**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas shelach 5773**

**Volume 4, Issue 39 23 Sivan 5773/ June 1, 2013**

***For a free subscription, please forward your request to*** [***keren18@juno.com***](mailto:keren18@juno.com)

Light in All the Dark Places

The Extraordinary Metamorphosis

Of Hitler's Nephew's Grandson.

**By** [**Yitta Halberstam**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48868047.html)

It's said that the "truth will set you free," but when an intrepid Israeli reporter browbeat Dr. Daniel Brown (name has been changed) into going public five years ago, the aftermath was traumatic. "

“I had always been open about my identity with both my family and friends," he recalls, "and no one had ever been less than supportive and warm. But this particular Israeli newspaper misrepresented its agenda to me.

**Repercussions of Interview Left the Family Shaken**

“I didn't know that it intended to publicize or sensationalize my interview the way it ultimately did. The story was printed in the weekend edition of the paper, and all day long on Thursday and *erev Shabbat* radio commercials continually blasted every 15 minutes: *Hitler's nephew's grandson -- right here in Israel -- and a Jew!* The repercussions left my family shaken."

Brown's sons -- enrolled in a modern Orthodox yeshivah in Jerusalem -- were spat upon by several of their classmates and called "Nazis." A handful of neighbors studiously avoided Brown when they encountered him on the street. And in shul the Shabbat after the story aired, a number of social acquaintances who normally greeted him with hearty handshakes turned the other way.

"How could it be that children of Nazis live right here in Israel and no one knows about them? Impossible!"

"To these people, who had known me as Jewish for 25 years, I had become -- overnight -- a pariah," says Brown. "I thought I was sharing a valuable lesson with others: that the past can be recreated and that a person always has the opportunity to change. But actually, it was *I* who was taught the lesson: Some people will *never* let you change." (Not surprisingly Brown wanted to use a pseudonym in this article.)

**A Litmus Test for Various Reactions**

Still, the incident becoming a litmus test for the varieties of human behavior, the responses were not uniformly negative. "In the same synagogue that Shabbat, I was also the recipient of a clearly symbolic act of acceptance," says Brown. "I was given the first *aliyah*.

“This told me in no uncertain terms that the majority of the shul members regarded me as a full Jew and an accepted member of the community. Sadly, however, the decency of the majority didn't nullify the crude conduct of the minority. We were badly wounded by what happened.

"Now I understand why most of my counterparts hide their identities," says Brown. "Many Israelis are uneasy about our genealogy; they don't know how to react or what to do with us."

**Very Few People are Aware of “The Penance Movement”**

Perhaps that is why in a country still scarred by the Holocaust, a country whose very existence still trembles on the foundations of the ash and bone of the Six Million, very few people are aware of what I like to call "The Penance Movement": a subculture of hundreds of children of Nazis who have embraced their own dark past in the most extreme possible way. They have not only aligned themselves with the group of people their parents sought to annihilate, they have cast off their former identities and themselves become members of that very group. The majority of them have converted according to Jewish law, live as Orthodox Jews and reside in Israel.

**Last Great, Untold Chapters of the Post-Holocaust Era**

This, I believe, is one of the last great, untold chapters of the post-Holocaust era. It's a story that speaks to humanity's quest for meaning in life, our capacity for goodness and our potential to reshape identity and destiny. Yet, when I contact government officials, rabbinic courts and Israeli journalists themselves asking about this phenomenon, most seem shocked by my inquiries. "Are you sure?" they ask, some surprised, others skeptical. "It's an urban legend," many insist. "How could it be that children of Nazis live right here in Israel and no one knows about them? Impossible!"

Interestingly, a disproportionate number of the German converts are distinguished academicians -- most notably, in the field of Jewish studies. Brown has followed this trajectory himself and chairs the Jewish studies department at one of the country's leading universities.

**Grandmother’s Name was Erna Patra Hitler**

In his engagement with rabbinic and Talmudic literature, Brown is joined by Rabbi Dr. Aharon Shear-Yashuv (formerly known as Wolfgang Shmidt and one of the few converts who grants me permission to use his real name), chairman of Jewish studies at Bar-Ilan University, and many others including the chairman of the Jewish studies department at a Southern university in the United States and a professor of rabbinic literature at an Ivy League college in the United States. But it is clearly Brown who possesses the most interesting antecedents of all.

