**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Chukas 5774**

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**The Awesome Importance of Answering Amen to a Child’s Blessing**

 This awesome story from the Kaf Hachaim (124:30) and R' Shloma Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo end of sefer) reveals how severe the punishment for not answering "*Amein*" to a *Bracha* can be. "Rav Mordechai Yaffo (known as the "*Levush*") once went to study by a great Sephardic Scholar named Rabbi Abohav.

 One day Rabbi Abohav's son made a *Beracha* and everyone answered "*Amein*" except for Rabbi Yaffo. Rabbi Abohav was so angry with him that he excommunicated him. After 30 days, Rabbi Yaffo asked forgiveness which Rabbi Abohav granted. Rabbi Abohav then told him the following story depicting the severe punishment for not answering "*Amein,*" explaining that he excommunicated him to save him from a much harsher punishment.

**The Evil Torquemada**

 "Before the expulsion of The Jews in Spain in 1492, there were holy Jewish communities there. The evil Torquemada, leader of the Inquisition attempted to expel them many times, but there was one pious Jew whom King Ferdinand respected and he would always save the Jews from expulsion. After one such edict, the Jews came to the king's friend begging him to intervene on their behalf. He agreed to go to the King, but wished to *daven Mincha* (say his afternoon prayers) first. They persuaded him to go immediately, since it was a matter of life or death. The King was very happy to see him, and they started conversing about the decree.

 Meanwhile, a priest came in and started to bless the King with a long Latin blessing. The Jew, who had not yet *davened Mincha,* withdrew to a corner and started to *daven*, hoping that he would finish *davening* before the priest would conclude his blessing, thus his absence would go unnoticed.

 The priest, however, concluded his blessing while the Jew was still *davening Mincha*, and called upon everyone present to answer (the Latin equivalent of) "*Amein*" on his blessing. Everyone answered "*Amein*" except the Jew who was still *davening*.

**The Priest and King**

**Both Became Infuriated**

 Afterwards, the priest asked the Jew if he answered "*Amein*" to his blessing. When the pious Jew told him that he didn't answer "*Amein*," the priest flew into a rage. He started ripping his hair out, screaming that now his blessing would not be fulfilled because the Jew didn't answer "*Amein*." When King Ferdinand heard this, he also became furious and ordered the Jew killed with a cruel death and his body sent home. He then, together with Queen Isabella, signed the final edict expelling all the Jews from Spain by Tisha B'Av 1492.

 A close friend of the murdered Jew fasted for many days to be allowed to know what sin this pious Jew had committed to deserve such a brutal death. The murdered Jew appeared to his friend in a dream and explained to him that one time, (and only one time), he neglected to answer "*Amein*" to his child's blessing.

**The Reason for the**

**Horrible Death**

 Until this incident the Heavenly Court did not prosecute him. However, when this priest got angry over his failure to say "*Amein*," the Heavenly Court focused on this sin and sentenced him to die such a horrible death."

 "Rabbi Abohav concluded; "Heaven will forgive you on the condition that you publicize this story, and warn everyone to be careful and always answer '*Amein*'."

*Reprinted from the June 27, 2014 email of Daily Halacha, a Torah project of Congregation IKLF of Spring Valley, NY.*

**Two Days in Dakar, Africa**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This story occurred over fifty years ago. A well-known Chabad Chassid by the name of Rabbi Yosef Weinberg was a great Torah Scholar and successful lecturer and therefore often was invited to speak in various countries.

 He lived in New York and before each journey he would inform the Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Shneerson, aka The Lubavitcher Rebbe) and ask for a blessing. But one time he entered the Rebbe's room to inform him of an upcoming trip to Johannesburg and the Rebbe asked him if he planned to make a stopover on the way anywhere in Africa for two days.

**A Blessing from the Rebbe**

 When Rabbi Weinberg said no, that he was flying directly to Johannesburg, the Rebbe paused, gave him a penetrating look, continued the conversation and finished by blessing him with a safe and successful journey.

 The next day Rabbi Weinberg was on his flight reading a book when the plane made a routine fuel stop in Dakar. In those days, even direct flights usually had to stop for refueling and Dakar, the capital of Senegal was one of the stops on the way to South Africa. But this time the captain announced that the delay would be a bit longer and suggested that the passengers wait in the more comfortable Senegal airport lounge.

