**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Shemini 5776**

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**Cast Your Bread…#40**

**Rabbi Rosenbush’s Letter**

**On Behalf of a Child**

 The home of R’ Rosenbush was always a beehive of activity. People came at all hours of the day and night to seek words of Torah, guidance, advice and blessing from this very prominent Rosh Yeshiva and Torah personality. R’ Rosenbush received them all with a warm smile and endless patience.

 The scene in his home was the same on the evening before his overseas flight to Canada. None of his visitors could detect that he was due to leave Eretz Yisrael to have surgery performed for a malignant tumor that posed a danger to his life.

 Just when the family finally thought they were settled to sleep for the night, the shrill ring of the telephone at 12 a.m. sliced through the silence. R’ Rosenbush’s son hurried to grab the phone, but his father had awakened and also picked up the extension in his room.

 The caller, Mr. Mencahem Raful, was desperately seeking R’ Rosenbush’s help in placing his four-year-old disabled son in an institution The situation had become urgent, yet the Shorashim Institution, for which the boy was suited, would not accept him because Mr. Raful was not yet an Israeli citizen. Mr. Raful asked R’ Rosenbush if he could use his influence with a board member of Shorashim, with whom the Rav was very friendly, to have the school accept the boy.

 Greatly distressed by the man’s plight, R’ Rosenbush asked him to come over to his home. Despite his frailty, and over his family’s protests, R’ Rosenbush rose from his bed and sat down to write a moving letter to the board member on behalf of the Raful child. R’ Rosenbush felt drained and exhausted from the effort of writing the letter. However, he told his family, “I can nap on the plane tomorrow, but this poor Jew cannot sleep at night. How can I refuse to help him?” At 12:15 a.m. the doorbell rang. With tears of gratitude, Mr. Raful thanked R’ Rosenbush for the letter. After a few hours of sleep, R’ Rosenbush and his son prepared to leave to the airport. In Canada, the test results made it clear that surgery was the only option. The cost of the operation was astronomical, and the surgeon discerned R’ Rosenbush’s concern.

 Being that R’ Rosenbush was somewhat of a VIP in Israel, the surgeon suggested that they speak to the hospital director about the hospital’s policy of reducing its fees for important people. He explained that the hospital’s public image benefited from servicing famous personalities, thus the reduced fee arrangement.

 R’ Rosenbush’s son set up an appointment for the next day with the director. R’ Rosenbush felt terribly uncomfortable portraying himself as an important personage, but he really had no choice. When they introduced themselves, the director noted that the name Rosenbush sounded familiar.

 He thought a moment and then pulled out a folder from his desk drawer. He handed R’ Rosenbush a letter. It was none other than the letter R’ Rosenbush had written for Mr. Raful on the night before he left Eretz Yisrael! It seems that the board member in Israel had faxed this letter to the hospital director, who served as Chairman of the Board of the Shorashim Institute, asking him to have the Raful child accepted based on the recommendation of the highly esteemed R’ Rosenbush.

 The hospital director seemed amused at this interesting turn of events. R’ Rosenbush began pleading the case of the Raful child, as if it was the purpose of his trip to Canada. The director agreed to arrange for the child’s acceptance into Shorashim. He also authorized a sizable reduction in R’ Rosenbush’s hospital fees! (There Is No Such Thing as Coincidence)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5776 email of The Weekly Vort.*

**Dark Days for**

**Jews in Brussels**

**By Dr. Yvette Alt Miller**

**The terror attacks and subsequent lockdown are having a devastating effect on the community of 15,000 Jews.**

 The normally busy morning rush hour turned deadly in Brussels on Tuesday, March 22, 2016, when a series of bombings at Brussels’ Zaventem International Airport and the busy Maelbeek metro train station killed 34 and injured hundreds of commuters, many seriously.

 ISIS claimed responsibility for the carnage.

 Brussels immediately went into a lockdown, with residents warned to stay indoors. It was a familiar echo of the aftermath of the Paris attacks four months earlier, when Belgian officials also asked Brussels residents to stay indoors while police searched for the terrorists, who were thought to have been based in the Belgian capital.

 For Brussels’ 15,000-strong Jewish community, the terror attacks and subsequent lockdown are having a devastating effect. In exclusive Aish.com interviews, Jewish residents of Brussels speak of a community that is subdued and fearful, and which increasingly sees little future for Jewish life in their city.