"My grandmother's name was Erna Patra Hitler," says Brown. (After the War, she dropped the "t," changing her name to 'Hiler.') "Hans Hitler -- her second husband -- was the Fuhrer's nephew, but he didn't resemble him in any discernible way.

**Her Husband was the Fuhrer’s Nephew**

“He was soft and gentle. But what my step-grandfather lacked in vitriol was more than made up by the fierceness of my grandmother who was a sworn Nazi. She believed in the Nazi ideology before, during and even after the War. She was proud that her father-in-law was Hitler's brother, although he kept away from politics. Instead, he managed a cafe in Berlin, and because everyone knew that he was the Fuhrer's brother, all the Nazi elite patronized his establishment. This made his family and him -- including my grandparents -- local 'nobility.'

"When [my grandparents] visited us, they arrived in a black Mercedes, which was then a novelty and status symbol. It was a big deal when the Mercedes arrived in the working-class neighborhood where my mother and I lived."

**Born in Frankfurt in 1952**

Brown was born in Frankfurt in 1952 to Protestant parents who had both served in the Wehrmacht. His father, an ardent supporter of the Nazi party, divorced his mother shortly after his birth, and promptly disappeared from their lives. Brown was raised by his mother, who scrambled to make a living in post-War Germany.

She received neither financial nor moral support from Erna Hitler, whom Brown describes as "indifferent to the pain and suffering of others." Brown's childhood years were marked by deprivation and hardship, as his debt-ridden mother struggled to keep them afloat. They were constantly on the go, moving from one apartment to another, leaving when frustrated landlords forced them out for lack of payment. Still, in one respect that would have profound reverberations for his future, Brown was fortunate. His mother always told him the truth.

**Many Germans are “Sick and Tired”**

**Of Talk About the Holocaust**

Today, there are Germans who complain that they are "sick and tired" of the "endless talk" about the Holocaust, but in the immediate years after the War, there was only silence and denial, explains Brown. "In school, history teachers taught German history only up until World War I, in accordance with governmental legislation," he says.

"The government was afraid that if these teachers had a Nazi past or had been supporters of Hitler's regime, they would not be objective in the classroom. So, actually, this law was borne of good intentions. But as a result, we remained largely ignorant about what had happened only a few years before. I remember having conversations with classmates who refused to believe in Germany's accountability. Their parents had glossed over the details or lied outright. But my own mother hadn't."

**Brown’s Mother Revealed Her Sordid Past**

Instead of the elaborate fabrications concocted by his friends' parents to conceal the truth, Brown's mother showed her son her cache of documents (which bore seals of the Reich with accompanying swastikas), letters and photographs of family members -- including herself -- wearing Wehrmacht uniforms, which testified to their complicity.

She told him that she had been stationed in the Polish city of Lodz, where they hung Jews in the center of the city. "It was awful," his mother told him. "I needed to pass through the center of town every day in order to get from my house to headquarters and back. But I couldn't bear to see the Jews strung up like that, so I took a long detour around the city each day to avoid this terrible scene. I never got used to it."

Brown was horrified by his mother's account. He felt the room go black as he rifled through the physical evidence of her past, but his mother's genuine remorse provided him with some small measure of comfort. "When I asked her why she kept following orders, why she didn't resist, she answered simply, but with deep shame, 'I was afraid.' I believed her," says Brown.

Although Brown tried to share his mother's revelations with his school friends, they couldn't accept them as true; they told him that he was making it up. "So I tried to block it from my mind," says Brown.

**Couldn’t Remain Apathetic to His**

**Knowledge of What Germans Had Done**

I couldn't remain apathetic to what I read. I know my encounter with it shaped my future to a large extent."

But when he was a high school student his destiny came calling again by way of an inheritance from his biological grandfather -- his grandmother's first husband -- who had willed him a carton of books, among them his personal copy of *Mein Kampf*.

"I had never seen Hitler's infamous book before, and I read it thoroughly," says Brown. "I was absolutely enraged by what he wrote. I kept on writing comments in the book's margins, comments that countered Hitler's claims. I still have this book in my library, because it served as a major catalyst in my life. I couldn't remain apathetic to what I read. I know my encounter with it shaped my future to a large extent."

