**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas shemini 5775**

Volume 6, Issue 31 29 Nissan 5775/ April 18, 2015

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

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**An Occasion for a Special Yom Tov Celebration**

Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates an inspiring story (Touched by a Story). In the early part of the twentieth century, money was a scarce commodity, especially for Jews. Materialism was not the primary focus in life, and the little things that might not matter as much today, had much greater value at that time. Clothes were a luxury. Hard-earned money was spent only for something important.

A dress for the mother was important, but it was a process that took time. It entailed deciding on the fabric, design, and color. Then there were the measurements that were taken at different intervals of the garment's creation. In other words, purchasing a dress was an "event."

The story takes place in the early 1900's, as the family of Yitzchak, an outstanding young boy of eleven, waited in anticipation for the new dress the father had ordered for the mother. It would be the first new dress she would have in years. Pesach was coming soon, and what better time than Yom Tov to put on the new dress for the first time.

The entire family waited eagerly in anticipation of the arrival of the new dress. Finally, news came that it was ready, but the mother was not going to put it on until Yom Tov. It was just not right.

Yitzchak was an exceptional student who was very adept at his Torah studies. Although young in age, he had skipped a few classes and was already studying with boys much older than himself. He came home a few days before Pesach and told his mother that he had just completed Mesechta Bava Kamma.

His mother beamed with pride. Yitzchak didn’t make much of the accomplishment, but his mother was thrilled. The next evening, Yitzchak came home from yeshivah to be greeted by an astonishing sight. The table, covered with Shabbos linen, was set with their finest china; the candles were lit; and - his mother was wearing her brand new dress that she had been saving for Yom Tov!

Yitzchak was shocked. After taking a few moments to compose himself, he asked, “What is all of this? It is not Shabbos and it is not Yom Tov. Why are you wearing the dress that you were saving for Pesach? What is the happy occasion?”

His mother looked glowingly at Yitzchak, smiled and said, “You are correct. I was saving the dress for Yom Tov. What greater Yom Tov is there, however, than when my son completes a Mesechta of Gemara? There is nothing more special to me than my son's Torah learning! If you are making a siyum, then I want to celebrate with you!”

Yitzchak never forgot this incident. He knew how proud his mother was of his achievements, and he was now acutely aware of the value she placed upon them. As he continued to complete one Mesechta after another, his mother's message reverberated within him. As Yitzchak grew into the venerable HaRav Yitzchak Hutner, zt”l, Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, he imparted this lesson to his thousands of students!

*Reprinted from “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.”*

**It Once Happened**

**The Boys Who Gave Vodka to a Goat and Disrupted a Yeshiva**

Once at a Chasidi**c** gathering, Rabbi Avraham Zaltzman told a story about his yeshiva days in the town of Lubavitch nearly a century ago:

I was only 12 - but so wild and uncontrollable that I simply couldn't sit and study Torah. So what happened? I, along with two other boys of similar nature, was given various odd jobs to keep myself busy in positive ways.

One of these jobs was to milk a few goats at a nearby farm and supply milk to the pupils. But this too became boring. So one terrible day, desperate for some fun, my friends and I somehow managed to get one of the goats to drink vodka, led the intoxicated animal to the entrance of the large study hall where all the pupils were immersed in Talmudic study, and pushed it in.

The goat, totally oblivious to the holiness of the place, jumped onto tables, knocked over several rabbis, and scattered books and papers in all directions. It was hours before the studies could be restored and, of course, it was no secret who was to blame.

The three of us were summoned to the principal Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Shneersohn (son of the Rebbe Rashab - Shalom Dovber Shneersohn, fifth Rebbe of Chabad and founder of the yeshiva), where we were ordered to pack up our belongings and leave. With no other choice we did as we were told, and several hours later were waiting in the train station at the nearby city of Rodna, suitcases in hand, to return to our homes.

But suddenly I turned to my friends and said, "What are we doing? We can't leave! We must go back and plead for mercy!"

