

SHABBOS STORIES FOR ROSH HASHANAH 5779

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Rosh Hashanah: A New Beginning

By Rabbi David Ashear



Rosh Hashanah is the day of the world's conception. Every year on Rosh Hashanah, the world is recreated. We start again fresh. Whatever was before Rosh Hashanah has nothing to do with what will be after Rosh Hashanah.

The Sefer Emunah Shelemah brings a story which was told over by Rabbi Menachem Stein. The rabbi knows a man from Petach Tikvah by the name of Daniel, who had been experiencing excruciating lower back pain for twelve years. He went to many doctors, both in Israel and in America; but none of them were able to cure him.

For twelve years, he couldn't sit in a chair for more than fifteen minutes at a time. After fifteen minutes, the pain would shoot up his spine to his neck and would force him to have to lie down. For six years he had been taking a medication called Voltaren to help his back, but it was also potentially damaging to the liver.

During that time, he wasn't able to learn Torah with his son, who was born at the same time the pain began. He would try to sit with him, when he was twelve years old, and learn Gemara, but after fifteen minutes he would have to stop. He couldn't be a good father or a husband, and he became very depressed.

On one occasion, Rabbi Stein went over to him to try to give him Chizuk. He said, "Daniel, Rosh Hashanah is coming. Do you believe that Hashem is going to recreate the world once again anew? Do you believe that every one of us will also be created anew? Sarah Immenu was born without a womb, and the Gemara tell us that on one Rosh Hashanah, through her prayers, Hashem created a womb for her. She never lost hope. She didn't listen to the doctors who told her, 'You're wasting your time, you're ninety years old, and you're incapable of having children.'"

The Rabbi continued and said, "Daniel, do you know that there's a Halacha, if you didn't see your friend for over a year and then you see him, you make a Beracha that Hashem is מחיה המתים -revives the dead. Why do we say that Beracha if the man didn't die?

"The Mishna Berura explains from the Maharsha that since the man went through a Rosh Hashanah and a Yom Kippur, he was created anew. Hashem gave him new life. So now you can say מחיה המתים on him. Daniel, you could receive a new back this Rosh Hashanah. Talk to Hashem; beg Him, pray with the belief that it could be done. Cry to Him and say, 'Even if I'm not worthy to be healed for my own sake, please do it for the sake of my wife and child.'"

"On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we take out the Torah and read about Sarah finally having a child after so many years. The Haftarah is about Chana having a child after such a long time. Shouldn't we be reading about the day of Rosh Hashanah? Maybe something about judgement? Why this? Because our Rabbis want us to know the power of the day. Chana was created anew; Sarah and Rachel as well, and they were all answered through their Tefillot on Rosh Hashanah. Now is the time for change. We can have a new beginning. People who need wisdom, children, marriage partners, health, Parnasa-this is the best time to make it happen."

Daniel took the message to heart and accepted upon himself a Taanit Dibur for both days of Rosh Hashanah, only speaking words of Torah or prayer. Every moment of Rosh Hashanah is so precious. The whole year is encompassed in those two days. Daniel prayed from the bottom of his heart on Rosh Hashanah, the entire Aseret Yameh Teshuva and Yom Kippur. Then Sukkot passed, Simchat Torah passed, the month of Cheshvan began.

On the fourth day of Cheshvan, his medication ran out. He went to the doctor to get a prescription for another three months. But that day the doctor wasn't in. There was a twenty-nine year old rookie doctor, just beginning his career,

taking his place. Daniel was skeptical about continuing with the appointment, but he thought to himself "it's only to get a prescription it's a very straightforward visit."

He said, "Doctor, please give me a prescription for three months-worth of Voltaren, half in pills and half in cream."

The doctor said, "What? Three months of that stuff could harm the body."

Daniel said, "Please, I've been on them for six years; just give them to me."

The doctor replied, "Please listen to me; I want you to take an ultrasound of your kidneys. Lower back pain could come as a result of problems with the kidney."

Daniel laughed and said, "I've been to top doctors all over the world, nobody ever mentioned a word about my kidney."

But the young doctor persisted, and Daniel finally agreed. The results showed that one of his kidneys had a twenty-two percent blockage. The doctor said, "That's it; that's what's causing your pain."

When his regular doctor saw the results he said, "I can't believe it, he's right, I never thought of that all these years, and neither did any other doctor you went to."

The reason was because Hashem held it back from their brains, because he was not meant to be healed yet. But now the time of healing had come, and Hashem brought the salvation through this young doctor. It was so obvious that it was Hashem. His kidney was treated and Baruch Hashem the pain went away.

This is the power of one Rosh Hashanah. Let us use these awesome days to connect to Hashem and pray with all our might.

Reprinted from the September 20, 2017 Erev Rosh Hashanah email of Daily Emunah.

A Tale to Remember

Blowing Shofar for Rav Elyashiv's Sick Wife

Rav Gedaliah Sheinen, a Rosh Yeshivah in Yerushalayim, blew the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah for many years at the Minyan where Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, would daven. After davening, Rav Sheinen would go back with Rav

Elyashiv to his apartment, and blow the shofar again according to the opinions of the Rishonim that are not written in the Shulchan Aruch.

One Rosh Hashanah, Rebbetzin Elyashiv was ill and was not able to go to Shul to hear the Shofar. After davening, when Rav Sheinen finished blowing the extra tekios for Rav Elyashiv, he asked the Gadol if he should blow the shofar according to the basic halachah for the Rebbetzin, since she wasn't in Shul to hear them and so that she could fulfill the mitzvah.



To his surprise, Rav Elyashiv told him not to. He explained, “Today is Sunday, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, and the obligation to hear the shofar is only M'D'Rabonon, a mitzvah decreed by the Sages. Women are not obligated to hear the shofar, but they have accepted this mitzvah on themselves. Since it is a bother for you to blow the shofar so much, it is better that you go home than blow the shofar again.”

Rav Sheinen knew better than to argue with Rav Elyashiv, so he started to leave the apartment and headed down the steps. Suddenly, he heard Rav Elyashiv coming after him, saying, “Please come back!”

Rav Elyashiv explained, “It is true that the obligation to hear shofar today is only a D'Rabonon, and for women it is an even lesser obligation, which is why I sent you home, however, my wife will be so happy to hear the shofar. If you blow for her, you will be doing a chesed, (kindness) and a chesed is a Mitzvah M'D'Oraysa, a mitzvah from the Torah. Therefore, I am asking you to come back. For a Mitzvah D'Oraysa, I can bother you!”

Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

In the Merit of The Imahos, Mothers

Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein relates that during the Shivah for his mother, he was visited by the Ozorover Rebbe. The Rebbe quoted his grandfather, the author of the Aish Doss, who asked a question on the Laining of Rosh Hashanah.

The Torah section which we read on the first day of Rosh Hashanah discusses about Sarah Imeinu, her experience becoming a mother, and the incident with her maidservant, Hagar.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of Avraham Avinu and his son Yitzchak, and their preparations for the Akeidah.

Why is it that on the first day we read about the Imahos and on the second day we read about the Avos?

The Aish Doss answers that if a child stumbles, his father helps him up, and supports him as he continues along his way. His mother, on the other hand, will guide and teach her son to be careful, so that he will not fall again in the future.

A father offers comfort after the fall. A mother sees to it that the child won't fall again. This is why the merit of the Imahos exceeds that of the Avos, because mothers provide the foundation that prevents us from falling in the first place.

This is why we read about Sarah Imeinu before we read about Avraham Avinu!

Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

Rabbi Shalom and the Rosh Hashanah Challos

During the Blitz, World War II, Reb Shalom of Shotz zt'l left the bombarded city of London for Gateshead, until the war's end. Food was scarce. Fish and meat could only be purchased with vouchers. Potatoes and onions, however, were in abundance, and that became staples.

On Shabbos, they would put a small piece of meat into a pot full of potatoes, and that was the cholent. A piece of chicken was placed in a pot full of water, and that was chicken soup.

In addition, the Jewish community faced another problem: there was only one baker in town, and being very pious, he preferred to say Tehillim, and other tefillos, rather than bake.

The problem came to a head on Rosh Hashanah. Early in the morning on erev Rosh Hashanah, the baker davened Selichos, so he couldn't bake then. After Shacharis, he was weak from his fast (he fasted for a half day on erev Rosh Hashanah) so he didn't bake then either. In the afternoon he was busy with other preparations for Rosh Hashanah. This left the Jewish community of Gateshead with not enough challos for a two-day Yom Tov of Rosh Hashanah.



At the seudah of the first night of Rosh Hashanah, Rebbe Shalom Shotzer's host announced to his thirty guests, "We have enough challos for tonight. For tomorrow, there will be enough for everyone to get a kezayis. As for the second day of Yom Tov, there won't be any challos..."

The Shotzer Rebbe decided to speak with the baker, and have him bake more challos. At four o'clock a.m. on Yom Tov morning, the Rebbe went to the mikvah. His intention was to go to the baker's house afterwards, but that wasn't necessary, since he met the baker outside the mikvah.

The Rebbe explained to the baker that he should bake challos all morning, so there will be challos for the community for Yom Tov.

"But I awoke especially early, because I wanted to say the entire Tehillim before Shacharis...", the man said.

"I will say Tehillim for you," the Rebbe replied.

The baker explained that he wants to at least go to shul to daven Shacharis like all other Yidden do on Rosh Hashanah morning, but the Rebbe advised him to bake until 12:00 noon, when it was time for tekiyas shofar.

"You can daven Shacharis during breaks; like when the challos are rising, or when they're baking in the oven, but otherwise, you shall be busy baking challos for the holiday. Come to shul at 12:00 for the tekiyos. I won't begin the tekiyos, before I see that your there."

The baker asked, "But what will be with all piyutim we say Rosh Hashanah morning?"

The Rebbe told him that he would say those piyutim for him. The baker understood that although he would be baking challos, and the Rebbe would be davening, in essence, they would be exchanging their merits. The Rebbe would get the merit of baking challos for Yom Tov, and the baker would get the merit of the Rebbe's tefillos.

"I agree to this plan," said the baker, "because I won't be losing anything... I will get the merit of the Tehillim and the piyutim of the Rebbe. But I'm wondering whether Heaven will agree that you should do this, because you will be losing out..."

The Rebbe replied, "Don't worry. I'm getting the better part of the deal." The Rebbe knew how great it is to do chessed for Yidden. As the Baal Shem Tov zt'l said, "It's worth living in this world for seventy or eighty years, if only to do a favor for a Yid once."

Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5778 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Biderman as compiled by Rabbi Boruch Twersky.

Shloyme Came Home for Shofar

By Asharon Baltazar

The crowd waited silently for the Rebbe. Many kept glancing at the doors, hoping to be the first to see his entrance, and others simply bowed their heads in meditative quiet. The Rebbe of Stolin had locked himself in his study prior to the blowing of the shofar. It was his custom every year to reflect and prepare himself spiritually before blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah day, and many traveled from afar to spend this special moment in Stolin.

But something was amiss. Fifteen minutes passed, then 30. Never had the Rebbe been late before. By the time an hour had passed, the sentiment in the synagogue became one of worry.

The Rebbe's *gabbai* (attendant) was suddenly seen weaving between the shoulders of worshippers. Some flattened themselves against their neighbors to help him get to the front. He rushed to two esteemed chassidim and whispered hurriedly in their ears.

The two exchanged apprehensive looks, and without saying a word, followed the *gabbai* out of the hall. The door swung shut, and as though waiting for the right moment, the room erupted into furious whispers.

"There is a grave decree hanging over us, and the Rebbe is pleading to G-d to overturn it!"

"Perhaps the Rebbe isn't feeling well?"



"Maybe some tragedy happened in the homes of those two?"

Many other speculations followed, but no one could say for sure.

Sometime later, the *gabbai* appeared and motioned to everyone that the Rebbe would soon proceed with the shofar-blowing. A minute later, the Rebbe of Stolin finally walked in. His face radiated a heavenly glow and his mind was visibly absorbed in divine realms. He wasn't alone, though. A young man, dressed more like a gentile than a Jew on Rosh Hashanah, was locked arm in arm with the Rebbe. A wide-brimmed straw hat hid his face, and his eyes, moist with tears, were downcast. The Rebbe handed the stranger a prayerbook and began busying himself with preparations for the shofar-blowing.

"Shloyme."

Someone recognized the young man, and the name rippled across the room in hushed voices. The name was a familiar one, too, and for some, it warmed their hearts to see his return. But no one knew *how* this happened. As the service

continued, Shloyme never moved from his place up front, his face buried in the prayerbook he was holding.

Only at the end of the service did the full picture emerge.

In his youth, Shloyme had been talented and ambitious—eager to pave his own path in Torah study.

Then the unthinkable happened. Shloyme abandoned everything he had once held dear as the winds of assimilation blowing from the West tugged him in a different direction.

Some three months later, he had changed his appearance, preferring to dress like his gentile neighbors, and started working at a carpenter's workshop on the outskirts of town.

That Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe of Stolin withdrew to his room before the shofar-blowing and sat there for longer than usual. He then summoned the two esteemed chassidim and said to them, "I can't continue without Shloyme among us. Leave now and don't come back until you've found him. Tell him I'm waiting and I will not blow the shofar without him."

The pair made their way to the carpenter's shop. To pick out Shloyme from the rest of the workers was difficult at first, but the incredulous expression at seeing the chassidim in full holiday garb betrayed his identity.

"The Rebbe is waiting in his room for you. He will not begin the shofar-blowing without you," they said.

"Shofar," Shloyme mumbled. "Shofar . . ." He looked as though he were engaged in a bitter struggle with something immutable deep inside him. Not knowing what would happen next, the chassidim kept silent.

The minute stretched painfully. Suddenly, Shloyme cast the hammer from his hand and seized the leather apron he was wearing, pulling it over his head and throwing it on the floor. Without a backward glance, he broke into a run.

The Rebbe of Stolin was beaming when Shloyme arrived. Wordlessly, the Rebbe curled his arm around Shloyme's elbow, and together they strode through the crowded sanctuary.

Shloyme stayed for the second day of Rosh Hashanah, as well as the Ten Days of Repentance and Yom Kippur. He remained in the community for Sukkot and Simchat Torah. Never again did he return to his old ways.

He had come home.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Nitzavim 5778 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.
Translated from Sichat Hashavua 873.*

Rosh Hashanah 2018: When Is Rosh Hashanah? What Date is Jewish New Year?

By Kate Whitfield

ROSH Hashanah, the celebration of Jewish New Year, is just around the corner. So when is Rosh Hashanah 2018?



Rosh Hashanah 2018: The shofar - a horn from a ram - is blown (Image: Getty)

Rosh Hashanah is one of the most important dates in the Jewish Calendar. The date marks the first of the High Holidays, a ten-day period which ends with Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year.

On Rosh Hashanah, Jews all around the globe celebrate the creation of the world and have an opportunity to ask for forgiveness and start afresh. Rosh Hashanah is two days long and usually occurs during the months of September.

This year, Rosh Hashanah will begin in the evening of Sunday, September 9, and ends in the evening of Tuesday, September 11.

Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of the universe in Jewish belief, the day God created Adam and Eve.

The celebration begins at sundown on the eve of Tishrei 1 - the Hebrew month corresponding with September/October.

Directly translated, Rosh Hashanah means 'head of the year'.



Rosh Hashanah 2018: Sweet food is eaten to symbolise hope for a sweet year ahead. (Image: Getty)

How is Rosh Hashanah celebrated?

During Rosh Hashanah, Jewish people ask God for forgiveness for anything they may have done wrong the previous year.

The holiday is an opportunity to remind oneself not to repeat the mistakes again in the year ahead.

Rosh Hashanah is also seen as an annual observation of improvement and fresh starts.

Jews from all over the world celebrate Rosh Hashanah, and traditions can vary depending on the region.

Reprinted from the September 3, 2018 website of the Daily Express (United Kingdom)

Ride into Rosh Hashana with A Bet Shemesh Taxi Driver

By Ari Waldman and David

**A ‘Simple Jew’ is never simple and this
one has an amazing message for us**



A ‘simple Jew’ is never simple. This is true everywhere and in Bet Shemesh you can see it with your own eyes. You can go into a garage when it’s time for the afternoon prayers and see men placing a kippah on their heads and praying an afternoon prayer for a half hour straight including making blessings on food (of course everyone listens so they can say amen!) and a listening to a halacha (Jewish

law) from Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's books. The average afternoon prayer normally takes only 15 minutes so you get the idea... a simple Jew is not at all simple.

If you get the pleasure of getting a cab in Bet Shemesh the drivers will all say how livelihood comes from G-d and they are generally unperturbed by life's uncertainties. Just watching them in action never fails to strengthen the faith. Try it!

My friend David shared a story of his ride home with a Bet Shemesh taxi driver from Tel-Aviv. The ride was pleasant and the roads, especially route 38 which goes to Bet Shemesh are greatly improved. My friend commented on the road improvements recently instituted. "You'd think that with all the money they poured into this highway, that they'd do away with these 2 traffic lights and make the whole ride flow without needing to stop," said my friend David.

The taxi driver heard the point David made and responded: "You're 100% right! They could've planned out the road a bit better to not even need these 2 traffic lights. But think about how greatly improved the whole ride is. Do you remember not even 6 months ago how long it used to take on Route 38 to get home?"

"And besides, now we're in Elul before Rosh Hashana. It's good to always see the positive in everything. It's very easy to see the negative. We're all trying to improve ourselves and when we look at ourselves we can be very hard on ourselves. I believe the best way to look into yourself to improve anything is first to see everything good inside you. Once you're sure of that then you can begin trying to fix everything you want to fix. But it first starts from seeing the good inside and around you."

You can ride high with this taxi driver straight through all the high holidays! (Heard from David in Bet Shemesh)

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The Rich Man and The Island Fisherman



There was a Rabbi who was close with a very wealthy man. The Rabbi noticed that the man worked tirelessly, never allowing himself a break, to the point where he barely had time for anything besides his work. Finally, one day the Rabbi asked the man, *“Tell me, how much money do you need to be able to take a break and feel content with what you have?”*

The man thought for a few moments and then said, *“\$100 million.”*

“And how much do you have now?” the Rabbi asked.

“\$50 million.”

Exactly as *Hazal* said – a person always feels he needs twice as much as he already has.

