**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas behar 5776**

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**Cast Your Bread…#48**

**Reb Berel Zlodovitz’s Amazing Story**

 The Egged Bus Terminal in Yerushalayim is the site on which once stood the United Old Age Home. The home was occupied by elderly, dim-eyed and sad people.  There was one man who stood out from the rest with his erect posture and a face that exuded a joy of living.  His name was Reb Berel Zlodovitz.

 Reb Berel and his brother had owned sugar factories and other vast properties in Minsk, Russia.  Reb Berel generously distributed his wealth to charities, especially to the poor of Yerushalayim.  He and his family had purchased the land where the Kollel Minsk built free housing for its scholars and their families.

 Reb Berel rose very early every day and prayed with the vasikin minyan so that he could promptly arrive at the factory.  One morning, on his way to work, Reb Berel was (providentially) detained by a man who begged him to help form a minyan so that he could say Kaddish for his mother.  It took a while to gather the minyan, and Reb Berel was becoming impatient.

 Finally, after Kaddish had been said, Reb Berel ran towards his factory.  When he was a few blocks away, he saw his foreman running towards him, motioning him to stop.  The foreman warned him to run for his life, as the Bolsheviks had seized the plant and were looking for him.

 Reb Berel and his wife managed to hide and flee Russia.  After World War I, they traveled to Eretz Yisroel to settle.  The once wealthy Reb Berel arrived in Yerushalayim, penniless, with barely more than the shirt on his back.  The people of Yerushalayim, however, remembered the kindness of their benefactor and received Reb Berel and his wife with honor.

 The directors of the various institutions which he had supported gathered a special fund to put Reb Berel back on his feet.  Instead of resuming a life of business, Reb Berel decided to devote his life to the study of Torah and performance of good deeds.  He and his wife were allocated a wing in the United Old Age Home, the very institution which he had built with his generosity.

 Reb Berel lived happily and peacefully in his new surroundings.  The Gaon Rav Yechiel Michel Tucatzinsky, Rosh Yeshivah of Eitz Chaim, lived nearby.  Reb Berel had helped to support the Etz Chaim Yeshivah, and Rav Yechiel Michel was forever grateful.  Reb Berel and his wife became frequent Shabbos guests at Rav Yechiel Michel’s home.  Indeed, Reb Berel was the happiest resident of the United Old Age Home reaping the benefits of his spiritual investments, which he never dreamed he would ever need. (Tales From Old Jerusalem)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Emor 5776 email of the Weekly Vort.*

**Story 964**

**A Matter of Lineage**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0001ApG0:001NEXJ000003GwQ&count=1463428746&randid=783809131&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=783809131)

 A mixed gathering of rabbis, chasidim and householders of all sorts once heard the popular chasidic rebbe, **Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz,** telling of his forefathers, who were sages and tzaddikim of world renown.

 “I doubt if there is anyone in the world,” he concluded, “who can compete with me as far as distinguished lineage is concerned, whether oh my father’s or my mother’s side.  And if there is such a one, I would very much like to meet him.”

 One of his listeners, a chasid of his from Siebenbuergen, took up his challenge:  “Rebbe, my *yichus* (genealogy) is more distinguished than yours!”

 When Reb Naftali asked him to trace his ancestry, the chassid replied:  “My *yichus* is that I am the only one in my family who puts on tefillin.”

 Well pleased with this answer, the Rebbe chuckled and said: “Gentlemen, our friend from Siebenbuergen is perfectly right.  Allow me, though,” he went on, being in jovial spirits, “to explain the difference between a person who has *yichus* and a person who is not of noble extraction.”

 Suppose we have a tzaddik who is a great scholar, serving G-d with both love and awe, who rises at midnight to lament the darkness of the Exile, then makes his way to the mikveh to immerse himself for the sake of purity, then returns to study both the revealed and the esoteric treasures of the Torah until daybreak.  At dawn, like the spiritual lover celebrated in the *Song of Songs,* his voice is roused and his spirit wakened to an eager flame as he prepares himself for worship by singing psalms, studying Mishna, and giving alms.

 “He now joins the congregation for communal prayer, and his soul cleaves to his Maker devoutly, sweetly.  Half the day has passed, and it is time to partake of something, but as he prepares to wash his hands before eating, he sighs bitterly: “Very well, so I am about to do my body a favor.  But what have I done for the good of my soul?  What is the real worth of my Torah study and my level of worship?” But then he thinks it over, and consoles himself, “After all, for the son of a simple man like my father was, it’s not too bad”“ and he is satisfied.