 They left the plane, were taken to the lounge, Rabbi Weinberg found a table in a quiet corner, opened his book and continued reading.

 A young man’s voice interrupted his thought.

**“Are You Jewish?**

**Are You a Rabbi?**

 "Please excuse me sir. Please pardon me for interrupting." He looked up and saw a well dressed young man. "My name is David Pinto, I live here in Dakar, I work for an oil firm here, and I just happen to be here in the airport. Please tell me sir, "are you Jewish? Are you a Rabbi?"

 "Yes I am" answered Rabbi Weinberg.

 "Ahh, Thank G-d!!! Boruch HaShem!! I thought so," he said excitedly as he sat down across from him grabbed his hand and began pumping it enthusiastically. "I have lived here in Dakar for almost four years with my wife and three children and it is so good to see a Jew!! Believe me, you’re the first Jew I’ve seen since I arrived."

 "You mean there are no other Jews here?" Asked Rabbi Weinberg.

 "None at all" he replied. "I even looked around a bit, and found nothing! I even...well, except for making Kiddush for my family on Friday night I don’t do any Jewish things anymore. I used to do a lot, I even have a pair of Tefillin but I stopped putting them on years ago. Am I glad to see you!!"

**Promises to Begin**

**Putting on Tefillin Again**

 The Rabbi spoke to him for a few minutes and it had an effect. Mr. Pinto, who was just waiting for some encouragement, promised to begin putting on Tefillin again and was interested in learning more.

 They exchanged addresses, promised to correspond, and when the loudspeaker announced the re-boarding, they hugged each other like old friends and parted.

 In his seat on the plane, about fifteen minutes after takeoff, the Rabbi was beginning to concentrate on the book he opened again when suddenly something happened. The plane shuddered, the lights flickered, and everything lurched to the side. The people began screaming, while the captain's voice mumbled something from the P.A. system but there was too much noise - something was really wrong!

 Through the windows, the terrified passengers could see one of the engines on fire pouring thick billows of black smoke!

**Miraculous Landing in Dakar**

 The captain's voice was clear now. "Please fasten your belts. We are having trouble from one of the engines. We are returning to Dakar for repairs."

 The plane dropped abruptly then steadied out again wobbling and shaking but miraculously making a safe landing where the shaken passengers once again left the plane and filed into the Airport.

 They spent the night in the terminal waiting for news. Then, at dawn, the captain appeared, and announced apologetically that there will be a regrettable delay of two days until a new engine is installed, and they will be accommodated at a local hotel.

 Everyone was disappointed but once in the bus on the way to the hotel, Rabbi Weinberg comforted himself with the thought that he could easily change the date of his lecture and now he could sit and learn Torah uninterruptedly for a few days. At home and on the road there were always interruptions. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad after all!

 Once settled in his hotel room, he prepared himself a cup of tea, sat down by the window, brought out a Talmud from his suitcase and began again to learn.

**Suddenly Reminded**

**Of the Rebbe’s Words**

 Suddenly the Rebbe’s words jumped into his mind;

 "Are you going to have a two day stopover on your journey?

 He thought for a moment, closed his book, left the room, locked the door behind him, walked into the street, stopped the first person that passed him, introduced himself as a Rabbi and asked if there were any Jews in the city.

 But man he asked just shrugged his shoulders and walked away and so it was with everyone he stopped. Either they didn't understand English, or never heard the word "Jew" before or maybe Mr. Pinto was right when he said there are no Jews in Dakar.

 "There must be Jews here" thought the Rabbi to himself. "I saw it in the Rebbe’s eyes".

 Just as he was thinking to himself, one of the people he asked earlier came back and pointed to a store and said "There is a Jew, I think."

 And behold he was right!

**Meets Another Jew**

 The young manager of the store introduced himself as Clement Bajio. He was Jewish, 25 years old, born in Lebanon, had been working here in his uncle’s store for the last eight years and was overjoyed to see the Rabbi.