**Looking for Ways to Avoid Post-High School Military Duty**

The future of every young German in the post-War period included a mandatory stint in the army, but largely as a result of his encounter with the Holocaust, Brown had become a pacifist. "I was expected to join the army as soon as I graduated [from] high school, so I cast about for ways to get out of this civil obligation," he says.

"I learned that the two groups that were exempt from military service were the clergy and students of the Catholic Church. So when I opted to become a theology student, it was originally out of opportunism, not spiritual concerns. But way leads on to way, and that's precisely what happened to me.

"Theology students are required to take several courses in Judaism and Hebrew, and I became increasingly fascinated by what I was learning," says Brown. "While studying Judaism, I saw more and more things that troubled me about Christianity. For example, the concept of the Holy Trinity bothered me a lot ... how [could] G-d be three? Another thing that I didn't understand was the idea that a Christian has to suffer in order to be redeemed. The Jewish approach manifested by Yom Kippur made much more sense to me.

"The vast theological differences between Judaism and Christianity created a schism inside myself, and I was beginning to feel schizophrenic," Brown continues. "In 1977, I decided to go to Israel to further my studies at Hebrew University where I ... took classes in Hebrew literature and Jewish philosophy. I fell in love with Israel and lengthened my stay from one year to two." Ultimately, Brown ended up studying at Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav.

**Argues that He Converted to Judaism**

**Because of Theological Reasons**

Brown makes short shrift of my "Penance Movement" hypothesis -- that children of Nazis convert to Judaism as atonement -- maintaining that he converted for theological reasons, not out of penance for his parents' sins. "Maybe there are unconscious psychological reasons that drove me to Judaism," he allows, "but since I am a critical thinker and very cerebral, on a conscious level at least, I believe that I came to Judaism from a place of pure intellect."

He does, however, concede this: "I believe that whoever is willing to take this step [conversion] must have a very deep identity crisis preceding the conversion itself. He's not able to return to the identity that he was born into. I understood that I was not happy in the place where I was born, and I made a decision to go to another place.

**The Percentage of German Converts**

**In Israel is Not Insignificant**

"The fact is that during the seventies and eighties many young Germans who wanted to detach themselves from the previous generation, the generation that was complicit in the Holocaust, left Germany. And the percentage of German converts in Israel is not insignificant.

“I converted mainly because I had a theological criticism of Christianity. Is this a rationalization I gave myself? My grandfather didn't have any educational or cultural influence over me, but it still makes me feel awful that this is the background I come from. It sharpens the identity questions that I am so busy with.... My identity is not taken for granted. It is something that I must continually deal with."

Brown converted to Judaism in 1979, and married another German convert who is also an academician. Although his wife's parents in Stuttgart cut off all contact with their daughter, his own mother (who died seven years ago) accepted him as a Jew and visited him several times at his home in Israel.

"Perhaps she was afraid that if she didn't accept my conversion, she would lose her only child," says Brown. "Whatever the reason, she dealt well with my Jewishness. She attended my three sons' Bar Mitzvahs and participated in our Passover Seders. I once even suggested that she come live with us in Jerusalem and not remain alone in Germany, but she said, 'You don't plant an old tree in a new place.' But up until her death, we remained very connected."

**Unable to Participate in Yom HaShoah Ceremonies**

Brown is strictly halachic, identifying with Centrist Orthodoxy. Still, as a German convert, there are a few areas that give him pause, such as participating in Yom HaShoah ceremonies; emotionally it is too turbulent for him. "I usually stay home."

Brown and his wife have worked hard to create a home that is warm, loving and supportive. "I wanted to make sure that my children have a path, a direction, a value system, not the muddled and complex dysfunction I myself experienced as a child," he says.

"But as much as I've tried to protect them from their schizophrenic legacy, there are things I can't control. For example, when my son Yisrael traveled to Poland with his school several years ago, his reaction was completely different from his classmates.

**“Everything Felt Weird”**

'Everything felt weird,' he told me. 'I stood in the camps and thought about how the grandfathers of all of my friends had been inside, while my grandfather had been outside. My classmates came to those camps with their pasts; I just came to watch. I was caught in the middle -- it felt screwed up.'

"I also feel utterly helpless when my sons' classmates say mean and hurtful things to them -- comments which have accelerated since the interview in the Israeli newspaper was first published," Brown says.

