**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas vayakhel 5776**

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**The Happy Mohel**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

 The work *Or Daniel* tells a story of Rav Yehuda Tzadka, who was once approached on Friday afternoon by the father of a newborn baby boy. The father asked the Rabbi if he would come to his home on Shabbat to perform his son's *berit*.  The Rabbi was already aged, and it was a very long walk to this man's home, but the Rabbi nevertheless happily agreed to perform the *mitzvah*.  And so, the next day, Shabbat, Rav Tzadka walked with his attendant to the man's house.

 After waiting for several minutes, the Rabbi sensed that the father was, for some reason, trying to stall. He inquired about the delay, and somebody told him that it seems the father had changed his mind and invited another *mohel* to perform the *berit*.  He now did not know what to tell the Rabbi.

 "No problem," Rav Tzadka said.  "Let's perform the *mitzvah* as quickly as possible."

 The father then approached the Rabbi and, embarrassedly, said, "It looks like the other *mohel* forgot his equipment.  Would he be able to use yours?"

 The Rabbi responded with a warm smile and said, "Of course, please take whatever you need."  The *mohel* took the equipment and performed the *berit*.

 On the way back to Rav Tzadka's house, his attendant turned to him and said, "I cannot believe the way you handled that situation.  We walked for over an hour to go to this man's home, in the middle of Shabbat, and not only did they embarrass you by inviting a different *mohel* to perform the *berit*, they had the gall to ask for your equipment.  How were you able to respond so warmly?"

 "I've performed thousands of *beritot* in my life," Rav Tzadka said, "but today, I thanked Hashem for the opportunity like I never did before. *Hazal* tell us that if a person tried to do a *mitzvah* but was unable to due to extenuating circumstances, Hashem considers him as having performed it. Every time I perform a *berit*, I receive a great deal of honor from the people there, and therefore it is difficult to perform the *mitzvah* purely for the sake of Hashem. But today, I intended to perform the *mitzvah*, and so I am considered as having performed it, yet I received no honor. And so this is the best *berit* I have ever done!"

 The Rabbi knew that this was all arranged by Hashem - walking for over an hour, and then having somebody else perform the *berit*. Not only did he not become upset, but he even left happy. When we know that Hashem chooses who does what, then we won't get angry at other people for taking what we had assumed was rightfully ours. Let us all strive to reach that great level where we feel genuine joy in our hearts for other people's success and good fortune.

*Reprinted from the February 19, 2016 email of Daily Emunah.*

**A Slice of Life**

**A Life for Others**

**By Tzippy Clapman**

 When I was a child, my mother's youngest sister, Shaina Esther Szmerkes, lived near us in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn with her husband, Irving and their three sons. With my mother's influence and gentle guidance, she became Torah observant, she kept strictly kosher, observed Shabbat, and carefully kept the laws of mikva. She sent her three sons to the Mesivta Tiferes Jerusalem on the Lower East Side. Her husband worked as a driver for a kosher catering establishment.

 My aunt had no need to work in those years, and she decided to make a difference in the community. She realized how the elderly Jewish American women, mostly widowed and living alone, needed some assistance in their daily needs. Some were homebound, with help from government-sponsored home health aides, in and out of their homes a few times a week. Most of this population had children out-of-town who could not assist them in their daily needs.

 Most of the government health aides were lazy. They would come, watch television and eat. They were known to neglect and sometimes even mistreat their patients. My aunt decided to make it her mission to visit these homebound Jewish women on a daily basis, to look in on the treatment they were receiving and the health aides. This kept the workers on their toes, as they knew someone was coming to check on them who cared.

 Shaina Esther knew the needs of each of her "clients," and she turned their needs into her personal responsibilities. One needed help with banking, as her Social Security check had to be cashed and bills had to be paid. My aunt would make sure her rent, grocery accounts, telephone, electric, gas, and other bills were paid on a monthly basis.

 One woman liked fresh bread or rolls, daily. Others needed her to accompany them to their medical appointments. A few of her clients were totally non-mobile and bed-ridden. My aunt would make sure to be there for their daily bath, to assist the home attendant in washing, drying, lifting, turning. Because of my aunt's presence, the bathing and dressing were done gently and lovingly, under her watchful eyes.