 Ever since the May 24, 2014 attack on the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels in which a gunman opened fire, killing four, the Jewish community has been on high alert. “We have a lot of military guards the past few months in front of our Jewish places,” recounts Isabelle Steinkalik to Aish.com. Originally from Paris, Mrs. Steinkalik has lived in Brussels since her marriage 28 years ago, and has seen the community change from being relatively secure to feeling under siege. “It’s sad but If the guards are here, we feel their protection. It's secured,” she explains.

 Shimon Bretholz, a Jewish community worker, describes the massive security presence that always accompanies Jewish activities in Brussels differently. “It...massively destroys us all.” The never-ending fear and feeling of always being on high alert are exhausting.

 The week of the attack was meant to be a light moment when Brussels Jewish community would come together to celebrate Purim with some high profile communal events. Residents were planning a major Purim party for the whole city and expected a thousand attendees, all hearing the Book of Esther together and celebrating the holiday.

 Instead, all public events have been cancelled. In the hours after the attacks, Brussels’ Jewish communal leaders set up a situation room, monitoring the security in their city. "They fear there will be more attacks and (warn against) taking any unnecessary risks,” Rabbi Menachem Margolin, CEO of the Brussels-based European Jewish Association, explained to Israeli newspapers.

 Rabbi Margolin, whose office is located next to the bombed Maelbeek metro station, says, “The Jewish community here in Brussels and in Europe in general is not surprised… We’ve been receiving alerts for a long time now. Despite the shock the city experienced, we were not surprised. Of course, we feel the concern and the pressure, but we were really not surprised by everything that’s going on in the city. It was only a matter of time before such an attack happened.”

 “Today was awful, unbelievable, such darkness…” Isabelle Steinkalik recounted to Aish.com. Brussels looked like a “death city. People are afraid. When it was just terrorism against Jewish people they didn’t so deeply care. Now it’s changed. People are realizing terrorists can kill anybody.”

 Brussels’ main Jewish school dismissed its students at 12:30, asking parents to pick up their children one at a time to avoid having a crowd in front of the building. Brussels resident and community activist Shimon Bretholz was one of the terrified parents picking up their children. “There is no future for Jews in Brussels,” he adamantly told Aish.com. “There is also not a future for Jews in Europe.” He would like to move to Israel, he explained, but first needs to find a job.

 Isabelle Steinkalik concurs; Brussels’ Jews are leaving, moving to Israel and other places. Rates of aliyah increased 25% in 2015 for Belgian Jews; overall about 200 Belgian Jews relocate to Israel each year.

 According to Mrs. Steinkalik, it’s mostly the young who are better equipped to start over who are moving. “They believe in the future and can work everywhere. It's more difficult for the ‘older’ people; not everybody has so much money they can build another life in a foreign country.”

 “Purim is cancelled,” one Jewish resident sadly explained. "We are going to have sad days of Purim. No celebrations. These certainly are dark days for us and there is great concern in the streets. We will make made modest celebrations in the house," Shimon Bretholz told an Israeli newspaper soon after the attacks.

 Later in the day, speaking with Aish.com, his attitude had evolved. “Of course I will go to synagogue to hear the Megilla,” he declared. Brussels’ public Purim celebrations may have been cancelled, but the Jewish community is quietly resolved. Purim celebrations will continue in people’s homes and in synagogues, as residents question the long-term future of Brussels Jewish community.

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

**Jews in Jail**

**By Larry Gordon**

 In a sense, they have hit bottom. They are down and out, often with nobody to turn to except the good people at the Aleph Institute. They are Jews in jail and prison, and as Purim and Pesach approach, we are all asked to think about them on some level.

 The large number of people incarcerated in the United States is an issue in the campaign for the presidency. Jewish prisoners make up a tiny fraction of the more than 2.2 million people who are currently in these prisons scattered around the U.S.

 So how many Jews are actually imprisoned? According to Aaron Lipskar and Mendy Katz, who work around the clock as they deal with the needs of Jewish prisoners, there are currently 4,000 prisoners who identify themselves as Jewish. If you are interested in Orthodox Jewish inmates, the number bandied about is around 250.

 The subject of Jews in jail comes to the fore particularly at this time of year. The Aleph Institute teams are gearing up to send Megillahs, mishloach manos, and even graggers to Jewish prisoners. To whatever extent possible, taking into consideration the restrictions of the environment they find themselves in, they can celebrate the festive holiday.

 The preparations for Passover—four weeks down the road—are even more painstaking and challenging for the people of Aleph. In our conversation over the phone earlier this week, Rabbi Katz, speaking from his office in South Florida, said that next week he will be traveling to New Jersey, where a friend and donor to the organization has made a warehouse available for the preparation of packages for Pesach to be sent to prisons and prisoners around the country.