I once heard a story told of a businessman who was vacationing on a certain island and he noticed the fishermen fishing every day. There was one fisherman who stopped fishing early every day, several hours before the others, and so the businessman approached him to ask why he stopped fishing so early.

The fisherman answered, “*When I catch enough fish to support my family,*” the man explained, “*I go for a stroll with the senora along the beach, and then I go home to my children and we enjoy a family barbeque together.*”

“*But I see you are a very skilled fisherman,*” the vacationing businessman said, “*and if you continued for another few hours every day, you could catch twice as much fish.*”

“*Yes,*” the fisherman acknowledged, “*but what would I do then?*”

“*You could sell the fish and make extra money.*”

“*What would I do then?*”

“*You could use the extra money to buy a small boat and sail into the ocean, where you can catch even more fish.*”

“*Ok, but what would I do then?*”

“*You could sell all that fish and have enough money to buy a large ship. I will be your partner, and we can go deep into the ocean and catch very large fish and sell them for a lot of money.*”

“*And then what?*”

“*You could open stores all over the island selling your fish.*”

“*And then what?*”

“*Eventually, you’ll catch so much fish that you could ship it overseas and become very wealthy.*”

“*And what would I do then, when I’m very wealthy?*”

“*You’d be able to retire, so every day you can take nice strolls with your wife along the beach and enjoy family barbeques.*”

Let us recognize all the blessings that Hashem has already bestowed upon us so we can take advantage of them now, feeling happy and content, and living life to its very fullest without always worrying about what tomorrow will bring.

Reprinted from Parashat Ki Tavo 5778 from Jack E. Rahmey based on the teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

The Brisker Rav and The Border Crossing

The Brisker Rav, zt”l, lived his life by the laws of the Torah, and nothing in the world could move him in the slightest degree that would take away from his mission to serve Hashem. He believed that every moment of our lives is a moment that is commanded by Hashem, and this mindset guided every decision he made. Anything else that may have been going on in the world around him was meaningless, because every circumstance he found himself in was another chance to do more Mitzvos.

During World War II, the Brisker Rav and his son, Rav Yosef Dov, zt”l, were fleeing from the war zone and were heading in the direction of Vilna. They came to a border crossing that was open for only one hour a day. They waited there for hours for the border to finally open and they could leave, until it became late in the afternoon and it was time to Daven Minchah.

The Brisker Rav said to those around him, “I can’t Daven properly in a place like this, and I have to go find a quiet place where I can concentrate.”

When they heard that the Brisker Rav wanted to leave the border area they were waiting by, everyone tried to convince him that he should Daven there anyway. They said that if he left the area for even a few minutes, he might miss his chance to cross the border, and since it was wartime, no one knew if there would be another opportunity.

But the Brisker Rav stood firm and told them that one will never lose out by performing a Mitzvah properly, and he immediately turned around and headed back to a nearby village where he would be able to Daven with proper Kavanah, and a group of people went back with him.

When they returned to the border crossing, they discovered that indeed, the gate had opened while they were away, but they had then closed again, and they missed their chance to cross.

A few people approached the border guards and explained to them that they were waiting for hours for the gates to open but they left only for a short time to Daven, and they pleaded with them to break their normal protocol and open the gates again for the Brisker Rav and his son.

Strangely enough, the border guards listened to the pleas and opened the gate again for the Brisker Rav!

After everyone had crossed through, the Brisker Rav again stated, “No one will ever lose out from doing a Mitzvah in the proper way!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5778 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg

The Rare and Valuable Watch



Rabbi Dovid Ashear once related: “A man I know, who lives and breathes Emunah, told me he had a customer who agreed to buy a very rare watch, which was valued in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The customer told this man to call him back after the weekend and they would finalize the deal.

The man called on Monday morning, but the customer did not answer his phone. The man repeatedly attempted to get in contact with this customer that day but failed every time. He tried him the rest of the week but there was still no response.

He thought that maybe something unexpected had come up with the customer that week, so he tried again the following week. After another entire week of calling and failing, he tried again during the next week as well. During that third week, it happened that he was listening to a Shiur by Rabbi Yisroel Brog who was talking about concepts of having Bitachon, trust in Hashem.

Rabbi Brog told a story about himself when he went to Yeshivah in Eretz Yisroel and was looking for an apartment to rent. He was having a very difficult time finding one, and the people around him were not encouraging. The young

Rabbi Brog not only wanted an apartment in a certain area that was very hard to find one in, he also wanted an apartment close to his Rebbe.

After having no success, he went to his Rebbe for advice. The Rav told him, 'You did everything you could possibly do to find an apartment here. Now, you need to stop trying. You need to give the job over to Hashem. You need to work on yourself and realize that apartments only come from Hashem. And when you honestly believe that and hand everything over to Hashem, you'll find what you're looking for!'

The young Rabbi Brog took the advice, and he felt so happy, as if a heavy load was lifted off his shoulders. He honestly handed it over to Hashem, and within just a few hours, someone approached him and asked if he was still looking for an apartment! He explained that something new just came on the market.

Rabbi Brog went to see it and he could not believe what he saw. It was a brand new apartment, which was a very rare find in that neighborhood, and it was right near his Rebbe! The help from Hashem came instantly!

When the man listening to this Shiur heard this story, he became very inspired from that message. He said to himself, 'I also did everything in my power to try to close this deal with that customer. I'm finished with him now', and he said, 'Hashem, I'm handing it over to You!'

Immediately, he felt a sense of calm with his decision. The very next day, someone from his office suggested that he contact a customer that he knew of regarding a sale from a few months before. He took the advice and called that customer to see if he would be interested in the watch. Not only did the customer want the watch, but by the next day, he had all the money sent into the man's account and the deal was finalized!"

Rabbi Ashear said, "The man told me, 'No matter how much Emunah and Bitachon I have, I always need Chizuk, strength and encouragement in it.' To be strong in Emunah requires constant work. This man already knew all the principles of Emunah and Bitachon, but that little reminder from the Shiur he was listening to made all the difference.

We can take a lesson from this that we must first do what is necessary, as that is following Hashem's instructions. After we have made a normal effort, then we have completed our job, and we should say, 'Hashem, I'm handing the job over to You now!' And when we say that and we honestly believe it, we too will feel calm and at peace. Hashem will then take over and do His part!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg

The Apta Rebbe's Judicial Bribe



**Title Page of the Apta Rebbe's
classic sefer “Ohev Yisrael”**

A plaintiff wished to bribe Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta (the Ohev Yisrael), but he was unsure how to go about it; how does one bribe a Tzaddik (righteous person)? Eventually, he came up with a plan. When he was confident that no one was watching, he slipped into the room where the judges kept their personal belongings. He found the Ohev Yisrael's coat and placed a substantial sum of money in its pocket.

As the Ohev Yisrael sat in Beis Din (Jewish court), he suddenly felt an unyielding urge to rule in favor of the plaintiff. He immediately adjourned the Beis Din for the day and returned home. The Ohev Yisrael spent that entire night in heartfelt prayer, crying out to Hashem, and begging Him to open his eyes to the truth.

The next morning, the Ohev Yisrael discovered the sum of money in his pocket and he immediately understood what had transpired. “Look at the powerful influence of bribery!” exclaimed the Ohev Yisrael. “Even if the judge isn’t aware that he is in possession of it, he is still under its sway.

“Now, I am able to resolve a difficulty that has bothered me for some time,” he continued, “The verse states (Devarim 16:19): ‘for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make crooked the words of the righteous. How can a judge who would accept a bribe be referred to as righteous?’”

“The verse must be speaking of a judge who, unbeknownst to him, had a bribe placed in his pocket. The judge remains righteous, as he was unaware that he was being bribed; nonetheless, the bribe still has the ability to twist his words!”
(From a “Shabbos Vort” by Rabbi Yisrael Bronstein)

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5778 email of Torah Sweets Weekly, edited by Mendel Berlin.

Story #1080

Clutching the Sleeve

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com

Oh, hers was a bitter lot. Her husband had left her years before. Not that their marriage had been perfect, but still, did he really have to steal away like a common criminal without even telling her that he was leaving, or even granting her a divorce?

No divorce was the worst part of it all. Now she was "chained" to the man who had betrayed her. Without a divorce document, she could not remarry.

She tried looking for him, sending letters to rabbis in communities all over Poland. She even tried consulting the greatest Talmudic scholars, hoping for a "loophole" that would allow her to remarry. But nothing panned out. She had almost resigned herself to the fact that she would live alone for the rest of her life.

As a last resort, she and her brother-her faithful brother, who had supported her even when her friends abandoned her-traveled to the city of Kozhnitz. There lived the great rebbe, Rabbi Yisrael, who was known far and wide as a wonder-worker.

"Rebbe," she sobbed, "you are my last hope! My husband left me years ago, and I desperately want to move on with my life. Tell me. Please! Where O where shall I turn?"

The rebbe listened intently, his large eyes mirroring the raw pain and agony of her words. Then, turning to his assistant, he asked that a pail of water be brought into his study.

"Look into the pail," said the rebbe to the woman, "and tell me what you see."

"I see a large city," said the incredulous woman. "I can see houses, streets, shops . . ."

"Now look for the marketplace. Can you make it out?" prodded the rebbe

"Yes, yes," she replied, "I can see the marketplace. It's lined with shops on either side."

"Now look into the windows of the shops, and tell me what you see."

"Rebbe! I see my husband," she replied excitedly. "He's aged a bit, but I would recognize him anywhere. He is sitting around a table with a group of workers, and they are all sewing. He's putting the finishing touches on an ornate sleeve right now. I've seen him do this dozens of times. You know he was a tailor, my husband."

"Good," said the rebbe. "Now take your hand and grab the sleeve from him."

As if in a trance, she took her hand and plunged it into the cold water, and withdrew it holding the sleeve-still warm from the iron!

"Good," said the rebbe. "I want you to hold on to that sleeve. With it and G-d's help, you will get a divorce from your husband."

"Rebbe, "pleaded the brother and sister, mystified; "please instruct us. Where should we go next?"

"You can go wherever you'd like," was the rebbe's cryptic reply.

"But how can we possibly hire a coachman if we don't even know where we wish to travel?" they asked. "Please guide us, Rebbe."

"Go in peace," said the holy man of Kozhnitz. "The good and merciful G d will prepare everything for you."

They stumbled out of the rebbe's humble home, and there stood a gentile coachman next to a coach that was harnessed to two fine steeds.

"Can you take us?" they asked the man.

"Yes, get in," he replied without the usual discussion about destinations and fares.

Within minutes they found themselves in a vast and dark forest. They could scarcely see the path, but they had no fear. Clutching the sleeve, the woman had faith in G d and His messengers.

Suddenly, the two of them found themselves tumbling on the hard ground. "We must have fallen asleep," they said to one another, "and the coachman must have dumped us out of his coach and ridden off."

They stumbled through the forest until they came to the edge of a large city. "This is the city I saw in the bucket," the woman said hopefully to her brother. "Thank G d, the rebbe's words are proving to be true. Let's walk through the city until we find the marketplace I saw."

Sure enough, they soon saw the marketplace. "My dear brother," she said, "let's quickly go to the rabbi of this town and ask him how we should best approach this matter. After all, my husband can easily deny having ever been married to me, despite the miracles that have brought us here."

They made their way to the rabbi's home and told him the chain of events that brought them to his city, even showing him the sleeve that they had brought with them.

"Thank G d," said the rabbi, "He who has not abandoned our generation, and has placed His holy spirit upon the great sage of Kozhnitz.

"I know your husband well," said the rabbi. "He has established himself in our city. He has a wife and children here, and is regarded as an upstanding member of the community. But fear not. Everything will turn out well; just hold on to that sleeve."

The rabbi then told the brother and sister to make themselves comfortable in the small alcove next to his study, and immediately summoned the tailor.

"Rabbi," said the tailor quizzically, "is there something you need done? Does your clothing need repair?"\

"I just have some questions for you," answered the rabbi. "Do you have a wife?"

"A wife? Of course I do. Everyone knows that I am married and have a family."

"But were you once married before you came here and started your family?"

"Rabbi," said he with a twinge of nervousness, "I was never married before. I came here free as a bird."

"Tell me," said the rabbi, "what were you sewing today?"

"Funny you should ask," he replied, relieved that the conversation had shifted to a less touchy subject. "It was the strangest thing. I was sitting at the table working with my fellow craftsmen. I was holding the sleeve of a cloak I was making for a nobleman."

"All of a sudden," said the tailor, "the sleeve flew right out of my hands. We all watched in shock as it flew out of the room, as if it were a kite in the hands of a child. We looked everywhere for that sleeve-I had invested hours of work into it-but it was gone. It was like a miracle had happened."

"And what would you give me if I were to give you back your sleeve?" asked the rabbi.

"There is nothing I could give you," said the tailor, "because there is no way you could possibly give me back that sleeve. It's gone forever."

"Oh, I can do it," said the rabbi, sliding open the door of the alcove. The tailor gazed at the sleeve in amazement.

"Come in," the rabbi bade the woman, "and give your husband what is rightfully his."

The long-suffering woman placed the sleeve on the table, as the tailor gazed at the sleeve in amazement. He was so astonished by its miraculous return that he didn't even notice who had carried it in.

"This is indeed your sleeve," said the rabbi sternly, "but this is your wife!"
The man looked up and fainted.
After he was revived, the husband humbly gave his wife a divorce.

Source: Translated and freely adapted by Menachem Posner for //Chabad.org from Sippurim Nora'im by Rabbi Yaakov Kaidaner, who heard it from a follower of the Kozhnitzer Maggid, Rabbi David, who personally interviewed a number of people involved in this miraculous event. Reprinted with permission. Lightly edited by Yeachmiel Tilles.

Biographical note: Rabbi Yisroel Haupstein of blessed memory: [5497 - 14 Tishrei 5575 (1737 - Sept. 1814 C.E.)], the "Maggid" (preacher) of Kozhnitz was a major disciple of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lyzhensk and, along with the 'Seer' of Lublin, the main spreader of the Chasidic movement to Poland-Galitzia. He acquired his position in Koznitz at age 28, and lived there for the rest of his life, known for his passionate prayer and many miracles. He is the author of the chassidic-kabbalistic work, 'Avodas Yisrael' and fifteen other kabbalistic books. His miraculous birth to an elderly couple is the subject of a famous Baal Shem Tov story.

Connection: Weekly Reading of Ki Teitzei - rules of divorce (Deut. 24:1-4)
Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Teitzei 5778 email of KabbalaOnline.com, a project of Ascent of Safed.

The Missing Corpse

By Dovid Zaklikowski



Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, of righteous memory – who would later serve as the Israeli Chief Sephardic Rabbi – was the youngest rabbi in the Israeli rabbinate when at the age of 28 he joined the rabbinical court in the city of Beersheba. Even

at that relatively young age, he was renowned as a brilliant scholar who was exceptional in his care and personal attentiveness to the needs of all whom he met.

A short time after he was appointed to his post, he noticed a woman sitting outside the offices of the rabbinate reciting Psalms, tears in her eyes. This recurred for days, with her closing her Book of Psalms only as the rabbinate office closed its doors for the day.

His curiosity and concern aroused, one day, the young rabbi asked his assistant to call the woman into his office.

"Tell me what you are doing here," Rabbi Eliyahu gently asked once she appeared before him. "How could we help you?"

She responded with a distinct Moroccan accent: "I just moved to Israel from Morocco. The government settled me in this city, and I immediately sought out the local rabbinate."

"Back in Morocco my husband was a taxi driver. Ten days after our marriage he traveled from one city to the next and I never heard from him again. They say he died in a crash, however, they cannot locate his body, only the wrecked car." "You see, back in Morocco my husband was a taxi driver. Ten days after our marriage he traveled from one city to the next and I never heard from him again. They say he died in a crash, however, they cannot locate his body, only the wrecked car."

"I never found his body or those who buried him, and I was told that I cannot remarry unless someone testifies that he or she actually saw the corpse."

"Now that I am in Israel, I thought that perhaps in Morocco no one could help me, but maybe here a rabbi could assist me and permit me to remarry."

"Since then, I have been praying here."

The rabbi asked, "But, why have you not entered the offices to speak to us?"

"Who are you?" responded the Sephardic woman, "you are but messengers. I am praying to G-d, the Creator of the world; He will decide if I should remarry or not!"

Rabbi Eliyahu, admiring the woman's strong faith, traveled to Netivot, to Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzairah, the famed and righteous Sephardic sage (known as the "Baba Sali") who hailed from Morocco, to see if he had any idea to whom to turn.

The sage told him that he should be in touch with his brother, the "Baba Chaki." "He knows everyone; he will tell you who was in charge of burials at that time in that city," he said.

When he said the story with the taxi and mentioned the deceased's name, an old man, dressed in traditional Moroccan clothing, jumped up in the corner of the room. Rabbi Eliyahu took a taxi from Netivot to Ramla, where the Baba Chaki resided. The sage from Ramla told him that the grave diggers in that city moved to

Israel eight months earlier, "one lives in Kiryat Ata and one lives in Dimona." He gave Rabbi Eliyahu the exact addresses for both.

The rabbi continued to the closer of the two cities, Dimona. Upon arrival at the home of the grave digger, there was a note on the door saying that the father of the home – the grave digger – had just passed away. Rabbi Eliyahu arrived just in time for the afternoon prayer services. He joined the prayer services and then shared some words of comfort with the family.

In the hope that someone there would be able to give him a clue to aid him in his undertaking, he said over the woman's story.

When he said the story with the taxi and mentioned the deceased's name, an old man, dressed in traditional Moroccan clothing, jumped up in the corner of the room. "I am one of the grave diggers who buried the taxi driver. The second one just passed away and I am here in his home to console his family..."

The rabbi immediately gathered two others, creating a mini rabbinical court, and they took this man's testimony. The next day, Rabbi Eliyahu delivered a letter to the woman, permitting her to remarry.

Relating to his fellow judges in Beersheba's rabbinical court what had happened the day earlier, Rabbi Eliyahu exclaimed, "This is the power of a prayer that comes from a sincere heart."

Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Seitzei 5778 website of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Renewable Energy

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

Reb Menachem Mendel Dubravsky was known as an *illuy* (Torah genius,) and shortly after his marriage he was asked to become Rov in the town of ____.

Before Pesach (of that year or a subsequent year), he received a letter from the office of Tomchei Tmimim . The letter stated that the Yeshiva is looking for a Gemara (Talmud) melamed (teacher) for one of its younger grades.