 Any time we would sit in the park near the housing projects, we would see my aunt rushing through the streets, coming and going from one apartment to another. She was always schlepping a bag of groceries or a stack of envelopes.

 There was a mentally disturbed older woman in our community who suffered from severe anxiety issues. She was divorced and had a child who was taken away from her due to her lack of childcare skills and resources. Her pain was great. Without proper medical attention for herself, she would run through the neighborhood screaming and shouting. Naturally, most people avoided her. My aunt knew her situation and would greet her daily with hugs and kisses. She would calm her down, find out what issue was bothering her at the time and work on resolving it. Whether she needed to go to the doctor's office or re-apply for her medical benefits, rent subsidies, etc., my aunt would escort her to the various offices all over town with no hesitation.

 Shaina Esther had three children. Her oldest, Shmuel, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in his teens. Thank G-d, he was successfully treated at the time and grew up to be a fine religious young man. Like his mother, he was kind, giving, helpful and loved by all his friends and co-workers. Later, he had a recurrence of his disease, from which he did not recover. My aunt was heartbroken, but after shiva she ran out doing her mitzvot with more vim and vigor than before.

 Her other two sons never married, so my aunt was left without any grandchildren at all. However, she would not allow this situation to take over her life. She kept busier than ever helping people in need, people nobody else wanted to deal with.

 My aunt also regularly visited her mentally challenged brother, Chaskel Zelig, in the Group Home where he was a resident. She always came with her sons, and took him out to his favorite restaurants. She made sure he had anything he wanted that was within her power to provide.

 In her 70s, my aunt lost her devoted husband. A lone survivor of the Holocaust, he was never a very happy man, but he was very supportive of his wife's activities and he always worked hard to support her and care for his family. After his death, once more my dear Tanta Shaina Esther picked herself up from her sadness and went back to all the people who needed her.

 Over the years my aunt always partook in our family simchas and she would visit with us on special occasions. But we knew that she was always on call and in high demand in her community mitzvot. She never had fancy clothing or expensive jewelry, as these things were totally worthless to her. Her apartment had only basic furniture as she had no use for material goods. Accumulating them was not her goal. Caring for, and comforting people in need was all she needed, to be content.

 Three years ago my aunt suffered a heart attack and spent a year in and out of the hospital. I spoke with her almost daily and often visited with her during that year. She kept saying that it wasn't her own pain or discomfort that bothered her. What caused her the most pain and regret were the lonely women who needed her and all the mitzvot she was missing out on. A year after her heart attack, her holy soul left us.

 Shaina Esther lost a child, a husband, had no grandchildren, so little in worldly good but never stopped caring, loving, and giving.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Sisa 5776 edition of L’Chaim Weekly. It was originally printed from the N'Shei Chabad Newsletter. Tzippy Clapman, RN, MS, FNP, lives in Crown Heights with her husband, Rabbi Yehuda Clapman, a certified sofer. Formerly a NICU nurse and now a provider in school-based clinics*

**Our Daughter, the Rebbetzen**

**By Lieba Rudolph**

 When our daughter Nell was five years old, a door slammed on her toe and nearly sliced the tip of it off. We were in the country for the weekend with Rabbi Yisroel and Blumi Rosenfeld. Their children and our children had been playing upstairs. The adults had been enjoying a relaxing Shabbat lunch when, one by one, each of the children marched down with the news that Nell had hurt her toe.

 At first, we weren't concerned, knowing how children love to report even the slightest mishap. But when my husband and Rabbi Rosenfeld saw her sock bright red with blood, it was clear that she had to get to a hospital. The fact that it was Shabbat did not change anything - this was an emergency and Jewish law permits the violation of Shabbat in such cases.

 An ambulance took us to the local hospital, where the doctor informed us that the surgery required to repair the toe was beyond his expertise. A second ambulance then took us to Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh, where a resident performed the delicate task of resewing the tip of her toe, sixty per cent of which had been severed. To protect the toe while it healed, he put a cast on her foot which she would wear for four weeks.

