**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Devorim 5774**

Volume 5, Issue 49 6 Menachem Av 5774/ August 2, 2014

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

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**The Short Vort**

**The Kollel Wives of Arzei HaBira and the Soldiers of the Iron Dome Defense System**

**By Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenman,**

“*In the Merit of the Righteous Women the Jewish People Were Redeemed*”

*\*(Yalkut Shimoni Shir HaShirim: 993)*

I met my good friend Hymie Gluck from the Bagel Store yesterday. Hymie is a warm and friendly person who I (and many others) like and admire very much. He always has a good Vort or story to relate to me any time he sees me.

Yesterday was no exception as he related to an incident which brought tears to my eyes.

Hymie lives in Brooklyn and commutes daily to Passaic. He is very close to Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, Rav of Agudath Israel of Madison and often will relate to me Torah thoughts in his name.

However, yesterday’s comments demand dissemination.

Rav Reisman, who is in Israel at the present, related the following to his flock via email.

Word reached the Arzei HaBira neighborhood in Jerusalem that many of the soldiers who man the Iron Dome defense system have been relegated to consuming army rations during these trying days of war, and are craving for something else.

Perhaps because they are attached to their post and can never leave- as who knows when the enemy will choose to fire-, they are especially dismayed by not having a home cooked meal in over two weeks.

The word reached the Arzei HaBira neighborhood where Rav Reisman is staying and suddenly as if automatically and without prompting, a group of holy women spread the word that Jewish boys are in need of home cooked real Jewish food.

These holy women, the majority of them are Kollel wives who have sacrificed the comforts of America in order to facilitate and assist their husbands Torah learning, sprang into action.

Ignoring the fact that all of them live on tight Kollel budgets, which often means happily giving up eating chicken or meat daily for the sake of a spiritual life of Torah, they took their chickens which perhaps were being saved for Shabbos and began to cook for Jewish boys.

They spared no effort and no food and no expense to supply the culinary needs of the Jewish boys at the front.

Many of the women used a rare piece of meat which was being saved for a special occasion or they used that night’s chicken -which was to be dinner for the family and they substituted tuna fish for their family’s dinner-to cook for the soldiers.

There was no talk of whether army service should be mandatory or not.

There was no question if these boys are religious or not; there was only one concern, a Jewish boy is hungry and a Yiddishe Momma responds to the call of hunger.

In a matter of minutes, hot, fresh, home cooked meals, complete with fresh bread and cakes were carefully cooked and baked and wrapped with the love which only a Jewish mother can give- were ready to be delivered.

Soon Yeshiva bochurim offered their services and personally drove the fresh food to the south of the country into the waiting hands of the hungry soldiers.

No one cared if these boys were Chareidi or Dati or secular; there was only one concern, these boys were hungry Jewish boys who are serving the Klal.

And as in the times of Mitzrayim, it was the righteous women of the generation who showed us the way and who once again taught us that a Jewish child needs his Jewish mother and whatever life style he has chosen, he is always our son.

The *Nashim Tzadkanios* (the righteous women) of Arzei HaBira have once again showed us the path of redemption.

They sacrificed their meager rations -which they are already compromising on to support their husband’s learning-, for the sake of soldiers of the IDF.

Their families would manage that evening on tuna.

I can just visualize the conversation which took place that evening in homes all across Arzei HaBira.

The father returns home with a smile after a tiring and productive day in the Mir Yeshiva. He sits down at the table surrounded by his children and wife and all are surprised as his wife places a plate of tuna and some cut vegetables out for dinner.

The husband although surprised remains quiet and does nothing which could embarrass his wife.

However, one the little children asks, “Mommy, how come there is no chicken tonight for dinner?”

The mother responds, “*Sheifela,* there is chicken for dinner tonight. It is being eaten by the soldiers who are down south who together and in tandem with Tatty’s Torah- protect us from our enemies. Tonight, the soldiers are eating our chicken and we eat tuna.”

The husband who has no idea that his wife has done this wonderful mitzvah is full of pride and admiration for his Aishes Chayil.

He looks up at his children and proudly proclaims, “*Kinderlach,* you should know that the tuna we are eating tonight is like the finest meat from the finest *Korban*. For by us eating the tuna, we have allowed Jewish soldiers to enjoy a home cooked meal from our Mommy which reminds them that although we do our part in the war effort through Torah and Mitzvohs; we have not forgotten them who do their part on the front lines.

“Tonight we are one people.