Reb Mendel said to his wife that although the letter was written in a manner as if it was a public announcement, the fact that the Lubavitcher Rebbe's son sent it to me, expresses the message that the Rebbe [Rashab] desires that I accept the position.

"I am positive that the Rebbe's son, despite being the *menahel poel* (executive director) of the Yeshiva, doesn't do things as this on his own accord, and he definitely asked or consulted with his father, the Rebbe, if he should send this notification to me. Since the Rebbe either said that this letter should be sent to

me or he allowed it to be sent to me, that shows that the message within applies to me. Simply put, the Rebbe wants me to accept the offer and become that melamed.”

Reb Mendel then informed the community he was serving as rov that he will be leaving them after Pesach. After Yom Tov he traveled to Lubavitch and became the melamed for a class of boys under bar mitzvah.



The Rebbe Reshab The Frierdiker Rebbe

As noted, the Frierdiker Rebbe was the *menahel poel* of the Yeshiva and wanted to know the level and progress of every student in the Yeshiva. In general, this was accomplished by the weekly report each melamed and mashpia wrote to him regarding the students.

This was the way he appraised the situation in Zhembin and the other branches of the Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim that were not in Lubavitch. However, when it came to the students that were learning in Lubavitch, in addition to the reports he received, he also personally listened into the classrooms from time to time.

One summer day, the students in Reb Mendel's class noticed that the door was slightly being pushed open. They realized that either someone is about to enter, or that the Rebbe's son [the Frierdiker Rebbe] was behind the door and listening in. so they began glancing constantly at the door.

Observing that the students were being distracted, Reb Mendel stopped speaking for a moment and also glanced towards the door. Seeing that the students

knew he was listening in, the Frierdiker Rebbe entered the classroom and listened to the remainder of the class.

When the class was over and the boys went home, the Frierdiker Rebbe discussed with Reb Mendel the students' progress and other points. During their conversation, the Frierdiker Rebbe also asked Reb Mendel about his own well-being.

One of the points Reb Mendel mentioned was that the situation is exhausting and draining him of his strength.

The Frierdiker Rebbe replied that the Navi (prophet) [Yeshayahu 40:31] states, "Vi'kohvei Hashem Yachlifoo Koach."

Author's note: the simple translation is that those who place their trust in Hashem, Hashem will reward them by refreshing their strength. [Some commentators explain that they won't tire and others say it is stating that when Moshiach comes, they will be granted tremendous strength. However, the Frierdiker Rebbe explained it according to the literal meaning of Yachlifoo which means to exchange:

He explained that those who place their trust in Hashem and do His work [of educating His people in the teachings of the Torah], will have their strength that they invested into their work exchanged for Hashem's unlimited strength which He will grant them. Therefore, you should realize that you are granted this power and vigor and shouldn't tire.

I heard this vort from Reb Peretz Feigenson and Reb Dubrowsky (relatives of Reb Mendel) and I thank them for sharing it with me.

Reprinted from the June 14, 2018 email of Rabbi Avtzon's Weekly Stories. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim and their chassidim. He is available to speak or farbreng in your community and can be reached at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

SHABBOS STORIES FOR YOM KIPPUR 5779

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Last Year's Sandy Koufax Moments by Jewish Athletes

**Israeli NBA player Omri Casspi skips
preseason opener for Yom Kippur**



Omri Casspi playing for the Sacramento Kings in a game against the Atlanta Hawks at Philips Arena in Atlanta, Nov. 18, 2015. (Kevin C. Cox/Getty Images)

(JTA) — Omri Casspi, the first Israeli to play in the National Basketball Association, missed his preseason opener with the Golden State Warriors because it took place on Yom Kippur.

The Warriors, with whom Casspi signed a one-year deal in July, played faced off Saturday against the Denver Nuggets.

Golden State head coach Steve Kerr said Casspi had his “full support” to sit out the holiest day on the Jewish calendar.

“Whatever each person needs to do, obviously we afford them that right,” Kerr said. “It’s an important holiday for people of the Jewish faith. Obviously, Omri has our full support, and we’ll see him tomorrow.”

Casspi will make his debut with the championship team next week when the Warriors play two exhibition games against the Minnesota Timberwolves in China. The team left for China Sunday morning.

Casspi also missed media day in 2009 with Sacramento Kings in his first year in the NBA due to Yom Kippur. (JTA – October 1, 2017)

Top-ranked Israeli tennis player Dudi Sela leaves match early for Yom Kippur



Dudi Sela celebrating after winning a match at the Shenzhen Open tennis tournament in China, Sept. 28, 2017. (STR/AFP/Getty Images)

(JTA) — The World Series is weeks away, but an Israeli tennis pro has conjured memories of Sandy Koufax.

Dudi Sela, his nation’s top-ranked male player, quit his quarterfinals match Friday in the third set of a Chinese tournament so he could begin observing Yom Kippur by the time the sun set.

Sela, ranked 77th in the world, was tied at a set apiece with Alexander Dolgoplov of Ukraine at the Shenzhen Open when he realized the match would likely not finish by the start of the holiday.

The sports website Vavel reported that tournament organizers refused Sela's request to have the match played earlier in the day. The failure to advance cost the 32-year-old veteran a possible \$34,000 in prize money.

Meanwhile, in American college football, the long snapper for the University of Nebraska will take the field but fast when the Cornhuskers host the University of Illinois on Friday night, the start of Yom Kippur.

A colorful Chicago Tribune profile published Thursday details Jordan Ober's Jewish rituals, such as reciting the Shema prayer before each snap for a field goal or punt. His towel bears the Hebrew phrase "Hineni," meaning "Here I am."

"I am very serious about my religion, but I am also serious about my job," Ober told the Tribune. "I spoke with my rabbi and with G-d by myself. I do not want to let my teammates down." (JTA – October 2, 2017)

Rav Leib Sarah and The Baron Apostate

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

The next story happened in the Ukraine with one of the followers of the Baal Shem Tov called Rav Leib Sarah's. (Kol Sipuri Baal Shem Tov vol.1, page 209)

Rav Leib's unusual last name; 'Sarah's' was after his mother, Sarah, who when she was in her teens rejected the local gentile Baron's marital advances and promises of wealth and luxury by marrying an eighty-year-old Jew in order to escape.

Rav Leib was once traveling after Rosh HaShanna (Jewish New Year's Day) when a fierce snowstorm forced him to find refuge in a small town for several days.

When he realized that the storm wasn't stopping and Yom Kippur; the Jewish Holy Day of Forgiveness, was approaching he began trying to organize a 'minion' (ten Jews) to pray with.

He discovered that there were only ten male Jews that lived there. They had a small Synagogue (Shul) but, as fate would have it two of them had been taken to debtor's prison. So there were only eight Jews, which, together with him meant they were one short.

Reb Leib asked them if perhaps there was a Jew they hadn't thought of, even an apostate Jew.

"Well" answered one of the elders after everyone else was silent for a while, "There is the old Baron."

"What?!" the others turned to him in amazement. Some even spit on the floor in contempt, "The old Baron?! That evil anti-Semite? He's a Jew?! No way!! He's a Jew hater!!! Why, he'd just as soon kill a Jew as look at him! "

"You're right!" the old man continued, "He's evil all right. But he's a Jew. At least he used to be. He changed his religion some fifty years ago to marry the previous Baron's daughter. That's how he got to be Baron; when the old buzzard died."

"Does he have any children?" asked Reb Leib

"Nope, no children and no wife. She died a few years ago too and he never had children. Must be over eighty years old already but he's mean. I'd forget him if I were you, Rabbi."

Immediately Reb Leib put on his fur coat and set off to the Baron's castle. An hour later he reached the huge front door, pushed it open and entered without knocking.

The Baron was startled to see the old Jew and instinctively spit on the ground and reached for his sword but Reb Leib began to speak.

"Listen to me. I know you are a Jew. My name is Leib Sarah's. My mother, Sarah of blessed memory, had a chance to become rich, powerful and famous by agreeing to marry a Baron. But she didn't. She refused because the Torah forbids marrying a gentile.

"But you weren't able to stand up to the challenge. You left the G-d of Israel, the Creator of the Universe just for luxury and power. Now is your chance to be true to your soul. Nothing stands in the way of repentance. Repentance is above time. Tonight is Yom Kippur and we need you as a tenth man for the minion."

The Baron unbuckled his sword, put it on the table then put on his fur coat and followed the Rabbi like a small child.

The entire night and the next day he just sat in the corner of the small Shul with his prayer shawl over his face reading from his prayer book and saying psalms occasionally heaving a deep sigh.

Then, at the end of the services. after the last prayer as everyone yelled 'Shma Yisroel', he ran to the open ark, screamed 'Shma Yisroel HaShem ECHAD' and dropped lifeless to the ground.

From that year on Reb Leib Sarah's would say "Kadish" and remember the soul of the Baron every Yom Kippur.

Reprinted from the Parashat Ve'etchanan 5778 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.

A Whale of a Story

By Larry Gordon



The bidding will be high, as those with that kind of money have a profound desire for it. Some buy it every year and are hoping to do so again; others are going to pursue it for the first time. It is one of those signature purchases that must mean different things to different people. In a sense, it is at least one of the centerpieces of the Yom Kippur service that Jews around the world will observe over this Shabbos.

The bidding referred to above is for the privilege of the third aliyah at Minchah, as the day begins to wane and the clock counts its way down. This third aliyah also features the reading of Maftir Yonah, the riveting story of the prophet Jonah, his charge to warn the citizens of Ninveh of their impending destruction unless they repent, and his attempt to avoid the mission and “escape” from G-d.

What an interesting escape this is. Once Hashem tells Jonah to get moving in the direction of Ninveh, he actually does get moving rather promptly—but in the opposite direction. His goal was to try to evade G-d’s jurisdiction even though he surely knew that this was impossible to achieve.

And perhaps that is one of the important reasons that the story of Jonah has such a deep and intense impact on Yom Kippur. In the course of the year, we may imagine or even believe that there are circumstances under which we can evade His jurisdiction or notice, and we might even envision Hashem as being busy with other things and looking the other way as we prance our way through our daily routine.

But that is exactly the point of this haftarah—regardless of how well-thought-out or choreographed our planning or circumstances are, there is one certainty: there is no such thing as escaping from the dominion of the Al-mighty G-d. And maybe that is why on the surface, the plan of Jonah was to escape to Tarshish, outside the jurisdiction of Eretz Yisrael, a place where he thought that a prophet would not be able to prophesy. Was this a prophet's miscalculation or just some wishful thinking on Jonah's behalf?

I believe that it is imperative, though, that we not just retell the story of Jonah and the whale but that we pause for a moment and delve a bit deeper into what took place here, who Jonah was, how he conducted himself, and the connection of this entire episode to Yom Kippur, amongst other intriguing aspects of this fascinating episode in our history.

The series of events recounted in this haftarah of Yom Kippur afternoon took place 2,665 years ago, in the year 3113 on the Jewish calendar, which makes that 640 BCE. It is important to stop for just a moment and come to the awe-inspiring realization how today, in these advanced and modern times, we are still connected to events that took place more than two and a half thousand years ago. It is a religious text that is timeless, but Jonah was also a person who lived in a city and was living his life—maybe it was simple, maybe not—just like we are living our lives today.

Jonah was a reluctant prophet, if not the most reluctant or even uncooperative man, who was charged with bringing a message from Hashem to the world. Some commentators draw a parallel between how Moshe Rabbeinu responded when G-d appeared to him at first and directed him to tell the Jewish nation enslaved in Egypt that the time of their redemption had arrived and he was the redeemer.

You will recall from your study of Chumash that Moshe, too, was at first averse to the idea of representing G-d to the people. Moshe protested vociferously, almost challenging G-d on a multiplicity of levels, even arguing his case for why Hashem should be convinced that he, Moshe, was not the man for the job.

Moshe argued and even debated, but he did not run away to try avoiding the task or mission at hand. At the other end of the equation, we have Jonah, who did not debate G-d per se—he was unexpressive and spoke very little—but just went

about doing things the way he saw fit and ran away, hoping to be let off the hook, so to speak.

The scene on the boat that he ran to is an exciting one. As Sefer Yonah describes in detail, he boarded the boat and found a place for himself at the lowest level of the ship. He promptly went to sleep, oblivious to everything that was happening around him. As the stormy weather increased at sea, the other sailors, who apparently worshiped a series of other gods or idols, searched for who on the boat deserved this kind of treatment and was placing all their lives at risk.

The sleeping Jonah was a suspect for the cause of the raging seas by virtue of his cool disinterest in what was going on around him. He so does not want to be the messenger who convinces the pagan residents of Ninveh to repent that he readily admits that he is the cause of the distress and that he is a Jew who is attempting to escape from G-d. Jonah pleads with the other sailors to save themselves by throwing him overboard in what might conceivably be a desire on his part to end his life so that he does not have to carry out this mission.

And what was his problem with following Hashem's directive and warning the idol-worshippers of Ninveh to change their ways of debauchery and to repent? Jonah cared so deeply for the Jewish people that he was afraid that the people of Ninveh would readily do teshuvah while the people of Israel, who had been beseeched by a series of prophets to repent, seemed to always fall back to their rather unsavory ways of doing things—and therein was Jonah's dilemma.

So why is this story the centerpiece of the Yom Kippur service? There are many other events that can be recounted at this time about the challenges and obstacles that Klal Yisrael has faced and overcome during all these thousands of years. Part of that answer is that at its core, Yonah is about change and reversals that run contrary to human emotions and instincts. And it is also about the extremes we will resort to in our lives in support of customs and habits that we may have learned from early childhood or adopted later that, intellectually, we know can stand some updating and correcting, but if for no other reason than just because we always did something a certain way, we continue to be committed to that way of life.

So on one level, if Jonah, who was so determined to avoid Hashem's directive, can change and become a willing messenger of G-d, and if the pagans in Ninveh can reverse course and repent, then perhaps we can, too. So while this is indeed a whale of a story, it is important to internalize and adopt its vital messages.

On the matter of the giant fish or whale (some say Moby Dick was inspired by Sefer Yonah), our sages tell us two things. One is that this big fish was one of the things created by G-d on the Six Days of Creation and placed in the sea for this specific purpose 3,000 years down the road. The Midrash also recounts that at first Jonah was swallowed up by a male whale and that he was getting comfortable in

there as there apparently was plenty of room for him in there—as unusual as that sounds. It was only after a short period that the male spat him out, if you will, into a female whale that was pregnant with multiple fetuses which crowded Jonah. This, according to the Midrash, helped him to come around and become a cooperating prophet.

And finally, there is the more practical matter of the modern-day practice of selling Maftir Yonah to the highest bidder because it is a segulah for good health and parnassah—probably a combination of the two, which is always useful. I came across a shul website that is offering the sale of Maftir Yonah with bidding beginning at \$1,000. It says that you don't have to daven in the shul and that you do not have to live in the same city. Here's a quote from the website:

“Maftir Yonah is unquestionably a blessing for parnassah and we invite you to be a part of this tapestry of blessings in the year to come. May you and your loved ones benefit from this bounty in health and happiness! It is the real deal!”

And that's no fish tale. G'mar chasimah tovah.

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Story #1033

The Forest Cantor

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com

Tense weeks and months crawled by, with Zalman Bronstein forced to spend most of them lying motionless in muddy foxholes on the Russian battlefields of World War II. Whenever he trained his rifle on the German enemy only a few dozen meters away, he knew well that his counterpart was simultaneously aiming at him, waiting patiently for an opportunity. His thoughts were constantly on his wife and three children; this supplied him the strength to struggle on against the ominous threat of the warfront.

The blood-saturated battles between the Russians and invading German forces had already stretched on for over a year. Tens of thousands of young men had already paid with their lives. The two sides were of equal strength and no end to the war was in sight.

During a brief lull in the shooting, a squad of Russian soldiers arrived to relieve their comrades. Zalman crawled slowly and carefully to his bunker, sank onto a plank, and tried to doze off for the short time before he would be ordered back to his battle post.

Correcting the Officer's Singing

Suddenly, a Russian officer entered the bunker, humming an upbeat marching tune, and began to shave. Zalman opened his eyes, annoyed. He couldn't figure out why an officer would have decided to shave in the tent of the common foot-soldier draftees. Plus, the officer's off-tune singing aggravated him even more. "Comrade Officer! Excuse me, but I have to tell you that in the original version, that song is sung differently."

The officer turned towards him with a look of surprise on his face. "You know this song? If so, you must sing it for me. I can't get along without it."

Zalman tried to refuse, insisting that in his present downtrodden state of mind, he couldn't possibly sing a cheerful song, but the officer wouldn't relent. With a shrug, Zalman began to sing. After a few bars, the officer's face lit up with pleasure.

When he finished singing, the officer's expression became fierce. He began to rail against the Russian Army leadership. "How can it be that they sent such a gifted singer like you to the front? This is an unforgivable outrage. I shall raise this issue with headquarters as soon as possible, even today."

Back to His Regular Battlefield Duties

Zalman dismissed the officer's words as polite exaggeration, and promptly forgot about them. After a brief rest, it was back to his regular battlefield duties and terrors.

The next few days were filled with pitched explosive battles. Several times, Zalman felt death was near, but he survived through veritable miracles. In those desperate situations, he pictured in front of his eyes the face of his holy rebbe, **Rabbi Yosef-Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch**. He felt secure in the knowledge that the Rebbe was praying for his well-being.

Suddenly an announcement blared over the bunker's loudspeaker system. "Paging the singer Bronstein. Report to headquarters immediately." Zalman hurried to present himself before the commanding officer of the bunker. The latter told him, "I just received an order to transfer you to officers' headquarters. Get your things right now and crawl out there. But be careful! One wrong move on the way could mean your doom."

Zalman began his crawl along the muddy earth, his belongings on his back and his heart full of suspicion. What could possibly be the reason behind this incomprehensible transfer? Only when he reached his destination and was told to report to a high officer in the Culture Division who was in charge of the Army choir, did he realize the connection between what was happening and the words of that officer in the bunker before whom he had sung the battle song.

Commanded by Choir Leader to Sing Before Very High Ranking Officers

The choir leader told him that he must now sing before a group of very high-ranking officers. Zalman well realized that his future depended on the success of his performance. He started by singing the same military marching tune, but this time with a lot more feeling.

