**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas vayakhel 5774**

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**Rabbi Meir Schuster, a”h:**

**Every Jew Counts**

**By Bracha Goetz**



**Rabbi Schuster with one of his many**

**“friends” at the Western Wall**

 What one person can do when he really cares about the Jewish people.

 One day, when Meir Schuster and his friend were in their early twenties, they had just finished praying at the Western Wall. They watched other young people going to the Wall and being lit up by the experience. And the thought struck both of them at the same time: Why can’t someone connect with all these people and bring them closer to their heritage? They noticed one young backpacker leaning against the wall and crying. They watched as he composed himself, and started walking away from his moving encounter.

**The Moment of Epiphany**

 That was the moment of epiphany: this fellow had nowhere to go with the feelings that had just emerged. Rabbi Schuster’s friend walked over to the young man, gently tapped him on the shoulder, and said, “Hi, I’m Chaim Kass – I hope we are not bothering you, but it looks like something happened for you there. Can we introduce you to learn some more about Judaism?” This young man's reaction was one of appreciation, and they introduced him to a rabbi with whom he could study a little Torah.

**Captivated by this Experience**

 The two young yeshiva students were captivated by this experience, and they started going back every afternoon during their breaks to speak with more young people. They connected with a dozen more people in the first two weeks, inviting some to come to Meir Schuster’s house for a Shabbos meal. Seeing the impact he could make in connection young Jews to their heritage, Meir Schuster took over completely, and he continued doing this for the next 40 years.

 Day in, day out, feeling sick, with a sprained ankle, in the hottest weather and the coldest, in the rain and in the snow, wanting to share his love for Judaism with his fellow Jew, Meir Schuster was there. He did this out of pure kindness, receiving no monetary payment.

 People think they need to be a charismatic charmer to be successful at reaching people, but it was Rabbi Schuster's pure earnestness that found its way into another's heart gently and directly. Rabbi Schuster would typically ask both men and women if they wanted to attend a class or come for a Shabbos meal. He would remain in touch with as many individuals he met that he could, sending cards of encouragement that managed to make major impacts - even thousands of miles away. As one friend said, “No one cared more deeply about a soul than Rabbi Meir Schuster.”

**Inspired to Create a Jewish Youth Hostel**

 In the 1980's, seeing that there were only youth hostels run by Moslems or Christians in the Old City, Reb Meir became determined to create a Jewish youth hostel where young Jewish men and women could stay and learn about Judaism in a warm and relaxed atmosphere. This unlikely speaker then became a fundraiser, establishing the men's and women's Heritage House, and traveling around the world for three months a year.

 Then, beginning in 2000, after terrorist attacks in Israel were on the rise and tourism dropped off substantially, Rabbi Schuster established the Shorashim Heritage Centers for young Israelis in several locations throughout Israel. Over 50,000 young Israelis have attended classes at these centers already.

 Meir Schuster, in a way, brings to mind the greatest and the most humble leader of the Jewish people, Moses, who was determined to overcome his most glaring weakness of being a shy and awkward speaker in order to fulfill his role for the Jewish people. Meir Schuster’s wife said that she saw how her husband went against all odds to do what he did for years after year.

**Rising Above His Limitations**

 Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory, said that if Rabbi Meir Schuster, who was by nature an extremely shy individual, could rise above his limitations to reach out to help so many Jewish people reconnect with their heritage, then anyone – no matter how shy or reserved they are – could do it. He is a model who can inspire everyone to pursue their deepest goals, even if they don’t think they have “the right stuff.”

 “When he decided to do something, he believed that the Almighty would help him, and he wouldn't give up until the end,” Rebbetzin Schuster said.

 Two years ago, Rabbi Schuster began to develop Lewy Body Disease, a rare degenerative disorder whose symptoms are those of both Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s Disease. His wife said that “when he was barely able to even walk anymore, he still wanted to go to England to raise funds for the Heritage House. He is a real fighter. Nothing could stand in his way because every action he did, he did for a Divine purpose.”

 As the disease began stealing away his ability to think and remember and communicate, he redoubled his efforts.

**An Unpretentious, Self-Effacing Legend**

 Rabbi Michel Twerski describes Rabbi Meir Schuster as “an unpretentious, self-effacing legend of our time. A rare figure of history who has touched so many lives through his profound authenticity.” And he could care less about any recognition for himself.