 “But as for me suppose now and again I happen to rise at midnight, and sometimes study a little Talmud and the legal codes, and perhaps a bit of Kabbalah, or occasionally recite a few psalms, and go off to prayers.  Then, as I come home to eat something, I weigh my deeds, and realize that I have not yet done anything worthwhile towards revealing in This World the awesome unity of Him who gives life to all Creation.

 “To make matters worse, I bring to mind the memory of my saintly father, and my other pious forebears, and I ponder in the words of our Sages ˜When will my deeds come to equal those of my forefathers?”  This though humbles me no end, as I consider how worthless I really am.

 “This, then, is the value of *yichus*.”

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***Source*:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales*(Artscroll), as translated by R. **Uri Kaploun** from *Sipurei Chasidim* by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin.

***Biographical note*:** **Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz** [of blessed memory: 6 Sivan 5520 (the same day as the *Baal Shem Tov’*s passing!) - 11 Iyar 5587 (1760-1827 C.E.)] became the *rebbe* of many thousands of chasidim. He was noted for his sharp wit and humor and his illuminating aphorisms. Some of his teachings are collected in his works, *Zera Kodesh, Ayalah Sheluchah,*and*Imrei Shefe Rabbi*Many stories about him appear in the book, *Ohel Naftoli*.

***Connection*:** Seasonal -- 190th yahrzeit of the Ropshitzer on Iyar 11

*Reprinted from the Parshas Emor 5776 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)*ascent@ascentofsafed.com*

**A Visit from the Rashba**

 In recent times, there was a Jew in Eretz Yisroel who set aside time for learning Torah in the Beis Medrash on a regular basis.  He was scrupulous about not missing a day.  He was once unable to attend his regular *shiur*, and remained at home learning on his own.  He reached a difficult passage which he was unable to understand even with Rashi’s help, and he experienced great anguish.

 Finally he fell asleep.  He dreamt that a man with a noble countenance appeared before him, saying, “Come, I will explain the difficult passage in Rashi.z”

 The man indeed expounded on the subject in a new way. The dreamer asked, “Please tell me, what is your name?”

 The other answered, “My name is Rashba.” The next day, the man related his dream to his *maggid* *shiur* who found the explanation for the difficult Rashi, word for word, in a *sefer* written by the Rashba!

qThe *maggid shiur* was dumbfounded. The man who dreamt the dream was incapable, on his own, of understanding a single line of Rashba and he did not even own a copy of the Rashba’s sefer!

 It seemed the man had indeed been privileged to have the holy Rashba himself speak to him in a dream.  Rabbi Yitzchok Silberstein, Rav of Ramat Elchonon, who relayed this story, said that this incident, which took place in our own time, shows us the power of diligence and a genuine desire to learn and grasp Torah.  If we learn regularly, our limited understanding will be helped along by Heaven itself. (Stories My Grandfather Told Me Vol. 1)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Emor 5776 email of the Weekly Vort.*

**What a Wedding!**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

 The other day, a young man came over to me. He said that he has been studying and working towards getting a certain job for the last four years. It has been the focus of every one of his prayers since then. Now, the opportunity he thought he would have seems to be slipping away. He will have to settle doing something else. He asked, "I thought Hashem is so loving and kind. This is all I have ever wanted. How could He not give it to me?"

 I told him that we must live with the precept: **"גם זו לטובה**"-This too is for the best. If you don't get what you want, it is not because Hashem doesn't love you. It is because He knows that right now, this is what's best for you. Hashem knows the future. He knows what we need to accomplish and how we will be able to accomplish it, and He acts accordingly. We have to train ourselves to always think, "This too is for the best." Even what appears to be the most difficult situation is actually Hashem's loving kindness acting for our benefit.

 A man told me that his wedding date was January 7, 1996. The guest list was short, as he was marrying an orphan, and both he and his bride had very small families. To make matters worse, that day, New York was hit with one of the worst blizzards ever. By the time the wedding was set to start, a foot and a half of snow had fallen, and it was still coming down.

 Nobody could drive, and it looked like the wedding would be a disaster. One of the local rabbis called all the neighbors, telling them that it is a Mitzva to come immediately to this wedding. He even invited the local Yeshiva. It turned out to be one of the liveliest, most festive weddings, with hundreds of boys dancing. People were so inspired that they became religious just from being there. It was a wedding that no one would ever forget.