 The next day we called Dr. Mark Sperling, Chairman of Pediatrics at Children's, who put us in touch with Dr. Morey Moreland. Because of the delicate nature of the injury (and the not-so-delicate nature of our impatient patient) when the four weeks had passed and it was time to remove the cast, Dr. Moreland wanted to do so under anesthesia. This could best be done in a hospital, he explained, with Nell being treated as an outpatient.

 When we agreed, he told us he wanted to schedule the surgery for 11 a.m. the next day. But when he told us not to feed her anything after 10:30 p.m. that night, we became concerned about the timing. Nell had come down with a nasty flu--the kind that "plenty of liquids" helps, and we didn't want to make her any unhappier than we had to.

 Dr. Moreland felt that, despite the flu, the cast should be removed right away so that he could perform any necessary surgery while she was already "under." He was fairly optimistic that the skin had reattached and that additional surgery would not be required, but he did not want to wait any longer to see. Nervous but hopeful, my husband and I followed the doctor's instructions. We arrived at the hospital promptly at 10 a.m. to fill out the paperwork. By 2 p.m. they still hadn't called us for surgery. Nellie still hadn't had anything to eat or drink, and she still had a fever. (Meanwhile, neither my husband nor I shared her endurance and we took turns sneaking away for some sustenance.)

 When her name was finally called just after 2:30 p.m., the nurses took us to their desk and told us what the sequence of events would be. Nell would be anesthetized in the operating room, the cast would be removed, any necessary procedures would be performed and she would then be taken to the "post-op" room to recuperate.

 She would be quite thirsty, they said, so they would give her a popsicle. We questioned whether or not it was kosher and the nurses assured us that other parents of patients had made similar inquiries and that the popsicles were fine. Not having seen this product's kosher symbol ourselves, we were a bit uncomfortable, but we told ourselves that it was probably, in fact, fine.

 And besides, we rationalized, even if the frosty treat wasn't up to our "standards" of kashrut, these were extenuating circumstances. After all, Nell was just five years old, and she had the flu, and if a popsicle would make her happy after almost a day in the hospital without anything to eat or drink how bad could it be?

 We kissed our little girl good-bye and waited with our Psalms in hand to be called once again. Just after 5 p.m., the nurses called our name and told us that Nellie was awake in the post-op room. The re-sewn piece had taken, thank G-d, and she was doing fine.

 But before we went in to see her, the nurses wanted to tell us something that had happened. When they offered her a popsicle, she asked to see the wrapper to see if it was kosher. She didn't see a symbol she recognized, so she told the nurses she just wanted water instead. The nurses couldn't believe it. After nearly 20 hours with nothing to eat or drink, despite surgery and the flu, this little five-year-old didn't want to take any chances with her kashrus. The popsicle was not worth it. My husband and I were also amazed. Sure we had pointed out various kosher symbols on food products in our home and she had learned in school how important it is to be conscientious about eating kosher food. But her pure, unquestioning commitment had to have come from somewhere deep within. And that commitment has always been a lesson for me.

 As I've watched that little toe grow into a big toe, I am reminded to be grateful to G-d for everything, and to ask Him not only for physical health, but for spiritual health as well.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tetzaveh 5776 email of Torah Teaser.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**The Klausenberger Rebbe and a Rebellious Meshulam**

**By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**

 The Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam (1905-1994), was legendary for the encouragement he gave to the thousands of shattered Jews who came to the Displaced Persons camps after their liberation from the horrors of the concentration camps. To each of the bereaved, the Rebbe had different words of comfort and consolation. Everyone knew that it was the Rebbe, more than anyone else, who could give people hope and strength to renew their lives. At times, the Rebbe would refer to the unspeakable tragedies that he personally suffered. He lost his wife, Rebbetzin Pessel, and 11 children!