The officers to a man reacted boisterously with excitement and appreciation. Each one wanted Zalman to be assigned to his own unit so that he could give a concert to the brigade under his command. They began to quarrel with each other about who had the top priority. Finally, they came up with an arrangement that made it possible to schedule their new star to perform in front of many different platoons.

So, Zalman became the lead soloist in the Army choir and they traveled from base to base giving performances. Everywhere they went, the Russian officers in charge were very friendly to Zalman.

Performance were a Source of Pride for all the Jewish Soldiers

His performances and popularity became a particular source of pride for all the Jewish soldiers. At one of the concerts, a Jewish officer passed him a note requesting that he sing something in Yiddish. He complied, choosing a song that he felt would be sure to arouse in the Jewish soldiers' memories of their religious roots.

The date for the next concert, the most important one on the itinerary, was already set. They were to perform before an audience of hundreds of commissioned military doctors. However, the date coincided with Yom Kippur, the holiest of holy occasions. Zalman was firm in his mind that no matter what the consequences, he could not and would not perform on the holy day.

On Yom Kippur morning, he informed the musical director that he had terrible pains in his head and throat and that it would be impossible for him to sing on stage. The director pressured him to change his mind, but Zalman was adamant; he could not possibly sing this day. The director had no choice but to accept that the choir would have to perform without its star soloist.

Zalman retired to his room, where he devoted himself to the Yom Kippur morning prayers, those which he was able to remember by heart. Afterwards he began reciting Psalms, while in the background he could hear strains of singing and musical instruments from the military concert that was proceeding without him.

Several sharp knocks on his door broke his concentration. Three officers, whose epaulets indicated very high rank, quickly entered the room. "Are you

Zalman Bronstein?", one of them queried. He nodded, whereupon of the other officers demanded, "Do you know what day is today"?

Zalman was taken aback by the unexpected question, and upon reflection, a bit afraid. He took a moment to compose himself, then answered calmly with the truth. "Yes. It is Yom Kippur."

"We Too Are Jews"

His guests' faces softened visibly. "We too are Jews," they said. "Please, could you sing for us a few sections of the holy day's prayers?"

Zalman felt great relief upon hearing of their Jewish identity, and at the same time felt compassion for them. Nevertheless, he demurred, "How can I sing for you? In order to escape having to go on stage, I arranged to be officially registered on the sick list as 'unable to sing because of head and throat pains'."

The three officers did not give up. They presented a possible solution. "In back of the camp is a thick forest. Let's go deep inside it; then we can hear you pray and sing without anyone around to bother us."

Their excitement was contagious. Zalman could feel how strongly they desired to be reminded of their parents' homes, and of the Jewish life they tasted as children.

They entered the forest. Under a tree with a thick trunk and large, draping branches, Zalman stood facing the three Jewish officers. He closed his eyes and began to intone softly "*Kol Nidre*", the opening prayer of Yom Kippur evening with its traditional, haunting melody. He repeated it a second and third time, following custom, each time successively louder.



After *Kol Nidre* he switched to "*Unetana Tokef*", the thrilling lyrical invocation that is the highlight of the Cantor's repetition of "*Musaf*," the "Additional" prayer recited on Yom Kippur [and Rosh Hashana] morning. He became absorbed in the intense phrases, singing each one with deep feeling.

"On Rosh Hashana they are inscribed,
And on the fast day Yom Kippur they are sealed:
How many shall pass away and how many shall be born;
Who shall live out his allotted time and
Who shall depart before his time;
Who shall be at rest and who shall wander;
Who shall be tranquil and who shall be harassed;
Who shall enjoy well-being and who shall suffer tribulation;
Who shall be poor and who shall be rich;
Who shall be humbled and who shall be exalted."*

Zalman concluded his mini-performance with the popular lively Lubavitcher tune for "*Hu Elokeinu, Hu Aveinu*" - "He is our G-d, He is our Father" usually sung in unison by the congregation during the Cantor's recitation of Musaf shortly after "*Unetana Tokef*." He exhaled deeply and slowly opened his eyes. The sight that met them remained imprinted in his memory for the rest of his life.

The three officers were bent over, eyes bulging, and sobbing like little children. In the midst of lethal war, their futures concealed in the smoke of daily battle, three Jewish souls became revealed in a forest, flaming brightly with Yom Kippur holiness.

"Who knows?" he couldn't help thinking to himself. "This could be the reason that Heaven directed the steps of that non-Jewish officer to me that morning in the bunker."

Source: Translated-adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the Hebrew weekly *Sichat Shavua*, #1081, with a few supplementary words of biography from the son of R. Zalman, gathered when Divine Providence directed us to sit next to each other at the 5776 Simchat Torah celebration in the Tzemech Tzedek *shul* in Old City Jerusalem. This story appears in the Yom Kippur section of my book, **Festivals of the Full Moon** (Koren).

Biographical note: Zalman Bronstein was drafted into the Red army in 1942. Soon after the termination of WWII, he emigrated to the Holy Land, where in 1949 he was one of the founders of Kfar Chabad, the Chassidic settlement just west of Lod, one train stop after 'Tel-Aviv South.' For decades he served as the cantor on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the main synagogue there. In 1984, he passed away, leaving many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Translator's note:

* The English translation takes 86 words. In the original Hebrew it is a rhythmic, poetic 36.

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 2017 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed

When Jewish Justices Got The Supreme Court to Shut Down on Yom Kippur

By Nathan Lewin



Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer listening to President Barack Obama deliver his State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress in the U.S. Capitol, Jan. 28, 2014. (Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON (JTA) – Since 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court has not held public sessions on Yom Kippur. Since the court opens its term on the first Monday in October, it is not unusual for the Jewish Day of Atonement to arrive just as the court begins its public work.

How the Supreme Court came to observe the Jewish High Holiday is a story about religious diversity on the court, the quiet perseverance of two justices and an unexpected illness.

In an impromptu appearance at a synagogue here last week on Rosh Hashanah, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg recounted how she and fellow Jewish Justice Stephen Breyer approached Chief Justice William Rehnquist and explained that Jewish lawyers who had been “practicing their arguments for weeks” should not be required to choose between religious observance and representing their clients before the court. According to Ginsburg, Rehnquist agreed.

But Ginsburg was being respectful of the memory of Rehnquist – cognoscenti have slightly less gracious memories of his role in the change.

Almost a Quarter of a Century with No Jewish Justices on the Supreme Court

There were no Jewish justices on the Supreme Court in the almost quarter century between the resignation of Abe Fortas on May 15, 1969, and Ginsburg’s swearing-in on Aug. 10, 1993. (Breyer joined the court on Aug. 3, 1994.) I appeared before the court as private counsel a number of times between 1971 and 1994, and the Supreme Court clerk was always accommodating to Jewish religious observance. Cases in which I was scheduled to argue orally were scheduled for dates that would not conflict with Jewish holidays.

In 1994, I was scheduled for two appearances during a Supreme Court session in March that included Passover. At my request, the arguments were scheduled so as not to conflict with the first and last two days of the holiday.

A lawyer asking for an argument to be rescheduled was one thing; a Supreme Court justice sitting out an argument was quite another.

The Challenge of Yom Kippur in 1995

Yom Kippur in 1993 and 1994 came in September, so there was no religious conflict during Ginsburg’s first two years and Breyer’s freshman year on the court. But in 1995, Yom Kippur was on Oct. 4 – a Wednesday on which the court was scheduled to hear oral argument. No counsels apparently had requested that their cases be rescheduled. Although the court’s Hearing Calendar had arguments scheduled for that date, they were abruptly postponed. The court took the day off on Yom Kippur, as it has done ever since.

Those of us who followed the court closely and were battling for recognition of Jewish religious rights were curious as to how this happened. The story – as I heard it at the time from a knowledgeable source – did not portray Rehnquist as cordially accommodating to Jewish religious observance.

The account I heard then was that Ginsburg and Breyer had approached Rehnquist after oral arguments were scheduled for that Oct. 4. The two Jewish members asked the chief justice to be respectful of their religious identity and postpone the arguments scheduled for Yom Kippur.

Rehnquist, however, had not accommodated Jewish observance in a 1986 case in which I had argued on behalf of an Orthodox Jewish Air Force psychologist who wanted to wear a yarmulke with his military uniform. Rehnquist had written the Supreme Court's majority 5-to-4 opinion rejecting the First Amendment claim.

Before she was nominated to the Supreme Court, Ginsburg as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals — along with Antonin Scalia and Kenneth Starr, judges at the time — had voted in favor of the psychologist's motion to rehear the lower court's rejection of the yarmulke request. (Following the high court's rejection, Congress would enact a law, still in effect, that grants military personnel in uniform a statutory right to wear a neat and conservative religious article of clothing.)

In 1995, according to the version of the story I heard, Rehnquist turned down the request of Ginsburg and Breyer to reschedule the court date to accommodate Yom Kippur. He told them that they could, if they chose, absent themselves on Yom Kippur and still vote, pursuant to the court's practice, after listening to the audio tapes of the oral arguments.

The Chief Justice Suffered From a Painful Back Condition

Soon thereafter, however, Rehnquist found that he, too, would be unable to sit with the court on Oct. 4 because his painful back condition required medical treatment on that day.

According to my sources, this gave the two Jewish justices an unexpected opportunity. They approached John Paul Stevens, the most senior justice who would be presiding if Rehnquist were absent. They pointed out to Stevens that if the two of them were not on the bench on Oct. 4, only six justices would sit to hear oral arguments on that day. Although that number is technically a Supreme Court quorum and the absent justices could vote after listening to audio tapes, Stevens agreed that the optics of such a diminished panel would be less than ideal. Stevens then postponed the Yom Kippur session, and the practice stuck.

This year's Yom Kippur falls on Friday night and Saturday morning, Sept. 29-30, and the court won't convene until Monday, Oct. 2.

But thanks to Justices Ginsburg, Breyer and Stevens, the next time a public session falls on Yom Kippur, a sign of respect for Jewish observance will again prevail.

(Nathan Lewin is a Washington lawyer who has argued 28 cases before the Supreme Court and is on the adjunct faculty of Columbia Law School.)

Reprinted from the September 29, 2017 website of the Jewish Telegraph Agency.

Rate My Service: A True Story about a Devastating Critique

By Shlomo Horwitz



Someone wronged Mike, the owner, unfairly, and plastered it online. My heart went out to him.

I needed some guitar supplies for a kumzitz. I didn't feel like schlepping to the stores I normally go to and with the help of Google I discovered a store close to my office called Mike's Music. I couldn't believe I hadn't know about it after all these years working in the area.

I wanted to first check online ratings before making the trip. Most were excellent, but then I found this one:

suzanne TC 3 reviews a year ago-

It is all about greed and money. They have a very unfair makeup/cancellation policy. So if class falls on a holiday (Ex. July 4th) and the center is closed, they still charge you for the class, . They do not pay the teachers for that day either, so

free money for them. According to their policy it is up to the costumer to schedule a make-up. However, the teachers are all always fully booked. It is almost impossible to schedule a make-up class.

Their solution: They offer substitutes. But they are missing the point, after working with a teacher for many years, I don't need a stranger who has never met my child nor know anything about his progress hanging out with him for 30 minutes. I don't call that a "make up " class. That is just a waste of time and money.

Also their parking stinks.

Bottom line: I don't recommend them, Mike and his wife are greedy people.

I finished reading the review and had my doubts about going. I didn't want to give my business to a greedy, inconsiderate person. But then I noticed that the owner, Mike, had responded. I read further:

Response from the owner 7 months ago

Hi Suzanne,

Wow, where do I start?

How about, "Mike and his wife are greedy people."? Congratulations, you've ruined my day. This is so untrue and hurtful. You don't know me or my wife. You have no idea how much of our time and money we donate to our community, to those in need, to veterans, to schools every year. I may be a lot of things, but greedy isn't one of them.

"They have a very unfair makeup/cancellation policy." Actually, I believe our makeup policy to be just about the most fair I've seen in the music lesson business. If your lesson falls on a holiday that we are closed (Ex. July 4th) we PRORATE that month and you actually do not pay for that lesson. If you need to cancel a lesson, we only ask to be notified by the night before. If you do need to cancel on the same day of your lesson we pay our teacher for the lesson, so you would not be able to make it up.

"The teachers are always fully booked." This is not exactly true, but we do our best to keep their schedules pretty full. Perhaps if our teachers weren't so amazing they may have more openings?

"They offer substitutes." This is true. If your teacher is sick or on vacation we will have a substitute. When I was a kid taking guitar lessons, I would show up once in a while and there would be a substitute. I would actually be excited to learn something brand new and different from a new instructor. I realize that some kids and parents prefer not to have substitutes. Not a problem. All you need to do is let us know you don't want a sub and we will always let you know if/when your teacher is unavailable and we will reschedule your lesson.

"Parking stinks." I can't really dispute this one. The parking lot is a bit small for our growing business. We're working on possible solutions and will let everyone know when we find an answer.

Mike

I was touched by his vulnerability, his admission that he wasn't perfect, and the dignified way in which he explained himself and addressed the complaints. *I want to meet this guy*, I thought to myself, and decided I'm going to Mike's Music.

Later that day, I stopped in at Mike's. I picked him out right away – a hardworking guy running a business, saying hi to customers, stocking shelves, and answering questions from his employees.

I went over to him. "Mike?"

"Yep. You are...?"

"I'm Shlomo Horwitz."

"Do we know each other?"

"Sort of. I read the Google review about you."

"Which one?"

"Ummm – the one where they called you greedy."

Mike was taken aback.

"What?! That review gets me so upset. I was just looking at it today!"

"I know, and I totally understand that. But the way you responded to that negativity is what brought me here. I thought you were so dignified, and I sensed that you were in the right."

Mike couldn't believe it. "Larry!" he shouted.

Larry looked up from behind the counter. "What's up?"

Mike pointed to me. "This guy is here because of the BAD review!"

I was so happy to give Mike the business (and not because he gave me a 10% discount for coming). My heart went out to Mike. Someone wronged him unfairly and plastered it on the internet where it now resides forever. This could have been devastating to his business.

He didn't respond and claim he's perfect and he's a gem of a human being, and that his store and policies, parking, etc were all fantastic. He admitted that he wasn't flawless and that certain things need fixing. But he also elegantly explained that certain perceptions the reviewer had were mistaken.

It made me think of the effects of *lashon hara* (negative gossip) and the ability to destroy someone's reputation by using the latest technology. I wondered how often I fell into the trap of believing something hurtful just because I saw it in writing.

Mike was vulnerable and honest, and I found that so rare and refreshing.

Maybe this is a reflection of how G-d views us when we approach Him this Yom Kippur. He doesn't want us to paint a false and flattering picture of ourselves. We need to confront our flaws and faults.

But He also doesn't want us to put ourselves down needlessly and feel worthless. He wants us to be honest. He wants us to recognize our triumphs and successes, too.

And if we are honest, perhaps He will appreciate us so much more. After all, honesty is the critical foundation of a relationship. How much more so in a relationship that lasts forever – between us and G-d.

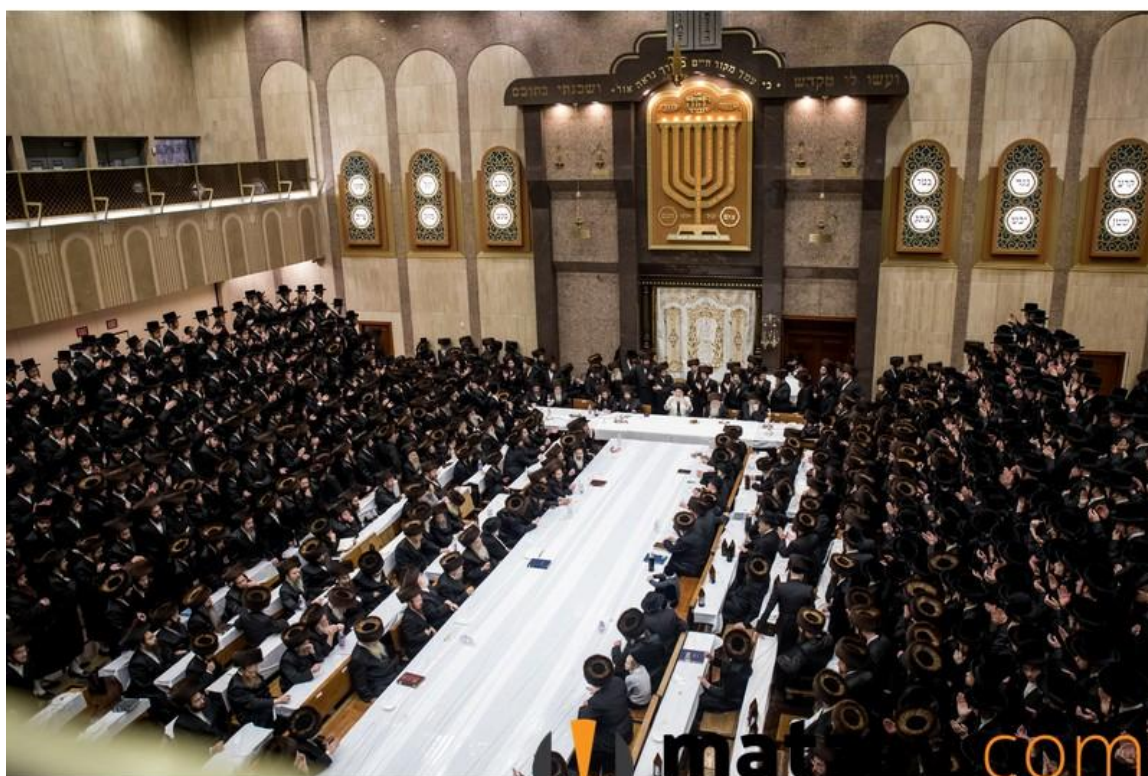
Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5778 website of Chabad.Org

Motzoi Yom Kippur 5778 (2017) With the Bobover Rebbe, shlitah





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A Yom Kippur Tradition in Amsterdam Dates Back to The Invention of Electricity

By Cnaan Liphshiz



Concertgoers enjoying jazz music at Amsterdam's Portuguese Synagogue, Aug. 17, 2017. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — As one of Europe's oldest and most impressive Jewish buildings, this city's Portuguese Synagogue is known far and wide for its majestic beauty.