 Fourteen years later, the groom's older sister was finally getting married. It was her first marriage and her groom's second. Again, the families were not large, but whoever was coming was very excited. This wedding was set to take place on a hot August night in a Shul in Deal, New Jersey.

 Everyone recalled the eventful wedding of '96, but they knew that would not happen now-or would it? As Hashgacha would have it, right after the ceremony, the police entered the Shul, which was located in a quiet neighborhood, and evacuated the entire building because of a bomb scare. This was unheard of. There had never been a bomb scare in that area before, and there hasn't been one since.

 The entire wedding party left the building and was standing in the parking lot. The doors of the Shul were locked, with the police guarding the building. All the food and music were left inside. Time passed, the guests were waiting outside sweating, but they were not being allowed back in. People began to leave.

 One of the bride's friends came and saw what was happening and quickly went into action. She knew of someone with a garage full of water bottles. She asked to bring them to the wedding and distribute them to the guests. Then, she asked the neighbor if she could use their backyard to dance. The neighbor was happy to help. All of the sudden, chairs and tables were being set up. A local DJ arrived with his equipment, free of charge.

 The backyard became a reception area. The woman then called someone who had just made a large barbeque for an organization and asked if she could bring the leftovers. The hot food arrived. Hundreds of young ladies were asked to come and dance with the bride. Yeshiva boys were called to dance with the groom. Within half an hour, it was the liveliest scene anyone could have imagined.

 Finally, at 11:30 the Shul was reopened, and the reception moved inside. At that moment, none other than Yaakov Shwekey walked in to sing. Someone had called him to do a Chesed and save the wedding. The crowd became charged. They danced until 2AM. It turned out to be the most memorable wedding. The bride said afterward that she had always wanted Yaakov Shwekey to sing at her wedding but couldn't afford it. Now she got what she wanted-and much more.

 **גם זו לטובה**- Everything always works out for the best. Sometimes we see how, but most times, we don't. Yet, we can rest assured that Hashem is always doing the best for us.

*Reprinted from the May 11, 2016 email of Daily Emunah*

**The Reward of Getzel’s Forgotten Chesed**

**By Rabbi Dov Brezak**

 Please tell your children the following true story told by Rav Zilberstein and appearing in his book Nifleosecha Asicha (Bereishis, page 377.)

 Many years ago there was a poor man by the name of Reb Getzel. He was a simple and G-d fearing man. He was also very strong physically. Reb Getzel was always happy and never complained even though he was poor. One day he became sick and he felt that his days were numbered. He sent his wife to the Rav of the town to request that he pay a visit to their home. Reb Getzel wanted to speak with the Rav before he would leave this world.

 The Rav , who was very dedicated to the people of his town, summoned his assistant and together they went to Reb Getzel’s house. As the door was opened for the Rav, the Rav, with a look of astonishment on his face, closed the door. After a moment he then opened the door and proceeded inside.

 Reb Getzel’s pale face lit up at the sight of the Rav. With a very weak voice he apologized for troubling the Rav to come, but he immediately proceeded to explain why he did so.

 “I know that my days are numbered, and therefore I am very afraid. I am not a learned person, I never had the opportunity to learn Torah. All that I learned was how to say the daily prayers and to recite some chapters of Tehillim by heart. Even that I do not do so well.”

 Reb Getzel sighed deeply and continued, “Now that I am to stand in front of the Heavenly Court, I tremble at the thought that I have nothing to show for myself after a lifetime in this world. But even worse than that I have no one to say kaddish for me or to learn for the merit of my soul. This is the reason I had the audacity to trouble the Rav to pay a visit to my home. I humbly ask forgiveness for the trouble.

 “Please find me someone that will say kaddish for me and that will pray for my soul, even though I have no way to pay this person in return”, asked Reb Getzel.

 “Certainly Certainly”, said the Rav as he attempted to calm Reb Getzel down. “I am sure you have nothing to worry about” continued the Rav, “You have surely done the best you could in your situation.

 “Please share with me some of the good deeds you have done in your life” asked the Rav of Reb Getzel.

 “But Rebbi, I have nothing. I am leaving this world with empty hands. I have no good deeds that will accompany me to the World of Truth” said Reb Getzel.