 [In the last years of his life] he [was] no longer be the man beside the beloved Wall. He came to require full-time care from his devoted wife and daughter at home, and is now in a nursing facility connected to a feeding tube.

 Rabbi Meir Schuster has never cared about wealth, power, or prestige. He devoted his life to the simplest form of reaching out to ignite another’s inner spark, showing us what one person who really cares about the Jewish people can do.

 Visit [www.RebMeirSchuster.org](http://www.rebmeirschuster.org/), a site lovingly created by Reb Meir's students to honor him.

 With great sadness we inform you the Rabbi Schuster passed away Monday, Feb. 17, 2014, 17th of Adar 1, 5774. May his soul be bound to the bond of eternal life.

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

**It Once Happened**

**In Defense of a Rooster**

 The love and patience which Rabbi Yitzchak Shaul showed to all the people he met - men, women and children - were unsurpassed. Even animals and birds benefitted from his uniquely warm and caring personality. This, his father, Rabbi Nissan, had implanted in him since earliest childhood. His father always told him that one must love everything that G-d has made, and one must not harm any of His creatures.

 Rabbi Nissan had had good reason to teach his son to be merciful, for, as a child, like many other children, Yitzchak Shaul had thought nothing of throwing stones at birds, chasing cows, goats, dogs or cats.

**A Favorite Rooster that**

**Crowed Loudly Each Morning**

 Rabbi Nissan had a favorite rooster. Each morning it crowed loudly, awakening Rabbi Nissan at the break of dawn, thus allowing him to begin his day. Rabbi Nissan looked after the rooster himself, making sure it had enough to eat, and keeping it in good health so that nothing would effect its excellent crowing. The louder the cock crowed, the more pleased was Rabbi Nissan. But not so little Yitzchak Shaul. As much as his father loved the rooster, so did his young son hate it. He delighted in persecuting the bird at every opportunity.

 One day, unnoticed by Yitzchak Shaul, Rabbi Nissan came into the yard and observed his son's cruel behavior toward all of the farm animals, and the rooster in particular. Suddenly, Yitzchak Shaul felt a heavy hand on his shoulder and looked up to see his father's angry face.

 "So, this is the way you spend your time! Ill-treating helpless creatures!" his father rebuked him sternly. "I could never imagine that a child of mine could be so cruel!"

 The frightened little boy thought his father would surely give him a beating, he looked so angry. But this was not Rabbi Nissan's way. He was a teacher of young boys. But in all of his years of teaching, he had never laid a hand on his pupils, nor any of his own children. True, his "strap" hung on the wall of the class-room. But if a pupil deserved punishment Rabbi Nissan had only to indicate the strap on the wall, and tell him what he deserved, and it was always enough for the culprit.

**Directed His Son to Read a**

**Section from the Talmud**

 Entering the house with his son, Rabbi Nissan asked him to bring the Talmud and open it to page 125. He told him to read the section relating to the injunction to look after chickens with gentle care. "See how the Torah thinks of everything," Rabbi Nissan enthusiastically explained to his little son. "In another part of the Talmud, we find that we must never sit down to a meal before first looking after our animals.

 "Thus, we see that we must first of all care for the other of G-d's creatures before we look after our own needs. Yet, you, my son, have not only ignored this teaching, but have moreover shown a cruelty towards the poor creatures, which I could hardly have believed possible in a child of mine!"

 Yitzchak Shaul trembled before the reproof and reproach of his father. He thought his father had finished with him when, instead, he heard his father saying in a very serious voice:

**Going Against His Nature**

 "You know that it is not in my nature to hit anyone, and I have never hit you, but this time, I am going to ask you to take down the strap which is hanging on the wall. I want you to understand the pain you have inflicted upon the creatures you have so thoughtlessly persecuted."

 Yitzchak Shaul gravely took a chair and reached up for the strap which he had never before seen his father use. This in itself impressed upon him the enormity of his crime.

 "Before I hit you," Rabbi Nissan said, "I want you to know quite clearly that the only reason I am doing this, is so that you will the better remember the pain you have inflicted upon the birds and other living creatures."

 This was the first and last time Rabbi Nissan ever used the strap on Yitzchak Shaul, and he accepted them without a murmur.

**Deep and Painful Sobs**

 Rabbi Nissan quickly went into another room without a backward glance, and a moment later Yitzchak Shaul heard his father crying, deep and painful sobs escaping him which he seemed unable to restrain.