You must know my children, that your mother’s chicken which was prepared with love and sent to our sons on the front lines is considered in Hashem’s like the *ketores (*the sweet smelling incense) of the Beis HaMikdash. *Kinderlach*, I am enjoying this tuna more than any steak in the world, for I know it was brought about by the chesed and kindness and caring of your mother for others.”

*Mi Ki’amcha Yisroel - Hashem- who is like Your people?*

*If Not Now- Then When?- Hillel*

*Reprinted from the July 24th email of Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenman, Rav of Congregation Ahavas Israel in Passaic, NJ.*

**L’Maaseh…A Tale to Remember**

**The Boy in the Remedial Resource Room**

Rabbanit Mizrachi was recently at a women’s convention in Israel, where she heard the following story from another woman:

“I work as a resource room teacher with children who have learning disabilities. A few years ago a young boy began taking lessons in my resource room. I could not figure out what had brought him to seek my help, as he clearly had no difficulty with his lessons and did well on all his tests. Yet, time after time he consistently came to my resource room for his lessons. I was determined to find his area of weakness but, as hard as I tried, I could not find any type of learning disability or difficulty.

Finally, out of frustration, I took him aside and told him I could not continue giving him lessons. It was a waste of his time and his parent’s hard earned money, as he clearly did not need any sort of remedial help.

The boy turned to me and said, “I will tell you why I am here but I am asking you not to tell anyone else. I have a friend with a learning disability, and our teacher told him that he needed remedial classes in the resource room.

“He was so embarrassed to be singled out as having to go to your classes, so I told him that it was not a big deal and that I also take remedial classes in the resource room. He immediately felt relieved and was no longer embarrassed. That is why I come to you,” he said, “so that my friend will not be embarrassed”.

The name of the boy who came to my class so as not to embarrass his friend was Gilad Shaar, HY”D. He was 10 years old at the time.”

(Editor’s Note: Gilad was one of the three yeshiva students kidnapped by Hamas.)

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insighted Compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg. The article originally was published in Mishpacha Magazine.)*

**A True, Amazing Story from**

**The Iron Dome in Israel**

**By Ohad Shaked**

On Sunday, I received a call from A, one of the officers operating the Iron Dome system. He had been a student of mine about six years ago. I was happy to hear from him.

“Where is somewhere I can learn Torah in Ramat Gan?” he asked me. I was surprised at the question, because he was completely remote from Torah observance. “I’m going to be released from the army in a few months, and I want to start learning in a Yeshivah. I saw Hashem with my own eyes!” he declared..

“What happened,” I asked.

“A missile was fired from Gaza. One of the features of the Iron Dome system is its capability to pinpoint where a missile is going to fall, within a radius of 200 meters. This missile was headed for a central area, in the Azrieli Towers vicinity, either in the actual square or on the train tracks. Either way, hundreds of lives were in danger!

“We fired an interceptive missile, which missed. The second missile missed too, and then the third. That is highly unusual. Until today, there were only two such occurrences. I was shocked.

“We had about four more seconds before it would be too late to intercept the missile. We alerted the emergency services, Mada, police, and fire department, to head for the scene. We already activated the mass terror attack alert.”

He was talking quickly, with me listening breathlessly.

“Suddenly, with no alert from the Iron Dome system (which usually computes and predicts wind factor and direction), a strong wind from the east blew the missile southward, into the sea.

“We were all in shock. I jumped up and yelled, ‘There is a G-d!!! There is a G-d!!! There is a G-d!!!’

“I saw this miracle with my eyes. I didn’t hear about it. No one told me about it. I saw the Hand of Hashem knocking the missile into the sea!

“This was obviously not publicized due to security regulations (which is why the date and time are not reported here), but it is enough to note the miracles that we do clearly see with our own eyes in the populated areas to understand that there is a G-d,” he said.

“I ran over to the religious soldiers, and asked them for tefillin to put on. I committed to begin keeping Shabbos, and it was the best Shabbos I ever experienced,”he said. I was completely moved, and a tear escaped from my eye.”

“How fortunate you are,” I told him, “to have seen this and understand that it is from Hashem.”

*Reprinted from an email sent by Mr. Harvey Tannenbaum.*

**Story #870**

**Linking Battlefield**

**And Yeshiva**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

This happened last week.