 “I am certain that you have done something special”, said the Rav. “Try to remember. Try to remember which great and special mizva you have done.”

 Getzel closed his eyes and was quiet. All was quiet except for Reb Getzel’s belabored breathing. After a few minutes he opened his eyes and he said, “I remembered something that can perhaps be considered a good deed but I don’t think it was anything special. If not for your request , Harav, I wouldn’t even think that it was worth mentioning.

 “It happened many years ago. One day I was on my way to work, in the slaughter house which was far from our town on the other side of the nearby mountain. I climbed the mountain with ease, as I was young and strong, and the climb was no challenge for me. Suddenly I saw a wagon full of people speeding down the mountain. The men woman and children were all wearing festive clothing, apparently they were on their way to a wedding. The horses were racing wildly.

 “It was clear that the wagon driver had lost control of the horses. When I saw what danger the passengers were in I walked towards the horses and stood in their path. I stuck out my hands on each side hoping that the horses would see me and slow down. They didn’t slow down. At the last minute I jumped aside, I grabbed the reins of one of the horses and managed to climb up on him. Somehow I was able to get from there to the wagon. I grabbed the reins from the drunken wagon driver, who didn’t even realize the danger he had gotten his wagon into.

 “With great difficulty I was able to hold back the wild horses. Bechasdei Hashem they calmed down and slowed down. I continued to drive the wagon to the nearby town where the wedding was apparently to take place. When I realized that, aside from the shock of what happened, no one was hurt, I left the scene and went to work.

 “That’s all that happened, concluded Reb Getzel, in his simple way.”

 “You did a great thing”, said the Rav. “It’s merit will certainly stand you by. As for your request I will see to it that someone will say kaddish and pray for your soul.

 “At this point though, I wish to ask that you return a favor for a favor. Promise me that if you will be able to, you will tell me how your judgment went in the Heavenly Court.” Reb Getzel promised and the Rav left.

 On their way home the Rav’s assistant asked for an explanation for the Rav’s strange behavior.

 “When we first came to Reb Getzel’s house after opening the door the Rav closed the door and after a few moments opened it again?”

 The Rav replied, ‘I will explain what happened. When I first opened the door I saw a lit menorah over the head of Reb Getzel. I understood that the Yid that was in this bed was not a simple person rather a great zaddik. I hurried and closed the door so that I could think how to conduct myself with him.

 “Now, we both know that that this Yid endangered himself to save the lives of others. He save and entire wagon of people and proceeded on his way without even thinking he did anything special. He will certainly merit to be in a very special place in Gan Eden”, concluded the Rav.

 Reb Getzel passed away. On the third day after his passing he appeared to the Rav in a dream. “I came to fulfill my promise and tell you what happened in my judgement at the Heavenly Court”, said Reb Getzel.

 “When my trial [in shomayim] began a giant scale was placed before me. On the left side were placed all the aveiros that I had committed, big and small. On the right side to my surprise I discovered many mitzvos and good deeds. Still as I suspected the left side was heavier and was tipping the scale .

 “Then, right before my judgement was passed, as if from nowhere a wagon with horses appeared. It went onto the right side of the scale. The wagon, the horses, all the people in the wagon including the drunk wagon driver, and even the mud on the wheels, all of these went onto the right side of the scale and tipped the scale in my favor.

 “Immediately after that the call went out, ‘Open the gates of righteousness for the zaddik’. Before I was sent to Gan Eden I was told that I have to fulfill my promise to you the Rav. More than that, I do not have permission to say. Honorable Rav, Please publicize how great is the mitzva of kindliness to another Yid for even something that appears simple and without value in this world, could be important AND THE DECIDING FACTOR in the next world.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Metzora 5776 email of Peh Tahor.*

**The Landlord Who Couldn’t Evict His Jobless Tenant**

**By Sheina Medwed**

 It was the first time in six years that the Goldmans were late in paying their rent. But their landlord, Shimon Davis, understood. It was during the Great Depression of 1929. Times were hard; jobs were scarce. Shimon had come to Springfield, Massachusetts from Pinsk, Russia, and had saved enough money to buy a three-story home.

 A carpenter by trade, Shimon was far from wealthy. He relied on the rent money to meet his mortgage payments every month. But he was a man of deep faith who had a heart of gold.

 “How can I have a roof over my head while my fellow Jews are out in the cold? If Hashem wants me to have money, He will give it to me. But right now He wants me to give these people a home.”