 The Klausenberger Rebbe had a special interest in children. Even under dismal and sorrowful conditions he opened a yeshivah, *Sh'eiris Hapleita*, for 100 boys, and a Bais Yaakov school for 120 girls. One day, two men told him about Meshulam Yalver.(name has been changed). When Meshulam was 16 he was known as an exceptional *masmid* (diligent scholar), punctilious in his mitzvah observance; a boy who had a bright future as an exemplary Jew. Now, having gone through suffering, loss, and catastrophe, he rejected his Judaism and resisted any attempts to bring him back to the fold of observance.

 The Rebbe asked the men to bring Meshulam to him.

 When Meshulam entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe motioned for Meshulam to sit down next to him. *"I'm told that you are the son of Reb Laibish, whom I knew,"* the Rebbe said.

 *"Yes,"* Meshulam answered. Meshulam did not want to be lulled into a conversation where he would have to debate the Rebbe in topics of *emunah* (belief) and *bitachon* (faith). For him the world of religion ended in Auschwitz; there was nothing to discuss.

 *"They say that you were a great masmid (diligent scholar), back home. Is that so?"* the Rebbe asked in a non-confrontational tone. Meshulam just nodded.

 *"But now you are angry?"*asked the Rebbe softly.

 *“Of course, I'm angry,"* Meshulam blurted out heatedly, unable to contain himself any longer. *"The best were taken away, the finest are lost forever."*

 The Rebbe extended his palm and touched the boy's face and said, *"You are so right. Look at me; They left me alive while my wife and all 11 children were taken away. You are right,"* the Rebbe said again, *"the best were taken away and look what's left...."*

 And with that the Rebbe burst into tears and began sobbing. And then together the Rebbe and the boy cried without stop on each other's shoulders.

 No more words were spoken - for no words had to be spoken - for no words could be spoken. Two tortured hearts joined in a stream of tears.

 An hour later, Meshulam left the Rebbe's house. That night when Meshulam was alone, he recited *Krias Shema*(the Shma) for the first time in months. Within a few days he was wearing his yarmulka again, Eventually he became fully observant again.

 Years later, Meshulam then in his 70’s, commented: *"There was nothing anyone could say to me, and the Rebbe understood that. Everyone spoke to my head; the Rebbe touched my heart.”* (The “Echoes of the Maggid”, Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, p.272)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tetzaveh 5776 email of Good Shabbos Everyone*

**Why the Chofetz Chaim Celebrated His Birthday**

 Someone once told HaRav Elchanan Wasserman, Zt”ll H’yd, that the Chofetz Chaim had just celebrated his 70th birthday. Rav Elchanan couldn’t believe that his modest Rebbi would ever celebrate or allow anybody else to celebrate his birthday.

 Research of the matter revealed, that there was indeed a celebration for the 70th birthday of the Chofetz Chaim, however for a different reason. The Chofetz Chaim explained that all his life he was worried that he would be niftar young, despite how careful he was with Shemiras HaLashon.

 Since he spent his whole life advocating the zechus of Arichus Yomim for being careful with Shemiras HaLashon, an early petirah would cause a great Chilul Hashem.

 For this reason, he celebrated his 70th birthday, since past this age he felt his death would not be a cause for a Chilul Hashem. This is the greatness of our great Gedolim--who only celebrate Kavod Shomayim. (A teaching of Rabbi Mordechai Schmeltzer, Shlita)

*Reprinted from the February 24, 2016 email of the Hakhel Community Awareness Bulletin.*

**L’Maaseh A Tale to Remember**

**The Incredible Tefilin**

**Of the Ohr HaChaim**

 There is a story told about the Ohr HaChaim Ka’kadosh. When he was about to pass away, his wife asked him how she would support herself, as they were so poor. The Ohr HaChaim told her that a month after he passes away, someone will come to buy his Tefilin. The Ohr HaChaim instructed her to sell it to him for an exorbitant amount, and he will surely pay it, and she will be sustained from that money.

 However, he told her that she must make one condition to the sale, and that is, when the one buying them would wear them, he has to be extremely careful that when he wears them, he must maintain their Kedushah, and he should not think about anything except for Torah and Tefilah, and to never talk Devarim Bateilim, idle chatter, while they are on him.

