounded doctors, who had given up the unconscious man for dead, were shocked to hear his voice again. The priest, who had taken his final confession, turned pale. Had a miracle taken place?

 The doctors quickly initiated treatment. For hours they attended at his bedside. Finally, they saw clear signs of a positive change in his condition. By evening they were able to declare that his situation was no longer critical. He was out of danger.

**A Complete Recovery**

 For another several weeks the man, named Bagalo, continued to be very weak, and the doctors prohibited him from engaging in any of his regular activities. Finally, however, he regained his strength completely. Every trace of the disease had completely disappeared!

 The king considered Bagalo to be a financial wizard, and was not slow to express his appreciation . . .

 All of Spain breathed a collective sigh of relief at Bagalo’s recovery. He was one of the king’s most trusted advisors, with a strong reputation for honesty and intelligence. The king loved to consult with him so much that he had risen to be one of the most important personalities in the royal court.

 His advice was especially valued by the monarch in economic affairs. More than once, his suggestions had directly resulted in great fiscal gain for the kingdom and concurrent improvements in the daily life of the people. The king considered Bagalo to be a financial wizard, and was not slow to express his appreciation, as he showered upon him wealth and valuable gifts.

 Although everyone was aware of Bagalo’s great wisdom and praised him for it, no one had yet realized that he was really a Jew. This was his great secret. He was from a family that had been coerced to convert, an *anous* (meaning “forced”), a “Marrano.” As far as he was concerned, his Catholic status was for appearances only. He conducted himself outwardly as he had to, while he continued to observe all of the commandments secretly, in hiding.

**The Price Paid for His**

**Prominent Position in the Court**

 At moments when he was alone, a heavy sigh would push through his lips. Lately, though, he hadn’t had much to hide. Whereas previously he had set aside time for mitzvah observance, and even for Torah study and thought, his new prominent position in court consumed virtually all of his waking hours. He no longer had time to pray or to study, or even to perform the commandments. His Judaism remained only in his core beliefs, his strong inner faith in his G‑d and His people.

 From time to time, at moments when he was alone, a heavy sigh would push through his lips. How he longed for Shabbat and the Jewish holidays, indeed for all of the mitzvot. How had he allowed himself to become so distant?

 But such thoughts could only be indulged for a few moments. Then the heavy pressure of his workload would again take over his time and his thoughts. Thus he conducted his life until he fell critically ill.

**The Best Royal Physicians Were Summoned**

 The most competent of the royal physicians had been summoned to care for him. They gave him the finest medicines and treatments at the king’s order, sparing no expense, but nothing helped. He became weaker and weaker, until finally the doctors felt they had no choice but to declare that his case was hopeless. An important priest was summoned.

 Then came his miraculous recovery. After a while, no one recalled that he had been so sick. No one but he, that is. He remembered very well what had happened; he knew and kept to himself what even the most expert of the physicians could not know.

 One day, Bagalo summoned the priest who had taken his confession. He led him to a private room, locked the door behind them and closed the curtains. He sat opposite the priest and looked him straight in the eyes. “I remember everything you said to me when we thought I was dying. At the end, after all the prayers, you muttered a few words that I didn’t understand. Those words are engraved in my memory. What do they mean?”

 The priest visibly trembled. His face changed colors. He tried to stammer a reply, but his teeth were rattling too hard.

 Seeing that the other’s distress had rendered him unable to speak, Bagalo continued. “The words were: ‘Shema Yisrael Ado-nai Elo-keinu Ado-nai Echad.’ Isn’t that a Jewish prayer?”

**Declares that the Priest is a Jew**

 The priest’s whole body quivered, but no words were forthcoming. “So, you are a Jew?” Bagalo pushed on.

 The priest sat frozen, his face registering shock and terror that his secret had been uncovered by the king’s advisor.

 “Don’t be afraid; I won’t inform on you,” Bagalo said gently. “Just give me your word of honor that you will be wholehearted in the word of our savior, and you will put aside these Hebrew incantations.”

 “No!” roared the priest. “I prefer to die as a Jew. Enough of this double life. This is the moment of truth.” Now that he had recovered himself, the words were quickly tumbling from his mouth. “I am prepared to die, but as a Jew.”

 “My brother!” Bagalo cried out, and fiercely embraced his co-religionist. “I too am Jewish. And now I know that you are truly attached to the faith of our fathers. We are one!”

**The Shared Secret Makes Them Close Friends**

 Their shared secret drew the two men to become close friends. They revealed to each other about their secret lives. The priest explained that he had entered the clergy for one reason only: to be able to whisper “Shema Yisrael” in the ear of Marrano Jews on their deathbed, so that their souls would exit in purity.