But the others just shook their heads. "It won't work," one answered. "Didn't you see the look on the principal's face? He doesn't want to see us again. We're finished!" The other boy agreed. But I wouldn't give up. Before the train arrived I managed to convince one of the boys to come back with me and give it a try.

We said good-bye to our third friend and trudged back to Lubavitch with no real idea what our next step was, but I was determined not to go down without a fight. We couldn't go back to the principal; he was too angry. And the Rebbe, the principal's father, also wasn't the one to approach; he would never override his son's decision, especially in this situation.

Our only chance, we decided, was the principal's grandmother, Rebbetzin Rivkah. She had a wonderful, warm heart and was a mother for all the boys in the yeshiva. She cooked, sewed, and washed for them as well as tended to them in times of illness and need. Maybe she could help.

We went to her house and knocked on the door. When she answered, I poured out my heart.When I was done, her answer was to the point. "I can't go against the decision of my grandson; he's the principal. The only one who might be able to do that is my son, the Rebbe. But I can't talk to him about this either. I simply can't mix in."

Then she brightened. "But, what I can do is this: every morning at ten my son sits in his room and drinks a cup of tea. Come tomorrow morning and I'll show you where the room is . . . . but you will have to do the talking."

My friend and I found some place to sleep that night and the next morning I reported to the Rebbetzin while my friend, who was simply too afraid, waited outside. She let me in, pointed me to the room, whispered "Good luck," and watched as I bravely approached the door.

The door was open. When the Rebbe saw me standing there he looked up, stared at me for a moment, and asked what I wanted. "I want to learn in Lubavitch." I was almost crying.

"Lubavitch?" The Rebbe smiled, motioning me to come closer. "But there are so many other good yeshivas! Slobodka, Navordek," and he rattled off all the other Torah academies, about 20 of them, in the area.

"But I want to learn here!" I whined.

The Rebbe smiled at my reaction, and when I saw the smile I began to cry. This in turn made the Rebbe laugh, which made me cry even harder.

Suddenly the Rebbe became serious. "We will think about it. Come back later today."

I backed away, sniffling and wiping my eyes with my sleeve. Suddenly I stopped, took two steps forward which put me back in the entrance of the room, and just stood there, staring sheepishly at the floor. "Nu? What do you want now?" the Rebbe asked.

"Uh, I have a friend," I answered. "He's waiting outside."

The Rebbe leaned back thoughtfully. "A friend, is it? Well, we will think about him also. Come back in a few hours."

Well, the story has a happy ending. We returned to the Rebbe a few hours later. The Rebbe took us into his son's office to speak to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, said a few words, and left.

His son imposed a stiff fine: we had to learn tens of pages of Talmud and Chassidut by heart. Nevertheless, he accepted us back in!

And that's the story - how my broken heart got me back into yeshiva.

Rabbi Mendel Futerfas, a well-known Chasid, was also present at this gathering, and he commented:

"Tell me, what made the Rebbe accept you back into the yeshiva?"

"That's the point of the story," explained Rabbi Zaltzman. "Because I wanted so much to learn in Lubavitch that I actually wept! That's how much a person should want to study Torah and Chasidic teachings; that his heart is breaking!"

"Nope!" said Reb Mendel. "Your broken heart is not what got you back into Lubavitch. The reason the Rebbe took you back was because you worried for your friend. You thought of another Jew. That's why he took you back. Because of your brotherly love!"

*Reprinted from the Vayikra 5775 edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. Originally printed in the Beis Moshiach Magazine*

**Sparks of Greatness**

**The Alshich**

Reb Moshe Alshich lived in Tzefas and was a talmid of Reb Yosef Karo and Reb Chaim Vital. He was a shadar (traveled around to collect money for the chachomim of Eretz Yisroel) and a dayan. He is most famous for his sefer “Toras Moshe”, where his unprecedented ability in derush comes to light He also wrote many other seforim on various parts of Tanach.