 "Here there is nothing Jewish, nothing at all." Said Clement. "No Synagogue, no books, not even one pair of Tefillin. It's like a desert. There are even four other Jewish families but no Judaism. When I was young I used to do the commandments but not anymore."

 "I will try to send books and Tefillin when I return to New York." Replied the Rabbi "But now, perhaps you would like to put on my Tefillin? Please come with me, they are in my hotel, unless you want to wait and I will bring them."

 Clement immediately closed his store, and accompanied the Rabbi. To add to the excitement they even bumped into David Pinto; the man he had met earlier in the airport.. "Wow! What are you doing back here Rabbi? It is a miracle to see you again!"

 The Rabbi told him of the near plane crash, introduced him to Clement and chided him saying, "You see, David? You have been here for years and haven’t found one Jew and in just a few hours I have already found five families!

 In the course of that day Rabbi Weinberg searched the telephone book for Jewish names and then went from store to store and succeeded in discovering a few more 'hidden' Jewish families. That evening he telephoned them all and invited them all for a meeting and the next day Dakar had a Jewish community… the first in it's history! The Rabbi spoke, many people actually cried from joy and they all promised to strengthen their Judaism.

 For the remaining time that the Rabbi was in Dakar, Clement did not leave his side, and as he drove him back to the airport he opened his heart.

**A Question of Marriage**

 "Rabbi , ... my business here is very successful but recently I began thinking of getting married. After all I am 25 years old. But, you know, there are no Jewish girls here in Dakar but there are a lot of girls. So, to tell the truth I have been thinking about maybe ..."

 "Listen Clement," said Rabbi Weinberg. "If you marry a non-Jewish woman your children will not be Jewish and neither of you will be happy. I advise you to close the business for a few days or even longer and go to France to look for a wife. I know some people there and they will help you. HaShem will help also, I’m sure. Don't worry."

 They shook hands, and parted.

 When Rabbi Weinberg reached South Africa, he immediately called the Rebbe's headquarters in Brooklyn, reported to one of the secretaries there all that happened in Dakar and asked if it could be arranged to send them books and Tefillin. When he returned to Brooklyn a few weeks later he learned that the Rebbe sent them several pairs of Tefillin, a lot of Jewish books in English and even (because Passover was approaching) Matzot, wine and Haggadot for Passover as well.

**More to the Story**

 But there is more to the story.

 Several months later, Rabbi Weinberg received an envelope in the mail containing a letter of thanks from Clement and David and a plane ticket to France.

 In the letter they wrote that from the day they received the Rebbe’s package, all the men have been putting on Tefillin every weekday, and everyone was even beginning to keep Shabbat. Not only that, but on Passover the little community made what was certainly the first Seder in the history of Dakar.

 As for the plane ticket, it was a ticket for the Rabbi to attend Clement's wedding. He met a Jewish girl (also form Lebanon) in Paris just as the Rabbi suggested.

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

**Must a Convert Honor**

**His Biological Parents?**

**By Rabbi** [**Yisroel Cotlar**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/12471/jewish/Yisroel-Cotlar.htm)

**Question:**

 As a potential convert, I wanted to know what Jewish tradition says about the relationship of a convert to his parents who are not Jewish and who are not interested in conversion. Are they still considered his parents after the conversion?

**Answer:**

 Our sages say that when someone converts, it is as if he or she becomes a new person, now charged with a Jewish mission. “A convert who converts is similar to a child being born.”1

 But while this is the case spiritually, the physical facts must also be taken into consideration. There are biological parents who gave birth to and raised that individual. The fact that someone has the opportunity to convert is due to what those parents did for that child. Practically, according to Jewish law, one should honor his or her biological parents.2

**A Difficulty for Parents**

 It can be difficult for parents to see their child choose a path so different from their own, and it is important to remain sensitive to their feelings.

 Leaving a certain life behind you while still respecting those who got you there can be tricky. Finding the right balance is something to discuss with the rabbi you would be working with on your conversion.

 Let me know if this helps.

Yours truly,

*Rabbi Yisroel Cotlar*

**Dear Rabbi Cotlar,**

It was a pleasure to receive such a prompt response to my question. Moreover, it was wonderful to receive such an enlightened, considerate, well thought out, sensitive opinion. Judaism is a beautiful religion, and the Jewish people comprise a nation of “menschen” because of spiritual leaders such as you.