 The king’s advisor related that when he had been at death’s door, he had wanted to at least say the Shema. To his distress, he found that he couldn’t remember exactly how it went. Then, suddenly, he heard the holy words being said in his ear! It was as if a gentle breeze had wafted him up and reinvigorated him with new life.

 Falling into a deep sleep, he began to dream. He saw an old man, who smiled warmly and spoke. His voice was gentle and melodious. “I am your grandfather. You shall recover from this illness and you shall live, but only on a condition. You must return to a full Jewish life. Therefore, you shall leave this country. Move to the Land of Israel. Upon your departure, take with you the bones of your father and give them a Jewish burial there.”

**Planning Their Escape**

 The two friends planned their escape. They decided that Bagalo should tell the king that during his critical illness he had vowed that if he recovered, he would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The king would probably not be able to refuse such a request. He would likely even help him to fulfill it. The priest would arrange for the disinterment of the remains of Bagalo’s father, for the church cemetery was under his supervision.

 Thus, the pair was able to abandon Spain. After a series of difficult journeys, the two *baalei teshuvah* (those returning to Jewish observance) reached the holy city of Safed. There they dedicated themselves to lives of total mitzvah observance, Torah study and prayer. When in the course of time they passed away, both of them were complete *in their return*.

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad of Bel Air, California. (Translated and adapted from Sichat HaShavua #144)*

**When Questions Disappear**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 250 years ago when the Chabad Chassidic movement was just beginning it had a lot of opposition. There were tens of thousands of Orthodox Jews who eventually called themselves "The Misnagdim' (the Opposition) who opposed them for no other reason than they were different.

 It so happened that one of these Misnagdim realized that his adversity to the Chassidim was based on pure hear-say and, although he trusted his sources implicitly, he decided that according to the Torah he had to see for himself and that without clear, visible evidence he could not condemn.

 So he prepared a list of questions, packed his suitcase, told his wife not to tell anyone where he was going and set off for the city of Liozne where the first Rebbe of Chabad (Rabbi Shenur Zalman, who wrote the book “Tanya") lived.

 The journey took several days and one of his stops on the way was the city of Homel (or Gomel as the Russians pronounce it) where the famous holy genius Rabbi Isaac of Homel presided.

 This Rabbi Isaac was one of the followers of Rebbe Shenur Zalman and when the 'misnaged' told him where he was going and showed him the questions, he requested that, if possible, on his way back that he stop back in Homel and tell him what the Rebbe answered.

**Returns from His Journey to Liozne**

 Early the next morning the misnaged resumed his journey and sure enough a few days later he returned back in Homel and sought out Rabbi Isaac to tell him what had happened.

 He told him that he arrived in Liozne near evening and was told that the Rebbe would only be available the next day after the morning prayers. So, early the next morning he arrived in the Synagogue and prayed with the congregation figuring that after the prayers he might get an audience. But after an hour or so when the Prayers ended and everyone either left the room or sat down to learn Torah he saw that the Rebbe was still deeply involved in his prayers.

**Watched the Rebbe Pray for Five Hours**

 He watched for five hours as the Rebbe quietly sang beautiful, slow melodies while moving and swaying in total oblivion to the world around him enraptured by each word of prayer he was uttering to the Creator.

 Then he said "just as the Rebbe finished praying I left the Synagogue and, well, here I am on my way home."

 "I don't understand" Rabbi Isaac asked incredulously. "You mean you didn't talk to the Rebbe? What about your questions? Couldn't you just have waited a few more minutes and approached him?"

 "Ahh, my questions?" the misnaged answered. "They disappeared! I don't have any more questions. In fact, not only did my questions go away but my entire self 'went away': just seeing the Rebbe made me realize that I understand nothing."

**A Similar Story Occurred More Recently**

 As soon as my friend Rabbi B' heard this story he remembered a story he himself experienced years earlier when he was just a pupil in the Rebbe's headquarters-Synagogue-Yeshiva in 770 Eastern Parkway Yeshiva in the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn.

 The year was 1971 when a lot of hippies were scattered all over the world trying to settle down after the explosive sixties and one of them showed up there in the yeshiva.

 He had a list of twenty questions that he wanted to ask about G-d and Judaism and he wanted a private audience with the Rebbe to get the answers.

 He was in luck; some people had to wait weeks or even months to see the Rebbe but, perhaps because someone suddenly cancelled, he was scheduled for the next evening.