The Alshich was a great tzadik and many people add the word “hakadosh” to his name. He passed away on the 13th of Nissan, 1600 ,“The Chidah, in his sefer “Shem Hegedolim writes in his entry on the Alshich: There was a Rov in Poland who would always quote the Alshich when he spoke. During the pogroms of Gezairos Tach V’tat (1648-1649), the Alshich revealed himself to the Rov while he was awake, and thus saved him from the pogroms

There are certain neshamos which have a connection to a specific part of Torah that defines their mission in life in their current gilgul. When the Alshich would sit in front of the Arizal and hear the secrets of the Torah being expounded, he always would fall asleep. He felt very bad about this, until the Arizal told him that his neshama was connected to the world of derush and not to the world of sod (the secrets of Torah.)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that while sleeping, the neshama of the Alshich would .ascend on high and learn parts of derush in Torah. Had he been awake when the Arizal was speaking, he would have lost out on both areas of Torah )

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tzav 5755 edition of The Baal Shem Tov Library in Flatbush.*

**Turkey unveils Great Synagogue As Jewish population fades**

**By Reuters News Service**

**(March 25, 2015)**

[The Turkish] Goverment invests $2.5 million in restoring first [synagogue] to open in Turkey in two generations; but it will be without worshipers, as Jewish community shrinks in light of growing wave of anti-Semitism.



**Workers put the final touches during the restoration**

**of the Great Synagogue in Edirne (Photo: Reuters)**

When the domes of Edirne's abandoned Great Synagogue caved in, Rifat Mitrani, the town's last Jew, knew it spelled the end of nearly two millennia of Jewish heritage in this Turkish town.

As a boy, Mitrani studied Hebrew in the synagogue's gardens and, in the 1970s, dispatched its Torah to Istanbul after the community shrank to just three families. In 1975, he unlocked its doors and swept away the cobwebs to marry his wife Sara.

"Only I am left. It happens slowly, becoming the last one," said Mitrani, 65, whose family fled here more than 500 years ago.

Now a five-year, $2.5 million government project has restored the synagogue's lead-clad domes and resplendent interior ahead of its Thursday re-opening, the first temple to open in Turkey in two generations, but one without worshipers.

It is part of a relaxation of curbs on religious minorities ushered in during President Tayyip Erdogan's 12 years in power.

Yet it coincides with a spike in anti-Semitism in predominantly Muslim Turkey and a wave of Jews moving away, say members of the aging community, which has shrunk by more than a third in the last quarter century.

The increase, observers say, is linked to anti-Israel sentiment which reached a crescendo during Israel's Gaza offensive in July. Erdogan compared Israel's assault on Palestinians to "genocide" and "Hitler's barbarism."

He drew distinctions between Israel and Turkish Jews, yet his words helped stoke outrage, and local Jews were threatened by public figures and pro-government newspapers.

Turkey's Jews, most of whose ancestors sought refuge here from the Spanish Inquisition, are on edge. Their school and synagogues are behind security tunnels, shielded by steel blast protection.

"They have lived in a state of fear for a long time after terror attacks and the feeling that they are not treated as Turkish citizens. There is worry for the younger generation," said Ohad Kaynar, Israel's deputy consul general.

Louis Fishman, an expert on Turkish affairs at Brooklyn College in New York, saw evidence of government indifference to anti-Semitism. "Buildings might be protected but the people who visit them are subjected to regular hate speech and threats," he said.

Erdogan's spokesmen and other officials did not respond to requests for comment for this article. However, the Turkish government has been at pains to distinguish between its Israel policy and its attitude towards Turkey's Jewish population.

**Former friends**

Close allies under previous governments, Israeli-Turkish ties hit a nadir in 2010 when Israeli commandoes stormed a Turkish-led convoy of ships carrying aid to Gaza and killed 10 Turks. Turkey withdrew its ambassador and ejected Israel's.

"Regardless of the fact that we identify ourselves as Turks, we are still perceived as foreigners. Tensions between Turkey and Israel directly impact us," said Karel Valansi, a political columnist with Salom newspaper.