Rabbi Yekutiel (Kuty) Medovnik teaches at the Machon Technologiy (Technical Institute) of Tsfat, a school for older *yeshiva* students where they study Torah topics in the morning and the rest of the day study those subjects which will qualify them for a career in technology. A man living in the South district of Tsfat whom Kuty had befriended and influenced to increase in *mitzvah* observance telephoned him to inform him that he had been summoned for *miluim* (reserve duty) and would be leaving soon for the Gaza war front. As an officer, he felt concerned and responsible for the soldiers in his unit and asked that the boys in Kuty’s *yeshiva* should pray for them and study extra Torah for them.

Kuty agreed immediately, of course, and asked the officer to supply the Jewish name and mother’s name of each of the boys in his unit (about 30). Armed with this information, he then posted the list on the *yeshiva* bulletin board and asked the students in his classes (about 30) to each sign next to one of the names and keep that soldier in mind in their prayers and dedicate to them the merit of their Torah study.\* All the *yeshiva* students were excited to do so.

A few days later the reserve officer called Rabbi Kuty Medovnik again. He was upset and frantic. One of his soldiers had just incurred a life-threatening wound from a fragment of a bomb that had pierced his skull. Please, the *Yeshiva* boys should pray and study more and harder for this endangered young soldier!

Kuty made the announcement in the *Yeshiva* to the entire student body, and then went to check his list of names. When he went to speak privately to the boy who signed next to this particular soldier’s name, he found out that this very morning, unusually, the student had slept late, and thereby had missed the morning *minyan* and first study session!

The boy was momentarily paralyzed with grief and guilt. But grief and guilt never helped anybody. He leapt into action. He took upon himself the responsibility of organizing extra Torah study and Psalm-reciting sessions throughout the day, and exhorted his fellow students to do so with extra feeling and concentration. Every two hours he called the hospital to check the status of his injured soldier.

Finally, later that day, they received word received word that the soldier was out of danger. In the evening, the soldier’s parents called to thank the yeshiva staff and student body and to request that the boys continue the special prayers and Torah study on behalf of their son, because clearly it was having a beneficial effect.

**Source:** My son, Yehuda, and other friends and acquaintances of Kuty Medovnik who heard the story directly from him.

**Editor’s note:** This pairing arrangement is the norm in Yeshivas in Israel. Sometimes it is on a yeshiva to military division basis, rather than individual student to individual soldier, and more often it is initiated by the students, although in the above case it was requested by the soldiers. This particular war seems to have tugged extra hard on soul strings, and perhaps the widespread use of internet and cellphone technology plays a part, for now we see these individual pairings springing up everywhere, not just in yeshivas in Israel but abroad also, and for that matter not just with yeshiva students but with lay people too. Anyone who is interested to join in and help to spiritually protect our dedicated young heroes can receive an IDF combat soldier name via //shmiraproject.com.

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Jews of Spain**

Some 100 years before the expulsion of Jews from the countries under Spanish rule, Spanish Jewry was divided into two major segments: those who remained loyal to Judaism despite all the persecutions to which they were subject, and some 250,000 "New-Christians" who had embraced the dominant faith at least publicly.

But even these lived a life of isolation and fear. They were cut off from those of their Jewish brethren who had remained Jews. They were likewise afraid to maintain contact with each other lest they be suspected of harboring an attachment to their Jewish past.

Neither were they absorbed among the "Old Christians," who continued to hate them and to spy on them day and night, in order to hand them over to the church for judgment over the sin of relapsing from their new faith.

Those Jews were called "marranos" by the Old Christians. The word "marranos" means pigs. That is to say, that they were regarded as growing fat from the labor of others, and as people from whom others could derive no benefit other than through their death, when their flesh could be eaten.

The Jews who had remained Jews publicly, were faced only with the threat of expulsion, whereas the Marranos were faced by the penalty of being burned alive publicly for the sin of disloyalty to Christianity.

The marranos were constantly spied upon. At times the accusations against them were truthful. At other times, their enemies fabricated lying accusations against them in order to acquire their wealth and possessions.

Eighteen years before the expulsion, Torquemada, the most brutal among the Catholic priests, set up the Inquisition; a special tribunal to impose penalties upon those discovered to have been disloyal to the Church.

Ostensibly, the activities of the Inquisition were related to all Christians. In reality, it was the "heresy" of the Marranos which was the major concern of the Inquisition.

Upwards of 30,000 of the marranos were condemned to death by the Inquisition and they were burned alive. Other tens of thousands were condemned to physical torture more horrible than death. Most of these sanctified the Name of G-d in death.

The repeated confessions of the tortured that they had remained loyal to the Torah and Judaism, infuriated the inquisitors and their agents, and caused them to persecute the Marranos ever more relentlessly.