 The Aleph Institute has its origins in the 1970s, when the Lubavitcher Rebbe made mention in a discourse of his concern for the well-being of Jews serving time behind bars. Rabbi Sholom Ber Lipskar, the energetic longtime rabbi of The Shul in Surfside, Florida, answered the Rebbe’s call and said that he wanted to take the initiative to reach out to Jewish inmates. The Rebbe started the process by writing a check to serve as the catalyst to begin the new group’s activities.

 Over the last 40 years, Aleph has provided hope for the future to those who would otherwise be languishing hopelessly in prisons. And they continue that life-giving and lifesaving work today as well.

 Rabbi Katz says that the relationships they have developed with prison officials allows them in some instances to intervene and arrange for proper placement for inmates so as to facilitate their religious observance.

 Jews are not immune to running afoul of the law. The community’s roots in Bible or Torah inspiration over the generations might be part of the reason why offenses punishable by imprisonment are committed so seldom by Jews in this country. The fact that Jews consist of only 2.7% of the national population is an obvious reason as well.

 Though the numbers are small, they are nevertheless a little too high for many of us. I don’t know what it is like in other communities, but in our community the idea of imprisonment brings with it a badge of shame. After all these years, it is still shocking when word trickles down that a member of our community is going to jail.

 On the matter of certain noteworthy cases, the discussion with the Aleph personnel is sensitive but still open, as some of these cases are public and in the news. For example, we discussed the case of Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin, a name well known and a man who has now been imprisoned for almost 7 years of a 27-year sentence. Rubashkin is serving his time at the medium-security facility in Otisville, New York. The reason for the higher-level prison is a result of the length of the sentence and the amount of money involved in the crime the prisoner was ultimately convicted of.

 Otisville is better known for its so-called “camp,” where low-level offenders are housed. Aleph knows this facility well, as it is the one preferred by observant Jews if they have to serve a prison term.

 Both Aaron Lipskar and Mendy Katz know almost all of the inmates there well. This location is preferred because, as Katz says, it’s the one prison in the country where there is a minyan three times a day and where yamim tovim like Purim and Pesach can be properly observed. Or at least they can be celebrated or observed as well as possible under the circumstances.

 A more recent case, the one where several members of the New York community were convicted of involvement in attempting to force a man to give his wife a get by threatening him with violence, has also been prominent of late on the Aleph Institute radar screen.

 As might be expected, the U.S. Prison Bureau is a cold bureaucracy concerned with whatever rehabilitation or punishment prison offers rather than involving itself in the personal needs of individual prisoners. The idea of a Megillah reading for Jewish inmates, or even a Pesach Seder that goes on to midnight even though there is a usual 9 p.m. curfew, is precisely amongst the accomplishments of Aleph over the last four decades.

 Arranging for Jewish prisoners to serve their time in the most proper environment possible is another challenge frequently within the organization’s purview. Aleph officials told us that while Rabbi Mendel Epstein—sentenced to 10 years in the get case—is in need of medical care and was referred to the Butner, North Carolina prison hospital, it now seems that his sentence will be served at Fort Dix, New Jersey—a low-security facility, where he will be closer to home and his family.

 Others involved in the same case will for the most part be going to the “camp” at Otisville. This is despite being involved in what has been categorized as a violent crime, which would not ordinarily qualify them for this minimal-security type of confinement.

 Over Purim, 150 young men will be visiting Jewish prisons around the U.S. in order to read Megillas Esther for the inmates. The prisoners—many alone and in far-off places, distant from friends and family—will observe a traditional Purim. And a few weeks later, they will be receiving provisions for Pesach and special permission to attend a Seder led by many of these same young men who are heeding the Rebbe’s call not to forget that part of society in the nation’s prison system.

 The observance of Purim and Pesach for inmates is probably the more well-known aspect of what the Aleph Institute does. Beyond these high-visibility events are the everyday requests from Jews in jail for kosher food where it is not otherwise available. Katz says that Aleph has purchased over 100 pairs of tefillin to fill requests from inmates and wherever possible to help in providing and bringing some semblance of Jewish life to them.

 I cannot write a prison essay without mentioning Dovi Mutterperl, who receives this newspaper in the maximum-security facility in Fallsburg, New York. Dovi is an impressive young man who got into trouble as a teenager and was sentenced to nine years of confinement. Today, he is a new person and will hopefully be out by June 2017. Mutterperl does not have to be in a maximum-security facility but has chosen to remain there because it is located in the Catskills, near frum communities. As a result, he receives a lot of visitors, especially over the summer, and local yeshivas send students there to visit and put together minyanim on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as well as on some of the chagim.