For centuries, Ottoman lands were a haven for Jews, welcoming Sephardim expelled in 1492 by Spain.

Once here, they adopted new rituals, such as the melody of the azan in their prayers, while maintaining their traditions, most prominently the Judeo-Spanish dialect called Ladino.

Census data shows Ladino was the mother tongue for 84 percent of Turkish Jews in 1927 before nationalist campaigns stamped it out. Today only a few elderly speak the archaic form of Castilian Spanish, one of the world's endangered tongues.

A "wealth tax" in the 1940s, emigration to Israel after 1947 and decades of political instability conspired to decimate a population that was 150,000 before World War One.

Spain and Portugal are redressing historical wrongs by offering citizenship, bound to prompt some to pull up stakes.

"Jews have long left for economic reasons. What is different now is a factor for young people is the pressure they feel because they're Jewish," said Mois Gabay, 31, who writes for Salom. He cited figures showing one in four Jewish high-school graduates opted to study overseas in 2014, doubling in one year.

But the decline is mainly due to a death rate that exceeds births threefold, said Naim Guleryuz, the Jewish museum curator.

**Hatred flares**

At Istanbul's main Neve Salom synagogue, vandals in November hung a fake demolition notice close to the anniversary of a string of 2003 car bombings claimed by al-Qaeda that targeted Jewish temples and British interests, killing 57 people.

Even the opening of the Edirne synagogue was at risk. The governor [said it would be a museum](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4595404,00.html) instead and that he felt "hatred" after Israeli police entered al Aqsa mosque in November. He later apologized, and restoration work continued.

"This is not only Jewish but a part of Turkish and world heritage. It is proof that we have lived together and still do," said Guleryuz, author of a book on Edirne's Jews. "If we occasionally celebrate a wedding, we can keep it alive."

The synagogue's bright yellow exterior is a burst of light among the dilapidated wooden houses and concrete apartment blocks in Edirne's former Jewish quarter. Inside, painters painstakingly decorated the ceiling with thousands of stars, as beams of sunlight passed through a colonnade of neat arches.

"It looks like its old self," said Mitrani, standing beside the polished marble of the ark bearing the Ten Commandments.

Once the Balkans' largest Jewish [synagogue], the Great Synagogue opened on the sultan's decree in 1909 to serve some 20,000 Jews. It was modelled on a [synagogue] in Vienna, later destroyed by the Nazis.

Thousands of Jews left Edirne, situated near the Greek and Bulgarian borders, in 1934 when a racist mob attacked their property, but Mitrani's father, a grocer, rebuilt his shop.

Mitrani, who owns two supermarkets here, travels to Istanbul each week to join his wife and daughters for the Sabbath.

He planted a pine tree next to his mother's grave in the old cemetery, part of which has been occupied by a housing complex that uprooted graves. Litter is strewn among hundreds of broken headstones, which include the odd Greek Orthodox inscription.

"I would have liked to have been buried in Edirne, next to my mother," Mitrani said. "Staying was always the easiest thing for me. I can't imagine the day I won't be here."

*Reprinted from the April 2, 2015 email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professional) Update. The Reuters news dispatch was published by Ynet Newscom.*

**Vice President Biden Says American Jews Can Only Rely on Israel, Not U.S.**

**By Ari Yashar and Tova Dvorim**



**Vice President Joe Biden (**Photo byThinkstock)

An incredible admission by US Vice President Joe Biden has been revealed, in which he told Jewish leaders that should the American Jewish community be in danger, it has only Israel to rely on - and not America.

Journalist Jeffrey Goldberg reveals in the April issue of *The Atlantic*how at a Rosh Hashana event in Biden's home last fall, the vice president told Jewish leaders and Jewish officials in US President Barack Obama's administration how he met former Prime Minister Golda Meir when he was a young Senator.

