**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas EMOR 5772**

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**Story #753**

**The Chief Doctor**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=ABC&msgNum=0000aOk0:001FbvK200000xeN&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1336445816&randid=444768160&content=central)

A prominent Jewish merchant, Reb Yaakov from Vilna, known to be an accomplished Torah scholar, once passed through Mezritch. Having heard of the greatness of the Mezritcher Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber, Reb Yaakov decided to visit him, even though he was not an adherent of the Chasidic movement.

Reb Yaakov was eager to engage the Maggid in a learned discussion, and he was not disappointed. But, as Reb Yaakov had no interest in Chasidic philosophy, the subject was not broached.

**G-d Sends His Cure Through a Particular Doctor**

As Reb Yaakov was about to leave, the Maggid suddenly said: "Remember, Yaakov, what our Sages of blessed memory said, that G-d sends His cure to a patient through a particular doctor and a particular medicine. Sometimes the One Above sends His cure not through the medication which the doctor prescribes, but through the doctor himself.

“As you know, a doctor receives his healing powers by authority of the Divine Torah, as it is written, 'And he shall surely cure him.' Therefore, the doctor has a healing angel at his side, and a very great doctor is accompanied by the chief healing angel, Rafael, himself."

**Thought About the Strange Parting Remark**

As he traveled back to Vilna, Reb Yaakov thought about this strange parting remark, which seemed to come out of the blue. Reb Yaakov was, thank G-d, in very good health. He had never needed a doctor before, and he hoped he would not have to consult one in the future. He hadn't asked the Maggid for medical advice, so why had the Maggid mentioned doctors? Unable to solve this puzzle, he soon dismissed the entire episode from his mind.

Reb Yaakov returned home and soon fell into his normal routine. Several weeks later, he awoke feeling quite ill. His condition worsened rapidly and although all the best doctors were called in, each offering a different medication, nothing helped. Word of his condition spread quickly. His friends and acquaintances were devastated, for Reb Yaakov was a kind and charitable man.

**A Ray of Hope Appeared**

Then, a ray of hope appeared. The Jews of Vilna heard that the king would be arriving in town, and his personal physician, who was a wayward Jew, would be accompanying him. If only they could persuade the king's doctor to pay a call on their beloved friend, maybe this great doctor could save his life.

The community leaders dispatched a delegation to the king and petitioned him to allow his royal physician to visit Reb Yaakov. The king received them graciously and agreed to their request. The hopes of his family and friends soared when the famous doctor entered the sickroom, but were soon dashed. When the doctor looked at Reb Yaakov he said disdainfully, "Am I G-d that you have brought me here to revive a dead man?"

**Something Caught the Doctor’s Eye**

To everyone's horror, the doctor turned to leave. The distraught family begged him to prescribe some medication. "Nothing can help this man," he replied brusquely, casting a parting glance at the dying patient. But at that moment something caught his eye and he turned to look again. A slight bit of color could be seen on the patient's pale face.

The doctor quickly took his notepad and scribbled a prescription. "Run to the pharmacy and bring this medication at once!"

Hope sprang again into the hearts of the man's family and friends. The royal physician remained at the man's bedside, his eyes fixed on the sick man. He was amazed to see further signs of improvement. He pulled out his pad and prescribed another medication. But no sooner had he written it out than the patient's eyes began to flicker. The doctor had never seen such a thing in all his experience.

**A Request to the Doctor**

Suddenly, the erstwhile dying man sat up in bed and addressed the physician, "I beg you, dear doctor, don't go yet. Stay a while longer, and I'll feel much better. The Angel Rafael must be at your side."

The physician was completely overwhelmed. He stared at the patient in utter disbelief, and although he didn't believe in angels, he could almost believe the patient's words.

As if reading the doctor's thoughts, Reb Yaakov began to relate his visit to the Maggid of Mezritch and especially the Maggid's puzzling remark at the end of the visit. "I can see now, that his remark was completely prophetic and true," Reb Yaakov remarked.

**The King’s Doctor Reflects On His Own Spiritual Needs**

The king's doctor, who had listened intently to the whole episode, sat engrossed in thought. It occurred to him that, great healer though he was, he needed a lot of healing himself -- healing of a spiritual nature.

"I would like to meet this saintly man," he finally said. "When you are fully recovered, please take me to meet him."

Not very long after, the two of them, Reb Yaakov and the king's physician, traveled to Mezritch - Reb Yaakov to become a chasid and the physician to return to his faith.

Source: Adapted from Talks and Tales and posted on //lchaimweekly.org (#1000!); supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles.