The repeated confessions also provided the inquisitors with further arguments in their efforts to prevail upon King Ferdinand to issue an expulsion edict against all the remaining Jews. For "as long as Jews would continue to live in Spain, they would continue to influence their brothers, the 'New Christians' to adhere to the faith of their fathers."

Writes Don Yitzchak Abarbanel in his commentary to Jeremiah: "When the King of Spain decreed expulsion against all the Jews in his kingdom, the date of expulsion was set at the end of three months from the day when the decree was proclaimed. It turned out that the day set for the departure of the Jews from Spain was the ninth of Av ['Tisha B'Av']. But the king did not know the character of the day when he issued his edict. It was as if he had been led from Above to fix this time."

The exiles went forth on the road in groups. Groups of various sizes preceded the great departure on the ninth of Av, and left during the three week period between the 17th of Tammuz and the ninth of Av. And although these days are days of mourning and weeping over the destruction of the Sanctuary and the land of Israel, and music is forbidden during these days, nevertheless the Sages of the generation issued permission to the exiles to march to the music of orchestras.

The musicians were to march at the head of the exiles and were to play on instruments in order to strengthen the spirit of the people, and to infuse in them hope and trust in G-d.

They uttered thanksgiving and thanks to their Creator over having withstood the test and not having submitted to conversion, and over their having achieved the merit of sanctifying G-d's Name by their departure from Spain.

It also was the aim of the Rabbis in permitting the playing of instruments at the time, to teach the people that we never weep over departure from exile; that we weep only over our departure from Jerusalem.

Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. It is excerpted *from The Book of Our Heritage by Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, published by Feldheim Publishers*

**The First—and Last—Time**

**I Wore Tefillin**

**By Rebecca Klempner**

I used to think that being a feminist meant doing whatever men did. Now I’ve found my own place as a woman in the Orthodox world.



The first time I laid tefillin, I was 15. I wrapped the straps around my arm conscientiously, coached by one of the teenage boys in my Jewish youth group. Reading the blessing from a prayer book, I followed it with the Shema, expecting to feel the same pleasure I received from doing other mitzvot—lighting candles each Shabbos, reciting prayers, sharing the Passover Seder with my family. Not necessarily a frisson of holiness, but the feeling of connection to generations of Jews that had come before me.

Instead, it felt like I’d borrowed someone else’s jacket—a wool jacket that itched.

My reaction puzzled me. I was already a staunch feminist, raised by generations of staunch feminists. After my mother divorced my father, she returned to using her maiden name. During my preschool years, she worked at the local women’s support center, surrounded mostly by ex-hippies. Mom dressed my twin sister and me in blue and yellow more often than in pink and purple. She gave us baby dolls, but we also played with Legos, Lincoln Logs, and action figures. She steadfastly refused to buy us Barbies.

While we occasionally attended synagogues or celebrations with mechitzas and the like—we had Orthodox relatives—the synagogues my mother chose for our family reinforced our feminist upbringing. Although she had not been taught Hebrew in childhood, my mother made sure we learned to read it. At religious school, the girls were treated no differently than the boys. After my sister and I mastered the blessings over the wine and challah, my grandfather often invited us to recite them at his place for Friday night dinner.

Teachers pushed me to take the most rigorous coursework possible, and to compete in academic tournaments. If my grades dropped, they told me I was a slacker. No one excused my failure or explained that “of course” math was hard for girls. My family and my teachers fully expected me to complete not only college, but graduate or professional school, as well. After seeing Raiders of the Lost Ark, I decided to become a real-life, female Indiana Jones, knowing that to do so, I’d have to earn a doctorate.

When my sister and I reached the age of bat mitzvah, we read from the Torah in a halting Hebrew. Our grandparents bought us each a tallit. I wore mine only a handful of times after my bat mitzvah—but not because I felt like a girl shouldn’t wear one. The stiff nylon fabric was hot, and the tendency to slip a nuisance.

By high school, I rarely wore a skirt (even to synagogue). As a member of the Conservative youth group USY, I frequently organized and led the prayer services.

I called myself a feminist, and I could do everything the boys could do. But the one thing I never did was lay tefillin. After all, they cost several hundred dollars a pop. It was hardly worth the investment unless the owner wore them frequently, if not daily. Even most of the Jewish men I knew didn’t own a pair.