"Last year, for example, during a ceremony on Yom Hazikaron, several students whispered to my youngest son that they were going to beat him up because he's a Nazi. I refused to send him to school for a week until the principal took care of the problem."

Brown has had his share of ugly run-ins himself. "I have always tried to be open and honest about my roots; I have never hidden my background like many converts from Nazi backgrounds," he says. "Most of the time, people are accepting and tolerant. Once in a while, though, someone will say something offensive. Recently, after sharing some biographical details with my university students, one of them told me: 'Imagine! Your grandfather might have turned my grandmother into soap.'"

Brown guesstimates that there are approximately 300 German converts in Israel, but most are averse to publicity and remain relentlessly reclusive. Still, as the Holocaust recedes into history, an increasing number of these converts are coming forward with their stories.

**Former Lutwaffe Member Now a Tour Guide in Israel**

Recent newspaper articles published in both Europe and Canada have detailed the extraordinary metamorphoses of people like Katrin Himmler, great-niece of SS Commander Heinreich Himmler, who married an Israeli and Oskar Eder, a former member of the Luftwaffe who changed his name to Asher, married a Holocaust survivor and currently works in Israel as a tour guide.

The astonishing trajectories of these personalities, and people very much like them, demonstrate for Brown the powerful message that "nothing is immutable. The meaning of my story, of my counterparts' stories, is that things can be changed: You can change your behavior, your location, your faith. Being and becoming is what we are doing every day."

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com. The article originally appeared in the Jewish Action, the magazine of the Orthodox Union.*

**It Once Happened**

**Selling One’s Portion**

**In the World to Come**

Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl felt the suffering of his fellow Jews deeply. Whenever he was not engaged in Torah study or prayer, he would devote himself to helping his fellow Jews in any way he could. Although he was a poor man himself, he would collect large amounts of charity to distribute to the needy. He spent much time traveling through towns and villages to discover what spiritual or physical needs he might be able to fill for his beloved brethren.

Rabbi Nachum was concerned not only with the lack of material possessions, but also the spiritual poverty which endangered his Jewish brethren's holy souls. In every place he visited, Rabbi Nachum would ask, "Do you have a shul? Do your children have a teacher? Is there a mikva here?" After he identified the needs of the community Rabbi Nachum set about raising funds.

**Visits a Small Village without a Mikva**

On one of his travels, Rabbi Nachum visited a small village which had no mikva. The villagers had to travel a distance to a larger neighboring town. In the winter, when the roads were often muddy, these trips were nearly impossible. Of course, Rabbi Nachum resolved to have a mikva built for the village.

When he returned home, Rabbi Nachum approached a wealthy member of his congregation with a startling proposition: "If you will pay for a mikva in the village I have just visited, I will sell you my portion in the World to Come." The rich man was stunned by Rabbi Nachum's offer but accepted it immediately.

When his Chasidim heard about the unusual arrangement, they were shocked. How could the Rebbe have done such a thing? Seeing the questions in their eyes, Rabbi Nachum explained to them: "According to the teachings of the Torah, every Jew must love G-d with 'all you heart, with all your soul and with all your might.' It has been explained that the phrase 'with all your might' means with all your money.

**“Am I Lying to Myself?”**

“Like every other Jew, I recite this verse every evening and every morning, and I wonder, 'How can I, a Jew who owns nothing and has no money fulfill this command? When I profess to love G-d with all my material means, what can I possibly be saying? Am I lying to myself?'

"This is what I have concluded regarding my situation. Although I may not have money, I do have one very valuable possession, and that is my portion in the World to Come. I have found that people are willing to put a price on anything. There are even such people who will put a price on the after-life. Since that is the case, and I cannot fulfill my duty to love G-d with 'all my might' in any other way, then I am obligated to sell this property to meet my obligation."

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Weekly Chasidic Story #809**

**The Chief Rabbi of Israel**

**And Napoleon's Throne**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000sSk0:001HT_m600001H0G&count=1366723153&randid=285794026&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=285794026##)

In the early 2000's, Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, the *Rishon L'Tzion* (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel), received an official invitation from the President of France, Jacques Chirac, to visit his country.

Mr. Chirac, before ascending to the office of President in 1995, had previously served two terms as Prime Minister and nearly 20 years as the Mayor of Paris. Throughout his career he was known as a hard line, pro-Arab leader who constantly pushed Israel to cede territories to the Palestinians, thus bringing French-Israeli relations to an all time low.