 One day the Goldmans walked in with downcast faces. Mr. Goldman had just lost his job and they would not be able to pay the rent that month. They had to move.

 Shimon told him, “If you have your health and family, you are truly a wealthy man. You can’t move – where will you go? Stay here and help fix up the house. Your work will be the payment for the rent. Meanwhile you will look for a job. Hashem will help. You are like family, and family sticks together. So don’t move now.”

 Mr. Goldman was stunned. He knew Shimon was having a hard time financially. How could he impose on them? But Shimon insisted. The Goldmans stayed for one rent-less year, until they felt too uncomfortable with the arrangement. They moved to Mr. Goldman’s sister’s farm.

 The vacant apartment was soon occupied – but not with paying tenants. Shimon knew too many jobless and homeless friends, and he took pity on them. One morning, Shimon prepared to go to the bank. He told his wife that he was informing the manager that he had no money to pay the mortgage, and they might have to sell the house. Just as he walked down the path, the mailman handed Shimon the mail. He put it on the table without giving it a second glance, and left. Soon his wife called after him urgently. Shimon found her with a torn-open envelope in her hand with five and ten dollar bills. “Shimon,” she cried, “the Goldman’s sent us a whole year’s rent money – and they want to know if the apartment is vacant so they can move back!”

 Shimon practically sang all the way to the bank, as he thanked Hashem for sending him the money for the mortgage. His kindness to the Goldmans was repaid – just in time! (A Mother’s Favorite Stories)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pekudei 5776 email of The Weekly Vort*

**A Rebounding Kindness**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

 At the end of the Holocaust, on April 15, 1945, the British Army entered Bergen-Belsen and liberated the camp. A young girl, 16 years old Nancy Baum went with a couple of people, including her aunt, to the men's camp to see if any of their relatives had survived.

 The scene, she said, was horrific. All they saw were corpses. They noticed a little movement from one of the bodies, and they went over there to check. Nancy recognized the person from the time she had visited her brother in his barracks. She told the others, "He's alive. We have to save him. Let's help him out."

 The others said to her, "He's about to die; there's no hope; just leave it." But Nancy was persistent. She said, "We have to save his life." And they got someone to come help carry him to a room that had been used by the Germans before they fled. The young man's name was Howard Kleinberg, an 18 year old, holding on to his last breath. They gave him some food and drink.

 After a week, he had enough strength to talk. He asked them, "Please get me a doctor." The problem was that even though they were liberated, the war still wasn't over; there was no way of getting a doctor. They did what they could to

keep him alive.

 One day during the third week, Howard opened his eyes; he didn't see anyone around. He decided on his own that without a doctor, he wasn't going to make it. So he crawled out of the bunk to the road. Within seconds a British military vehicle picked him up and rushed him to a hospital.

 When the people who were taking care of him came back to give him some food, they had no idea what happened to him. Baruch Hashem, six months later, Howard was back to full strength and was selected along with a group of survivors to be taken to Toronto to start a new life there. The Jews in Toronto were eager to help, and a family there took Howard in and treated him like one of their own.

 Meanwhile, Nancy Baum, the young lady who saved Howard's life, ended up in Buffalo (New York), and after six weeks she got a visa and was advised to go to Toronto. The community there was very small and everyone found out when a survivor arrived. Howard found out that this young lady Nancy who saved his life was now in Toronto, and he wanted to go personally thank her.

 The world is a very large place. Hashem orchestrated it that these two people Howard and Nancy, coming all the way from Europe both ended up in this small community in Toronto. And not too long afterwards, they got married and raised a family with children and grandchildren. When this story was told over in 2013, the couple was celebrating their 63rd wedding anniversary. Nancy wanted to do a pure act of chesed and save another Jew's life. Little did she know that she was saving her own זיווג, the one that Hashem destined to be her partner.

 Chesed is amazing. It is one of the pillars that the world stands on. We do it לשם שמים-for the sake of heaven, but we are always the real beneficiaries.

*Reprinted from the February 22, 2016 email of Daily Emunah.*

**Why the Rabbi Attended**

**A Secular Zionist Event**

 It was a cold Chicago winter night back in early 1951. The State of Israel Bonds annual dinner was hosting none other than Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion as the guest of honor and featured speaker. The ballroom as packed. The non-kosher event attracted members of Chicago's wealthiest business and professional secular Jewish leadership, all who braved the frigid temperatures to support the fledgling state.