Built in 1675 for the descendants of Jews who fled religious persecution on the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese Synagogue today sees some 200,000 tourists annually. Inside its vast sanctuary, a massive Torah ark made of Brazilian

Jacaranda wood towers over 17th-century furniture and a multitude of low-hanging golden chandeliers hang among 12 stone pillars.

Its architect is said to have drawn inspiration from Solomon's Temple, and the synagogue would be Europe's largest and most ornate, according to historians. While the Portuguese Synagogue was later eclipsed by even larger and more magnificent shuls — like the one on Dohany Street in Budapest — the Amsterdam building remains a spectacular sight on any day of the year.

Yet most of the synagogue's visitors are not around on the day when its beauty shines brightest: Yom Kippur. On the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, the hall is packed to capacity as worshippers pray by the warm light of hundreds of candles — a tradition that dates back to the invention of electricity — accompanied by unique cantorial melodies that resemble operas.

"It's one of European Jewry's most profound and beautiful sights," according to Esther Voet, a regular visitor to the synagogue and the editor-in-chief of the Dutch-Jewish NIW weekly. On Yom Kippur, entering the candlelit synagogue "has a cleansing effect – which is what Yom Kippur is all about," she said.

It's also like "stepping into a time machine," she added. "You feel that you are a link in a very long chain of Jewish tradition."

Few congregants experience this intergenerational dimension more than Ronit Palache, whose ancestors were among the early leaders of the synagogue. "Coming there means being a part of history, and it's my history," said Palache, whose great-great-grandfather was a chief rabbi of the Portuguese Jewish community.

But you don't need a personal connection to appreciate the historical dimensions of Yom Kippur services at the synagogue, according to Bart Wallet, a University of Amsterdam historian and author of the book "History of Jews in the Netherlands," which was published in Dutch this year.

"There is growing interest in attending on Yom Kippur and, in response, the community only a few years ago started assigning pre-ordered tickets," he said. Some Jews, including Lipika Pelham, a London-based author and journalist with Indian roots, travel with their families especially to attend the Yom Kippur service here. Tickets cost just \$22 but need to be ordered well in advance.

On Yom Kippur, the service is essentially conducted by the community's men, who are seated around the bimah, or pulpit, in the central section of the main hall. Male guests sit in pews surrounding the central section. Women sit upstairs, in the women's section, "where we struggle to follow the reading of the text below, which is not easy because of the acoustics," Voet said.

Still, while it may be less than ideal for reading prayers, the acoustics at the Portuguese Synagogue work beautifully for musicians and singers — something

that was key to the synagogue board's decision 10 years ago to host occasional concerts here. During those events, non-Jewish audiences can get a taste of the Yom Kippur atmosphere because all the candles are lit.

The candles are illuminated as well when important dignitaries visit, including Dutch royals and world leaders such as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and the late President Shimon Peres.

On Yom Kippur, the men of the community put on the traditional Portuguese Jewish top hats, an article worn by Jews who immigrated here from Portugal, Spain and their colonies when they adopted the church's anti-Jewish Inquisition as policy. The wood used for the Torah ark was brought from Recife by Jews who fled the Brazilian city for Amsterdam. Flanking the ark are two 16th-century sofas from the Middle East.

"The interior makes for a very cosmopolitan mix," Wallet said. "You have artifacts from many corners of the world."

Nowhere else in 17th-century Europe were Jews allowed to build a synagogue quite as large and impressive as the Portuguese Synagogue, Wallet added, which makes the building a testament also to the relative tolerance that Jews had enjoyed in the Netherlands for centuries, before the Nazis and local collaborators nearly wiped out the community.

With so much history in view, folklore inevitably grew around almost every aspect of the synagogue — even the fine sand that is strewn on its floor, which some believe is a reference to the desert that the ancient Hebrews crossed on their way to Canaan. In truth, though, the use of sand on wooden floor was a common cleaning and maintenance method in the 17th century that has disappeared almost everywhere else.

The Yom Kippur service also features prayers by Santo Servizio, the synagogue's resident choir, which curates the special tunes that have evolved here over the centuries. Sung in Hebrew in the Portuguese inflection, the tunes are melodic because they were composed in the 16th and 17th centuries to please the ear and compete with Christian choirs, Wallet said.

It was part of a broader effort by community leaders to rehabilitate and preserve in Amsterdam what the Inquisition destroyed in Iberia.

That effort is also evidenced in the thousands of manuscripts of the Ets Haim Jewish library, the oldest institution of its kind still in operation, which is part of the Portuguese Synagogue compound.

"You can see in the books their enthusiasm about being able to reconnect with their Jewish traditions openly and resume the study of it," said Ruth Peeters, a senior cataloger at the library.

The library's central role in the daily life of synagoguegoers is evident in the name that locals use for this house of worship: Esnoga — a mashup of the Portuguese-language words for school, “escola,” and synagogue, “sinagoga.”

At times, enthusiasm led astray worshippers and even the community leaders.

Around the time the synagogue was built, the community was split between followers and opponents of Shabbetai Zevi, the Turkey-born Jewish eccentric who divided the Jewish world with his claim that he was the Messiah before his conversion under duress to Islam in 1666.

Even this community's founding father and rabbi for 40 years, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, for a while was a follower of the man who would be known as the “false messiah.” Wallet said the debate on the issue was “a crisis for the community,” but was largely purged from its official records.

But the community's ultimate test came in 1940, when Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands, initiating racist policies that ended with the murder of 75 percent of the Netherlands' Jewish population of 140,000. The Portuguese Synagogue was sealed, its library and treasures looted.

But while Amsterdam's Ashkenazi synagogue was gutted, the Portuguese Synagogue remained essentially unharmed.

“I think they didn't quite know what to do with it,” Wallet said. “Ultimately even they didn't dare destroy it.”

Reprinted from the September 14, 2017 feature article of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA).

The Non-Jewish Landlord's Four Hundred Rubles

One Yom Kippur night, there was a large crowd assembled in the Berditchever Shul where Rav Levi Yitzchak, zt”l, was preparing to begin Davening Kol Nidrei. However, Rav Levi Yitzchak motioned to the Chazan to wait a while, and not begin Kol Nidrei.

The minutes passed by and people began to wonder what could be holding up their Rebbe? Soon, Rav Levi Yitzchak turned to his Shammes and asked, “Is Reb Mottel here?”

The Shammes looked around, and after noticing Reb Mottel, told the Rebbe that he was indeed in Shul. The Rav said, “Please ask him to come here.” When Mottel came over, Rav Levi Yitzchak asked him, “Do you live on a certain land that is owned by a landlord who is not Jewish?”

Surprised at the question, Mottel responded, “Yes, I do.”

Rav Levi Yitzchak asked, “Does he own a dog?”

Mottel replied, “Yes, Rebbe, he owns a dog.” Mottel didn’t have any idea why Rav Levi Yitzchak would be asking such questions just before Kol Nidrei. The Rebbe asked, “Do you know how much he paid for this dog?”

Mottel said, “I do know. He said it was a special dog with a distinguished pedigree, and he had paid four hundred rubles for it.”

This was a huge sum to pay for anything in those days, and certainly for a dog. Hearing that amount, Rav Levi Yitzchak was thrilled! He exclaimed, “Four hundred rubles! That’s fantastic!” He quickly motioned for the Chazan to begin Kol Nidrei.

Everyone was bewildered at this episode. Why did the Rebbe care about a dog? What difference did it make how much it cost? After Maariv, some students approached the Rebbe and asked him to please explain what had happened.

The Rebbe told them the following story:

“A Melamed, a teacher, came to our town this past year to earn enough money to support his family and pay his many debts which he had accumulated at home. After he had earned enough money and he was on his way home, he stopped overnight at an inn, and his bag with all the money he earned was stolen from him while he was sleeping.

‘When he woke up in the morning and saw what had happened, he was crushed and upset. Mottel’s landlord was staying at the inn that night, and when he heard the Melamed’s crying, he inquired about the commotion. The Melamed’s story broke his heart, and when he heard how much money had been lost, the landlord took out four hundred rubles and gave it to the Melamed.”

The Rebbe continued, “As we were about to begin Kol Nidrei, I became concerned about this story and if what the goy did would have any effect on us as we stand in judgement before Hashem. Do we deserve that Hashem should look at us favorably? Did any of us do an unusual act of Chesed that would stand on our behalf? If a goy could act in this way, we, Hashem’s nation should do no less. But can we say that we did?

I then remembered the dog, and when I heard that he spent four hundred rubles for a dog, a simple pet. It showed me that this goy does not really value money very highly. Therefore, while the act of giving the Melamed four hundred rubles was a remarkable act of Chesed, it was surely not an act of sacrifice by the goy. A man who can spend so much money on a dog does not truly appreciate the value of money! I know that when we do Chesed, it almost always takes some self-sacrifice to do, no matter how small, and I knew we could now start Kol Nidrei and enter Yom Kippur!”

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5778 email of Torah U'Tefillah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

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The Mesiras Nefesh Of the Maharsham



The Jews of Potik were terribly frightened. The gentiles of the vicinity had libeled the Jews, accusing them of a serious crime. Now there were rioters armed with clubs gathering in the Jewish section of the Potik, intent on inflicting horrible damage.

A pogrom was about to begin. The terrified Jews locked themselves inside their homes. They sealed the shutters and bolted their doors, hoping to gain some protection against the wild mob outside.

The city's shochet (ritual slaughterer), however, was not as fortunate. The frenzied mob broke down his door, grabbed him, dragged him into the street, and began to beat him mercilessly.

When the Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaCohen Schwadron (known more famously by the acronym, the Maharsham), heard what was happening to the shochet, he quickly put on his coat and hat, and went out into the street.

The pleas of Rav Schwadron's family, begging him not to put his life in danger, did not deter him. "It is my duty to try and save him," he replied. R'Schwadron rushed out into the street, and when the thugs caught a glimpse of him, they backed away from the shochet.

They then approached R'Schwadron, asked him for forgiveness, and quickly left Potik! In this manner, Rav Schwadron was the very fulfillment of the verse in our portion (Devarim 28:10), "And the nations of the earth will see that Hashem's Name is displayed upon you and they will revere you." (Story from "A Shabbos Vort," by Rabbi Yisrael Bronstein).

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5778 email of Torah Sweets Weekly edited by Mendel Berlin.

‘Returning a Lost Object’

By G.Y.

I returned from the Holy Land to where I lived, the United States. I landed at Kennedy airport in New York in the middle of the night. On my way home, at almost midnight, I received a call from someone I know, R; Yudel, the owner of a seforim store in my neighborhood.

He asked me, "Reb G. Y., did you forget your Tallis and Tefillin at Kennedy Airport?"

I didn't know anything about this, but since he asked, I remembered that I put down the Tallis and Tefillin in a corner at the airport and I don't remember if I took them from there, and it is possible that I forgot it there.

R' Yudel told me that one of my neighbors took it with him and he will bring it to me in the morning. I thanked him and I asked him how he got into the picture?

He replied, that on the Tallis bag and in the siddur there was just my name with no phone number to call. He searched to see if there was a number, and since inside the Tallis bag I had a bag from the seforim store, "Ateres Haseforim" and the particulars of the store including the phone number were on the bag, the finder called the store.

R' Yudel immediately recognized me, and that he is how he reached me. R' Yudel added that there was an interesting hashgacha pratis in the story, since in general, he was not in the store so late, since this was much later than the operating hours of the store, but it was just then that someone who sells Sta'M asked him to do him a favor and go to the store with him to take care of something.

In truth, he did not want to go there with him, but only because he was so insistent, he did him a favor, and he went to the store to take care of something for a few minutes.

It was during those few minutes that the phone rang. At first he did not want to answer at all, he was there for only a few minutes after working hours, but since the phone kept ringing insistently over and over several times, he picked up the phone. And so, with thanks to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for saving me aggravation, I received my lost object.

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5778 email of Tiv Hakehila.

THE HIGH END

A Building with Kosher Flourishes

By Jane Margolies

To appeal to observant Jews, an Upper West Side development hired a “kosher consultant” to help create features that would meet their needs.

Some luxury buildings have hired feng shui experts to help arrange harmonious spaces. Others recruit fitness experts to craft gym amenities. But a new Upper West Side co-op development called in a “kosher consultant” to advise it on how to ensure that the project would be attuned to the needs of observant Jews.

To keep kosher at the strictest level, some Jews commission extensive renovations to install double kitchen sinks and two dishwashers — one for meat, the other for dairy. At the Chamberlain, at 269 West 87th Street, however, all that infrastructure is already installed.

The Chamberlain, of course, welcomes all buyers — provided they can afford \$2.4 million to over \$10 million for the two- to five-bedroom apartments. The Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination against buyers and renters, requires that apartments be marketed to the general population. But the 39-unit

project is one of a handful of luxury buildings from developers who are differentiating themselves by taking into account the tastes and needs of a specific subset of the population.



The Chamberlain, at 269 West 87th Street, was designed to blend into its Upper West Side setting. Photo Credit - Rendering by Williams New York

In Flushing, Queens, the Grand at SkyView Parc, a 750-unit condominium from Onex Real Estate Partners, has appealed to Asian buyers with a park designed according to the principles of feng shui and brokers who speak fluent Mandarin.

Meanwhile, Corte, an 85-unit condominium under construction in Long Island City, is geared to South American buyers with a low-rise design of stacked forms inspired by the architecture of Buenos Aires.

The Chamberlain's developers, Simon Baron Development and Quadrum Global, and the team they assembled sought, first and foremost, to make the 17-story building suit its Upper West Side setting.

The architects, FXCollaborative, previously known as FXFowle, designed the building to evoke historic Art Deco apartment houses like the nearby Majestic and the Century. The apartments are laid out with rooms clearly delineated by function — as opposed to the more loft-like arrangements of other new buildings — in keeping with the sprawling Upper West Side apartments that have long been a magnet for families.

But given the building's location, just east of West End Avenue — with its parade of Jewish families strolling to services on Saturdays, and the many synagogues, yeshivas and day schools in the area — the developers considered how to accommodate the needs of prospective buyers who might be observant Jews.

On a recent tour of the building — where nearly 25 percent of units have sold and occupancy is expected this fall — Andrew Till, chief operating officer for Simon Baron, said that at the beginning of the design process his company hired Susie Fishbein, the author of popular kosher cookbooks, as a “kosher consultant.”

The developer assembled the architects and members of the marketing team, and Mrs. Fishbein held forth on the Orthodox lifestyle and recommended several features.



In the kitchens, under-counter kitchen cabinets can easily be pulled out so a second dishwasher can slide in; a feature appealing for Jews who would like to keep kosher at the strictest level. Photo Credit - Rendering by Williams New York

These went beyond an elevator that can run on Sabbath mode Friday night and Saturday — stopping at every floor so that observant Jews need not push a button, a violation of an injunction that stems from a prohibition against creating sparks and fires. The large front doors to the building have a power assist that can be deactivated, for the same reason.

In the larger apartments, under-counter kitchen cabinets can easily be pulled out so a second dishwasher can slide in. Subzero refrigerators that can be programmed to operate on Sabbath mode — so the light doesn't come on when the door is opened — were selected. Because Orthodox families tend to be large, laundry closets are commodious enough for two washers and two dryers, to handle heaps of clothes.

On the tour, Mr. Till pointed out an electrical cover plate above a bedroom window that hides access to wiring so that shades can be set on a timer, eliminating the need to flick a switch.

“A lot of what we've done is behind the scenes, behind the walls,” he said. “You can take advantage of it or not.”

Asked about the added expense, Mr. Till said it was “nominal.”

“It's not a big effort for us to put a wire in a wall when there is no Sheetrock,” he said. But it would be “a big effort for a buyer to have to rip out a wall to put in a skinny little wire to get power to the windows.”

Reprinted from the August 31, 2018 website of The New York Times. A version of this article appears in print on Sept. 2, 2018, on Page RE4 of the New York edition with the headline: Got Some Buyers in Mind? Go Ahead and Build for them.

Why Rav Sofer Cried in Shul

Rav Shimon Sofer, zt"l, was the Rav in a town in Hungary. Once, the Hungarian emperor planned a visit to the town, and Rav Sofer wanted to see him so that he could say the Brachah on seeing a king.

In order to prepare himself, he wrote the Brachah on a piece of paper so he would be able to say it properly, which is the Halachah, since it is a Brachah that is not said often and many are not familiar with it.

When the time came and the emperor had arrived, Rav Sofer approached him and took out his paper with the Brachah on it, and he began to say the Brachah. However, he was so nervous that he dropped the paper, and he said the Brachah by heart instead of reading it.

That night in Shul by Maariv, Rav Sofer began to cry. People approached him to see if he was alright and asked why he was crying.



Rav Sofer said, “I am crying because at Maariv tonight, I didn’t drop my Siddur!”

He explained, “When I was standing before a human king, I was so nervous that I dropped the paper I was holding. Why didn’t I drop my Siddur when I was standing and speaking to Hashem, the King of kings? Why wasn’t I so nervous and scared before the Ribono Shel Olam that I was able to hold on to my Siddur without it slipping from my hands? Shouldn’t I tremble before Hashem the way I tremble before a person? How could I not cry?!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5778 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg

The Old Yid’s Tallis

An old Yid was niftar in Uzbekistan, and before his demise, he asked his son to transfer his body to Eretz Yisrael, when the opportunity arises. The son moved to Eretz Yisrael, but as is the nature of people to procrastinate, he kept pushing off bringing his father to Eretz Yisrael.

When the son was eighty years old, he realized that if he doesn't do his mission now, he never will. So he hired Reb Mendel Ekstein (who has experience in transporting graves) to bring his father's remains to Eretz Yisrael.



Reb Mendel Ekstein traveled to Uzbekistan, opened the grave, and he almost fainted when he saw that the tallis covering the body had remained fresh, after all these years. The tallis is usually first to disintegrate, but miraculously this tallis remained intact. Reb Mendel never saw anything like this before; he was afraid to continue.

But he was hired to do this mission, and it was the niftar's final request, so he took the tallis off to see the body. The skeleton was as he'd expect it to be – totally decomposed. The tachrichim were totally disintegrated, too, just the tallis remained intact.

In Eretz Yisrael, the custom is to bury people without a tallis. A rav advised Reb Mendel that because of the unusual circumstance, the niftar should be buried with this miraculous tallis.