 He arrived on time to discover a line of some ten people before him and as he stood there with his long bushy hair and hippy garb, gradually more entered and took their places behind him.

**Exits the Rebbe’s Office**

**Just After a Few Moments**

 Finally his turn came. He entered and just moments later came out and told the secretary standing at the door that the Rebbe told him to make an appointment three weeks from now.

 The secretary admitted the next person and when the door closed asked the young man what had happened and why he exited so soon.

 The young man told him that he entered the Rebbe's office and was very very impressed. The only word he could use was Holy. But the Rebbe was very pleasant to him, took the letter with his questions on it, read them in just seconds, looked up and said that he would like to answer them in detail but it would take about two and a half hours.

 Does he think that it would be fair to keep the people outside waiting for that long?

**Asked to Reschedule Appointment**

 When he answered 'no' the Rebbe suggested that he that he make an appointment for three weeks from now and ask to be put at the end of the line. Then they could discuss the questions without any pressure.

 The young man of course agreed, but just as he was at the door and about to leave the Rebbe asked him where he would be for the next three weeks and suggested that he remain in the yeshiva dormitory and the Rebbe would see to it that they provided him with clothes and his other necessities.

 The secretary of course arranged it all.

 But three weeks later when the appointment day arrived the 'hippy' appeared in the office of 770 and told the secretary to cancel it. He didn't want to talk to the Rebbe.

 When the secretary asked if perhaps something was wrong; perhaps the lodgings or the food or maybe one of the pupils answered his questions. He answered 'Exactly the opposite.

 'I see the Rebbe is a very clever man. He knew that the few weeks I would spend here would make me realize that my questions aren't as important as I thought. It took me that long without distractions to digest what I saw in that room when I saw the Rebbe. My questions were according to logic but …. The Rebbe is above that.

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

**When the Utopian Idealist Met the Hardnosed**

**Realist in the Park**

**By Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

 It was another one of those park bench discussions. I hadn't seen my old friend Eli for quite some time. We would run into each other every couple of years, not because we planned it, but because we lived in the same city.

 We both loved to take long walks, and the frequency with which our paths crossed constantly amazed us. We also both enjoyed long talks, and the beginnings of some of those discussions went back to our sophomore year in high school.

 Eli was a self-described utopian. He had a clear picture in his mind of what an ideal world would look like. Although I too am somewhat of a utopian, compared to my old friend I am a hardnosed realist.

**Debates Over the Unfair**

**Distribution of Wealth**

 Many of our past discussions were concerned with what we both believed was the unfair distribution of wealth in the world. Personally, we were both acquainted with stupendously wealthy individuals. We also had mutual friends who were totally destitute.

 Our most recent chance encounter found us reviving that old familiar topic. The news media that particular day were bemoaning the widening gap in the United States and many other countries between the very rich and the very poor.

 Lo and behold, almost simultaneously, we were quoting chapter and verse from this week's Torah portion, *Parshas Re'eh* (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17). Ironically, each of us found a proof text to support our positions about societal ideals and social reality.

 Eli had served for many years as the Torah chanter, or *baal koreh*, in his synagogue. He had no trouble precisely recalling the following verse, and even singing it aloud for all in the park to hear:

"*There shall be no needy among you - since the Lord your G-d will bless you in the land that the Lord your G-d is giving you as a hereditary portion - if only you heed the Lord your G-d and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day*." (Deuteronomy 15:4-5)

**Envisioning a World with No Poor People**

 Eli thumped his hand down on the park bench triumphantly. "Clearly, the Torah envisions a world in which there are no poor people. That is unarguably the Torah's ideal."

 I could not resist the temptation of reminding my good friend that he had used that very text so long ago when we were both members of our high school debate team. He argued the cause of socialism while my duty was to defend capitalism. We had both outgrown the simple assumptions of adolescence, and, at this point in life, Eli was no socialist.

 But he still nurtured a penchant for an ideal world, a world without man-made discrimination.

**An Easy Response to the Utopian Idealist**

 I did not have to look very far for a verse which countered Eli's source. Although it has been very many years since I served as a regular Torah reader in the synagogues I attend, I had sufficient experience as a Torah chanter myself in years gone by to attach the traditional mellifluous tune to the words:

 "*Give to him readily… For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.*" (Deuteronomy 15:10-11)

 After all these years, we both must have reached a new level of maturity, for we soon decided that to continue debating the issues of idealism versus realism would be pointless at our age. I granted him that we were indeed encouraged by the Torah to try as best we could to construct, if not a perfect world, then a vastly improved one. If we could not achieve the ideal of "there shall be no needy among you," we could at least "open our hands" to those who were needy.