Connection: Seasonal Iyar is the month of healing. Its four letters are an acronym for: “I, G-d, am your doctor.”

**The Maggid of Mezeritch**

Biographical note: Rabbi Dov Ber (c.1700-19 Kislev 1772), the son of Avraham and Chava, known as the Maggid of Mezritch, succeeded his master, the Baal Shem Tov, to become the second head of the chasidic movement. Most of the leading chasidic dynasties stem from his disciples and his descendents. The classic anthologies of his teachings are Likutei Amarim and Torah Ohr (combined by Kehos Publishing as Maggid Devorav Yaakov), and Ohr HaEmmes.

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**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**The Rich Uncle (Part One)**

The Torah gaves us last week the ever important mitzvah of "and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Rabbi Akiva explained this is THE general rule in the Torah. If one follows this mitzvah, they will observe all the other mitzvahs regarding how we must treat others. Through do so, we will all lead rewarding lives both in this World and in the World to Come. The following story illustrates this concept in action.

**Replies to a Help Wanted Ad**

Yakov Braunstein (not his real name) is Jew who lives in the Brooklyn, New York area. One day, Yakov’s brother brought his attention to a “help-wanted” ad in a local paper. There was an older man who was looking for an attendant. It looked like a good opportunity and Yakov called soon after to set up an appointment. Soon after, Yakov interviewed with the man whom we will call “Mr. Roth.”

Boruch Hashem, Mr. Roth liked Yakov and hired him for the job. Yakov would have to work 6 days a week helping Mr. Roth. The following is the amazing account retold in Yakov’s words about his experiences while working for Mr. Roth.

"Very quickly, I realized that life in Mr. Roth's house was no easy street. He was a bit younger than eighty, and a difficult and stern person — easily angered, nervous, and convinced that the entire world was against him, that they no longer needed him alive.

**Got to Know the Other Employees**

During my first few months on the job, I got to know all of Mr. Roth's employees. And there were quite a few of them: a private attorney, a gardener, a cleaner, a cook. All contributed information. I learned that Mr. Roth was very, very wealthy; he had owned factories across the globe.

Ten years previously, he'd given over the business to his sons. Mr. Roth remained a multimillionaire, with enough money to line his grave with diamonds. "They say he used to be a nice person," the gardener told me, "but you can see those days are gone."

And gone they were. Mr. Roth was a strict, angry, and very suspicious person. During my first day on the job, I realized that even though I hadn't very much to do, I had a major task: to be constantly at his beck and call. Mr. Roth could call me at any given moment and ask for something. He didn't have much to ask for, because the household followed a very strict routine, and every worker knew that the smallest mistake could cost him his job.

Even though he paid well, the turnover was astounding. When I arrived, there was not a single employee who'd been on the job more than half a year. During my first two months on the job, two of them had to leave. He simply could not tolerate errors.

**Tested Many Times by His Employer**

Mr. Roth tested me many times during my first six months on the job. He often asked me to stay overtime; he asked me to arrive early even though it would destroy my entire morning routine and I had to search for Shacharis minyanim in different places, and believe me, those extra hours gained him nothing.

I didn't do much then, just as I didn't do much during the rest of my hours. He left money in strange places, as if it had been forgotten. I found a hundred-dollar bill in the bathroom, and one day I found a package of dollar bills wrapped in aluminum foil in the refrigerator, as if someone had hidden it there. Documents were scattered in places where any curious person would have been happy to find them.

**Did the Proper Things**

Of course, I brought the money directly to Mr. Roth. And I didn't glance at the documents, for the simple reason that it was forbidden to do so.

At first, I thought that he was really a bit tired and forgetful, but I quickly realized that he was sharp as an eagle. He was simply testing me. I smiled to myself and tried to keep up with all his demands, even though he complained about every single thing I did.

It was a conversation with my father that clued me in as to what was really happening. My father was approximately the same age as Mr. Roth and once remarked that he himself was fortunate that he had returned to learn Torah in kollel after retirement. Otherwise, he would have felt that no one needed him, and his days would have been long and boring.

**His Own Father Was Still Active in His Advanced Age**

My father, at his advanced age, still worked two hours every day, went to visit patients in the hospital, learned in a kollel, and received visits from grandchildren every day. All this in addition to three minyanim a day. He was a very busy man. Once, when I visited him, he told me all about a friend who had grown depressed because his life was so boring and he felt that no one needed him. It was then that I suddenly understood Mr. Roth.