Who was this man? Was he a tzaddik nistar? Reb Mendel asked the eighty-year-old son whether he can explain why this wonder occurred.

He replied, "The tallis? That's easy to explain. On the day my father began wearing a tallis, which was the day after his chasunah, he made a kabbalah that he would never speak while wearing it. He kept this kabbalah his entire life."

Apparently, in this merit, the tallis remained intact." We learn from this story the specialness of a good kabbalah.

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5778 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts of Rabbi Eli Biderman.

The Innkeeper and The Angel of Death

The Midrash (quoted in Orchos Yosher, Gemilus Chasadim) tells the following story:

There was a talmid chacham who was traveling for business. An innkeeper saw him, and said, "Rebbe, if you want, I can travel with you."

The talmid chacham replied, "Come in peace."

As they were walking, they met up with a blind pauper, sitting near the city. The talmid chacham quickly took out a coin and gave it to him, and he told the innkeeper to do the same.

The innkeeper said, "I won't give him anything, because I don't know him as you do. It was good that you gave him since you know him, but I won't give anything." The talmid chacham replied, "If you don't want to give, that's your choice." They walked further and met up with the malach hamaves (the Angel of Death). The malach hamaves said, "I am the malach hameves" and they became very afraid.

The malach hamaves said to the talmid chacham, "You gave tzedakah...therefore your life will be spared, and you will live another fifty years."

The malach hamaves then said to the innkeeper, "But for you, your final day has arrived."

The innkeeper replied, "We traveled together. Is it right that he should return home and that I should die?"

"Yes. He deserves to live since he gave tzedakah."

"Let me give tzedakah now!"

The malach hamaves replied, "Fool, if one didn't prepare provisions on land, what will he have on the sea? Similarly, if someone didn't prepare in his lifetime, it is too late to prepare when he's dead. What happened happened, now your time to die has come."

The innkeeper said, "Before you take me, allow me to praise Hashem for all the kindness He has done for me."

The malach hamaves replied, "Since you want to praise Hashem, years have been added to your life."

From this story we learn the benefit of praising Hashem. It can add years onto one's life. Praising Hashem is greater than tzedakah. We see that because the innkeeper wanted to give tzedakah, but at that point, it wouldn't help him. But praising Hashem saved him.

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5778 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts of Rabbi Eli Biderman.

The “Insensitive” Young Girl on the Israeli Bus



How careful we must be when we judge our fellow man, although we are not allowed to judge other because Hashem is the only true judge, subconsciously we do.

A story is told about an elderly woman who boarded a crowded bus in Israel. She stood next to a young girl who was seated. The young girl was looking out the window pensively, and ignored the woman beside her.

The elderly woman expected the young girl to offer her seat, but the young girl, though obviously aware of the situation, did not look up and pretended not hear the conversation around her.

The conversation was about the young girl's behavior. The elderly woman said out loud, *"She's not even looking at me, it's mindboggling. Today's teens are so... I don't know what's up with them... but they're certainly not thinking about me."*

The other standing passengers around her were sympathetic, and nodded their heads.

"I'm so confused," the older woman said, unable to understand why even after the rudeness was pointed out to her, the young girl still refused to get up and offer her seat. Instead, she continued to stare out the window acting totally oblivious to the conversation that was brewing around her.

A man standing next to the woman said, *"Frankly, it's scandalous."*

"It's not even crossing her mind that maybe..." the critical woman continued.

A second man concurred. *"There's no respect,"* he said.

The woman said, *"It's perhaps not respect but maybe a lack of manners."*

"What a generation..." she sighed, expanding her criticism from the girl to all her imagined peers.

Just then a woman across the aisle concluded a call on her cell phone. "I have to go," she said, shutting her phone and rising. She opened a folded wheelchair, and proceeded to help the young girl, who was evidently her daughter, into the wheelchair, and began wheeling her off the bus.

The passengers who had been so free with their loud and vocal criticism were silenced, and it was obvious from the look on their faces that they were deeply ashamed of themselves, and regretted every word they'd uttered.

We learn from this story that we have to be aware of our tendency to judge others, and of the consequences that this tendency has. First we feel free to judge. That leads us to communicate our judgment to others, and once we have taken that road, it won't be long before we are doing the same thing in public.

It is then an easy next step to humiliating the object of criticism in public. The elderly woman did not hesitate to complain about the girl in front of everyone, on a crowded bus. She was sure of her own judgment, sure that she was right. Because of her, the others joined in on the negative judgment.

We are not omniscient – only G-d is. We are never in possession of all the facts, and we have to be humble and acknowledge that. As the Talmud says (Baba Metzia 58b), one who shames another in public, causing the blood to drain from their face, is comparable to a murderer.

Not only did the people on the bus gang up in their criticism against an innocent girl who was unable to give up her seat, no matter how much she wished to do so, they also embarrassed her in front of everyone.

Reprinted from the Parashat Shof'tim 5778 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

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The Stranger Who Wanted to Go to Heaven

By Asharon Baltazar



Art by Leopold Pilichowski

The *etrog* shortage that hit Berditchev troubled its famed rabbi, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, giving him no rest. Determined to celebrate Sukkot with an *etrog*, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak instructed his messengers to fan out and search the roads for any traveler who might be carrying the coveted yellow fruit.

One of the messengers approached a traveler and asked him whether he was carrying an *etrog*. The man said yes. However, the traveler explained to the messenger that he needed to continue onward to his destination. He did not relent even when the messenger pleaded with him to spend Sukkot in Berditchev to allow Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and his community to fulfill one of the holiday's vital mitzvahs. After all, the traveler said, he was just returning from a lengthy journey and had plans to be home by the holiday, and he did not desire to spend it in Berditchev.

Meanwhile, word of the traveler's *etrog* quickly reached Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Not waiting for the *etrog* to arrive at his doorstep, the rabbi quickly made his way to the traveler. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began to lay his community's predicament before the traveler, but the latter refused to hear of it until Rabbi Levi Yitzchak offered the stranger a portion of his own reward in the World to Come.

Hearing this, the traveler agreed. He arrived at a local inn in Berditchev, intending to stay there for Sukkot. The townspeople of Berditchev, triumphant about the *etrog*, were ecstatic.

Sent by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, a messenger hastily crossed the town to inform the innkeeper of the rabbi's instructions: the man with the *etrog* was not to be given entry to the inn's *sukkah*. The same instructions were disseminated throughout the town: all householders were to refuse the man with the *etrog* entry into their *sukkahs*.

The traveler, oblivious to this instruction, returned from the synagogue and appeared at the entrance of the inn's *sukkah*, ready to chant Kiddush and settle down for the festive meal. But the innkeeper, as per Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's request, barred the traveler from even setting foot inside the hut. The traveler began to shout at the innkeeper, who stood his ground, ignoring the man's protests.

Realizing that his screaming was useless, the traveler hopped over to the neighbor and asked him if he could celebrate the holiday night inside his *sukkah*. To the traveler's bewilderment, the neighbor said no. And when he continued to walk about the town looking for a place to make Kiddush, the answer was always no. The traveler had a growing suspicion that some sort of concerted effort was afoot. How could *everyone* refuse him use of their *sukkah*?

And so the traveler decided to ask some of the residents, pestering them until they revealed the instruction from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Armed with this information, the traveler ran to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, forcibly voicing his thoughts:

“Is this how you repay me?”

But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak interjected, saying, “Here’s the deal. If you disregard my earlier promise of sharing my portion of the World to Come with you, I will allow you to enter my *sukkah*.” “Here’s the deal. If you disregard my earlier promise of sharing my portion of the World to Come with you, I will allow you to enter my *sukkah*.”

The traveler stood rooted to his spot, a battle waging inside of him. But in the end, the choice was obvious. As much as he wanted to delight in the rewards of the World to Come, his desire to observe the significant mitzvah of sitting inside the *sukkah* was more important.

“Fine,” the traveler acquiesced.

The following day, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak invited the traveler, along with other Jews of Berdichev, for the festive meal in his *sukkah*. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak then turned to the traveler and remarked:

“Now I once again assure you that you will indeed have a part of my reward in the World to Come. When I first made the promise to you, you did not deserve it. Now that you were willing to give it up in order to do a mitzvah, you are indeed deserving of that lofty reward.”

Adapted and translated by Asharon Baltazar from *Shemuot Vesippurim Vol. 1*, page 248 by Rabbi Rephael Nachman Kahan's *Shemuot Vesippurim*.

Reprinted from the Succos 5778 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Rabbi Aryeh Levine’s

Hidur Esrog

By Rabbi Yoni Golker

The story is told how on one Erev Sukkos, the great Rav Aryeh Levin zt”l entered a mocher seforim in Jerusalem, which also sold Esrogim. He asked the owner where his esrog was and was given a box. Rav Levine peeked inside for a second, closed it up and went on his way.

A young boy who had watched this exchange ran after the Rabbi. When he reached the bus stop the boy asked him why he hadn’t checked the Etrog for a longer time like everyone else does, examining every nook and bump!?

Rav Aryeh Levine answered, “Look, there are two mitzvos that require Hidur (beautification) one is Esrog (‘Pri Etz Hadar’) and the other is showing

respect to elders ('V'Hadarta Pnei Zakein'). For these two mitzvos the Torah uses the word Hadar, meaning you must beautify or go above and beyond.

"I am now running to the nursing home to bring dentures for an old man there whose teeth have completely deteriorated. He needs to eat dinner like a normal human being and if I don't make it in time he will once again be forced to eat bread dipped in milk. This is very important and this is also hidur mitzvah!"

Reprinted from the Parshat Acharei Mot – Kedoshim 5778 email of ONEG SHABBOS: North West London's Weekly Torah & Opinion Sheets)

They Sold Their House to Buy An Etrog with the Money

By Naamah Green



Rabbi Avraham, the brother of the Vilna Gaon, lived with his wife and ten children in Keidan, a small town near Vilna. When the children grew up, they moved to Vilna, while their parents remained in the small town.

As Rabbi Avraham and his wife got older, their children would come from Vilna to visit and take care of them. It was a great bother for them, but they did it happily and lovingly, knowing that caring for and respecting your parents is a great commandment.

The children repeatedly asked their parents to come live near them in Vilna. “You have a lot of family in Vilna, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. What do you have in Keidan? Come live near us and enjoy your family,” their children would urge them. Though their children begged them, Rabbi Avraham and especially his wife insisted on remaining in Keidan.

One Shabbat, when Rabbi Avraham and his wife were visiting their children in Vilna, the children asked the rabbi of Vilna to try and convince their mother to move to Vilna, which would make life easier for them and their children. The Vilna rabbi called the mother and tried to convince her to listen to her children. She told him, “I will not move to Vilna, but out of respect to you, I will tell you why I want to remain in Keidan.”

This is the story she told: “Many years ago, Sukkot was imminent and my husband returned from the synagogue with a sad look on his face. I asked him why he was upset and he told me that the etrog merchant had come to the synagogue and had a beautiful etrog for sale, but the price he was asking was so high that all the Jews in the kehilla couldn’t afford it even if they chipped in together. It looked like he would have to sell that beautiful etrog to another community. ‘This is why I am sad,’ my husband said. ‘This coming Sukkot we won’t have an etrog and won’t be able to fulfill the commandment.’

“When I saw my husband’s grief,” the mother continued her story, “I suggested that since we are getting older and our children are no longer living at home, we don’t need such a big house. ‘Let’s sell our house and buy a smaller one, and with the money that remains, we’ll buy the etrog for you and the entire community. My husband agreed to my suggestion but because he wanted to be sure that I really meant it and wasn’t just saying it, he asked me to arrange the sale of our home and the purchase of a new home.’

The mother continued, “I sent a message immediately to the etrog merchant not to sell the etrog to another community, and tomorrow I would bring him the fee for the etrog. A real estate broker found us a new house close to our old house, and in that way our community merited to have a beautiful etrog that year. My husband’s joy knew no bounds when he merited fulfilling the commandment of lulav and etrog in such a beautiful way.

“I am old and weak and my life is not easy,” she concluded her amazing story. “I am not healthy and things are hard for me. But what keeps me going is the fact that every morning when I get up, I see the house that we sold to keep a

commandment. I can't imagine how my day would look if I couldn't see the house that we sold for the etrog.

“It's true that in Vilna we would be able to enjoy all our family, and it's a bother for my children to come to Keidan to help us. But I cannot give up the thrill of seeing the house that we sold for the etrog. Without this, I don't think I would even survive,” the elderly mother ended her story of sacrifice to keep the commandment of the Four Species.

Reprinted from the October 1, 2017 website of Hidabroot.com

(A Blast from the Past – September 18, 2017)

Short Supply of Yanover Esrogim Makes For Limited Selection and High Prices

By Rafael Hoffman



A small dark green esrog on a tree in Calabria.

NEW YORK - In a matter of days, Yidden around the world will be spotted by *esrog* merchants poised at stands, makeshift shops and Judaica stores selling their wares. This year, however, the many who favor the variety known as

“Yanover” *esrogim* will be faced with the choice of paying exceptionally high prices or looking elsewhere, as a severe frost has resulted in a very slim harvest for this unique Italian variety.

As reported in *Hamodia*, a few days of sub-freezing temperatures took a severe toll on this year’s crop. The *esrogim* were growing much more slowly than in previous seasons, but those involved in the trade had held out hope that a late crop would save the day. Now that Sukkos is around the corner, though, it looks like many Yanover buyers will be pushed to look for alternatives.

“There were a few fields that grew nice *esrogim*, but a lot of others didn’t grow anything at all or only ones that were very small,” said Rabbi Menachem Lazar, co-director of Chabad Piazza of Bologna, Rome, who is involved in supervising the fields in which the *esrogim* grow. “There are a lot fewer that are even decent ... people should expect a higher price, and the minimum prices will be at almost no profit. *Sochrim* will be looking to repay their expenses with the more expensive *esrogim*.”

The term Yanover refers to *esrogim* grown in the Calabria region on the southwestern coast of Italy. *Yanovis* actually Yiddish for Genoa, the port city from which the citrons were originally shipped.

In recent decades, *esrogim* grown in Eretz Yisrael have captured much of the market. Kfar Chabad *esrogim* are actually produced from trees planted from branches taken from Calabria. Yet, particularly in the communities of Lubavitch and Satmar, purchasers favor the original Yanover variety. Many Yidden of Hungarian descent also prefer them, as they were used by the Chasam Sofer, who attested to their authenticity as pure and kosher *esrogim*.

Yoel Levy, who travels to Calabria and Morocco every year to select *esrogim* for his *daled minim* business in Kiryas Joel, said that he expected many of his customers to look for alternatives.

“They’re smaller and greener than usual and the prices for a decent one could be four times as high if you insist on getting a Yanover, but the Moroccans are beautiful this year. I don’t remember such a wonderful year for the Moroccan *esrogim*, and I think that that is what most of my customers are going to be taking this year,” he told *Hamodia*. “The bottom line is that everybody will walk away with a beautiful *mehudar esrog*. It’s not like in the old country where a whole town had to share one. There are enough beautiful *esrogim* for everybody; if it won’t be Yanover, so it will be Moroccan or something else.”

One Crown Heights resident who asked only to be identified as Dovid, having heard of the shortage, was hopeful that if he sought out an *esrog* before Rosh Hashanah he could find a Yanover in his price range, but he was disappointed with what he saw.

“The *socher* I go to usually has a massive selection, but all he had from Calabria started at \$200, and those were badly bruised, nothing they would even be selling in a regular year,” he told *Hamodia*. “He had a few boxes from Kfar Chabad, which he usually doesn’t sell at all, and that is probably what I’m going to end up buying, but I’ll try to find someone with a nice Yanover and make a *brachah* on that.”

Farmers usually begin to harvest *esrogim* in Calabria in mid-July, but the lagging growth pushed the process off until much later in the summer. Farmers and merchants held out hope that a last-minute post-Rosh Hashanah harvest of late blooming fruit could have a significant effect on the market, but Rabbi Lazar said that not enough of the *esrogim* left on the trees would be big enough to ship in time for Sukkos.

Another Crown Heights resident who has been involved in the *hashgachah* of Calabria *esrogim* for many years said that nice Yanovers are available this year, but only enough for those able to pay top dollar.

“You can find kosher *mehudar* Yannover *esrogim* out there, but you’ll have to pay a few hundred dollars for them and you’ll have to grab them quickly,” he said.

Reprinted from last year’s September 18, 2017 edition of the Hamodia.

The Vilna Gaon's Special Esrog

There is a story told about the Vilna Gaon, that one Succos, there was a severe shortage of Esrogim in Eastern Europe, and it was extremely difficult to get an Esrog to use on Yom Tov. A search committee was dispatched to go on a quest to find an Esrog for the Vilna Gaon.

Finally, after much searching, they entered a town where they met a man who had an exquisite Esrog. The man was willing to part with his treasure so that the Vilna Gaon could use it on Succos, but he wanted something in return.

The committee was willing to pay a very high price for the Esrog, but the man said he did not want money. He said, "I will sell it to you on one condition, and that is, the reward in Olam Haba that the Vilna Gaon will earn when using this Esrog to perform the Mitzvah, that reward will be mine."

The group didn't know what to do. They couldn't imagine giving the Vilna Gaon's S'char away, but they also knew how difficult it was to get an Esrog, and this may be their only opportunity. They decided to agree to the condition, and they returned to Vilna with the precious Esrog just in time for Succos.

They went straight to see the Vilna Gaon, but they were terrified to tell them what they had done. They showed the Gaon the beautiful Esrog, and he was ecstatic to see it, but they were trembling.

They nervously said to him, "Rebbe, please forgive us! In order to get this Esrog, we had to agree that you would give away all of the Olam Haba that you would earn doing this Mitzvah!"

When he heard this, the Vilna Gaon became very happy and he responded, "That's perfectly acceptable! All my life I never had a chance to fulfill a Mitzvah and receive no S'char, and now I have such a chance. I now have the opportunity to do the Mitzvah of Esrog purely out of love for Hashem, without any thought of getting rewarded for it!"

That Succos, there was an extra happiness that the Vilna Gaon had when he took the Lulav and Esrog!

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemini 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

Simchas Torah Treasures

Dancing Just for Hashem

Rabbi Yechiel Spero writes a story which took place in Yerushalayim during the second World War, as Rommel and his Afrika Corps were getting closer to the Holy Land. The mood in the country was full of fear and anxiety.