 A few days later the Ohr HaChaim passed away, and exactly as he said, one month later a man came to buy his Tefilin. The Ohr HaChaim’s wife told the man that he can buy them on condition that he only be involved in Torah and Tefilah while wearing them and never talk Devarim Bateilim. The man agreed and paid the large amount that she asked for them.

 The first morning that this man wore the Tefilin of the Ohr HaChaim, he felt as if he were lifted to a higher world. He was able to Daven with Kavanah that he never had before, and connect with Hashem as he poured out his heart in Tefilah. This went on day after day, until one morning a few weeks later, one of his employees came running to him in Shul, and said that he was needed desperately at the office.

 The man waved his hand at the employee, but he did not leave. The employee said he needed an answer from the boss about what to do, or else his employer should come in himself immediately.

 Finally, the man rationalized that it was better to answer his worker than to leave Shul, so as quickly as he could, he gave a short answer and then continued Davening, but it wasn’t the same anymore. Something was missing. He couldn’t concentrate anymore, his mind wandered, and he didn’t feel uplifted, and this man was devastated.

 He tried day after day to regain the quality of his Tefilah, but he couldn’t, and he began to wonder if something was wrong with the Tefilin. One morning after Shacharis, he went directly to the town’s Sofer and asked him to check the Tefilin, and he watched anxiously as the Sofer carefully opened the Batim to remove the Parshiyos.

 As the Sofer unrolled the Klaf, he gasped in amazement, and turned the Klaf to show the man, who nearly collapsed. The Klaf was completely blank— all the letters were gone!

 The man violated the holiness of the Tefilin by talking Devarim Bateilim while wearing them, so the letters of the Ohr HaChaim’s Tefilin vanished! We learn from this how important it is to listen to the directions of our Gedolim, and have Emunas Chachamim. If the man didn’t come up with a reason on his own to talk Divrei Chol with the Tefilin on, and instead followed the directive of the Ohr HaChaim, he wouldn’t have ruined his Tefilin!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Stories as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Baal Shem Tov and**

**The “Kosher” Chicken**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 The Baal Shem Tov (Besh't for short, founder of the 'Chassidic' movement some 300 years ago) was once on a journey with his prize pupil Rebbe Dov Ber of Mezeritz. Early one morning they passed through a town and were stopped in the road by a Jew with a smile on his face and a pleasant request on his lips.

 He explained how happy and amazed he was to see the holy Baal Shem Tov… EXACTLY at the right time!! What a miracle!!!

 His wife had given birth to a son eight days ago, the 'Bris' (literally 'covenant' referring to the commandment of circumcision) was going to be in just a few hours and he would be overjoyed if the Besh't would agree to be the Sandak (one who holds the child on his lap at the time of circumcision, which is a great honor and blessing)!

 The Rabbi of the town who had already been asked to hold the child would surely be overjoyed to relinquish the honor to the Holy Besh't.

 To his surprise the Besh't agreed….. but made two conditions.

 First, that the Rabbi of the town, would give his clear permission, and second that he (the Besh't) be allowed to choose and slaughter the chicken that would be his portion to eat at the festive meal after the Brit.

 The father of the child readily agreed. He escorted the Besh't and his pupil to the Synagogue, then ran to the Rabbi and got his full written permission and blessing (the Rabbi was delighted) and then ran back to take the around Besh't find a chicken.

 But it wasn't as easy as he thought. Each farm they visited and each chicken coop they entered, when the Besh't stood and lifted his walking stick all the chickens ran away. "Not here" he said, "we will have to try somewhere else."

 And the same thing happened farm after farm until, hours later at one coop when all the birds scattered, one scraggly fowl that didn't have more than a few spoonfuls of meat on its bones, remained.

 "This is the one." said the Besh't as he undid his sack, took out a small, longish box, and from it produced a ritual slaughtering knife and a small rectangular flat stone. He then sharpened the knife, had his pupil check it to see if it was done correctly, then made a blessing and slaughtered the chicken.

 "Hmmm" he said as he looked closely at the chicken he had just killed, I think there is something wrong here…call the Rabbi he's probably in the Synagogue waiting for the Bris to begin."