 When Yitzchak Shaul heard his father sobbing, he realized that it was all his fault for having made his father do something so contrary to his nature. This gave the little boy more pain that the actual hitting, and he determined, from that moment, never again to hurt anything or anyone.

 He felt the pain a couple of days, and walked about full of regret and shame for his misdeeds. On the third day, he suddenly went up to his father, kissed him and asked him, with tears in his eyes, if he would forgive him.

 Rabbi Nissan's eyes also filled with tears as he said to his son tenderly, "My son, you are still a little boy and I, your father, have to bear all your sins, which are not quite serious. But it would be dreadful if you grew up to be an unfeeling, cruel creature!"

 Yitzchak Shaul felt a changed boy. Gone was his previous pleasure in his cruel pastimes.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, New York. The above story originally appeared in “The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Memoirs.”*

**The Wise Testament**

**By** [**Gershon Kranzler**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/2374/jewish/Gershon-Kranzler.htm)

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 Zevulun was a good Jewish merchant in the land of Babylonia whom G‑d had blessed with riches, much land and other valuable possessions. Most precious to him, however, was his son Naftali, who at a very early age showed that he was gifted with a brilliant mind and with the will to learn. Zevulun decided to send him to Jerusalem, where he would study under the guidance of one of the great sages of Israel.

 Father and son loved each other dearly, and they felt the hardship of parting very much when the time came for Naftali to leave for the Holy Land. They clung to each other, and tears rolled down their cheeks. Their hearts were heavy, as if they knew that they would never see each other again. Finally, they could not delay the separation any longer. Very earnestly Zevulun blessed his young son, and sent him off on his way to Jerusalem.

**Arrived Safely After a Pleasant Trip**

 Naftali had a pleasant trip, and arrived safely at his destination. His father had arranged everything, so that he could immediately begin his studies under the guidance of the great sage Rabbi Eliezer. He immersed himself completely in his studies, and was thus able to get over the pain of parting from his father.

 Back home in Babylonia, misfortune soon befell the one he loved and revered most. His dear father took sick, and the doctors told him that there was no chance of his recovery. Zevulun longed desperately to see his beloved son before he died. Yet his appreciation of learning and his deep piety held him back from sending for Naftali. Instead, he used the brief spell of life still granted him to settle all his affairs.

**Gave a Large Part of His**

**Wealth to Charitable Institutions**

 He made out his will in a manner worthy of a man of his greatness of mind and heart. He gave a large part of his wealth to various charitable institutions to care for the sick and to support synagogues, schools and hotels for the poor. Having thus taken care of this important matter, he appointed his old slave Samura sole heir to all his possessions: his great treasure of gold, silver and precious stones; his estates; his ships and his merchandise that were spread over the far-flung corners of the earth.

 Samura was to be the exclusive owner and master over this huge wealth. There was, however, one clause in the will which read that Samura had to permit Zevulun’s son, Naftali, to select one object from all his possessions for himself. Zevulun had this mysterious testament duly signed and witnessed. Soon afterwards, his pure soul left him and returned to its divine creator. As befitted such a great man, his burial was an impressive affair in which not only the population of the city but friends from far and near paid homage to the departed.

 Very surprised, however, were the friends of Zevulun when his will was officially opened, and the strange arrangement of the inheritance was made known. In vain they searched for the motive of Zevulun’s disregard for his young son whom he had loved so much, and who was so industriously studying Torah under the guidance of the famous sage in Jerusalem.

**The Old Slave Inherited Zevulun’s**

**Wealth and Property**

 This was certainly not the proper reward of the youth’s love of Torah. Zevulun had lost his wife soon after Naftali’s birth, and there was no one else on whom the merchant should have bestowed his love and wealth other than his worthy son. Yet the will of a dying man must not be changed. And Zevulun had made sure that there was no doubt as to the legality of his testament. While Naftali concentrated on his studies, ignorant of the double misfortune that had befallen him, the old slave Samura inherited Zevulun’s wealth and property.

 Samura had been a faithful and industrious servant to Zevulun ever since the day he had come into the house of the kind merchant as a young boy. He had learned much from his master’s wisdom and nobility, and he possessed a sufficiently strong character not to become spoiled by the sudden turn of fortune in his favor. Instead of living a life of extravagance and luxury, as his newly found wealth would have permitted him, he spent his time and efforts in cautious investment and furtherance of the business.