**A Very Outspoken Individual**

Rabbi Eliahu, on the other hand, was a very outspoken individual with little patience for the formalities that are the essence of French culture. So the members of the Israeli embassy there were understandably very tense and apprehensive that the Rabbi might say or do something that would make things even worse than they were.

However, when the Rabbi arrived they soon calmed down. His outgoing and friendly demeanor put everyone at ease, and it seemed obvious to the embassy staff that the meeting would be nothing other than formalities and smiles.

**Asking if Napoleon’s Throne**

**Was Perhaps Available for Sale**

But they were wrong. For instance, at the first leg of the official tour when they visited the French National Museum, the Rabbi demonstrated what seemed to be a shameful ignorance and insensitivity to French heritage.

When he was shown the throne of Napoleon he asked if it was for sale; and if so, for how much; and how long ago did Napoleon live! Then when shown one of the rooms of King Louis the Fourteenth he asked if this King was a moral person, which caused everyone to blush and even laugh behind the Rabbi's back.

The tour guide explained that the chair of Napoleon was of great historical and national importance and was certainly not for sale and regarding King Louis; although he was not known to be a particularly moral person, nevertheless France is proud of him as part of their heritage.

Afterwards they returned to the office of the president for an official ceremony where, after many introductions and formalities, Rabbi Eliahu was invited to say a few words that would be simultaneously translated into French.

**Summarizing His Tour of the Museum**

Rabbi Eliahu began by describing in detail his tour of the museum and his questions that caused everyone to laugh.

At this point Rabbinit Tzivia realized that the translator was not paying attention to every word her husband was saying and, realizing that her husband was making some sort of point, requested that the chief Rabbi of France, who was also present, should take over the task.

Rabbi Eliahu continued, "In my visit to the Museum I learned that the chair of Napoleon was not for sale because of its historical importance and that King Louis, although not a man of pure character is nevertheless revered and honored as a French hero.

"I noticed that you expected me to honor these men also and were surprised when I did not do so, even though I am not French and do not even live in France.

**We Jews Also Have a Proud Heritage**

"If so, my dear friends, I ask the same thing from you: We Jews also have our founders: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob but not of two or three hundred years ago and of questionable character like yours but of three and four thousand years ago and of impeccable integrity and selflessness.

"Is it too much to ask that just as you expect us to respect your founders and kings, so you should in turn respect ours?

"For instance, over three thousand years ago Moses brought us to the Promised Land and some four hundred years afterwards our King David and King Solomon secured the city of Jerusalem.

"That is our history.

"Does it not make simple sense that just as you expect us to honor your heritage so you should honor ours? If the chair of Napoleon is not for sale then how can you expect us to sell parts of Israel and Jerusalem?"

The members of the Israeli embassy were in panic: this was exactly what they were afraid of! In the moment of silence that followed they were certain that Chirac would simply storm out of the room in a fury.

But they were in for a big surprise. All of the French officials present, including the President himself, stood and applauded!

**Chirac Warmly Shook the Rabbi’s Hand**

Then Chirac warmly shook the Rabbi's hand, and immediately called one of his assistants and whispered something in his ear. The man left the room hurriedly and returned in just seconds with a small, velvet box.

Chirac asked for silence and then announced, "This medallion is usually reserved for visiting heads of state, but I have never heard anyone speak such clever words like these. They so impressed me that I am presenting this to you." And when he finished speaking the crowd gave the rabbi another standing ovation.

Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton on *//ohrtmimim.org/torah* (based on *Sichat HaShavua* #1331).

**Biographical Note on the Former Chief Rabbi**

Biographical note: Rabbi Mordechai-Tzemach (ben Suliman & Mazal) Eliyahu (1929-25 Sivan 2010), the former Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, was born in Iraq. A noted sage in all areas of Torah study, as well as a significant kabbalist, he was considered to be one of the leading authorities on Jewish law in Israel. His son, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, is currently the Chief Rabbi of Tsfat.

Connection: Seasonal - the 3rd yahrzeit of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline,org, a program of Ascent of Safad.*

[*www.ascentofsafad*](http://www.ascentofsafad)*.com ascent@ascentofsafad.com*

**Giving Help to One’s**

**Greatest Enemy**

Menachem Mendel of Kosov (1768-1825) was a figure of great stature, who founded a number of Chasidic dynasties. As is the case of many outstanding personalities, he had many followers and he also had opponents.