Footnotes:

Talmud, Yevamot 22a.

See Encyclopedia Talmudit, vol. 6, p. 262

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

**Chassidic Story #865**

**Trick and Treat**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

editor@ascentofsafed.com

 (*Editor’s note: I don’t care for stories with unnamed rebbes, chasids and locations. Therefore it is rare to an extreme that I use one. This one has an exception, due to its source: a book originally written and produced here at ASCENT.*)

 Reb Chayim was a chasid who made his living by buying and selling in the various European market places and fairs. He devoted all of his free time to studying Torah. Once a year he would come to his Rebbe's court, to spend time in his presence and be inspired.

 Whenever he came, everyone would greet him with great respect, as he was known to be a scholar and a righteous man. On Shabbat, he would be honored with the most prestigious aliyah of the Torah reading, Maftir, the final portion plus the Haftorah. After Shabbat, he always made a handsome contribution to the synagogue.

 On one of his visits, he went in for "yehidut" - a private personal meeting with the Rebbe, the most special time for a chasid. This time Chayim poured out his heart to the Rabbi, telling him about a difficult problem that was hindering him in his service to G-d, a problem that troubled him every day. "I am hot-tempered," he told the Rebbe, and I am easily angered. Even small issues can set me off. For example, when things don't work out as I wished, or when people do not do what I asked them to, I explode."

 He finished speaking and eagerly waited for the Rebbe's response. Many times before he had been in yehidut and had received answers and instructions on a variety of matters. This time, however, was different. The Rabbi merely waved his hand dismissively and said that the problem was small and insignificant, really not a problem at all.

**Chayim Could Not Understand**

 Chayim could not understand. He had waited so long to come to his Rebbe and tell him of his difficulty, and had anticipated receiving an answer that would solve his problem, yet the Rebbe had barely addressed the issue.

 Chayim did not give up; he asked again. He described his difficulties, how his problem affected him and all those around him, and waited again for an answer. But again, the response was: "This is a very small difficulty, not really a problem at all," said the Rebbe.

 Chayim tried a third time and received again the same response. He had to leave the Rebbe's room in disappointment. "I can’t believe that I received no answer!" he thought. "But perhaps I will in time," he tried to cheer himself.

 After Chayim had left the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe called in the gabbai, the one who supervised the synagogue. He instructed him that on the coming Shabbat day, he not give Reb Chayim the honor of Maftir as usual, but rather, give him the task of "Gelila" - the retying of the Torah scroll at the end of the reading (a task often given to children) and covering it.

**The Gabbai Becomes Amazed**

 The gabbai listened to the Rebbe's request and looked at him in amazement. He began to imagine the astonishment and perhaps furor in the synagogue as a result.

 As the Shabbat approached, the gabbai's concerns grew, and he decided to take action. "It's best I let him know in advance," he thought.

 He called upon Reb Chayim and told him that on the Shabbat he would receive "Gelila" rather than Maftir. Chayim began complaining at once, and loudly, too. The gabbai explained that this was the instruction he had received from the Rebbe’s mouth. This calmed Chayim down a bit, and he began to understand that there must be something in this.

 "It must be that the Rebbe is testing me," he thought to himself.

 The Shabbat arrived. The chasidim had already seen Reb Chayim in the Rebbe's court, and assumed that he would receive the honor of Maftir, as usual. A few of them tried to guess how large a contribution he would make afterward. But when it came time for the Maftir and the gabbai called the name of someone else, they were amazed. When they turned to look at Chayim and see his reaction, they became doubly astonished: Chayim was standing there, completely calm.

 Shortly thereafter he was called for the Gelila task. "He'll get angry now," the chasidim thought to themselves. But to their amazement Reb Chayim strode up to the Torah with a little smile on his face, humming a tune under his breath. When he had finished retying and covering the Torah scroll, he returned quietly to his seat, still smiling.

 "I wonder what is going on?" they all thought.

 At the end of the prayer, Chayim did not leave the synagogue with the others, but waited to talk with the Rebbe. When the Rebbe had completed his prayer, Chayim went over to him. The rebbe smiled at him, and Chayim smiled back.