"I’ll never forget talking to her in her office with her assistant - a guy named (Yitzhak) Rabin - about the Six-Day War,” he recalled. “The end of the meeting, we get up and walk out, the doors are open, and...the press is taking photos. ...She looked straight ahead and said, ‘Senator, don’t look so sad...Don’t worry. We Jews have a secret weapon.'"

Biden states he asked Meir what the weapon was, noting "I thought she was going to tell me something about a nuclear program" - an ironic comment given the U.S.'s recent [**declassification of documents revealing Israel's nuclear program**](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/193175) in a breach of understandings with the Jewish state.

But according to Biden, "she looked straight ahead and she said, ‘We have no place else to go.'" Addressing his guests at Rosh Hashana, Biden paused for effect and repeated, "we have no place else to go."

"Folks, there is no place else to go, and you understand that in your bones," Biden said. "You understand in your bones that no matter how hospitable, no matter how consequential, no matter how engaged, no matter how deeply involved you are in the United States...there’s only one guarantee."

"There is really only one absolute guarantee, and that’s the state of Israel," he stated.

Responding to the statement, Corey Robin of *Salon* wrote how disturbing the statement is, given that it consists of "a sitting vice president telling a portion of the American citizenry that they cannot count on the United States government as the ultimate guarantor of their freedom and safety."

"The occupant of the second-highest office in the land believes that American Jews should look to a foreign government as the foundation of their rights and security," she added. "A country that once offered itself as a haven to persecuted Jews across the world now tells its Jews that in theevent of some terrible outbreak of anti-Semitism they should…what? Plan on boarding the next plane to Tel Aviv?"

*Reprinted from the March 30, 2015 email of Arutz Sheva. (Editor’s Note: While there is much to be learned from the lesson that Jews in America must not be their complete trust in the promises of the American Constitution towards the pursuit of the pursuit of happiness; we would similarly be making a great mistake if we turn around and put our faith in the State of Israel based on its power IDF. Rather, wherever we may find ourselves, we should only put emunah and bitachon in our Father in Heaven who has sustained in every generation when there arose those who would desired to have attacked us.)*

**My Heart trembles, My Heart Shakes And Tears Pour Down My Face.**

**By Rabbi David Bibi**

It was the first of Nisan, the anniversary of the dedication of the Mishkan, the wedding day between Hashem and the Jewish people.

It was Friday night. I stood by the window with Chantelle looking out at the beach. Six inches of snow had just fallen and it was the first day of spring.

The beach club next door in anticipation of the warmer weather began preparing the beach earlier in the week. The first stage is for the huge tractors to gather the blown sand from the protective fences into large mounds. Those tall hills, with valleys between them and the adjacent dunes were blanketed with snow.

My wife remarked, It looks like something beyond this world, something on a planet in outer space, something we cannot imagine. The next night, the snow was gone, but we remained in a place akin to outer space; we as all of you entered a world beyond our imagination.

It was Saturday night, we were in the Synagogue and I just completed Havdala as we were closing the lights in the sanctuary. My friend and neighbor Jack asked if we needed a lift home. I asked Moses if anyone was picking us up when someone stopped me to ask me a question. A few minutes later I followed Moses out and my wife was on the steps of the synagogue crying. What happened?

And you all know what happened. The world changed that night.

I knew Gayle from when she was born. She was Elliott’s - my life-long best friend’s - sister. I remember teaching her Gemarah for a test in Flatbush. I remember when she and Gaby got married. I remember speaking at their Sheva Berachot and I still have the bencher from that night.

Gaby is an amazing scholar whose life is dedicated to learning Torah. Gayle is a friend of Chantelle and she has influenced our life in so many positive ways. Neither us nor our children would be who we are without her. When Aryana studied in Har Nof for a year, I believe she spent more time in the Sassoon home than in school. Their family was a part of our family and I am sure they were a part of your family too.

Everyone who came to Israel knew that they had Gayle and Gaby as family there. So many kids studying there became a part of their home. And everyone who knew the children knows that they were in fact, pure and so special. They were truly Sadikim.