There was one Jew in Kosov who was bitterly antagonistic to the Rebbe. This man took great pleasure in interfering with any of the Rebbe's projects.

Thus, it was a great shock when one day the Rebbe's "emeny" showed up at his door. "I must speak with Reb Menachem Mendel," the man demanded. The attendant showed him to the Rebbe's room and closed the door behind him.

**Needs Money to Marry Off a Daughter**

No sooner were they alone than the man opened up his heart and poured out his problem: "I have a daughter of marriageable age, and I have no money for a dowry. Rebbe, please advise me how I can solve this problem."

"How much money do you need for a proper dowry," asked the Rebbe.

The man mentioned a very large sum. At once, the Rebbe opened his drawer and withdrew all the money he had. He put on his desk what amounted to several hundred gold coins, a huge amount of money, which he had amassed over some time. The man accepted the money and left, freed from his terrible burden.

**The Rebbe’s Own Brother was Infuriated**

It wasn't long before people found out about the amazing act of kindness on the Rebbe's part. The Rebbe's own brother. Reb Yitzchak, was infuriated when he heard about the incident, and he decided to go and reproach his brother face to face.

"I can't believe what you have done!" he railed at his brother. "You, who watch every penny when it comes to the needs of your own family have just given away a fortune to a man who has been your greatest opponent for years! I just cannot understand you!"

Rabbi Menachem Mendel was not surprised at his brother's reaction. "My brother, you should know that you are not the first one to condemn my action. But just as I ignored my first critic, I will ignore you, too! You must believe me when I tell you that I had good reasons for what I did."

His brother was a bit taken aback that someone else had the temerity to question the rebbe, and asked, "You mean to say that someone else was here before I came, someone with the same criticism? Tell me, who was it?"

"There was someone else," the Rebbe assured him. "It was my evil inclination. He came and tried all of his cunning arguments to convince me not to give this money. It seems he was very displeased about this unbelievable opportunity which came to me out of the blue, and he used all of his wiles to dissuade me from this mitzva. However, just as I have told you, I told him that his arguments were of no use. I did what I had to do."

Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

**The Thrill and Horror**

**Of Jewish Innovation**

**By Daniel Keren**



**Rabbi Avrohom Pam, zt”l**

All too often people (whether Jewish or not) get caught in routines. We wake up early in the morning to rush to *shul* in order to catch a *Daf Yomi shiur* (class) before the *Shachris minyan* (morning worship service). Then we dash off to work and come home to another series of routines.

A routine if it is good (such as volunteering to help others in need such as a *Bikur Cholim* activist in a hospital or tutoring someone who needs help in learning the *halachas* (Jewish laws) or to study the *Chumash* can be good. But if we are not careful even good routines can become mundane and done without the proper enthusiasm as though one were just a programmed robot.

**A Lesson from**

**Rav Avrohom Pam**

Often times we lead good Jewish lives but are so caught up by routines that we frequently fail to see precious opportunities when they arise. It once happened that an elderly Jew who *davened* in the Torah Vodaath Yeshiva *minyan* in Brooklyn was hospitalized. Rav Avrohom Pam*, zt”l*, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* noticed the older *mispallel’s* absence.

Because Rav Pam was a *Cohen*, he was not able to visit the hospitalized Jew as there was a chance that another patient might die when he was in the hospital and that is a prohibition that *Cohanim* have to avoid. So Rav Pam took a sheet of paper and wrote a short but heartfelt note to the elderly Jew that he missed him in the *minyan* and was not able to make a *bikur cholim* visit because he was a *Cohen*. He ended the letter by wishing the ill man a heartfelt *refuah shelaimah*.

**Revealed at the**

**Man’s Levayah**

It so happened that a few weeks later, the hospitalized man unfortunately was *nifter* (passed away) and at the *levayah* (funeral service), one of his sons spoke to those assembled. Again Rav Pam because he was a *Cohen* was not able to attend or deliver his own hespid (tribute) on behalf of the departed Jew.

However, it was reported back to him that the son spoke about just how proud his father was to have received Rav Pam’s letter. Whenever anyone came to visit the elderly gentleman in the hospital, he made a point of showing off the letter that the “great world renowned” *Rosh Hayeshiva* had written to him, a simple *Yid*.