Mr. Roth was a man who had once been active almost twenty-four hours daily, who'd been consumed by international business ventures, who'd been consulted every moment, had suddenly fallen into a paradise of silence and serenity, which essentially served as a prison. No one asked his advice; no one needed him. His four sons were very busy. True, they did phone every day to ask how he was feeling, but how much time did the conversation take? Each one took no longer than five minutes, totaling twenty minutes of the long day of Mr. Roth.

**Understanding that His Employee was Very Lonely**

The moment I understood that Mr. Roth was lonely, a lot of things became clear. I decided to implement a different method in my work. Until that moment, I had never initiated any conversation with Mr. Roth. If he didn't ask for anything, I never volunteered. That's how I had done my job until this point. But from the moment I understood how difficult life was for Mr. Roth, who felt as if the entire world had forgotten him and that his life had no meaning, I changed my perspective and behavior. Of course, I did it slowly and subtly, because I wasn't sure how he'd react.

It began when I brought up the morning paper. I said, "Mr. Roth, would you be able to explain the mess that happened in Wall Street? I don't understand what they're so upset about." Mr. Roth, who could discuss shares, stocks, trends, and the like with ease, and who hadn't had such an opportunity in ten years, began a long, detailed explanation.

**Learned More than a Student**

**Studying for His MBA**

I learned more in that hour than a student studying for his MBA. The information didn't interest me at all. I never dreamed that I'd ever have enough money to invest in stocks. But the fact that Mr. Roth was lecturing with such gusto told me something. Of course, I thanked him profusely for the explanation, and he asked me whether I planned on investing. I laughed and told him that for now, I was investing in diapers, baby food, and a bit of bread and milk.

Later, when my daughter Miri had a sore throat, I told Mr. Roth that I was worried about my daughter. To be honest, I wasn't really worried. Any father of several small children doesn't get excited about a sore throat. But it was the most interesting thing I could share with Mr. Roth.

Later, he looked at me in shock when I asked him if he had any good solutions for my underweight daughter, whose sore throat was preventing her from eating. "You understand," I said, "anyone can get a sore throat, but Miri isn't gaining properly, so it's a real problem."

"My mother," he seemed to come alive, "used to treat most of these simple illnesses on her own. Believe me, it helped more than all the antibiotics they use today."

**Interested in the Name and Ages of His Employee’s Children**

But Mr. Roth now knew that I had a daughter named Miri, and for the next week, he asked how she was feeling. Then he asked me the names and ages of my other children. From then on, I told him about all their antics.

Now every morning we began our conversation talking about our families, well usually my family, because, sadly, his family members didn't really include him in their lives. During those conversations, Mr. Roth was no longer the stern master. He became a wise, experienced, and intuitive human being.

Even his wrinkles looked as if they'd been ironed out. I very much enjoyed his insightful comments. Perhaps the greatest benefit was that he didn't get angry for the hour after our conversation, and didn't summon any of the workers needlessly. And when two months passed, we discovered that no one had been fired. I guess you can say that I had discovered a patent of sorts.

**Fires His Driver**

At a certain stage Mr. Roth fired his driver. It was so normal that I thought it amazing I was still employed. Then he asked me to drive him. That wasn't so extraordinary; he had asked me to drive him around before even when the driver was in service. But now we had new, interesting topics of conversation. He would tell me about places I didn't know or explain how the neighborhoods had changed during the last fifty years. I told him everything I knew about the Jewish aspects of the streets of New York.

**Stuck in the Area of a Chassidic**

**Rebbe’s Son’s Wedding**

One day, we got stuck in an area where a Chassidic Rebbe's son was getting married. The entire area was closed off, and Mr. Roth grumbled that they were ruining his schedule just for a wedding. But then I suggested that we get out of the car and try to see what was going on. And that's how Mr. Roth saw for the first time in his life that Rebbes do have more than twenty-three Chassidim, which is what he'd always thought.

He was astounded by the sight of thousands of people filling the streets. After we managed to enter the area, he simply forgot how to close his mouth, because he was in awe. Of course, we couldn't actually see anything. We were too far away... Little did I know that Mr. Roth's life would be changed forever after going to that Rebbe's son's chasunah (wedding)... To be continued next week. Good Shabbos Everyone.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**A Principal’s Decision to Defy a**

**Governmental Educational Directive**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Here we learn in Acha'ri Mot about the Temple service on Yom Kippur (the Day of Forgiveness) and in Kedoshim we learn how to be holy by doing G-d's commandments.

But at first glance this is not so clear. Why are these two topics; forgiveness and holiness necessary? Why didn't G-d just make us pure and holy to begin with? Even more, if G-d would not have given the Torah there would be no such thing as sins or un-holiness; these are all Torah terms. Then we could do what we want and just be ourselves?