“Harod Libi Charod UShefoch Demaot/My heart trembles, my heart shakes and tears pour down my face.”



## Sassoon family (from top left), Eliane, Siporah, Rivkah, mother Gayle, grandmother Francine Jemal (not at fire) David, Yehoshua, below, in front, Sara and Yaakob.

When Gaby, their father, spoke at the funeral, we wondered where his superhuman strength came from. He quoted the verse which tells of Aaron’s reaction to the death of his own children. “Vayidom Aharon,/Aaron was silent.”

Gaby compared his children who were taken on Rosh Hodesh Nisan, the same day that Aaron’s sons were taken by fire when the Mishkan was dedicated 3326 years ago, to the burnt offerings of Rosh Hodesh - the festival of the new moon. I realized that many of us would never read the Torah on Rosh Hodesh or read the Amidah of Musaf the same.

Numbers 28:11 “And on your festival of the New Moon, you shall offer a burnt offering to Hashem” - this he said was his family, two young bulls his wife who sustained burns on most of her body in her attempt to save their children and he in losing everything. One Ram his daughter Siporah struggling for her life. And Seven yearling sheep, pure without blemish, these were his righteous and pure children whose faces we will forever see as we say these words.

His words echoed in my mind.

Like all of you, sleep only comes out of exhaustion these past few days and when it comes it is fitful and filled with very strange dreams. I awoke in the early morning in a sweat and crying with a vivid image which I later revealed to my daughter Mikhayla.

I saw myself as a young boy and it was Yom Kippur. I was in Deal Synagogue and I was sitting in the seat I usually sat it. It was up front on the far right, the back row my dad and his brother and cousins sat in at the corner by the wall. We had just finished the bidding for the honors for the morning Torah reading and we had taken out the Torah. I walked forward towards the open ark to see the first words of the portion we would read, Vaydaber Hashem El Moshe Acharei Mot Shenei Benai Aharon,/and Hashem spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron.

In my dream, Rabbi Dwek was at the pulpit explaining the piyut or poem we read before the first Aliyah. The poem describes in very powerful prose the death of the two sons of Aaron who were taken as burnt offerings on the first of Nisan, the day the Temple was inaugurated. We sing this poem in a haunting melody once a year and I can still hear the rabbi explaining that it is meant to move the heart to repentance and motivate us to do an accounting of our souls. The song moves us to tears.

In my dream though, the words of the piyut were changed. Instead of a priests who were two and died as one, I heard, children who were seven and died as one, through those closest to me I will be sanctified, the edict is given.

We can never understand why. We exist within the picture of human existence and the picture can only be understood once completed and from a distance. We must have faith that although it is beyond our understanding, it will all be clear and we will comprehend everything.

With Gaby’s words in mind within the dream, the verses of this poem in that evocative melody continued, Their holy father saw and placed a finger to his lips, he accepted what G-d proclaimed and all Israel wept over the blaze within which G-d consumed the children.

I have written many times about personal tragedy and death, including the passing of my father last year and my Rabbi a decade ago, but nothing compares to this. Given that we are all so sad, but no matter the excruciating pain that we feel, it’s not a drop in the ocean for what the family must be feeling and our heart trembles and our tears pour for them. The stars withdrew their luster and the light of the sun was withheld over the lives of the seven children who perished as one.

We pray that Hashem will give strength to Gaby and send a refuat HaNefesh and Refuat HaGuf to Gayle -Gila bat Francis/Siporah and to their daughter Siporah bat Gila.

And for us the congregation, community and people of Israel, who have witnessed, heard and been touched, by these awesome portents. On a day like this what happened, not only to our fathers, but to our children, the servants of G-d. We must, remember them and stand at our posts.

We will never be the same, that’s certain. But in their memory and with them in mind, the question each of us must stop and ask ourselves is this. “How will we be different?”

Tenuchamu, Tenuchameynu Min HaShamayim

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tsav edition of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*