The Shomer Emunim Shul, in Me'ah She'arim, was the place to be on Simchas Torah. The dancing and singing would be so uplifting that it could not be matched by anything at any other time of year.

That year, however, the Davening was without the usual heart and passion. After a few minutes of Hakafos, the Rav of the Shul, Rav Aharon Roth, ordered the dancing to stop because he wanted to address the crowd.

He said, "My dear friends, I would like to share a story with you that I feel has great meaning for us. There was once a king who decided to make a very festive and unique birthday party for himself. He sent out letters throughout the land inviting the most graceful dancers and the finest musicians, and they were all to assemble dressed in the most lavish outfits for the grand event.

All was arranged and the special day arrived. The scene was truly fitting for a king's party. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, the king noticed a slight commotion, as an elderly, crippled man struggled to make his way to the dance floor. Not only was he handicapped, he was also blind, and he bumped into the tables and chairs.

After much exertion, the man finally made it to the dance floor and began to hobble around in a makeshift dance using his crutches for support. The king was mesmerized, and he ignored the rest of the show, focusing on this man who was doing his best to keep his balance.

One of the king's servants was taken aback by this, and asked the king for an explanation. He said, 'My king, we have the finest dancers and musicians here, and yet, you are only watching that poor man who is hobbling around on his crutches.'

The king smiled and explained, 'You are right. All those who have gathered here tonight are truly talented and their performance is certainly exemplary. But, let me ask you, are they not deriving personal enjoyment from their performance? Are they dancing only for me, or are they also enjoying dancing for the king and being in the spotlight?

"That man has nothing to gain from his dancing. He can't see and he can't dance. Yet, he does so because I requested it. He is acting solely for me! You can even see the pain on his face, but he still continues to dance just because he wants

to please me. That is why his dancing is so precious to me — because it is for me!”

Rav Aharon concluded, “My dear friends, in past years our dancing was different. We danced for Hashem, but we also danced for ourselves. We derived personal joy and benefit from the dancing. This year, however, with war all around us and the very fate of the Jewish People is on our minds, we have the unique opportunity to dance solely for Hashem! Tonight, let us dance, but just for Hashem!”

Reprinted from the Simchas Torah 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS ZOS HABERACHA 5779

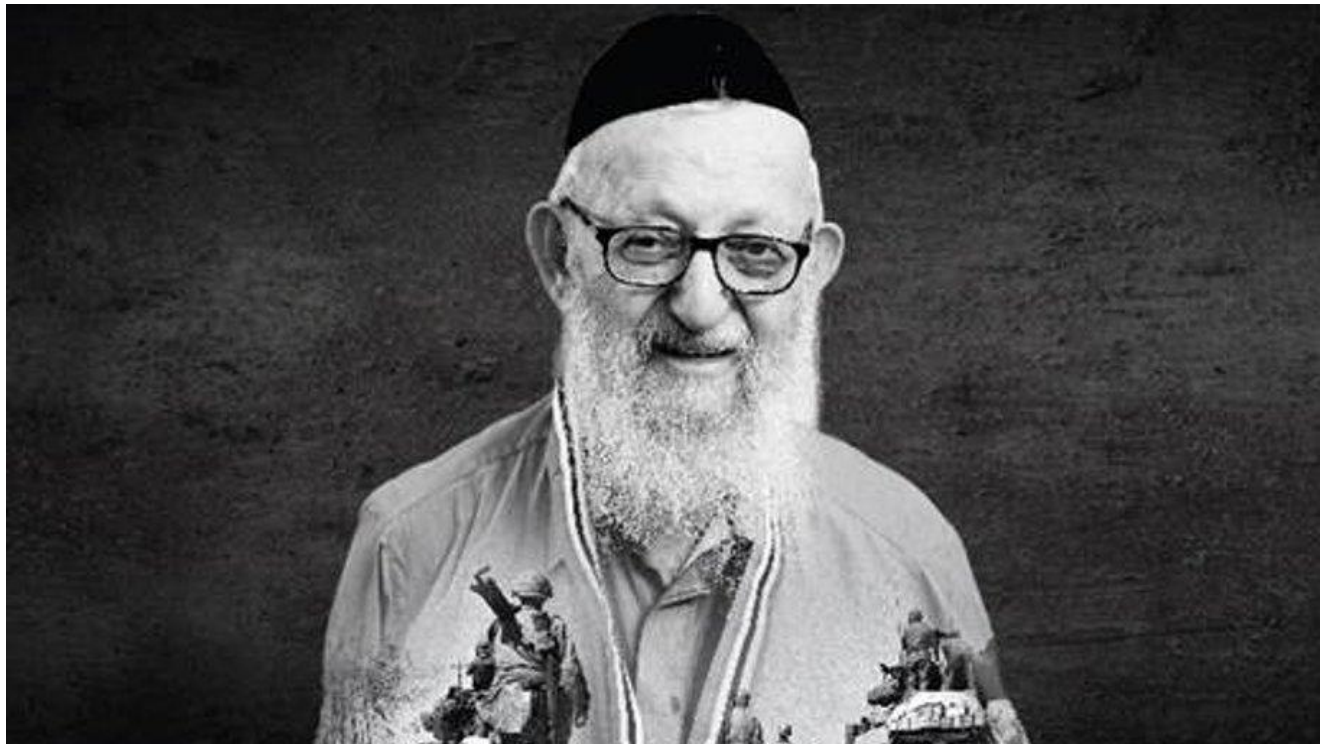
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My Bargain with G-d in North Korea POW Camp

By Shlomi Gil



Leonard Wisper's heroic return to Judaism.

Back in 1951, American draftee Leonard Wisper lay critically injured in a North Korean POW camp. With chances of survival minimal, he made a bargain with G-d that if he'd survive, he'd start keeping mitzvot.

The Korean War, which lasted from June 1950 to July 1953, began when communist-backed North Korea – aided by China and the Soviet Union – invaded South Korea. The United Nations, with the US providing 90 percent of the military personnel, came to South Korea's defense.



Leonard Wisper in U.S. military uniform during the Korean War

After the first two months of war, South Korean and dispatched US forces were forced back to a small area in the south known as the Pusan Perimeter. A counter offensive saw the UN forces beginning to advance, only to be cut off again by a million-strong Chinese army who joined with the North Koreans. During these reversals of fortune, South Korea's capital city of Seoul changed hands four times. The fighting ended three years after it began, incurring a death toll of 2.5 million people.

Wisper, who was 21 in 1950, didn't dream he'd be shipped out to join the forces on the Korean Peninsula. He grew up in Chicago to a Jewish family that had immigrated to the US from Poland so that his grandfather wouldn't be drafted to the Polish army.

"The *Zeide* was an observant Jew," says Wisper, "but when he came to America, the challenges of keeping mitzvot properly were too daunting, and so he went back to Poland, where he was later murdered in the Holocaust along with most of the family that remained there. My father stayed in America, though, but within a few years, his mitzvah observance dropped."

Wisper says the store where his father found a job required him to work on Shabbos, and like many others, "he felt he had no choice. He had to support us. The next generation, my siblings and me, grew up in a home where we would go to shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and didn't eat *chametz* on Pesach, but that was about it."

Lenny Wisper was in college and holding down a good job in auto repair – with no desire to serve in the military – when the draft notice came in the summer of 1951. "Army service was not part of my dreams," he says. "I had suffered from a spinal injury and was sure they wouldn't take me."

But the US, still reeling from World War II just a few years before, was under tremendous pressure and needed manpower. "At first they sent the American forces who'd remained in Japan to fight in Korea," he says, "but a few months after the war broke out they began to call up thousands of soldiers, especially since the Chinese, with their million-man army, joined North Koreans. So although I was far from perfectly fit, I was shipped out."

We didn't know much about Judaism, but when you're on your way to war at the other end of the world, who wouldn't want to pray?

Lenny was sent for basic training, and a few days before Yom Kippur, he boarded a military ship headed for Japan, along with 1,500 other soldiers trying to battle their seasickness on the way. "There was a religious soldier, maybe he even served as a rabbi, who gathered the Jewish soldiers to *daven* on Yom Kippur. We *davened*, even though we didn't know much about Judaism, and most of us were not religious at all. But when you're on your way to war at the other end of the world, who wouldn't want to pray?"

When the ship docked on Japanese shores, the fighters debarked and were sent to another training course before being deployed to the front. "At the time," recalls Wisper, "the only automatic weapons we had were some submachine guns left over from World War Two and that's what we used for training. Those guns had long bayonets, and they taught us how to attack first with the bayonets in order to stab the enemy before using the bullets."

Then the soldiers departed on small boats to Pusan, the large port city in South Korea that became its temporary capital during the war. The biggest shock for the thousands of soldiers coming from the mighty United States, he says, was the discovery that fighting against the North Koreans and their Chinese communist allies was an extremely complicated and painful endeavor.

“There was a lot of frustration,” Wisper, who worked as a machine gunner, says. “It was sort of like a ping pong game, but with bodies as the score card. Sometimes it was North Korea that captured territory and we liberated it and then they captured it again. Other times, we captured territory, the North Koreans liberated it, and we captured it again. This went on over and over again. In every such round, thousands of soldiers on both sides were killed.

Wisper realized that every day he was still alive was something of a miracle. “One of my jobs was to bring back the American soldiers who fell in these battles. The scenes were indescribably gruesome. Some of these men were my friends, they were in my unit. The South Koreans weren’t prepared for the invasion, and we, the American soldiers, needed time to mobilize against the intensity of the North Korean and Chinese forces. One time we got to a field where I saw some American soldiers lying on the ground. At first I thought they were resting, but then I realized they’d been killed by shelling.”

Split-Second Salvation

A few months into battle, Wisper realized that every day he was still alive was something of a miracle. And then came the direct hit to his outpost in the middle of the night.

“My partner was killed instantly, and I was knocked unconscious,” he says, replaying the scene he’s relived thousands of times over the last six decades. “When I came to, I heard the voices of Chinese and North Korean soldiers, but I couldn’t move. The pain was excruciating. I didn’t feel my legs, and one of my eyes was badly injured. It took me a few seconds to realize I was surrounded by enemy soldiers.”

When he was finally able to raise his head, he saw his friends, the other soldiers in his unit, lying sprawled all around. Most of them were dead; a few were critically wounded. “I also realized that I was going to be taken into captivity and we’d all heard the horrifying rumors about what happened to Americans taken prisoner by the North Koreans. I was in agony, but I forced myself not to moan or make a sound, hoping the enemy troops would leave the area without noticing I was alive – maybe that way I’d survive.”

It might have been a good plan, but a few minutes later, another injured soldier lying nearby began to groan in pain. The Chinese captors quickly came

over, realizing they had a prize – living, wounded Americans. Seconds later, Wisper and the others still among the living were dragged to a hiding place.

“I was thrown into a small bunker in the area,” he remembers. “The Chinese would build makeshift bunkers on all the battlefronts, and the one they dragged me into was already occupied by three frightened, injured Americans. To his credit, the Chinese soldier who had captured me pulled out a rice ball that was probably meant for him, and tossed it in my direction.

It was pretty clear that only a miracle could save me – but how to pray to G-d who I had basically ignored my entire life up to then?

“Still, I was pretty sure I was dead meat,” he continues. “For the Chinese, I was a burden because I was injured. This was just a holding bunker and they were going to march us to a bigger detention center, but since I couldn’t walk and I’d hold up the convoy, I assumed they’d just shoot me and finish me off.

“At that point it was pretty clear that only a miracle could save me – but how to pray to G-d who I had basically ignored my entire life up to then? So I focused and said, with every fiber of Jewishness I could muster up into my consciousness, ‘Merciful Father, if You help me get out of here I will return to You.’ I didn’t know the words of the prayers or Psalms then. I just spoke to G-d in my language, in my own words. I promised that I would begin to keep Torah and mitzvot if I emerged from there alive.”

After half a day in the bunker, bleeding and wounded, Wisper heard shelling and soldiers shouting in English. He realized that American troops had come to rescue them.

That split second, I got the strength to leap over, grab the grenade before it detonated and throw it back out of the bunker.

“An hour later, one of the Chinese guards peeked into the bunker, looked in my direction, and emitted a string of curses as he pulled out a grenade. That’s when I realized we were really finished. In a few seconds he’d toss the grenade into the bunker and we’d be blown to smithereens.

“I watched as he pulled the pin and threw the thing in – and somehow, in that split second, I got the strength to leap over, grab it before it detonated and throw it back out of the bunker, where it exploded in a blast of smoke and fire. The soldiers who were with me hugged me with a joy that’s hard to describe. ‘You saved our lives!’ they shouted. A few minutes later, American soldiers came and rescued us.

“They put me on a military jeep and took me to a field hospital, where they began to extract the shrapnel from my body. The shrapnel was embedded all over and it took hours to get the pieces out. One piece was a millimeter from my eye – only a miracle saved my vision.” Wisper was later sent to a hospital in northern Japan for recovery, and then returned to the US.

The Promise

The war raged on for another two years; with the cease-fire in 1953, Wisper was discharged from the army, but the memory of that oath in the bunker loomed large. “When I promised to do *teshuvah* (return to Jewish observance), I didn’t really understand what it meant,” he admits, “but when I returned home I discovered that it wasn’t so simple. There was no *teshuvah* movement then, no Aish and no Jewish outreach, but I knew I had to change my life.”



Aryeh (Leonard) Wisper with the South Korean ambassador.

He began to seek out Jewish centers in Chicago, but, he says, “In those days, even the religious rabbis in Chicago were pretty liberal by today’s standards. So I began to go to *shul* on Shabbos and to keep a few mitzvot, but I didn’t have the fire – I felt somehow that I wasn’t really fulfilling my promise.”

In the summer of 1957, Wisper made his first visit to Israel. It was a time when everyone had to dig in their heels – it was toward the end of the Austerity period when staple foods and supplies were rationed, and when Jordanian snipers

and infiltrators were a threat to daily life – but Wisper was unfazed. Something inside shifted, and when he returned to Chicago, he began wearing a *yarmulke* in public and had become fully mitzvah-observant.

At the time, a religious Israeli girl who worked at the Israeli consulate in Chicago was suggested as a match for him, and they were married soon after.

The Wispers made *aliyah* in 1965 with their two daughters. They first lived in Jerusalem, where they had a son, and soon afterward, they moved to Bnei Brak, right across the street from the great Rav Aharon Leib Steinman *ztz"l*.



Aryeh Leibish Wisper's "Ambassador for

“He was our special neighbor,” says Wisper. “I was still pretty new to Judaism, and for years I’d go in and ask him every halachic question I had. That was before he was ‘discovered,’ before tens of thousands of Jews would converge on his little, dilapidated apartment. But the Rosh Yeshivah never changed. Even as the leader of Orthodox Jewry, he always treated me the same way he did in the earlier years, and that’s how he treated everyone else as well.”

Wisper didn't think too much about his Korean adventures until 2011, when he heard that Korean ambassador to Israel, Ma Young-sam, was looking for Jewish soldiers who had fought in the Korean War, so that his government could express its gratitude. South Korean embassies annually honor veterans in the 16 countries that fought the North under the United Nations banner.

While Israel, a two-year-old struggling country at the time, didn't send soldiers to fight in the Korean War, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion did support America's pro-South efforts against the Soviet Union-backed North, and also sent \$100,000 in food items to South Korea – a substantial gift at the time, especially considering Israel's own precarious situation.

The Korean envoy spent several years tracking Jewish war veterans and discovered that about 4,000 Jewish soldiers were dispatched to South Korea. In Israel, he discovered seven veterans, Wisper among them.

Sixty years after Wisper saved his American comrades in that enemy bunker, he received a medal of honor from the South Korean ambassador.

Sixty years after Wisper saved his American comrades in that enemy bunker, he received a medal of honor from the South Korean ambassador, and – accompanied by his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, some of whom probably never even heard of the Korean War – delivered an emotional speech in which he eulogized the Jewish soldiers who had lost their lives in the region.

Wisper has been attending the South Korean embassy's ceremony every year since, and has developed a warm relationship with the embassy staff. The South Korean ambassador even visited Yeshiva Nesivos Olam to learn about its Torah learning methods. Wisper was his personal tour guide.

"Afterwards," says Aryeh Leibish Wisper, "we sat down at a festive banquet held in his honor and he related his dream to include Talmud studies in the South Korean study curriculum. We've all heard in the last few years how the South Koreans are fascinated by the Talmud and how it's being studied there, and for the ambassador to sit in a *beis medrash* in Israel, it was a special honor for him. For me, it was like coming full circle – my promise fulfilled in a way I would have never imagined."

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An ADHD Success Story

Hi. My name is Shmuel, and I am 28 years old.
Most of the people who know me simply call me Shmuly.
I am not used to telling stories. I'm the kind of guy who does better with action.
That is why it took me some time to put together all the parts of my personal story and write it down so that I can share it with you.
My story began about eighteen years ago.
I was ten years old, a pretty regular kid, just like everyone else except in one area - I had a really hard time sitting in one place for a prolonged period of time.
And when I say time, I don't mean what you probably think. My concept of time is different than most people's.
Too much time, for me, means a few seconds.
Yeah, I'm a spring, if you will.
If this would be today, I would surely get a diagnosis comprised of a string of initials (along with a pill or two), but in those days there weren't that many interpretations, so the nickname given to me was short and friendly, Shmuly the Spring.
Honestly, I didn't mind. I knew that it was true, and I could actually relate to the imagery.
Baruch Hashem, I had no complaints. I had incredible rabbeim who didn't make a big issue out of my hyperactivity.
Everyone in my class was already used to the fact that Shmuly the Spring is the one who is sent to bring the rebbe coffee in middle of class, and other such jobs, basically keeping me busy.
And truthfully, I liked the arrangement, too.
I would sit in front of the rebbe and try hard to listen and understand what he was teaching.
Then, when I couldn't focus anymore (usually after a few minutes), I would look for something to do.
At that point I would hear the rebbe's voice calling to me, Shmuly, please get us some more chalk. I would happily get up and run to perform the chore.
That was basically what my life in school was like.
One morning, as we waited for our rebbe to enter the classroom, the principal walked in instead. He stood behind the rebbe's desk and asked for silence.
I'm sorry to share this with you, he said, but your rebbe has suddenly fallen ill and had to undergo emergency surgery last night.
He will not be coming back for the next few weeks.
We were in shock. We loved our rebbe and were really worried about him.