 They hovered around the ballroom, offering contributions at a rapid-fire pace, while carefully balancing both their martinis and checkbooks. There was nary a yarmulke in sight.

 However, one individual, who stood in a corner of the massive lobby, outside the ballroom, was markedly unique. He wore a long dark caftan and sported a large black fedora. His beard encircled a face that was lined with the creases of hours of Torah study. His piercing eyes darted about the scene, observing the philanthropic flurry of activity. An ancient relic tucked in the corner of a sea of modernity, he stood stoically, observing the entire scenario, a slight smile emanating from his lips.

 He was about to leave the hotel and return to the Yeshiva at which he taught when a loud voice boomed from behind him. "Rabbi Mendel Kaplan! What bring you to the Israeli Bonds Dinner?"

 Rav Mendel turned around. He stood face to face with one of Chicago’s wealthiest philanthropists. Though a very secular Jew, the man was still a major supporter of the Yeshiva at which Rabbi Kaplan was employed.

 Rabbi Kaplan was known in the Yeshiva as quite a zealous individual who disapproved of many of the policies surrounding the Labor party and the Prime Minister, and so, baffled, the man continued his mocking inquisition.

 "Surely you did not come to pay your respects to the Prime Minister and join us in this event!" He added sarcastically. Then he broke into a wider grin. "I am positive you did not come here to partake in a little shellfish!" The man let out a chuckle.

 Rav Kaplan did not return the tease. Instead, his answer was open, honest, and quite blunt. "I came here for one reason," he began, "to stand and watch how the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stand in line in order to give charity."

**Comment:** So many people “take the bait” and predictably get sucked into arguments which cause more issues than they resolve. A wise man is able to re-frame any conversation into one with a positive feel. (Story from R’Mordechai Kamenetsky)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Terumh 5776 email of Reb Mendel’s Torah’s Sweets Weekly.*

**Man’s Best Friend – A Holocaust Reflection**

 We know the harsh reality. There were few survivors of the Holocaust in comparison to the millions mercilessly taken. Given this and given the advanced current age of those who witnessed it all first-hand, all testimony is precious. Every account counts! This present-day generation of children will be the last to have that direct link.

 Looking through a lens of appreciation and understanding the true value of each remarkable story, in this edition we cast a spotlight on Chaim Tzvi Solomon, a Holocaust survivor who currently resides in Israel. Below, he generously shares of himself. Respect.

 Chaim Tzvi originates from the Hungarian town of Holmein. Miraculously, in his possession is an ancient but beautiful Sefer Torah in mint condition, that has been protected and handed down in his family for generations. It is an exceptional and unique Torah, written long ago by a pious and extremely gifted holy scribe.

 Today, this Torah is much sought after by many rabbis and communal leaders. Like countless others, the entire extended family of Mr. Solomon perished in the horrors of Auschwitz - his parents, brothers and sisters were all exterminated. Chaim Tzvi is the sole survivor of the entire Solomon clan. However, through Divine intervention, his precious Sefer Torah (today residing in a famous synagogue in Israel), astonishingly survived the Holocaust.

 And here’s how:

 When World War II broke ‎out, Chaim Tzvi was a young student studying at the yeshiva of the revered Rebbe of Sekelhed. Chaim Tzvi was extremely close to his Rebbe and acquired great Torah knowledge while learning there. One day, he received a Nazi directive to immediately report to the army to be drafted to work for their (despicable) war machine. Chaim Tzvi knew ignoring this notice was not an option. With a heavy and downtrodden heart, he went to his holy Rebbe, showed him the letter and relayed his expected obligation to reply and consequently leave his studies. He solemnly requested a blessing from his Rebbe for protection against all harm.

 The holy Rebbe held Chaim Tzvi's hands within his own, looked him in the eye and said, “My dearest Chaim Tzvi, promise me you will forever observe the bind between a Jew and Hashem.”

 When Chaim Tzvi heard his Rebbe’s request he was taken aback, but immediately replied with great emotion and in a loud firm voice, “I promise I will never forget or let go of my commitment to Hashem, not even for one moment.”

 Upon hearing his reply, the Rebbe took his holy hands and placed them on Chaim Tzvi's head and with the greatest affection, assured him that in the merit of keeping his pledge with Hashem, he would be protected throughout the war.

