**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Chukas 5773**

**Volume 4, Issue 41 7 Tammuz 5773/ June 15, 2013**

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

**My Intolerance**

**Of the Faithful**

**By Rabbi Yonason Goldson**

The moment the rabbi walked through the door all the students jumped to their feet... and I looked about desperately for a way out of the room.

The rabbi wore a long coat, a wide, antiquated black hat, an untrimmed beard, Coke-bottle spectacles and, incredibly, *sidelocks*. I knew — I just knew — what was going to happen next: the rabbi would lecture us in a thick German accent and tell us we were all damned to hell. There was no way I could sit through such an ordeal.

But I had taken a seat in the far back corner of the room and now found myself trapped by the crowd of glassy-eyed acolytes eager to drink in the torrent of demagoguery that was about to come our way. I would have made a spectacle of myself climbing over people to get out. Instead, I slumped back in my chair and told myself that I could survive anything for an hour.

Then the rabbi began to speak. I leaned forward, immediately drawn in by an introduction as elegant and articulate as if he had been an Ivy League academic.

Which he was, despite his Chasidic garb: a former professor at Johns Hopkins University, in fact. Over the next two months, he systematically shattered my stereotypes and dismantled my arguments against the existence of G-d and Torah from Sinai, drawing upon proofs from science, history, and human psychology, which he wove together in a tapestry of irrefutable logic. Three decades later, my mind still returns to his lectures as I teach my own students.

Imagine how differently I might view the world today had I seated myself nearer the door on that fateful morning half a lifetime ago.

The kind of ignorance of which I was guilty was far more excusable than that of the Forward's contributing editor Jay Michaelson, whose selectively documented hit-piece against traditional Torah observance proves Alexander Pope's famous observation that a *little* learning is a dangerous thing.

In a drive-by "editorial" not worthy of a hyperlink, Mr. Michaelson spews forth with an eruption of pure vitriol prompted by the most egregious violation of politically correct jurisprudence: non-conformity to liberal ideology. Here are some representative excerpts:

Call them what you will — ultra-Orthodox Jews, "fervently Orthodox" Jews, Haredim, black hats. They will soon become the majority of affiliated Jews in the metropolitan New York area, and the religious majority in Israel. The results will be catastrophic…

[M]ainstream American Jewish organizations must stop pretending to have common cause with Jewish fundamentalists. Just as mainline Christian denominations recognize Christian fundamentalism to be a threat to their religious values, so the mainstream of Jewish denominations — including Modern Orthodoxy — must recognize that this distortion of Judaism is actively destructive to Judaism itself.

Like Christian fundamentalism, Jewish fundamentalism is extremely new. It arose in response to modernity, and it radically changed Jewish values. Formerly, the Jewish mainstream balanced strictness and leniency: In the battle between the strict Shammai and the lenient Hillel, Hillel always won.

But the Haredi world is a phalanx of Shammais. The strictest is always the best. Moses wore a shtreimel, the fur hat that many married Haredi men wear, at the Red Sea. Scientific knowledge is evil. These are radically new Jewish ideas presented as radically old ones. Those of us who do not share them must recognize them as a threat.

Of course, human nature being what it is, the Torah community is not perfect. We have our lapses and even our outrages, like the indefensible violent zealotry against the so-called women of the wall. We have those among us who succumb to the same superficiality that characterizes popular culture and those who cross legal or moral boundaries under the burden of financial pressure.

But to overlook the Torah community's extraordinary acts of kindness, charity, and devotion to the traditions handed down over a hundred generations in apoplectic rant against back hats and Talmudic scholarship is disingenuous at best and pathological at worst. What Mr. Michaelson denounces as "fundamentalism" is in truth the selfless commitment to the path of our forefathers, without which the Jewish people would have become extinct many centuries ago.

And no, Mr. Michaelson, no one believes that Moses wore a fur hat when he split the Sea.