 So no matter how you spin it, it is not an attractive situation to be in. Mendy Katz says, “In prison, you lose everything. As a result, many turn to and try to get in touch with religion. That is when we are there for these Jewish inmates. They appreciate that they are not forgotten.”

*Reprinted from the March 25, 2016 edition of the 5 Towns Jewish Times.*

**Dustin Hoffman Knows**

**He’s a Jew. Now What?**

**By** [**Lieba Rudolph**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/4433/jewish/Lieba-Rudolph.htm)



Dustin Hoffman (PBS)

 Purim is an auspicious time for revealed good for the Jewish nation: G‑d can save us from anything, just like He did in ancient Persia. Haman, the irredeemable anti-Semite, maneuvered a death decree against every last Jew in the land. Through Mordechai and Esther, G‑d performed “miracles within nature,” saving our people from annihilation, inspiring Jews for generations to be bold, hopeful, and unified in our commitment to G‑d and Torah, even in the face of annihilation.

 You’re probably asking, Isn’t this story getting old? The answer is, yes. But it’s about to be over.

 Exactly when and how our people’s Final Redemption will happen, I don’t know, but I do know the Lubavitcher Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—said it can happen at any time. It’s up to each of us to be invested in the process: one small mitzvah transforms the world.

 Can you imagine getting Hollywood behind the effort? It would seem unlikely, but it’s not impossible now that a legendary actor has discovered his Jewish soul.

 Dustin Hoffman sobbed, “I’m a Jew,” on a recent episode of PBS’s, “Finding Your Roots,” when he learned the pained and often tragic fate of his ancestors in Soviet Russia.

 He may not have known what hit him at first, but by now, he’s probably disconnected his phone: There’s a whole mishpachah looking to encourage him on his Jewish journey.

 So add me to the list. Why shouldn’t I try, too? The Purim timing is perfect—for me, for him, for all of us, really—to act on behalf of our people.

**Dear Mr. Hoffman,**

 You probably understand by now that your father sought to spare you from Jewish pain. But you also understand that he didn’t. He couldn’t.

 Because when you cried, “I’m a Jew,” it was the cry of your Jewish soul, yourneshamah. And your Jewish soul is part of G‑d. You can conceal it, but you can’t eliminate it.

 Welcome to the club, Mr. Hoffman! Here, you’re just a Jew. Lucky you, though. You learned about your Jewish ancestors.

 Now you know that the Soviets murdered both your Jewish grandfather and your Jewish great-grandfather. You know your Jewish great-grandmother endured five years in a Russian concentration camp before arriving in America.

 Just so you could be a movie star?

 Don’t get me wrong. I’m sure she would have tremendous nachas from your success. But now you know how much pain she and others endured in order for you to achieve it.

 So what would your great-grandmother want to you to do now, as a Jew?

You probably have a packed social calendar, so it might be hard for you to start keeping Shabbos the way she did. And she would love to see you follow Jewish dietary laws—you are what you eat, right?—but, well, let’s just say that keeping kosher is a big commitment.

 One thing your great-grandmother would surely love is for you to see what’s happening in Russia today. Jewish life is thriving there; it’s filled with yeshivahs, synagogues and even kosher restaurants.

 It’s mind-boggling to think how our nation’s fate turns in the blink of an eye, how we never can rest. But we are rapidly approaching a new era. Just think about how fast technology is advancing, even the fact that you’re reading this. The spiritual worlds are changing just as quickly.

 It’s all part of G‑d’s vast, eternal plan to give the Jewish story a happy ending, to transform our pain into joy.

 Your great-grandmother undoubtedly knew about Moshiach, the Messiah. Jews have prayed for the Redemption for thousands of years, ever since theTemple was destroyed in Jerusalem. Many Jews alive today are unaware that a final Redemption was G‑d’s purpose for creating the world. Some don’t even think Moshiach should be included in the script.

 But now you know about the big picture. The world is G‑d’s stage. He is the Director. You and I and every single Jew play an essential role in helping the world to understand this. Until that era arrives, all of our Jewish souls cry.

 Mr. Hoffman, whatever you do as a Jew will help to hasten the Redemption. You’re just the person to start a trend of giving tzedakah to schools where Jewish children learn Torah. It’s not too late for you to start learning Torah yourself. I know about a thousand rabbis who would be happy to help you.

 But whatever you do, please do something. Do it now, and let the whole world know about it. You learned about your roots for a reason: so you would know who’s up there rooting for you.

 You’ve got a new role, Mr. Hoffman. Break a leg!

**Sincerely,**

Lieba (just like your great-grandmother) Rudolph

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