**The Huge Business**

**Thrived as Never Before**

 He did not waste a single penny. He dismissed all lazy and careless servants, and employed only able men to act as his representatives in his worldwide dealings on land and sea. He built new storehouses and warehouses, and purchased ships and vehicles to carry his trade to the distant corners of the earth. Thus his huge business thrived as never before.

 Meanwhile, as we have said, Naftali studied unceasingly, as he knew his beloved father wished him to do. Zevulun had amply provided for all his needs. He had bought him a house and had left sufficient funds to pay for his son’s expenses. So Naftali enjoyed his learning in a carefree atmosphere of comfort and leisure. His knowledge increased, and he became one of the most promising young scholars to whom the world of learning looked with great hope.

 One day a man knocked at the door of Naftali’s study. Interrupting his studies, the young man reluctantly opened the door. To his surprise, he was greeted by a fellow countryman from Babylonia who had brought him a letter. “I have been asked to wait for your signature and reply,” he said.

 Naftali opened the sealed message, and was deeply shocked when he read the news that his beloved father had passed away. Tremors shook his body. His knees trembled, and he fell to the ground unconscious. The messenger quickly lifted the young scholar from the floor and loosened his garment.

**Regretted Being Unable to**

**Be at His Father’s Deathbed**

 Slowly, Naftali recovered consciousness. He cried bitterly at having been absent from his beloved father’s deathbed. If his father was destined to die, at least he, his only son, could have made his last hours happier and his death easier with his presence. Sadly he tore his clothes and sat down on the ground to mourn for his beloved parent who had been both father and mother to him.

 After a while, Naftali recovered somewhat from the initial sorrow and pain. Yet more shocking news was waiting for him. When he again opened the fateful letter to read fully the long message from his father’s friend, he found out about the mystifying details of Zevulun’s testament. But it was not the loss of the wealth which troubled him so.

 He was terribly upset at the thought that he must, somehow, have given cause for his father’s strange action. “I cannot understand why I have been abandoned by my dear father. He must have had only contempt for me, if he put me thus to public ridicule and shame. It must surely be my fault to have estranged my father’s heart at the time when his death was near. How could I have lost my dear father’s love forever?”

**His Great Teacher Eliezer**

**Enters the Room**

 Sitting thus shaken by pain and sorrow, the door opened and his great teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, entered the room to comfort him in his mourning. Silently, he sat down by the side of his heartbroken pupil. After a while he tried to console him, and pointed out that it was G‑d’s decision to take his father’s soul to heaven. At least he, Naftali, had inherited the huge wealth of his father, and would be able to carry on the charitable work for which Zevulun had been famous.

 At his words, Naftali began to cry. He showed his teacher the letter, that he might see for himself the double loss that had come to him. Rabbi Eliezer took his time in reading every phrase of the fateful letter. Having finished, he put it aside and thought for a while. Naftali expected to see the great sage’s face saddened by the same disappointment that had filled him when he read the bad news. But to Naftali’s great surprise, a happy and joyous smile lit up the scholar’s face, and his wise old eyes beamed at him.

**Praises the Father’s**

**Wisdom and Understanding**

 “Blessed is G‑d, who gave wisdom and understanding to His servants,” he exclaimed fervently, and then turned to the astonished Naftali: “My son, be happy and joyful, for truly pleasant is your lot. Your father’s love and care reaches even beyond his grave. Know that the very will that you thought had deprived you of your father’s love and possessions proves his infinite concern and tender care for you. In his wisdom, he protected and made safe his huge wealth for you.”

 Naftali did not immediately grasp what had given Rabbi Eliezer this idea. But when his teacher asked him to whom, according to the Jewish law, belonged the possessions of a slave, light dawned on him. “To his master, of course,” replied Naftali.

 “Well, now do you see why your father made those strange arrangements? During the years of your absence, servants and managers might easily have done great harm to your inheritance. Knowing Samura’s capabilities and good character, your wise father made him temporary heir, so that he would take proper care of the possessions until your return. Then, as provided by the clause in the testament, you would choose the slave as the one object that you select for yourself. Automatically, all of Samura’s possessions will be yours, according to the law.”