 In just moments the Rabbi was brought, examined the bird and declared it to be kosher. But the Besh't turned to his pupil and asked "What do you think, Dov Ber?"

 Rabbi Dov Ber took a look and answered, "I think it is not kosher!" and he brought several reasons why.

 But the Rabbi didn't agree. He began quoting noted opinions to support his lenient decision. But the Besht's pupil rebutted with equally great opinions to contradict those brought by the Rabbi and so they went on for almost an hour!

 Meanwhile the father of the child was getting more and more desperate…it was getting late! It was already well after noon, in just over an hour it would be after sunset and too late to make the bris!  And it seemed like the argument would go on forever.

 Finally the Besh"t turned to the Rabbi and said, "I think the only way to decide this is to ask your son Alexander Sender for his opinion. Bring him here and ask his opinion.

 The Rabbi's eyes opened wide almost in horror, he became pale and looked like he was about to faint as he stammered, "Sen… Sender? My… my … my son? How did you know I had a son?"

 The Besh't calmly continued. "Just go and ask him, I'm sure when he sees the chicken he'll know if it's kosher or not."

 "But… but… he's paralyzed…since birth…Totally." The Rabbi whispered aloud tears suddenly running down his cheeks. ". Sender??? Why he can't…my Sender … he can't talk or move."

 "Ridiculous!" answered the Besh't, "Come, I'll show you. Just tell him to get up and come look at the chicken."

 They walked to the Rabbi's house, entered the boy's room and sure enough when his father bent down and whispered what the Besh't said …. The boy suddenly sat up and said, "But I can't go there in pajamas, daddy! You'll have to find me something to wear."

 The entire household was upside down, screaming and jumping around hysterically but after a few moments they calmed down, found clothes for him and he went to examine the chicken.

 "The chicken is kosher!" the boy declared. And he proceeded to repeat all the previous opinions and then add a genius analysis of his own that solved all the problems.

 The boy's father was amazed, how could the lad possibly have known ideas that were totally new to even himself? But the Besh't didn't seem surprised at all. "Now we have two more reasons to rejoice besides the bris; the chicken is kosher and … today is Sender's Bar Mitzva!"

 The boy's father thought deeply for a moment and exclaimed, "Yes! You are right! He was born exactly thirteen years ago! Today is his birthday! We have a double holiday!"

 Immediately they went to the Synagogue, made the circumcision, washed their hands for bread and began the celebrations. Sender gave a long Bar Mitzva speech filled with deep and wondrous Torah ideas and after he finished he said he wanted to lie down and rest for a while after such a demanding few hours. The Besh't agreed, Sender thanked everyone, said the blessing after eating and went to his room.

 Shortly afterward the meal ended and the boy's father thanked the Besh't profusely but the Besh't answered. "But we still have one more 'mitzva' (good deed) to do…Alexander Sender's funeral."

 "What!" The Rabbi shouted. His mouth dropped open and his eyes again widened in horror. He ran to the boy's room and, sure enough, it was as the Besh't said. Sender had passed away!!

 Again, the household was turned upside down, but this time with cries of sorrow and heartbreaking grief.

 After the funeral the boy's father asked for an explanation and the Besh't answered.

 "Years ago lived a great and holy Torah Scholar, the author of the book Tevuat Shor, Rabbi Alexander Sender Shor. He was unequaled in erudition and people came from far and wide to drink from his wisdom and to ask him to decide difficult Torah questions.

 "Well, it so happened that one Friday afternoon a poor widow arrived at his home with a problem. She had purchased a chicken for her family for Shabbat but after it was slaughtered a question arouse if it was kosher or not. This woman had worked like a slave for a month to afford this chicken for her five orphans and she was really praying that it was kosher.

 "But it just so happened that precisely when she entered Rabbi Shor was so busy with pressing problems of the community that he just took one fleeting look at the chicken said it was not kosher and wished the woman a good Shabbat.

 "So years later when he passed away and his soul was elevated to heaven he was informed by the heavenly court that, although he had led a perfect life he could not be raised to the sublime level he really deserved because of one blemish; that chicken was really kosher and if he would have made a super human-effort and taken the time he would have decided it was kosher.