Indeed, one of the reasons for anti-Semitism is the Torah; that when it was given on 'Sinai', hatred (Sina) descended to the Jews.

To understand this… here is a story.

**A Chabad School in Some Israeli City**

It takes place in Israel around forty years ago. Names were omitted for obvious reasons but it deals with the manager-principal of a Chabad School in an Israeli city.

In Israel, as everywhere else in the world, there is a public school system and a religious (parochial) school system.

But unlike other religious groups the Chabad (Lubavitch) Chassidim have both types. As well as their Torah institutions where young men sit and learn Torah all day, they also run a large network of schools in co-ordination with the Israeli government that feature Jewish, Torah classes in addition to math, history, science and other secular subjects.

Needless to say there are certain government rules that must be abided by in these schools and one of them is the three month summer break during which children are 'free' from learning.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, the leader of the Chabad Chassidim, was never in favor of such long breaks and one year he wrote a letter to one of the school principals, the hero of our story, that he should cut the summer break short and resume the learning three weeks early.

**Implements Request of the Rebbe**

Of course, when the principal got the letter he immediately set into action. He called the secretaries, who were on vacation along with everyone else, asked them to come in to work early, with a raise in pay of course, and contact all the pupils and teachers to inform them of the change.

Of course he couldn't force any of them to stop their vacations all he could do was offer them to come so he was sure that only a small percentage would actually change their vacation plans. But to his surprise, when they heard that it was a request from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, almost everyone; secretaries, teachers, pupils and even the cooks and maintenance people, returned to work.

But then there came an unexpected problem; the Ministry of Education. It's not so clear how they found out about it, but as soon as they did they sent a high official to stop it.

**Official Appears with a**

**Look of Disbelief and Rage**

The official appeared with a look of disbelief and rage. He knocked angrily on the principal's door, entered his room and demanded an explanation.

"What is the meaning of this!!" He held himself back from screaming. "Who gave you permission to begin classes?! To stop the vacation!!!? These children need their vacation!!! And so do the teachers!!! And so do YOU!!! If you don't suspend learning immediately you will be suspended permanently!!! You will get a permanent vacation!! Do you understand!!!?? Stop the classes… immediately!!!"

"Yes, I understand" replied the principal. "But we aren't stopping."

"What?!!" Yelled the official as his face reddened in anger, "Remember that this school is funded by the Israeli Government… if you refuse to follow the orders of the Ministry of Education we will CUT OFF that funding and CLOSE YOUR SCHOOL DOWN!!!"

The principal calmly replied. "Listen, you have no need to yell and threaten me. This school is run by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I only listen to him. He is the manager, not you or your government and there is no use in your ultimatums. If the Rebbe says to start early we will start early and you and the government can do whatever you see fit."

The official looked blankly at the principal as though at a madman, then took two steps back, took a few deep breaths, again turned red with anger, pointed his finger and yelled, "YOU'LL SEE WHO'S BOSS HERE! YOU'LL HEAR FROM US …. AND HOW!! YOU'LL REGRET THIS!!!"

**Slamming the Door Behind Him**

Saying this he turned on his heels, and left the room in a fury, slamming the door behind him.

The secretaries and everyone else that heard the ruckus immediately gathered around the principal to comfort him and ask what he was going to do, maybe they should just go home and start at the ordinary time in a few weeks.

"This school is run by the Rebbe and no one else" he assured them, "and money? Well, the same G-d who wants these children to be educated is the same G-d who will provide the money. I'm not worried. Let's just get back to our jobs and forget this ever happened."

And it seemed he was right. One week went by without anything happening, then another. But just as everyone had almost forgotten about it, early one morning just as classes were beginning, several huge tractors rolled up to the school followed by a truck carrying a massive steam shovel accompanied by several carloads of workers. It looked like this was the end! They were going to actually level the school!

**Unexpected Construction Work Commences**

The workers got out, began measuring and surveying and the tractors, with awesome roars began to dig and level the ground around one side of the building while the steam shovel began digging a huge hole and depositing the dirt nearby.

The principal went outside, approached one of the workers who looked like the foreman and asked what exactly they were doing. The foreman opened a large page of blueprints, spread it on the hood of the car before him and pointed out what they were doing. "We're building an addition. Here, see? It will be two stories and about twenty more classrooms."

To the total amazement of the principal he realized that they were actually making additions that he had been requesting for the last eight or nine years with no success; they had been totally ignored.