You and I if we had done what Rav Pam had accomplished with his letter we would probably have been thrilled and patted ourselves on our back and maybe even “whispered” to others just how we had so brilliantly cheered up another *choleh* (ill Jew) so that they too could also properly appreciate our “spiritual greatness.”

**An Unpleasant Sensation**

But what was the reaction of Rav Pam? Instead of being happy to learn how his simple *mitzvah* had brought such incredible joy to another *Yid*, he began to shake and his face lost his color. One of his *talmidim* (students) asked, “*Rebbe*, what’s wrong? What you did was a wonderful accomplishment!”

Rav Pam explained that composing the letter only took him three minutes and he had no idea of just how much it would mean to another Jew. He was afraid that perhaps in *shomayim* (heaven) after 120 years when he would come before the *Bais Din shel Mailah* (the heavenly tribunal) instead of praising him for how his letter cheered up a *posheta* (simple) *Yid* who was very ill, he would be asked why he hadn’t written more such letters before to others whom he knew and who had also been in the same situation.

**The Lesson for Us**

But for you and I who have heard or read of that story about Rav Pam, the lesson is for us to be on the lookout for others in own circle of acquaintances whom we can similarly perform simple but incredible deeds of *chesed* as was demonstrated by the *rosh hayeshiva* of Torah Vodaath.

A friend of mine recently confided to me that for years he attended *Gemorah shiurim* (Talmudical lectures) and truthfully didn’t enjoy them. He felt obligated to take part and envied others in the class who seemed to brilliantly capture the essence of the *Gemorah* debates between Abaya and Rava, and other great Talmudical personalities. As soon as the *shiur* began, he began looking at his watch or the clock on the wall to see when the hour would finish and he could “escape.”

**The Importance of**

**Reviewing or Preparing**

Many times he heard the *Maggid Shiur* talk about the importance of *hazara* (reviewing) the lesson or even preparing in advance for the *Gemora* class. It didn’t make sense. Then one day he attended the *levaya* of an elderly Jew he knew who struggled to utilize all his energies to study various tractates of the Talmud. One of those who gave a *hespid* at the funeral service spoke of how he devoted himself to going through the ArtScroll English translated *Gemora* including all the notes at the bottom of the page.

My friend thought to himself that maybe he should try a few days before his next class to just read the text of the *Gemora* with the English translation and the notes of explanation. He did it twice and then three times before the *Gemora shiur*. A funny and horrifying experience unfolded. When the next class was being taught, he actually understood great parts of what the *Maggid Shiur* was saying.

**The Two-Prong Sensation**

He told me that this gave him a seemingly contradictory two-prong sensation. On the one part he was incredibly excited and happy that he was beginning to understand something that had previously seemed hopelessly beyond his abilities. Yet he was also horrified that he had let so many years pass by without trying to do this and all those classes that were seemingly wasted.

Such revelations occur to all of us. I think that instead of crying over all the wasted years, we should rather give thanks to Hashem for opening our eyes and instead commit ourselves to appreciating the half full glass facing us as opposed to reflecting on the half empty glasses of our past.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of the Jewish Connection.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**One Moment of Teshuvah**

Every Jew has a soul which is a spark of Hashem From On High. Hashem is the Origin of the Holy Fire, which is the Source of Life. Hashem keeps the pilot light of the soul alit as long as we are alive, however, we as individuals are responsible for making sure that the Holy Flame of the soul burns high. The following true story will inspire us to kindle our souls.

Rav Yisroel Spira, known as the Bluzhever Rav was a beam of spiritual light in the darkened evil of the Nazi concentration camps. he recalls:

**The Lemberg-Yanovsky Labor Camp**

It was the Lemberg-Yanovsky labor camp, a few days before Yom Kippur. There, as in all the ghettos and camps, the Nazis appointed Jews to supervise the laborers and extract from them the last particle of endurance and strength. The chief Ordenungsdienst (work supervisor) in Lemberg was a Jew named Schneeweiss.

Like many Jews in his position, his fawning desire to please his masters in return for an extra portion of bread or an extra day of life often made him seem even more cruel than they. The Nazis, in turn, enjoyed the spectacle of Jew persecuting Jew.