**Great was the Son’s Joy**

 Great indeed was Naftali’s joy over this legitimate interpretation of his beloved father’s will. He embraced Rabbi Eliezer gratefully, and thanked him for his help and consolation. His wise teacher blessed him and left him with the customary wish: “May G‑d comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

 Thirty days later, Naftali arrived in Babylon and legally succeeded to the huge wealth of his father by selecting Samura for himself. In appreciation of the good slave’s services, he freed him and made him manager and adviser, with full powers to carry on as if the business were his own. Thus, Zevulun’s wise will had indeed completely cared for and protected his beloved son beyond the grave.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Sky High!**

**By Rabbi Yosef Weiss**

 Panama City, Panama in Central America was a long way from his native West Hartford, Connecticut, but to Matt Schweitzer the move was a great opportunity to enhance his career as an Air Force pilot. Matt would be flying an airplane which was only in service in that part of the world. As an officer, Matt was entitled to live off base, so he took up residence in a high-rise apartment building about half an hour away.

**Intrigued by Meeting a**

**Young Traditional Couple**

 Having grown up as an active member of the Reform Jewish Movement, Matt was intrigued when he happened to meet a young traditional couple. After a few exchanges, they invited him to experience a Shabbos meal at their home. The experience was a revelation to him, and he soon found himself enjoying more Shabbos meals with these new friends, as well as with other families to whom he was introduced. Matt began to look forward to his Fridays; *Friday meant that Shabbos had almost arrived.*

 Matt's interest in Judaism blossomed. He soon realized that the long neglected Bible that he had been given upon his graduation from the Air Force Academy was an integral part of this new way of life. Each night he would read a few pages, and he always came away amazed and inspired by the wisdom contained within the ancient text. No human, he was certain, could have authored this work.

**Began Attending a Rabbi’s Class**

 He began attending classes given by Rabbi Daniel Grama. Little by little he became more and more committed to the Torah way of life. Shabbos observance presented a major obstacle, since many of his flights were scheduled on Saturdays. But Matt was undeterred. He was determined not to desecrate Shabbos for the duration of his Air Force career. For a few months, things worked out well, and Matt was able to avoid flying on Shabbos. But then the time arrived for the base's first ORI.

 ORI, the Operational Readiness Inspection, was a very important inspection dreaded by nearly everyone on base, regardless of their rank. A special team of inspectors would come from Air Force Headquarters to scrutinize every aspect of the base's operations. Promotions as well as suspensions could result from this inspection. It was no surprise that tensions ran high.

**Designated an Aircraft Commander**

 Designated as an aircraft commander for one of the crews during the ORI, Matt had to fly a number of missions. Inspectors on board and on the ground would be monitoring the flights and the accuracy of their landings.

 The ORI was scheduled to run an entire week, from Monday through Sunday. To his dismay, Matt discovered that he was scheduled to fly a mission on Friday night. Rescheduling simply was not an option. All he could do was pray that somehow Hashem would help him.

 To minimize the problems he had to deal with, Matt decided to spend Shabbos on base. Briefing time was at 1600 hours (4:00 p.m.). Matt arrived equipped with wine, bread, food, a *siddur* (prayer book), and a sleeping bag. The crew proceeded with the required briefings, then went to the armory to pick up their weapons.

**Requesting the Rabbi’s Prayers**

 With a few minutes before boarding time, Matt decided to call Rabbi Grama. He told him about the situation he was facing. "Please pray for me," Matt concluded.

 *"I will, Matt,"* Rabbi Grama reassured him. "*My wife will also say Tehillim (Psalms) for you. Remember, Matt, Hashem is with you."* Reassured by Rabbi Grama, Matt proceeded to make his way towards the aircraft. The mission was about to start. It was 5:20. The sun was getting low. Shabbos was about to come in…

 Matt was just 50 feet away from the aircraft when a car pulled up with a screech of tires, and a sergeant jumped out. *"The ORI is over!"* he announced. *"Because of the base's excellent performance, the last two days of the inspection have been canceled."*

 Matt listened, openmouthed, while his heart swelled with joy. Shabbos was saved! It was hard to keep his feet on the ground, hard to keep from expressing his gratitude to Hashem.
A look at his watch quickly brought him back to earth. Candle lighting was at 6:05, and he still had to return his gun to the armory and drive home in rush hour traffic. On Friday afternoons, his half-hour ride often turned into an ordeal of an hour or more.

 Matt arrived at the armory, quickly turned in his gun and sped for his car. It was 5:40. Time was running out. Even without traffic, the drive normally took half an hour. Would he make it in time? Matt prayed for Hashem's assistance as he steered onto the highway.