The thought crossed his mind that perhaps they were building because they intended to fire him and install another principal in his place. But he decided that, in any case, it was best to just be quiet and see what happened.

But nothing happened! In less than a month the building was done, he began using the rooms and not another word was said.

But the principal was curious and after a few months he asked friends to try to find an explanation for what had transpired. Perhaps the angry official had a change of heart, or perhaps he was fired, or replaced.

But after several weeks of intensive and secretive asking and inquiring there was no answer. For some totally unknown reason the angry official's request was ignored or he forgot about it and suddenly the government just decided to honor the principal's nine year old requests.

A true miracle!

**G-d Created the World with a Purpose**

This answers our questions.

G-d not only created the world but He created it with a purpose; that man should perfect it. As the Torah tells us about Adam, "To improve it and protect it" (Gen. 2:15): namely, to change 'nature' to become 'above' nature.

But in order to do this man must first reveal new powers in himself i.e. to go above his own nature.

And this can only be done when we are under pressure. As the Midrash explains that Jews are likened to olives; they only produce their best 'oil' when pressed.

**Arousing the Essence of One’s Soul**

As we saw in our story: the principal only got new things done when faced with opposition (both external and internal) that aroused the essence of his soul.

But this is only because he had a clear goal. And this is why G-d gave the Torah and with it good and bad, right and wrong, holy and unholy; in order to inspire us to reveal our true selves even if, or perhaps BECAUSE, the entire world hates and opposes us.

This is the point of our two Torah portions: Holiness can only be achieved by having a clear goal and transforming all obstacles in order to achieve it.

And our goal is to bring Moshiach. Moshiach will be a leader who will inspire all mankind to reveal their true natures and transform the world according the goals of the Torah.

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

**Hidden in Rome**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

“I saw the *parochet* of the *Beit Hamikdash* in Rome and there were some drops of blood on it.” This statement of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yossi, refers to the opportunity he was given to enter the treasury of the Romans where articles stolen from the *Beit Hamikdash* were stored.

The background for this rare opportunity was the mission of this Sage and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to Rome to seek annulment of an anti-religious decree. When these Sages saved the emperor’s daughter from the attack of a demon, they were rewarded with an offer to enter the royal treasury and take whatever they wished.

**The Rabbis Took Only One Thing**

The only thing they took was the document of the dangerous decree — which they then destroyed. It was during this incident that Rabbi Elazar took note of the spots on the *parochet* which had served as the partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. He identified them as the blood of the bullock and goal sacrifices which had been sprayed in the direction of the *parochet* in the Yom Kippur service.

But the *parochet* was not the only sacred item which the Romans kept in their vaults. In *Avot* of Rabbi Natan (Chapter 41, it is reported that along with the *parochet* the menorah, the table, the *kohen gadol*’s headband and the vessel used for preparing the incense are all still to be found in Rome.• *Me’ilah* 17b

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**Can We Throw a Homeless Person Out of Our Synagogue?**

**By Rabbi Tzvi Freeman**

**Question:**

**Dear Rabbi,**

Recently, at our *shul*, a homeless man named Joe, who has been attending every week, was asked by the rabbi not to enter the building anymore.

The reason was that Joe was storing things at the shul without permission, and he had washed up for Shabbat in the bathroom in order to change his shirt and made a mess.

The rabbi has told me that people do not want to sit next to him, and some feel afraid. He said that people have complained that Joe sometimes has an odor. It is interesting that they are mad at him for having an odor, and also for washing in the bathroom.

So I’m scheduled to speak on Joe’s behalf. I know what the Torah says, and what Isaiah says, about treating the homeless in our midst. But I need to provide a solution as well. So, I would appreciate whatever advice you could give me on how to address the board of our *shul*.

**Sincerely yours,**

**Joe’s Rep**

The solution is quite simple: Provide Joe a place, either in the *shul* or elsewhere, to store his things. Find other ways that he can be helped without embarrassment.

When parents bring their children to *shul*, and the children ask what the Torah is talking about, what does the prophet mean, they can introduce their children to Joe. They can show how the *shul* helps him out, without embarrassing him, as a peer and a friend—because we are Jews, and this is what we were chosen to teach the world.

And when they ask, “Where is the most special place in our *shul*?” you can tell them: it is not the seat where the rabbi sits; it is not the *bimah* where the Torah is read; it is not even the *aron* that stores the Torah—even though the Torah is very holy and guides us in all our ways. The most special place in our shul is the little cubby we gave to Joe to store his things.