 Blessing in hand, young Chaim Tzvi set forth (with reserved optimism) to the call of duty. During the war years he experienced horror after horror – from labor camps to crossing perilous borders trying to escape. Somehow he managed to sustain himself throughout.

‎ Chaim Tzvi attributed these miracles firstly to Hashem and also to the blessing of his holy Rebbe. He focussed on committing to keep his pledge. During this period, he also was able to secure a pair of Tefillin and performed this mitzvah daily. He shared this opportunity with other Jews during those difficult times. Are there really enough adjectives to describe how profoundly challenging it was? With a sigh, we all know there are not.

 In May, 1945, the war ended and although technically free from the clutches of the Nazis, Chaim Tzvi found himself dazed, alone and wandering with no particular destination. Rumors circulated that the Nazis not only annihilated his entire family but also the Jewish population of his home town. Unfortunately, the reports proved to reflect reality. And Chaim Tzvi, like so many others, was left desolate and alone in a cold, dark post-war reality.

 With no expectations and an impossibly heavy heart, he decided to return to Holmein to salvage any remnants of his pre-war life. To his utter dismay, he witnessed total destruction and devastation beyond belief. Not one Jewish soul was to be found. No one was spared the furnaces of Auschwitz. Every semblance of Jewishness was completely demolished, all burned to the ground - nothing but ashes remained.

 Despondent, Chaim Tzvi sat down heavily on a slab of rock not too far from what used to be his home. Destitute and bereft, he put his head between his knees and cried uncontrollably over the calamity and catastrophic situation that had befallen him and the Jewish People.

‎ Above all other material possessions, Chaim Tzvi was distraught over the loss of his family's cherished Sefer Torah. He ruminated … just like everything else that had been viciously destroyed, how could such a holy artefact vanish without any trace? Surely the merits of his forefathers and their good deeds would protect it from all danger?

 He had lost so much and prayed fervently. Engrossed in prayer and sobbing, from a distance he suddenly ‎heard a loud barking sound that escalated with every minute that passed. Chaim Tzvi raised his head, looked around and saw a huge dog heading directly towards him. As it approached, he recognized the dog as his family’s watchdog.

 The Solomon's had been very prosperous and wealthy, and in his mind’s eye he recalled the large mansion within which they all dwelt, necessitating a guard dog for protection. The dog was devoted to the Solomon family and was adored in return. An internal dialogue began, “I am not my family’s only survivor, look here, our dog was also fortunate to survive the Nazi onslaught.”

 The evil Nazis valued the life of a dog more than that of a Jew and dogs were thus exempt from the Nazi extermination decree. Now, a dog relies on its sense of smell to interpret its world. And with this, the dog recognized Chaim Tzvi as a Solomon family member and approached him barking loudly. However, the tone of the bark was not what Chaim Tzvi recalled. It was at a different pitch and caught his attention. The dog raised its front paws and rested them on Chaim Tzvi, all-the-while continuing this piercing howl. The dog’s uncharacteristic behaviour reminded him of an incident that happened many years past.

 Chaim Tzvi's father had popped out into a nearby store and briefly left his baby sister alone at home, sleeping in her crib. While unattended, the baby fell out, landed with a thud on the floor and began to scream hysterically. Obviously a dangerous situation. Hearing her distress, the family dog intuitively ran directly to the store to find the father, barking and wailing frantically. Determinedly, he jumped up onto the father with his front paws. Sensing the urgency, he ran after the dog who was bounding home. Thankfully, in the nick of time, he rescued the distressed baby.

‎ Flash forward. Chaim Tzvi, amidst the ruins of his once beloved town, saw the dog act in a similar fashion and grasped that there must be a reason for this behavior. He stood up and the dog began running, turning its head periodically to see if Chaim Tzvi was following. The dog picked up its excited pace with Chaim Tzvi in hot pursuit until he reached a certain wheat field on the outskirts of town. Panting, the dog finally came to a halt at a specific spot.

 Barking wildly, the dog began digging with his paws, hinting that there was something buried beneath, without any initial success. Seeing this, Chaim Tzvi felt compelled to help and he too began digging, finding a discarded old tool. Dogs are fondly known as Man’s Best Friend and in that moment, Chaim Tzvi and his dog were unified in the search.

 Before too long, they had carved out a deep crater ‎in the ground. However, much to his chagrin, nothing was unearthed. Disheartened, Chaim Tzvi thought to himself, perhaps my war-ravaged dog is delusional? Perhaps I am? He rose to leave. Sensing this, the dog continued barking louder and resumed digging this time, even more conscientiously. Chaim Tzvi saw the urgency in the dog’s actions, retraced his steps and returned to dig with revitalized energy.