**A Miraculously Empty Highway**

 Matt blinked and shook his head. Where was the traffic that usually clogged up the road at this hour of the afternoon? The highway was almost empty! He made it to his apartment in a record 20 minutes, and just managed to light the candles while still in his uniform.

 Matt hurriedly dressed and began his 30 minute walk to the shul. He arrived there at 7:00, right on time for *Maariv (the evening prayers)*. He would never forget the expression on Rabbi Grama's face when he saw him - a look of mingled astonishment and happiness.

 The prayers had already started, so Rabbi Grama simply shook his hand and whispered with a smile, *"Pray like you've never prayed before!"* Matt, now Mordechai, was so touched by this amazing incident, that he grew even closer to Hashem and Shabbos observance.

**Trying to Influence**

**His Younger Brother**

 Mordechai hoped to inspire others, particularly his younger brother Robert. Robert was married to a non-Jew, and Mordechai wondered if he had any chance of making an impression on his younger brother. Still, Mordechai wanted to try.

 Mordechai sent Robert an English Chumash (Five Books of Moses). A few weeks later, Mordechai finally got up the nerve to call and to ask his younger brother about the Chumash. To his surprise, Robert told him that he had read the entire book cover to cover.

 *"It was amazing, Matt. Who wrote this book?"* Moved by his brother's interest, Mordechai replied, *"G-d."*

 Robert had so many questions that Mordechai felt it would be best to refer him to an Orthodox rabbi. Mordechai wasn't sure if his brother would actually make the call, and he didn't want his new interest to subside. So Mordechai sent Robert two more books: Permission to Receive, by Rabbi Lawrence Keleman, and Choose Life, by Rabbi Ezriel Tauber. Then, Mordechai sat back and waited to see what would happen.

 A month later, Mordechai decided to call his brother again. This time, Robert's wife answered the phone. Her voice sounded surprisingly pleasant as she returned his greeting.

**The Power of the Books**

 *"Hi, Matt, good to hear from you. You know we've been reading those books you've given us."*

 Mordechai braced himself. *"Yes?"* he asked cautiously. *"Well, Robert is convinced that this is the real thing, and he wants to become Orthodox."* She paused for a moment, and then went on. *"I've also decided to convert."*

 Mordechai, despite his speechless astonishment, still managed to answer some of her questions. Then Robert got on the phone, expressing his enthusiasm for performing the mitzvos. Shortly afterwards, Robert began learning with an Orthodox rabbi.

**Undergoing an**

**Orthodox Conversion**

 Within a year and a half, Robert's wife and two children had undergone an Orthodox conversion; Robert and his wife remarried in a Jewish wedding ceremony, and the entire family was fully observing Torah and mitzvos. Some time later, Mordechai and Robert happened to be discussing their change of lifestyle.

 *"You know, Robert, I've always wondered exactly what it was that motivated you to change…,"* Mordechai commented. *"It was really quite simple,"* Robert replied. *"I've always believed there was a G-d. When I became convinced that He wrote the Torah, there seemed to be no choice but to follow it."*

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone. Excerpted from “Visions of Greatness – Volume 5,” by Rabbi Yosef Weiss (page 185).*

**The Power of the**

**Melave Malke**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 Some 350 years ago in the Ukraine Saturday night was approaching and the Baal Shem Tov (abbreviated Besh't, the originator of Chassidic Judaism) sat at the head of the table eating the 'Third Shabbat Meal' with tens of his Chassidim (followers). He was immersed in deep thought seemingly in another dimension while they filled the room with a beautiful Chassidic melody.

**What Could Be Done to Bring**

**Moshiach One Moment Sooner**

 And in fact he was in another dimension. He was scanning the entire world, to see what could be done to bring Moshiach (i.e. who will alleviate all pain and suffering) one moment sooner. Suddenly his face darkened.

 It was a catastrophe. One of his most talented followers; a great Rabbi (we will call him Rav Avraham) versed in all the holy texts and leader of an entire Jewish community, was about to fall to the depths of idolatry!! What could possibly have brought such a holy man (Tzadik) to such a heinous sin? What went wrong?!

**The Soul of the Besh’t**

**Soared to the Upper Realms**

 The Besh't concentrated deeply and his soul soared to the upper realms. It was worse than he thought. This Rabbi had, somewhat like in the story of Job, been given into the hands of the Satan. But unlike Job he had done something to deserve it.