**Why Did G-d Create Inequality**

King David said in his Psalms, “Let the world sit before G‑d.” The Midrash tells that he was complaining to G‑d. “Why did You create inequality in the world?” he said. “Why did You make some poor and some rich, some wise and some dull, some joyful and some sad? Make a world in which all are equal!”

And G‑d replied with the second half of the verse: “Who, then, will guard kindness and truth?”

Meaning: “If everyone had all that they need, then how would kindness fit into My world? Rather, I made an unbalanced world, so that the rich would have the opportunity to give to the poor, the wise could teach the dull, the joyful could cheer those who are sad. And this way, all could merit to enter the eternal life of truth—those who gave because they gave, and those who received because they suffered only in order that others should be able to give.”

“When you meditate on this,” the [Lubavitcher Rebbe once said](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/147441/jewish/Humble-Compassion.htm), “that a fellow human being had to suffer only so that your soul should have the opportunity to help him out, then you give and give again, and the giving crushes your heart and humbles you even more.”

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

**Rabbi Jonathan Rietti Offers**

**Sefira Reflections of Rebbi Akiva**

**By Daniel Keren**

[](https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=7eVkUUKY&id=64FA501215E2AABEC9822C2F87B52DF1B327152D&thid=OIP.7eVkUUKYdXHallWY_GQqQAC2C6&q=photos+of+rabbi+jonathan+rietti&simid=608002430938188437&selectedIndex=2)

**Rabbi Jonathan Rietti**

For more than a decade, Hakhel, a dynamic Flatbush-based organization dedicated to increasing a greater awareness in our community for Torah-true values, has sponsored popular morning-long *Yarchei Kallah* Events on legal holidays at the Agudath Israel of Madison in Flatbush when many people do not have to go to work. Due to the fact that this coming Memorial Day’s legal holiday falls on *Shavuous*, Hakhel decided to sponsor a Pre-*Shavuous Yarchei Kallah* Holiday Event at the Agudath Israel of Madison this past Sunday evening (May 6th).

**Hundreds of Men and Women Attended**

Hundreds of men and women from all parts of Brooklyn, including a couple that especially drove in from Staten Island came to gain inspiration from the Event titled “*The Sefira Shiur: 5772*.”

One of the evening’s features speakers was Rabbi Jonathan Rietti, director of Mishkan Yecheskel Teacher Training and internationally renowned educator spoke at Sunday evening’s Hakhel program on the topic of “*Rebbi Akiva: Our King of Counting*.”

Imagine Rebbe Akiva was here tonight and you could ask just one question to this great *Tana*. What would that question be? Rabbi Rietti offered that he would like to have asked Rebbi Akiva that although he was a self-confessed *Am Haaretz* shepherd for the first 40 years of his life, yet was nevertheless influenced to dramatically change the direction of his life because he noticed how the dripping water from a waterfall had carved a hole into a rough stone.

**It Wasn’t Done by the Millionth Drop**

What was it about the water falling upon the stone that so shook up Rebbi Akiva that he was inspired to become one of the greatest Torah sages in the history of the Jewish people? The explanation of Rabbi Rietti is that the immortal *Tana* realized that the hole wasn’t carved into the stone by the millionth drop of water. Rather Rebbi Akiva understood a very profound lesson. It was every single drop beginning with the first drop that at first glance to the human eye had made no effect that was so influential in making a hole into the stone. And with this knowledge he abandoned being a shepherd.

Eventually from the water-like persistence of his efforts to learn Torah, dit by difficult bit (or drop by drop), he evolved into the greatest Torah teacher of his generation. So great was his success in learning and teaching that he reached out to 24,000 brilliant *talmidim* who all considered him to be their primary Torah teacher.

**What Would Be Your Reaction**

**To Such a Terrible Tragedy?**

And then what happened? They all died in one terrible plague in the period from Pesach till Shavuos. Rabbi Rietti asked the audience, “What would you have done? Perhaps you might have thought about changing your career. Maybe there are still some sheep around to go back to shepherding?”

No, Rebbi Akiva didn’t give up, just as the water didn’t give up in its mission to bore a hold into the rough hard stone. He picked himself up and found five *talmidim* to teach and they went on to become the most quoted *tanaim* in the *Gemora*, including Rebbe Meir who is considered to be the father of the Oral Torah.

**Every Effort Helps and is in Itself Important**

Rebbi Akiva learned that vital lesson that every effort helps and is in itself important. He was nothing if not consistent. What is more important today – process or results? The society around us would seem to claim that it is results. But from Rebbi Akiva we learn that it is the process that is most important.

The Harvard Business School interviewed many multi-millionaires in order to try and detect common denominators in how they amassed their wealth. One interesting point was that most had many times failed in business before they finally found success.