Now, Yom Kippur was on the way. Fasting could be managed. It would mean placing oneself in mortal danger, because food rations were below the subsistence level in any case and the labor required even more than the nourishment that had been normal in pre-war days.

**G-d Wants Us to Exert Every Effort to Survive**

The rabbis who were frequently called upon to decide such questions always answered in accordance with halacha: "The Torah requires us to eat even on the holiest of fast days because to do otherwise is to invite death by starvation ― and G-d wants us to exert every effort to live. We are forbidden to surrender to death even though we are too limited to understand the purpose of our living under such circumstances."

Nevertheless, there were always those to whom a Yom Kippur, a smuggled pair of tefillin, a blast of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, a secretly baked morsel of matzah, a bit of oil for a Chanukah flame, a minyan, were worth an encounter with a bullet or, worse, a whip. A group of such people approached their spiritual leader in the Yanovsky camp of Lemberg.

"Rav Spira, Yom Kippur is coming. What are we to do? How can we desecrate the Holy Day working as if it were any other day?"

The rabbi was moved as he often was by the devotion of his fellow Jews. He would try to help them.

**Approaching the Hated Kapo – Herr Schneeweiss**

The Bluzhever Rav went to the hated Schneeweiss, "Herr Ordenungsdienst. As you know, it will soon be Yom Kippur. I am a rabbi and it is important for me to observe this day as properly as possible. A group of my disciples in the camp wish to do the same. We do not ask to be freed from labor, all we ask is that for that one day we be given work which will not force us to violate the law of the Torah. We are willing to do extra work on other days to make up for any labor which goes undone."

That simple request was in itself an act of great heroism, for Schneeweiss, no friend of observant Jews, had in his own hands the power of life and death. He could easily have used the "treasonous" request as a means of proving his loyalty to his SS mentors by turning in the "lazy rabbi who was prepared to sabotage the Master Race's war effort for the sake of his Holy Day foolishness."

**Asked for Time to Consider the Rabbi’s Yom Kippur Request**

Schneeweiss asked for time to consider. The next day, he told the rabbi that he could choose a limited number of prisoners who would be assigned to clean the apartments of the camp's commanding officers. But the Ordenungsdeinst would guarantee them nothing nor would he defend them if the Germans sensed something wrong. And if there was so much as a speck of dirt to be found anywhere in the house, they would pay with their lives.

So it was that on Yom Kippur an unusual prayer service was held by Rabbi Spira and fourteen young men. The rabbi stood on a window sill polishing the glass while the men were sweeping, dusting, tidying ― and all the while he led them in the solemn prayers as he had led congregations for many years in Galicia, but never had the Yom Kippur service been as fervent or as tearful.

At midday, a tray was brought in with food. It lay ignored on a table as the praying and cleaning continued. Then a few German officers entered to admire the work of their servants for the day. They examined the rooms and were pleased ― until they saw the food.

"Jiidische Hunde, freszt! Stuff yourselves, Jewish dogs!"

**Trying to Make the German Nazi Officers Understand**

The Jews could not ignore the order. What should they do? Rabbi Spira walked to the officers and explained: "It is our Holy Day, the day when sins are forgiven. As you have seen, we serve you loyally, even on this sacred day, and our work is perfect. But we are required to fast today and we ask of you to excuse us from eating our meal today. Our work will continue and it will not be affected by hunger."

The officers were furious. They sent for Schneeweiss. Quaking, the Ordenungsdienst came to the room. "These dogs refuse to eat their rations. You are responsible for them. We shall return in two hours ― and if all their food is not eaten, you will be shot."

**Challenges the German Officer to Shoot Him**

Schneeweiss stood up straight and unbuttoned his shirt, baring his chest. "I will not force them to eat. I am fasting myself today. If you wish to shoot me, then shoot me now!"

An officer drew his gun and Schneeweiss stood firm. A shot. He was dead. Hated Schneeweiss had become holy Schneeweiss. Who can estimate the great heights to which every Jewish soul can rise?

Then the Germans turned to the fifteen Jews who were ready for the same treatment.

"You will continue to work. The food will be removed and you will receive not a scrap to eat until tomorrow morning. Go back to work!"

The Talmud tells us: “There are those who acquire their world in many years, and there are those who acquire their world in a single moment.” (Avodah Zarah 17a) As long as there is the possibility to do teshuvah, one's past can be fixed.

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