 In Rav Avraham's town lived a poor Talmudic scholar who subsisted from community support. Once a week someone would go from house to house to collect money for him.

 But when Rav Avraham discovered that people were using this as an excuse not to give to other causes he expressed his dissatisfaction which his congregants understood as an order to stop giving donations to the Talmudic scholar. In time the income for this poor scholar dwindled so that he didn't have even enough money for preparing the Shabbat meal. And when that happened, he and his wife burst out into tears.

 Shortly thereafter, in an unrelated incident, one member of the community began using his power and influence to force another congregant who happened to be simple fellow, out of business. The latter complained to Rav Avraham who reprimanded the rich man but not as strongly as he should have. As a result the injustice continued until one day the simple man had to close his store and on that day he too wept.

**The Dangerous Tear Drops**

 The tears of both the scholar his wife and the simple man burst through to the highest heavens and began to accuse; the Rabbi had shirked his responsibility and thereby disgraced both the Torah and Judaism.

 It was decided by the heavenly court that Rab Avraham would be given over into the hands of the Devil!

 The Rabbi's custom each Sabbath was to pray the first half of the daytime prayer alone in his home and then go to the Synagogue when the cantor would begin his repetition of the prayers. But this Shabbat suddenly, in the middle of his prayers, the Rabbi felt a strange lust enter his heart. Instead of being enraptured with the awesomeness and nearness of G-d as usual, he only wanted a drink of brandy.

**A Burning Desire to Sin**

 He stopped his prayers thinking that the idea would leave him. But it didn't. It became a burning desire! Suddenly he felt that without brandy he would die! Before he knew it he had downed three full cups, removed his prayer shawl and was running down the street in the direction of the church!

 "I want to see the Bishop!!" he yelled insanely as he pounded on the massive church door. "Let me in!!" The fire of apostasy was burning in his and heart and when the Bishop heard the yelling he immediately understood what was happening.

 He ordered his servants to take the Rabbi to his home and provide him with cakes and more brandy until he was free to deal with him. They did as they were told and as soon as he saw the refreshments he grabbed the bottle in one hand, the food in the other and began eating and guzzling like an animal until he fell unconscious on the floor.

 The Baal Shem Tov saw all this from afar and was desperately occupied in the upper spiritual worlds trying to find a way to save this unfortunate pupil. He discovered that the only thing that would help him was to do a 'pure' commandment; only because G-d commanded it.

 But it was hard to find.

**Almost Every Good Deed**

**Contained a Selfish Motive**

 It seems that almost every good deed that Rav Avraham did, or had ever done, contained some selfish motive of earning heavenly reward. Nothing was done with only love of the Creator.

 AHA!! The Besh't had found it! ... Eating the Melave-Malke meal after the Sabbath! As strange as it may seem, this was the only commandment that the Rabbi did, and was able to do purely for the sake of honoring G-d.

 The Besh't knew that he had to work fast. His only chance was to somehow get him to eat this meal before the Bishop got to him!

 The Besh't tore off a piece from the loaf of bread before him, added a whole loaf from the 12 always before him at the Shabbat meals, wrapped them in a cloth and handed it to one of his holy pupils saying,

 "Take this and go. HaShem (G-d) will guide and help you!"

 The pupil had already seen such things from the Besh't Sometimes the only way to get things done is by implicit trust in G-d.

**Walked into the Cold**

**Ukrainian Night**

 He took the bundle, put on his coat and walked out of the room into the cold Ukrainian night not knowing why or even where he was going.

 He said words of Torah by heart as his feet led him out of Mezibuz (the Besht's town) to a lone, moon-lit, forest road. Suddenly the wind began blowing and the road became strewn with rocks and pebbles making it almost impossible to proceed.

 "This is obviously from the forces of evil" he thought to himself as he forged ahead, praying as he went.

 Then the road turned into deep sand but he only prayed more intensely and pushed on trying not to become discouraged.

 Then darkness and snow blinded him for an hour or so but when he regained his sight he found himself in a different place altogether. It was as though he had jumped hundreds of miles away.

 The snow was gone. In the moonlit distance he saw a Church and in just moments he was standing outside of a house that he sensed was his destination. He entered and saw an unconscious Jew lying on the floor in soiled Shabbat garments filthy with vomit and mud surrounded by idols and icons. Gevalt! He knew this man! It was Rav Avraham!! He recognized him! This must be what the Besh't had sent him for!