 And Eli conceded that until we can attain an ideal world in which there are no needy, we had better scrupulously follow the Torah's urgent plea that we "open our hands" to those who seem to "never cease to be needy." "Until we achieve the ideal," concluded Eli, "we had better face the reality and be fervently charitable."

 We parted ways, and were each fairly certain that it would be a while until chance brought us together once again to revive old arguments on a common park bench. Was I in for a surprise!

**A Rare Phone Call from Eli**

 The very next evening I received a rare telephone call from an unusually excited Eli. He opened the conversation by exclaiming loudly that he had discovered a story that he had to share with me.

 It seems that he had come across a relatively new book, in Hebrew, on the weekly Torah portions. It was simply entitled *Perashos,* Portions, and subtitled "A New Look at the Portions of the Week". The author, Chaim Navon, compiled the book from the weekly columns he had written for the Israeli newspaper, *Makor Rishon.*

 Eli was particularly impressed by an old story that neither of us had heard before.

**In the Early Years of the 20th Century**

 It was back in the early years of the 20th century when extreme socialism was in vogue and many believed that it would be the new world order. An old socialist leader was walking along the street with one of his devoted disciples. They passed a beggar pleading for alms. The master walked right by the poor man, but the disciple paused and gave him a few pennies.

 How shocked was the disciple when his master reprimanded him severely and called him a traitor to the cause.

 The disciple objected, "All I did was help a poor person! Did you not teach us about the plight of the poverty-stricken worker?"

 The master replied, "We are expecting the revolution, which will be a comprehensive and absolute solution to the problem of poverty. By relieving this man and his desperation for even a moment, you were providing a temporary solution to his situation. That will delay and postpone the ultimate Revolution."

 I was deeply impressed by this story and thanked Eli for sharing it with me. We spoke a little bit further about it, and came to the following conclusion:

 It is natural for humans to desire perfection. But they cannot allow that desire to get in the way of dealing with the ugly realities of life.

 This week's Torah portion, in verses which are separated by a few mere lines, drives home this important point. We must strive with all our might for a society in which poverty (and for that matter, all forms of human misery) is eliminated. But in our striving we cannot lose sight of the realities.

 Poverty exists and we must ameliorate it. We must expect that at every step along the way to the ideal world which we are commanded to create, there will be pressing problems that must be addressed immediately, even if that means that the long-term larger goals must be temporarily postponed.

 A lesson for the ages, and a lesson for today!

*Reprinted from the August 17, 2012 email of the Jewish World Review.*

**The Torah Will Not Be Changed or Replaced**

**By Yosef Bitton**

 The ninth principle [of Maimonides 13 Principles] asserts that our G-d given Law, the Torah could never be changed or replaced by another set of Laws.

 Rabbi Pereira-Mendes explains: "Our Torah was given us by G-d. He does not change. And His word stands for ever....It is because we believe that our Law never was and never is to be changed, that we reject Christianity."

 Christianity and Islam share with Judaism the Eighth Principle, i.e., the belief in the Divine origin of the Torah. But the Christian faith claims that G-d changed His mind and annulled the Pact with Israel (=ma'amad Har Sinai, when G-d made Israel His chosen people) and now He made a new pact (berit chadasha) or a new testament with the Church, annulling the Biblical commandments and replacing them with a new set of laws.

 Similarly, Islam accepts the divinity of the Torah, but their claim is that Mohammed's prophecies were greater than Moshe Rabbeinu (whom they also venerate) and the Koran, therefore, replaces the Hebrew Bible.

 The ninth principle conveys our categorical rejection of all these theories of replacement. Every prophet in the Hebrew Bible came to teach and uphold the Torah and to encourage the People of Israel to be faithful to its commandments, not to change them.

**Clearly and Explicitly Established in the Torah**

 The Torah establishes clearly and explicitly (Deut. 13:2-6) that if a prophet comes and claims that we should modify even one Mitzva of the Torah, we know that he is a false prophet. Even though this prophet shows that he is capable of performing miracles, something which apparently would give credibility to his prophecy, we are commanded explicitly to reject his message and consider him a false prophet.

 "In all these cases", Maimonides says "we know that such a prophet is speaking presumptuously in G-d's name, making up something not told him by G-d. For G-d Himself told Moses that these commandments (=The Torah) is for us and our descendants forever".

*Reprinted from a recent Halakha of the Day email from the Shehebar Sephardic Center.*