 But now, besides the injustice done to the widow and her children, the chicken had also been denied 'elevation' through being eaten by Jews on Shabbat and this denied 'elevation' was standing in his way.

 "So his soul was given the choice to either resign itself to a 'lesser' heavenly level until the raising of the dead or to return to this world and 'fix' the mistake.

 "But Rabbi Shor's soul protested; the world is fraught with temptations and darkness …perhaps, rather than fixing things the world might cause it to sin! So a solution was found in heaven.

 "Your son was the 'gilgul' (Reincarnation) of that Rabbi and that is why he answered to the name Alexander Sender. And that is also why he was completely paralyzed until the age of Bar Mitzva (when he would be responsible for his actions); to make it impossible for him to sin.

 And the chicken I picked contained the 'spark of holiness' that he had [in his previous incarnation had] denied and now had to fix. That is why he passed away almost immediately after he fixed it.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Sisa 5776 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Op-Ed:**

**Can a Nation Die? Ask Italy**

**Italy is Producing More Dead**

**Bodies than Children.**

**By Giulio Meotti**

**[](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Author.aspx/863)**

 In China, the "one-child" policy was imposed through quotas, repression and forced abortions.

 In Italy it is a voluntary choice. The last figures on population for 2015 are impressive and bleak. The mortality rate reached 10.7 per thousand, the highest in years. 13.4 million citizens are over sixty years old, 22 percent of the total population. The births were just 488,000, 15,000 less than in 2014,  the record low since the birth of Italy in 1860. And many of these births came from immigrants.

 Angelo Bagnasco, Cardinal Archbishop of Genoa and president of Italian bishops, was right when he said that "Italy is severely mutilating herself" because of its birthrate. Many laughed, pleased by the figures. We are producing more dead bodies than children. Italy is collapsing, like Japan.

 Today there are already more Italian grandparents than grandchildren. We are the first country in the world to experience the so-called "point of no return," when the number of people over sixty years exceeds the number of those under twenty. We are a country hostile to life. 488,000 births against 100,000 abortions in 2015. Almost one pregnancy out of four in Italy ends with an interruption.

 When did the collapse start? In the late Seventies, after the turmoil of "sexual liberation", is when our fertility literally halved. It does not depend on economic factors, welfare or employment opportunities (at the time, Italy was the cradle of welfarism from the cradle to the grave). How explain, otherwise, that the number of cars per capita, vacation trips per capita and material goods per capita are increasing and that only the number of children per capita is decreasing? We do not grow economically because in Italy the cradles are empty.

 Every night we open the television on the talk shows and we see trade unionists, journalists and politicians who speak of the elderly as "our greatest resource", as an asset to protect and fulfill.

 In Parliament, for a month, Italian MPs discussed the justice of gay adoptions, the most sterile subject in the world. We go into the Italian supermarkets and the childhood oriented departments are always smaller than those devoted to the care of animals. We are a country in the grip of languor and complacency.

 "Can a nation die?" asked the magazine *Foreign Policy*. Yes, of natural causes, as certain atolls of the Maldives are submerged by the rising waters. Or of demography, as is happening to Italy.

 My poor country reminds me of P.D. James' wonderful novel "The Children of Men", about a dystopian future where people have become sterile, pets are doted on as child-substitutes and churches hold christening ceremonies for cats.

 But Italy is not alone in this catastrophe: Germany, Spain, Portugal and the entire Eastern Europe is collapsing under this unprecedented barrenness. The rest, like France and UK, are already replacing the empty cradles with rising Islam.

*Reprinted from the February 25, 2016 email of Arutz Sheva. The writer, an Italian journalist with Il Foglio, writes a twice-weekly.*

**The Couple that**

**“Lost” Everything**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

 Rabbi Rosen, the founder of "A Time," said he received a phone call this year from a Rabbi from out of town, requesting help for two members of his community. It was a couple, both ba'ale teshuva. They didn't have much of a family life [with their non-frum relatives] due to their growth in religion..