This is a testament to the process of keep trying and picking oneself up after falling. What is greater, Rabbi Rietti asked, the achievement of losing weight or the process of maintaining that loss?

**What Style of Wealth is**

**Going to be More Appreciated?**

Similarly what is greater – winning a fortune by buying the right lottery ticket or more slowly developing one’s wealth deliberately by accumulating dollar after dollar? Which method is going to be easier to maintain? And what style of becoming wealthy is going to be greater appreciated?

For the last 80 years of his life, Rebbi Akiva was fueled by the strong belief that every drop or effort counts. The *koach* of a Jew is to ask questions. Rabbi Rietti noted than you can hardly go three sentences in the *Gemara* without asking questions. Only by asking questions can children develop their minds and successfully learn.

**The Ongoing Legacy**

**Of the “Wondering Jew”**

That is the power of the Jew. That is why, Rabbi Rietti jokingly said, we are not the “Wandering Jew,” but rather the “Wondering Jew.” Rebbi Akiva is the King of Counting, beginning from when he realized the power of each drop of water on the rough stone. His legacy is that he taught us this process and he was successful because he recognized that in this endeavor that Hashem was with him. The lesson for each and every one of us is to truly comprehend that every effort we undertake makes a significant difference.

**The Horse in the Gate**

**By Sara Yoheved Rigler**

In a G-d-Directed World,

You're Never Stuck.

I used to empathize with the horse in the gate. The only way for a car to exit the walled Old City of Jerusalem, where I live, is through Zion Gate. Like all authentic ancient gates, Zion Gate is a massive L-shaped stone structure. My 21st century car has a hard time maneuvering through the 16th century gate, especially when it is thronged with tourists. My car, however, has it easy compared with the horses of yore trying to invade the city.

A hole in the ceiling of the gate was used to pour boiling oil down on the invading horsemen. If the horse slowed down to make the L-turn, the horseman would be fried by the boiling oil and the horse would slip and fall. If it galloped fast to avoid the oil, it would smash into the stone wall. It was doomed if it did and doomed if it didn't.

**No-Win Situations**

I often feel like the horse in the gate. No-win situations abound in my life and, I suspect, yours. The morning when you have an important meeting at work with a visiting V.I.P., your child takes sick and needs you at home.

Just when you've blown your budget paying for holiday expenses, your washing machine breaks down and needs an expensive repair. Rushing to an interview for a new job, late because you couldn't find a parking space, a woman in a wheelchair asks for your help.

Your spouse splurges on two tickets to a concert to celebrate your birthday and, just as you're leaving, your mother-in-law calls complaining of chest pains that are either indigestion or a heart attack.

**Horse-in-the-Gate Situations**

 When caught in such "horse-in-the-gate" situations, we feel like a trapped animal. Often we lose it, and burst out in anger or tell self-protective lies or blame the people closest to us. In our frazzled state, our moral standards plunge like the "broken" 13-story elevator in Disneyland's Tower of Terror.

You would never leave a sick child at home alone, but this time... You would never dip into the money you're holding for the charity fund, but this time... You would never refuse to help a woman in a wheelchair, but this time... You would never yell at your spouse for helping his/her mother, but this time...

When we feel trapped without any recourse, our worst self manifests. We actually become the snorting, rearing beast in the gate.

**The Third Alternative**

The most dramatic scene in the Torah is just such a "horse in the gate" scenario. Three days after the Children of Israel made their Exodus from slavery in Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind and led his army after them. When Pharaoh's chariot forces caught up with the Israelite men, women, and children, they were camped beside the sea. With Pharaoh's army behind them and the sea in front of them, the people had nowhere to escape. Thinking their doom was sealed, they panicked.

Then, just at the critical moment, G-d intervened. He split the sea, let the Children of Israel walk through on dry land, and restored the water in time to drown the pursuing Egyptian army.

This Biblical prototype teaches us a profound lesson. At first glance, the horse in the gate scenario seems to have only two players: the invading soldier on his charging horse and the defending soldier poised to pour down his pot of boiling oil. From a Jewish perspective, however, there's always a third player: G-d.

**In a God-Directed World, There**

**Are Always Infinite Possibilities.**

Judaism believes in a G-d Who is intimately involved in His world. Everything is determined by the Divine Will except the moral choices that human beings make. In a G-dless world, the horse and rider would be doomed to fry or smash, but in a G-d-directed world, there are always infinite possibilities. G-d could, for example, as the horse enters the gate, give the soldier holding the pot of oil a coughing fit, or he could feel a sudden urge to eliminate, or he could be felled by an invader's arrow.