 "Well," said the Rebbe, "I see that your problem is not as great as you said. Look how you were dishonored in front of everyone because you were not called for Maftir like you usually are, and yet, you did not get angry."

 "Of course not, Rebbe," replied Reb Chayim , I knew that this was a trick, that you were testing me; therefore I did not get angry. If it were not a trick--if they were truly trying to anger me--you don't want to know the fury I would have unleashed here today!"

**Hashem is Always Tricking or Testing Us**

 The Rabbi replied, "Now you can understand why I said your problem is not so difficult. Listen to me - it is always a trick! The Holy One, Blessed be He, is always testing us. Everyone who annoys you is His messenger, a part of this exercise in which He tests us and our reactions.

 “When you look at all the world in this way,” the Rabbi concluded, “everything will seem different. You will not have to overcome your anger, because you will have no reason to be angry!"

 **Source:** From Mudaot Yehudit by Nadav Cohen, as first translated into English by his mother, Yehudit-Esther Cohen and lightly edited by Yerachmiel Tilles. The published English version is called GPS for the Soul (translator: Zalman Nelson of Tsfat) and is available for purchase at Ascent’s

KabbalaOnline shop site.

 **Connection**: Weekly Reading--anger management.

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**Midrash and Talmud**

**Im Yirtzeh Hashem**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

 There was once a very rich man who possessed large estates. He owned many acres of land but he still lacked enough oxen with which to plough the land. One day the wealthy man took along a bag containing 100 gold coins and set forth to the city to purchase oxen.

**Meeting Eliyahu**

**HaNavi in Disguise**

 On the way, he met Eliyahu *HaNavi* in the disguise of an elderly man.

 “Where are you going, my good friend?” asked Eliyahu HaNavi.

 “I am going to the city to purchase oxen so that I can plough my lands,” answered the man.

 “G-d willing,” murmured Eliyahu HaNavi.

 “What nonsense,” replied the man, “What has G-d to do with this matter? I have sufficient money to purchase the oxen whether G-d wills it or not.”

 “Foolish man,” said Eliyahu HaNavi. “You may not be lucky.”

 “It’s mere superstition,” angrily retorted the man and walked away. On the road to the city the man accidentally lost his wallet. When he reached the marketplace he bid for many oxen. However, when he reached for his money, he was dismayed to find it missing. He spent the rest of the day searching for his wallet and returned home that night very distraught.

**A Second Encounter**

**With the Navi**

 The following day he took another 100 gold coins and started for the city. Again he met Eliyahu HaNavi who asked him where he was going.

 “To purchase oxen,” was the reply.

 “G-d willing,” said Eliyahu HaNavi.

 “Whether G-d wills it or not, I have sufficient money to purchase the oxen. Good day!” With that the man hurried on.

 Feeling very tired, the man decided to lie down to catch a few winks of sleep. While he was sleeping, someone came along and stole his wallet.

 When he woke up, the man felt for his wallet. Imagine his chagrin when he found it missing.

 “I must be jinxed,” shouted the man in dismay. He searched for many hours but to no avail. Feeling miserable and dejected, he returned home.

 The following day he again set forth to the market. As before, he took along another 100 gold coins.

**A Third Question**

 “Where are you going, my friend?” asked Eliyahu HaNavi.

 “To purchase oxen, G-d willing,” replied the man meekly.

 “I see you have learned your lesson,” said Eliyahu HaNavi. “G-d bless you and may you be lucky!” Eliyahu HaNavi then made a sign and the previous 200 coins that he had lost were returned to his pocket. The man did not know of this.

 Entering the city he visited the cattle market and saw two *parei adumah* untouched by any harness.

 “How much do these oxen cost?” he asked.

 “Two hundred gold coins,” was the reply.

 “I don’t have that much money,” said the man. But putting his hands into his pocket he suddenly felt the extra money. Imagine his surprise when he extracted 300 coins from his pocket. With the remainder of the money he purchased additional oxen to plough the fields.

 Returning home, he sold the *parei adumah* to the king for a thousand gold coins.

 Therefore Ben Sira said: “A person never knows what will happen to him from early morning to night, therefore, he must always say, ‘G-d willing.’”

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