**Taking Water to**

**Wake Up the Rabbi**

 He took some water from a nearby faucet and splashed it on the unconscious Rabbi's face. But when he woke he began mumbling anti-Semitic remarks and demanding more brandy. The Chassid, however, paid no attention. Rather he helped Rav Avraham to his feet, led him to the faucet, filled a vessel he found on the floor and insisted that he wash his hands for bread.

 Miraculously the drunken Rabbi consented.

 "Come, now lets eat some of this bread" coaxed the Chassid. It took some maneuvering to get the Rabbi's attention away from the bottle but as soon as he took the first bite of the Besht's bread a startling change came over him.

**A Deep Frightening Moan**

 He let out a deep, frightening moan, looked down at his dirty garments then at the crosses and statues that hung on the walls and stood up in amazement. "What happened to me?" he screamed. "What have I done?!! NO!! NO!!!!! What have I done!!! We must leave here quickly!"

 He grabbed the Chassid's hand and staggered out of the room, away from the house, back towards the forest path from whence he came and then began running madly in the darkness. Suddenly they were back in Mezibuz.

 The Besh't was still sitting at the table surrounded by singing Chassidim when Rav Avraham stumbled in, filthy and heart-broken and collapsed on the floor. Another soul had been saved.

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

**Weekly Chasidic Story #847**

**Smoking on Shabbat**

**In Meah Shearim**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Ascent%20Stories&msgNum=0000xaG0:001IwXeL00001Usb&count=1392764343&randid=422875&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=422875##)

 An Israeli couple lived many years on a secular kibbutz in Israel. As years went by they felt a certain emptiness in their lives. Eventually they came to realize that the lack of Judaism was the cause of this feeling.

 Slowly they returned to the Torah true way of life. They also decided to move to the ultra "ultra Orthodox" Meah Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem. This amazing couple continued to grow until the husband became a completely committed Jew. The wife also became very religious. There was only one thing that held her back from complete observance.

**The Woman’s Strong Smoking Habirt**

 She had a strong smoking habit. She actually smoked on Shabbat, right there in the midst of the crowded neighborhood of pious residents.

 The most unusual part of this habit was that it was only on Shabbat that she couldn't stop; she had no trouble the rest of the week. Everyone tried to get her to quit, but to no avail. When Shabbat began she had an uncontrollable need to smoke.

 Eventually the people that were trying to help her went to [the now deceased] leading rabbinical decisor, Rabbi Y. S. Elyashiv, to ask his advice. He told them to investigate her mother, her mother's mother and even further back, to clarify if they were all Jewish.

**Revealed that Her Grandmother**

**Was Not Jewish!**

 After a short time it was revealed that her grandmother was not Jewish! This translates to mean that our smoker was not Jewish. They immediately went to the Rabbi to tell him the news. His reaction was amazing.

 He said, "Look and see how much mercy G-d has! We are talking about a woman who wants to do G-d's will. However, HE knows that she isn't Jewish (apparently the woman herself didn't know). A non-Jew is forbidden to observe the Shabbat complete in all its details, and is punishable with death for doing so.

**Heaven Helped Prevent Her**

**From Committing a Serious Sin**

 "But, since she desired so sincerely to come close to the Jewish people, in Heaven they decided to help prevent her from committing the sin of fully observing the Shabbat as a non-Jew. So G-d gave her an uncontrollable urge to smoke, which prevented her from observing Shabbat.

"This, in turn, led to us finding out that she isn't Jewish and needs to be converted! So I recommend you arrange with her to do the conversion and you will see that the urge will cease."

 And so it was!

 Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an email from Daniel Keren, based on an article in the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin (Vayakhel-Pekudei 5772) as translated by Rabbi Reuven Semah from Alenu Leshabeah, an Israeli book.

**Connection to the Weekly Torah Reading**

 Connection: Weekly Reading--Ex. 35:3 ("You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on Shabbat day").

 Biographical note: Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (1910-July 18 2012) was considered by hundreds of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel and worldwide to be the leading living expert on Jewish law. He resided in a small apartment on the edge of the Meah She'arim section of Jerusalem, where he was famed for his assiduous 16-20 hours a day of Torah study, up until age 102!. His grandfather, Shlomo Elyashiv, was a renowned Kabbalist, author of Leshem Shevo V'Achlam, popularly known as "The Leshem."

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