 They got married hoping to start their own family, built on Torah values. However, the young, courageous couple had been married for five years with no children. "A Time" took them under their wing, performed certain tests and the results were not good. They flew the couple to New York to meet a top specialist in the field. After looking at their case, he was not optimistic either.

 He attempted to do a rare procedure. It was supposed to take an hour and a half, but it took four and a half hours instead. Afterwards, the doctor told Rabbi Rosen, who was waiting there, that, unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. There was nothing left to do.

 The husband, whom the procedure was performed upon, was under anesthesia. The Rabbi was elected to break the news to his wife. As soon as he entered the waiting room, she saw his expression and broke down in tears. She said, "Rabbi, now we have nothing."

 The Rabbi said, "What do you mean- nothing?"

 She said, "When my husband told his boss he needed to take three weeks off and go to New York for this, the boss said, 'if you leave, you can't come back.' But, we wanted a baby so badly, we gave up the job. Rabbi, we gave up so much. We gave up our families to become religious. We have given up our livelihood in the hope of raising a child who would follow in the ways of Hashem. And now we are going back home with nothing. No family, no job and no child."

 Rabbi Rosen went back to the doctor and said "There has to be something else." The doctor said, "You saw what I tried; as of now, there's nothing. Maybe I could try a little more based on the procedure we did today. But, even if I do, the chances of something happening are one or two percent. I cannot give the couple false hope like that."

 The Rabbi said, "We don't care about percentages; do whatever it is. Hashem is the One bringing the salvation."

 The couple stayed at a nearby hotel, in case there were positive results. At 5 AM, they received a phone call to come immediately for a procedure. Baruch Hashem, that time it worked. The couple was blessed with their first child.  Even if the greatest specialist in the field says it can't happen, it can still happen.

 This is the job of a Jew-to constantly thank Hashem for the past and hope for the future. Everything is possible for Hashem. The hope that we have is so precious. B'ezrat Hashem, we will hear of many more yeshuot. Amen.

*Reprinted from the February 23, 2016 email of Daily Emunah*

**The Chofetz Chaim and**

**The Son of the Butcher**

 *“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever that in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.*(Shemos 32:16-17)

 He [G-d] promised them that this sign will remain forever and Israel will make great personal sacrifices for its sake and through this the sign He will remain with them forever.Â He also promised them that no other peoples will accept this day as their day of rest, rather they will seek to rest on another day.Â (Malbim)

 What’s so special about Shabbos? Why is it the central day in the Jewish week? Let’s see if we can appreciate one small sliver of an approach.

 A Rabbi was speaking to an elder group of Jews in Florida some time back. He wanted to impress upon them the greatness of the sainted Chofetz Chaim. He told them that in a town near to Radin where the Chofetz Chaim resided there was a butcher whose son had become a flagrant desecrater of the Shabbos. This presented a tremendous problem for the whole town. The son’s ill behavior reflected on the butcher and cast a shadow of over the credibility of his Kashrus.

 It was the source of great controversy for the whole community and deep personal pain for the butcher. After many discussions and after having exhausted every other option it was decided that they would bring the young man to meet the Chofetz Chaim. They did. After a brief encounter in a closed room the boy came out transformed and from then on was dutifully observant of the Shabbos.

 After the Rabbi concluded his lecture an older man approached him and told him that he was from a certain small town adjacent to Radin. His father was a butcher. In his youth he had gone on a streak of rebelliousness and had desecrated the Shabbos. His father had taken him to the Chofetz Chaim and from then on he ceased from violating the Shabbos. “*I was that young man in the story!” he confessed.*

The Rabbi pressed him, “What happened in that room?”

 He related, “I entered the room and saw this sweet elderly Rabbi. He took my hand with his two soft and gentle hands and he began to say, ‘Shabbos, oy Shabbos.’ He repeated over and over again and he began to cry. A tear ran off his cheek and landed on the back of my hand. When I felt that hot tear I gave a shriek and ran out of the room, vowing at that moment I would never violate Shabbos again.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5776 email of Shabbos Candle Lighting.*