 After approximately 15 minutes, his digging implement hit some sort of metal object, something he presumed was impeding his efforts. He persevered and soon saw the top of a huge metal chest. After expending tremendous physical effort, he was able to hoist it up, clear off the dirt and pry open the lid. Did his eyes deceive him? Joy of joys, much to his delight, there in front of him on an open random field in war-torn Hungary, lay the family's cherished Sefer Torah, along with all the Torah ornaments neatly arranged alongside. From the core of his being emanated an elated roar. The family’s treasured Torah, longed for and pined for … was right before his eyes. Upon seeing the chest, the dog seemed to compose itself - success.

 Mystified over the back-story, Chaim Tzvi was perplexed. Who hid the Torah? What were the circumstances behind it? He stood aside almost in a reverie when suddenly, the dog went back to the same site and began digging and barking louder than before. Chaim Tzvi assumed the dog wanted him to close the large hole, this was not the case. The dog showed no sign of abating – communicating that he still wasn't satisfied.

 Exhausted but determined, Chaim Tzvi lifted up the tool once again and continued digging until there was a hole approximately ten foot deep. To his amazement, he uncovered another chest similar to the first one. After much exertion, he hoisted the second chest to the surface and simultaneously, the dog’s barking subsided and it lovingly rested nearby. Opening the second chest, he could not believe what he saw. It was a chest full of money, valuables and deeds, all belonging to his late father, who had cleverly managed to hide them before the cruel Nazis deported his family resulting in an ultimate death sentence. Chaim Tzvi now understood the foresight of his dear, brave father.

 Pre-war, the loyal family dog was accustomed to accompany his master to the outskirts of town and was there the day these treasures were hidden. Impressively, after surviving the war, it remained faithful and waited until a family member returned home, assuming the role of being their guide.

 Amazing! Extraordinary! Remarkable!

 Chaim Tzvi approached the few remaining town neighbors and asked if any light could be shed on the (tragic) story of his parents. It was relayed to him that several days after being deported, together with all Jews in Holmein, his father was abrasively dragged back to his house surrounded by Nazi generals. Apparently, they were informed of his status as one of the wealthiest Jews in Hungary. An interrogation ensued with suspicions his wealth was hidden nearby. This was denied. He stated that upon sensing troubling times ahead, he had chosen to send his entire fortune to other countries. The brutal Nazis did not believe him and brutally bludgeoned him with clubs until he bled profusely.

 Hearing the deafening commotion and screaming, the family dog appeared and attacked the cursed Nazis, biting and tearing at them. The Germans (known to be skilled at handling dogs), attempted to calm the dog but to no avail. Enraged, they resolved to shoot the dog, but it fled, all-the-while dodging bullets.

 So a canine companion survived the war to accomplish a mission.

 How wondrous are the ways of Hashem!

 Several days after this life-changing discovery, the dog died. Having completed its life’s duty, this loyal four-legged friend allowed Chaim Tzvi to recover the precious Sefer Torah, together with the valuables. Through the unbearable pain of the war that decimated so many, this gesture enabled one Jewish man, Chaim Tzvi, to get back on his feet. Of course, the emotional scars are carried for a lifetime.

 A short while after the war, Chaim Tzvi immigrated to Israel, piecing his life back together and proudly raised a beautiful family. Today, he is surrounded by loving family members - his family Sefer Torah is safe, secure and in demand. It is an honour and a privilege for all who hold this precious parchment in their hands.

 Throughout his long life, just as the holy pre-war Rebbe of Sekelhed asked, Chaim Tzvi always observed that profound bond between himself and Hashem.

 And as for the dog … Man’s Best Friend? Yes, indeed

*The above story was emailed to us by an enthusiastic subscriber of the Shabbos Stories for the Parsha email – Reb Shabse Fisher. He read the story in a Jerusalem parsha sheet – “The Mishnas HaParsha” edited by Rabban Gamliel Rabinowitz, shlita in the holy city of Yerushalayim. Mr. Fisher personally translated the story word-for-word, but forwarded to Ms. Ramona Freedman of Sydney, Australia who edited it and created a more natural and easier to read English-language version that you read above. Thanks to all involved in this monumental literary venture.*