However, there were several USY boys who did own tefillin, and most of the male advisers did, too. And all of them, being liberal-thinking guys, encouraged the girls to borrow them. And so, that fateful day, when a good friend offered the opportunity to lay his tefillin on the Sunday following a Shabbaton, I jumped at the chance.

My heart raced a little. I felt quite excited, really, as my friend handed his tefillin to me. But then, as he helped me wind the leather straps around my arm, I felt a visceral revulsion to their presence on my body. Looking at my sister Rachel in the next row being coached through the process by another boy—like me, she was a feminist who was wearing tefillin for the first time—I noted the smile on her face. Yet it was hard for me not to rip the tefillin off. I had to force myself to say the appropriate prayers first.

Later that day, Rachel told my mother, “We put on tefillin today!” Mom approved. Remaining silent, I didn’t share the strange feelings I’d had. But from then on, I noticed something: As much as I hated wearing tefillin, I found it appealing when boys did wear them. The black boxes and straps had a certain macho quality, rather like a leather jacket. When I mentioned it to my sister, she giggled.

While still in high school, I started keeping kosher, to some degree, and continued to do so when I entered a small liberal arts college in a rural area. Surrounded with few exceptions by non-Jews, I found myself obstinately clinging to Judaism more. Each Friday night, I lit candles to mark the beginning of Shabbat, even after my candlesticks were stolen from the dorm kitchen. (I lit candles in my room after that.)

I schlepped to relatives’ homes for holidays, did Passover shopping during spring break so I would have plenty to eat during the holiday, and made Shabbat dinner for my friends, most of whom were not Jewish. Baking challah turned into a hobby, although it would be a few years until I really mastered it.

Halfway through college, I greatly reduced my driving on Shabbat. I started reading more about Judaism, and the more I read, the more I felt drawn to Orthodoxy, which seemed to me a more truthful and authentic expression of Jewish heritage and G-d’s will than the Conservative Judaism of my mother and the Reform Judaism of my grandparents. But reading about traditional gender roles in Orthodox life, I had mixed feelings.

On the one hand, deep down, they appealed to me. I’d always been particularly drawn to the mitzvot most associated with women, such as candle-lighting, and looked forward to following the laws of family purity from the time I first heard about them as a teenager. I’d also become very disenchanted with the “feminism” I read about in classes and witnessed on campus.

The feminist scholars I read generally offered flimsy, one-sided arguments about the evils of institutions like religion and marriage, and treated “un-liberated” women as pathetic victims.

I had another fear: By accepting for a “feminine role,” would I be settling for second-best? After all, that’s what my role models had told me: If I wanted to excel, I had to do it on male terms. When my sister enrolled in a Conservative rabbinical school at the end of college, I cringed inside, but on the outside, how could I object to her fulfillment of the feminist agenda?

Moving to a large city, I joined an Orthodox synagogue, but I still wore pants and had not yet fully committed to the observant life. To me, there could be no greater expression of feminism than to value each woman as an individual created in G-d’s image, with the ability to choose her lifestyle.

But many of the feminists around me—former role models, friends, and classmates—opposed my choices, sometimes vehemently and sometimes with little condescending smiles. When I eventually eschewed the label “feminist,” it wasn’t because I disowned them, but because so many of them scorned me.

Over the next two years, I would become fully Orthodox. In my new community, feminine roles like mothering and homemaking were prized. Female intuition, the binah yeseirah, was praised. The tears shed by a woman while murmuring psalms were considered more powerful than the tefillin-clad formal prayer of a man. By immersing myself in an environment where women were separate, but elevated, I felt for the first time truly free to be me.

I was blessed to enter the Orthodox life in a community where my neighbors and friends never pressured me to take any step—from wearing exclusively skirts to no longer singing in front of men—before I was ready to do it gladly. A decade and a half later, I never lay tefillin, I don’t get counted in a minyan, and I don’t learn Gemara.

But I have a vibrant spiritual life, dressing in a way that makes me feel dignified and feminine, praying daily at home or in the women’s section. Now that my children are a little older, I learn Torah, Jewish law, and mussar, Jewish character development, on a regular basis. I connect to God through blessings, verses of psalms, and caring for my family throughout the day.

My husband prizes the influence I have on our home, and I treasure his. Throughout my school years, I always felt in competition with male classmates. Today, my husband feels like a partner. We teach our daughters and sons that women and men are on the same team, and both their roles are necessary for each other’s mutual success. We define those complementary roles by Jewish custom and law, not by pop culture.

*Excerpted from the July 10, 2014 edition of Tablet Magazine.*