In a G-d-directed world, you could choose to stay home with your sick child, and the V.I.P. you were supposed to meet that day could have been detained in Tokyo for 24 hours. If you overcome your temptation to dip into the charity fund, in a G-d-directed world you could be surprised by a check in the mail from a friend paying back an old loan. If helping the woman in the wheelchair makes you late for your job interview, you could be sitting opposite the disapproving personnel director when the interview is interrupted by a visit from his wife -- the woman in the wheelchair. In a G-d-directed world, there are infinite possibilities.

The antidote for the panic of the horse in the gate is to repeat four simple words: "G-d runs the world." This does not mean relying on miracles. It does not mean abdicating responsibility. It does mean choosing to do the right thing and relying on G-d to take care of the rest. The recognition "G-d runs the world" is the invincible steel cable that keeps the elevator of our moral standard from plummeting.

**G-d Gives Us What is Best for Us**

Once you have chosen to do what is right and have prayed for Divine assistance, G-d may make things work out as you wanted or He may not. Yes, helping the woman in the wheelchair may make you late for the job interview and cause you to lose the job. But perhaps a better job is waiting for you... or perhaps this job would have posed ethical tests that you are not strong enough to pass... or perhaps this high-paying job would have taken too much time from your family...

Recognizing that G-d runs the world doesn't mean that we always get what we want, but rather that we get what is best for us.

When we fail to let G-d run our lives, we get stuck like the horse in the gate. Our possibilities are limited and our lives are constricted.

**The House of My Dreams**

Shortly after getting married in 1987, my husband and I moved to the Old City of Jerusalem. We rented an apartment, with the intention of buying an apartment at the end of our year's lease.

In those days, taking a mortgage in Israel meant financial suicide, because both the interest and the principal of the mortgage were tied to "the index," Israel's double-digit inflation rate. So, you could take out a $100,000 mortgage and two years later find that you owed $130,000 on the principal. We heard horror stories of people who were swallowed up by such mortgages. We resolved to buy an apartment only for the sum we had in the bank.

The problem was that all the apartments for sale in our price range were small, cramped apartments. After months of searching, I gave up. We decided to just rent for another year. Six weeks before our lease expired, simply for protocol's sake, I called the owner, who had never lived in the apartment, to make sure we could renew our lease. He informed me that he would be moving into the apartment.

**Suddenly We Were the Horse in the Gate.**

Panicked, I called the real estate agent to rent another apartment in the Old City. There was nothing available.

Suddenly we were the horse in the gate. We couldn't stay in our rented apartment, and we couldn't afford to buy an apartment that was big enough for us.

Then it hit me: Why were we limiting G-d? G-d runs the world, and perhaps He had a nice, large apartment that He wanted to give us. I prayed hard, then called the real estate agent and told her: "We want to buy the apartment that G-d wants to give us. Just show us our apartment; it doesn't matter the price."

**Looking for a Large Living**

**Room and Three Bedrooms**

Our apartment, I told her, had to have a large living room where we could hold classes and Shabbatons, had to have three bedrooms, and had to be on the ground floor so that my mother and father, who suffered from arthritis, could someday live with us. I secretly wished for one of the Old City's ancient structures with domed or vaulted ceilings, but that was not a requirement.

One morning soon after, the real estate agent showed us our apartment. It had all our requirements—plus high vaulted ceilings. Its price was exactly double what we had.

My husband and I each called our fathers and asked for loans. They magnanimously gave us the money outright, as "an advance on your inheritance," they told us.

That left us $20,000 short of the asking price. We told the real estate agent to make an offer for the sum we had. "They won't take it," she told us with authority. The owners, Mr. And Mrs. Kagan, had had the apartment on the market for over a year, and were not willing to budge on the price.

**“Tell Them It’s Our Maximum Offer”**

"G-d runs the world," I reminded her (and myself). "Please phone them with our offer. Tell them it's our maximum offer. Take it or leave it."

Two days later, she got back to us, her voice filled with wonder. The Kagans had told her that their married daughter, who lived on a moshav, had just found a house she wanted to buy. They needed cash quickly to help her buy it before she missed the opportunity. They were willing to accept our offer.

Two weeks after we closed the deal, I went with Mrs. Kagan to transfer the utility bills into our name. I asked her when her daughter would be moving into her new house. Mrs. Kagan frowned and replied, "That house fell through. She's not moving after all."

A world run by G-d is a world of infinite possibilities. We are never stuck like the horse in the gate.

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