The principal continued, Now, boys, let's say some Tehillim for his recovery.

We said some Tehillim with extra kavanah for our rebbe's speedy recovery.

That day, the principal taught us, but the following day he walked into our classroom with a man we didn't know.

Boys, the principal said, this is Rabbi Substitute. He is going to be your substitute rebbe until your regular rebbe gets better, be'ezras Hashem.

Rabbi Substitute walked over to the rebbe's desk, and the principal left the classroom.

I'm not sure what made me immediately realize that my life was not going to be easy with Rabbi Substitute.

Maybe it was the stern look on his face, or the hoarse voice with which he addressed us, but something told me there was going to be trouble soon.

I was right. It was only a few minutes later when I sensed a heavy shadow over me.

I looked up and found Rabbi Substitute staring angrily down at me through his somewhat-dirty glasses.

What are you busy with over there? he thundered.

I dropped the beautiful paper airplane I had just completed. The stunning plane did not have a chance inside Rabbi Substitute's clenched fist, and I felt my heart tearing inside me along with it.

I found myself standing shamefacedly in the principal's office. After recess was over, I returned to the classroom. But this scenario repeated itself over and over again in different variations.

After a few days of mounting frustration on all sides, my parents were called to the school.

In my class, all students must learn, Rabbi Substitute told them firmly. What do you think he's going to grow up to be like if he doesn't use his brain?

He refused to allow me to perform the various tasks that had been my lifeline until then.

Every day, I would be punished and sent out of the classroom in humiliation. I began to feel disappointed and disgusted with myself.

I always knew that I was not exactly a typical child.

I knew that I was better with my hands than with my head, but I always managed somehow, thanks to the energy that Hashem endowed me with and the fact that I loved to help people.

For Rabbi Substitute, however, these qualities meant nothing.

One day, Rabbi Substitute decided to call an emergency meeting to discuss my problems. My parents and I were both called in for a long, painful lecture.

I remember my father trying to say something like, Our Shmuly has other qualities. Maybe his head is less at work but he has amazing hands, but Rabbi Substitute didn't allow my father to say a word.

And here, I remember how Rabbi Substitute's face reddened. He pointed a finger at me and shouted, If you don't start using your head, you'll amount to nothing! Nothing!

Then he added under his breath, Good hands will make you a good plumber, nothing more.

The days passed, somehow, and finally, finally, our regular rebbe recovered and returned to the classroom.

I never saw Rabbi Substitute again.

With time, I even managed to forget his hurtful words. Most of the time.

Sometimes, unexpectedly, I would hear his words playing in my head and shrink into myself with humiliation.

When that happened, I would feel like an absolute nothing.

Is that all I could ever hope to amount to? A plumber? Could I really do nothing more? Was I truly worth nothing?!

I admit, though, that this did not happen often. Most of the time, I was busy performing the countless chores and tasks that my rabbeim came up with to keep me busy and confident.

I grew up, finished cheder, and then yeshivah ketanah. I was accepted to a good yeshivah gedolah thanks to my many other talents.

So maybe I was not the brightest boy in the class, but I had other things going for me.

The many small jobs I did in yeshivah helped me tremendously. The yeshivah and summer camps were where I felt proud and happy.

When I started shidduchim, I knew more or less what kind of girl I wanted to marry. A short while later, I met my wife who wanted me just as I was.

We got married, and I began my married life in kollel.

Of course, at the same time, I was searching for some action to fill up my day too; something that would keep me busy and allow me to feel good about myself.

I found that in Israel's medical emergency response team, a job that saves me from myself.

I do many shifts, am always first at the scene and the last to leave it.

Some people might make a face hearing that, but I love the drama and the action, and "more than anything else the tremendous chessed that I can perform for people in the most critical moments of their lives.

Slowly, I started climbing up the ranks. I did further training. At some point, MADA (Magen David Adam) became my second home.

One night, I woke up to the sound of the dispatcher calling all nearby volunteers to rush to an emergency nearby.

Apparently, someone had lost consciousness and needed help.

The address was nowhere nearby, but for some reason I decided to rush to the scene anyway.

I figured that there were not many volunteers in that area, and the late hour would make it even less likely that someone could get there quickly.

MADA's headquarters were also too far from the scene.

I jumped into my car and quickly drove over to the address the dispatcher had announced.

As soon as I arrived, I realized that I had indeed arrived first. I grabbed my first-aid kit and rushed up the stairs.

The panicked voices and the light coming from the apartment led me directly to an elderly man lying on the living room floor.

A woman stood next to him his wife, I presumed crying hysterically.

I quickly began checking his vitals and performing CPR. Things were not looking good.

No pulse. No breathing.

As I worked, a Hatzalah volunteer arrived at the scene and began working alongside me.

No pulse or breathing I reported to the station. Send MICU urgently. The Hatzalah volunteer and I continued working furiously.

This guy doesn't have much of a chance, I thought. Who knows how long he's been lying like this, in this condition.

But I'm used to leaving my thoughts for my own pillow for when I try to fall asleep at night. Right now, I had to focus on what I needed to do and do it.

The ambulance arrived and with it, more advanced equipment.

The full team and I continued to do our best, but nothing. The guy wouldn't wake up.

The team gave up, but I refused to. I continued to put in every bit of strength I could muster, without thinking.

Yair, a fellow paramedic, placed his hand on my shoulder. His eyes were telling me, Forget it, this is a lost cause.

But I kept going.

The other guys knew me already. They weren't going to try explaining to me for the umpteenth time that I was too naive.

I pushed. I pushed again. And then suddenly I felt something change.

I checked carefully and began screaming like a madman, There's a pulse! There's a pulse!

The paramedics looked at the patient and immediately realized that I was right. They all began working feverishly again.

Somehow, they managed to stabilize him and rushed him to the nearest hospital together with his tearful wife.

Honestly, I was very emotional as I watched them go.

I've been in this field for years, but it is still rare to succeed in performing a successful resuscitation - especially in such a case, where the man had been lying unconscious for so long.

I gathered my things and headed back home.

A month passed, and I nearly forgot the incident.

One morning, my phone rang. Hi, is this Shmuly, from MADA?

Yes, who am I speaking with?

The young man on the other end of the line told me that he was this elderly man's grandson.

My thoughts went back to that fateful night, and I asked him with some hesitation, "How is he?"

I wasn't sure what I was going to hear. I knew that not many people survive after being deprived of oxygen for so long, and even those who do survive are generally badly crippled as a result.

You have no idea, the grandson told me with obvious emotion. You gave us our grandfather back!

I was so moved that I could hardly get any words out of my mouth.

The young man told me that they had been searching all week long for the phone number of the angel who saved their grandfather. That was how he described me.

He told me that his grandfather had been discharged and is completely back to his usual self.

We would love to have you join us at the seudas hodaya that we are making in honor of this miracle!

I could not refuse. I still remembered the address, so I just asked him for the date and time.

On the day of the seudah, I came to the house again. The apartment was filled with family members and tables laden with cakes and candy.

They all welcomed me with hugs and joyful greetings. I have never met these people before, but it seemed that to them I was like family.

I was given a seat at the head of the table, next to a dignified-looking man with a white beard.

His face looked familiar but now I was seeing his face with a healthy coloring.

When he saw me, he stood up and enveloped me in a warm hug. I felt his tears wetting my shoulder, and then my own tears coursing down my cheeks.

He murmured words of thanks, and it was obvious that he was very, very emotional.

I myself was feeling my own storm of emotions and not only because of the opportunity I had been given to save another man's life.

With shocking clarity, I suddenly realized that this man who was now looking at me with such gratitude-filled eyes was none other than my childhood teacher, Rabbi Substitute.

It must have been his voice that made all the memories surface, but I had no doubt about it.

I gently asked him about his life and where he was from. Yes, it was him!

He did not seem to recognize me, but that was understandable. Unlike him, my own appearance had changed drastically since I was ten years old.

I was difficult for me to contain myself. I felt an unexplainable urge to tell him who I was.

I asked one of his sons, who was sitting next to me, to allow me to speak to his father privately.

He looked at me in surprise, but apparently, my status as the savior helped ward off questions.

He stood up and whispered into his father's ear.

I saw Rabbi Substitute's eyes looking at me, and then his head nodding in agreement.

We were led to a side room. After we both settled on the day bed in the room and the door closed behind us, I burst into uncontrollable tears.

I had planned to talk to him, but the wave of emotions was stronger than me. I myself had not realized, until that moment, just how deeply he had hurt me.

I felt his hands on my head, and then heard his soothing words trying to calm me. He obviously could not understand what was happening to me.

After I calmed down somewhat, I raised red-rimmed eyes and began to tell him who I was.

It took a few moments for him to recall.

You're Shmuly? he pointed a shaking finger at me. I saw understanding dawn, and his face suddenly became very white.

I felt a pang of panic. I had already seen his face looking like that. Slowly, however, his color returned. And then it was his turn to cry.

We did not exchange more than a few words, but to me it seemed like we had spent hours in deep conversation.

We simply didn't need any words. The tears said everything.

The deep hurt the frustration and the pain the insidious effect of his behavior toward me in the classroom and also, his regret, his remorse.

He hugged me again, and I returned the hug, feeling forgiveness wash over me. A huge rock was lifted from my chest.

And I told you that you'll amount to nothing, he whispered, his voice filled with indescribable regret.

He asked for my forgiveness again and again, and I told him I was fully mochel.

We walked back into the living room, both of us with red-rimmed eyes and blotchy faces. People looked at us in bewilderment.

When Rabbi Substitute reached his seat, he motioned for me to sit on the adjacent chair, but he himself remained standing.

He told everyone that he wanted to say a few words.

Within seconds, everyone fell silent. It was clear that they all wanted to know what had happened.

Rabbi Substitute first began by praising me for saving his life.

He especially emphasized the illogical efforts I had put in despite the fact that realistically, there was no longer any hope.

He focused on the main point, in his opinion, which was that I worked against all odds and used my heart, not my head.

Then he told everyone who I was and where we had first met.

He told them everything.

He repeated the words he had used then, at the fateful meeting with my parents, and the things he said about me in front of the entire class.

At this point, people were crying unabashedly.

In a broken voice he turned to me and asked for my forgiveness again.

I could not speak. I only nodded my consent, my own throat choked with tears.

Then, Rabbi Substitute ended in a heartfelt statement.

Twenty years ago, I told you that you do not use your head. Yet what saved me now was precisely the fact that you did not follow your head but your heart. Years ago, I thought you had a problem and were not thinking enough. Now I know that what you have is actually a huge heart.

He hugged me again, and I returned the hug.

That is my story.

It was not easy for me to write it all. You must have realized by now that I am not the sort of person who can easily sit and write things down. But I did it anyway, because I want you to always remember:

There are some kids who have a great head.

There are kids who have a great heart.

And they are all Hashem's children.

This powerful story was emailed to me by two of the subscribers to our weekly email. I am not sure where the story was originally published.

SHABBOS STORIES FOR SIMCHOS TORAH 5779

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Simchas Torah Treasures

Dancing Just for Hashem



Rabbi Yechiel Spero writes a story which took place in Yerushalayim during the second World War, as Rommel and his Afrika Corps were getting closer to the Holy Land. The mood in the country was full of fear and anxiety.

The Shomer Emunim Shul, in Me'ah She'arim, was the place to be on Simchas Torah. The dancing and singing would be so uplifting that it could not be matched by anything at any other time of year.

That year, however, the Davening was without the usual heart and passion. After a few minutes of Hakafos, the Rav of the Shul, Rav Aharon Roth, ordered the dancing to stop because he wanted to address the crowd.

He said, “My dear friends, I would like to share a story with you that I feel has great meaning for us. There was once a king who decided to make a very festive and unique birthday party for himself. He sent out letters throughout the land inviting the most graceful dancers and the finest musicians, and they were all to assemble dressed in the most lavish outfits for the grand event.

All was arranged and the special day arrived. The scene was truly fitting for a king’s party. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, the king noticed a slight commotion, as an elderly, crippled man struggled to make his way to the dance floor. Not only was he handicapped, he was also blind, and he bumped into the tables and chairs.

After much exertion, the man finally made it to the dance floor and began to hobble around in a makeshift dance using his crutches for support. The king was mesmerized, and he ignored the rest of the show, focusing on this man who was doing his best to keep his balance.

One of the king’s servants was taken aback by this, and asked the king for an explanation. He said, ‘My king, we have the finest dancers and musicians here, and yet, you are only watching that poor man who is hobbling around on his crutches.’

The king smiled and explained, ‘You are right. All those who have gathered here tonight are truly talented and their performance is certainly exemplary. But, let me ask you, are they not deriving personal enjoyment from their performance? Are they dancing only for me, or are they also enjoying dancing for the king and being in the spotlight?’

“That man has nothing to gain from his dancing. He can’t see and he can’t dance. Yet, he does so because I requested it. He is acting solely for me! You can even see the pain on his face, but he still continues to dance just because he wants to please me. That is why his dancing is so precious to me — because it is for me!”

Rav Aharon concluded, “My dear friends, in past years our dancing was different. We danced for Hashem, but we also danced for ourselves. We derived personal joy and benefit from the dancing. This year, however, with war all around us and the very fate of the Jewish People is on our minds, we have the unique opportunity to dance solely for Hashem! Tonight, let us dance, but just for Hashem!”

Reprinted from the Simchas Torah 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

Why Rav Diskin Had the Hakofos Repeated in Lomza

Rabbi
Yehoshua Leib Diskin



Before Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin became Rav in Yerushalayim, he was the Rav of Lomza, Poland. Simchas Torah was exceptionally joyous in Lomza. On Erev Simchas Torah after Minchah, the entire community gathered before the home of the Rav and accompanied him to Shul under a Chupah.

The community leaders stood under the Chupah with the Rav, and everyone clapped and danced, as if accompanying a Choson. The Hakafos continued until the late hours of the night. One year, immediately after the Hakafos, the Rav motioned that he wanted to speak to the Gabbai.

The Rav whispered something in the Gabbai's ears, and the Gabbai then immediately went to the Bimah and asked for silence. He made the following announcement:

"According to the Rav's request, we are beginning the Hakafos all over again!" Though it was very late and the people were exhausted, they listened to the Rav's directive, and didn't ask any questions. The Chazan began saying 'Atah Ho'raisah', and everyone said it along with him. The Hakafos began all over again, and the congregation danced with their remaining energy.

When the Hakafos were finally complete, the exhausted congregation went home to make Kiddush. Rav Yehoshua Leib's son, Rav Yitzchok Yerucham, later asked his father, "What was wrong with the first Hakafos that we had to repeat them?"

Rav Yehoshua Leib replied, "There was a certain Talmid Chochom at the Hakafof who did not receive an appropriate Hakafah, according to his stature. Therefore, it was worthwhile to repeat the entire Hakafof, just to correct the injustice that was done to him, and restore Kavod HaTorah!"

Reprinted from the Simchas Torah 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

A Blast from the Past (October 14, 1997)

A San Diego Mother Thanks a Kehilla for an Unforgettable Simchat Torah Hakafot

By Chanah Sarah Abrams

A nine year old boy was walking home from shul on Shemini Atzeret eve. "Abba," he asked, with all sincerity, "could we bring the Torah home on Simchat Torah?"

"No, son, the Torah stays in shul, except perhaps for hakafot around the shul," he replied factually. "No one can take the Torah home."

The boy broke into uncontrolled sobs, while Abba tried to understand how he felt. After a few minutes, the son confided that he wanted his Ima, who was home in bed with cancer, to kiss the Torah on the holiday. Abba knew his tears.

Yes, it's a true San Diego story. My name is Chana Abrams and I am challenged with a recurrence of breast cancer.

But there's more to the story. Although I am observant, my holidays have not been filled with synagogue prayers and pretty dresses and Yom Tov food. Rather my holidays were filled with turning on IV pumps and looking out the window.

On Simchat Torah day I was sitting on my recliner in my living room, trying to distract myself from the effects of chemotherapy and bed sores when I heard the sound of singing coming from the direction of the shul (we live only one block from Chabad House on Montezuma Avenue). A smile came to my face as I thought of my six year old riding on his Abba's shoulders and my nine year old dancing in circles.

The singing became louder and louder -- and a tear, the first of many, came to my eyes as I witnessed the whole congregation of Chabad House -- men in talleisim [prayer shawls], women in pretty dresses, children with flags, babies in strollers, friends and strangers alike -- march to my front lawn and dance the hakafot.

I treasure the memory as I watched my six year old waving a flag while sitting on a yeshiva boy's shoulders. It was priceless to see my husband dance with the Torah and smile with deep simcha [joy], transcending our family's troubles.

My nine year old son came in with the biggest and proudest smile that said "I love you" in the deepest way I have ever felt.

Then my closest friends came in, representatives of the shul, to wish me a refua shleima [complete recovery], the biggest get-well wish in my life of cards of encouragement and support and a speedy recovery. And yes, I did kiss the Torah! The festivities returned to shul, and I discovered a new-found simcha that carries me through my challenges. The simcha of love. The simcha of compassion. The simcha of mitzva.

Thank you to Rabbi Yonah Fradkin for his ability to hear the tears of a child, and for his display of Ahavat Yisrael, unconditional love of a fellow Jew, which is what Chabad stands for. Simcha, mitzva, compassion: this is what Chabad does best.



Rabbi Yonason Abrams, son of Chanah Sarah Abrams

I would like to thank Rabbi Yona Fradkin and the entire congregation for this most untraditional display of bikur cholim (the mitzva of visiting the sick). Please know that it gives me renewed strength and hope as I face life's challenges and come to a place of complete healing and Moshiach

(The following story was emailed to me last year by one of my most enthusiastic subscribers – Reb Shabse Fisher. It was reprinted from the October 14, 1997 edition of L’Chaim Weekly. It originally appeared in the N;Shei Chabad Newsletter. Mrs. Chanah Sarah Abrams, a”h, the author of the article unfortunately was nifteret eight months before the L’Chaim Weekly article on 24 Tevet 5757. May her memory continue to inspire her family and all who knew her. Today her nine-year-old son Yonasan is a 30-year old emissary of Lubavitch and with his wife Netanya continue the work started by Rabbi Yitzy and Dina Horowitz of Chabad of Temecula, California.)