Neither does the Torah community have any quarrel with science. Indeed, a growing community of Orthodox physicists, biologists, and chemists make an articulate case for reconciling Torah and science, and they convincingly expose the myopic fallacies indulged by secularists unwilling to concede the limits of their own understanding.

Finally, before Mr. Michaelson repeats his condemnation against the philosophy of the great sage Shammai, he might want to do his homework. One of Judaism's most famous maxims in Talmudic literature is recorded in the name of Shammai: *Greet every person with a cheerful countenance*. "Every person" — even those who froth at the mouth and defame you without cause or justification.

It is sadly ironic how the self-appointed defenders of free speech and ideological tolerance consider themselves exempt from both tolerance and civility toward those whose values might force them to question their own. The Forward does its readers a disservice by providing a platform to drive the stake of senseless hatred ever deeper into the heart of the Jewish community.

*Reprinted from the June 10, 2013 email of JewishWorldReview.com Rabbi Yonason Goldson teaches at Block Yeshiva High School in St. Louis, MO, where he also writes and lectures. He is author of “Dawn to Destiny: Exploring Jewish History and its Hidden Wisdom, an overview of Jewish philosophy and history from Creation through the compilation of the Talmud,” now available from Judaica Press. Visit him at* [*http://torahideals.com .*](http://torahideals.com)

[**Jews Becoming Major Targets For Whiskey Industry**](http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/06/05/jews-becoming-major-targets-for-whiskey-industry/)

Whiskey producers have identified a valuable market, and it might come as a bit of a surprise: Jews—and in particular observant Jews.

[Writes the New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/dining/whiskey-producers-court-their-jewish-market.html?src=twr&smid=tw-nytimes&_r=0): “Retailers have long recognized Jews as valuable customers. ‘Jewish men are very interested in the selection of whiskey available at a wedding or bar/bat mitzvah,’ said Jonathan Goldstein, vice president of [Park Avenue Liquor Shop](http://www.parkaveliquor.com/), a Manhattan store known for its whiskey selection. ‘They very often will pick up a special bottle to offer close friends or relatives.’ Of the Friday before the Jewish holiday of Purim, last February, he said, ‘It was like Christmas in here.’”

[](http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/06/05/jews-becoming-major-targets-for-whiskey-industry/whiskey/)

**Various whiskey on a store's shelves. Photo: Wikipedia.**

One of the ways in which Whiskey producers have moved to court the Jewish consumer is by certifying their whiskeys as kosher—or by making special kosher batches.

For example, [Buffalo Trace Distillery](https://www.buffalotracedistillery.com/) in Kentucky enlisted “the Chicago Rabbinical Council in laying down more than 1,000 barrels of three styles of whiskey, all certified kosher and set for release in five or six months,” writes the Times.

The [Royal Wine Corporation](http://www.royalwine.com/), a New York producer of kosher wine and grape juice, asked Wesley Henderson to make a kosher-certified version of his boutique bourbon, [Angel’s Envy](http://www.angelsenvy.com/). “We were looking for a bourbon line in general,” Shlomo S. Blashka, a wine and spirits educator at Royal, told the Times. “The Jewish community is a very big bourbon community.”

Henderson was already aware. “You’d have to be blind not to notice it,” he said. “I thought, if you had a kosher bourbon, that would be a great thing. It seemed a no-brainer.”

For Jews, the attraction to whiskey stems from their early days in the country. Mr. Blashka said Jewish immigrants to America, unable to trust the source of local wines, instead relied on certain distilled liquors, including whiskey. “Because the wine was an issue, typically spirits was their avenue for drinking,” he told the Times.

*Reprinted from the June 11, 2013 website of Matzav.com. The article originally appeared in the June 5, 2013 edition of The Algemeiner newspaper.*

**Chassidic Story #811**

**A Lucky Partnership**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000x8k0:001HhRmB00003AIp&count=1370984529&randid=1162488316&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1162488316##)

Menachem Mendel HaLevi (Max) Katsch, an international dealer in furs who resided in London, often visited the ***Lubavitcher Rebbe***, **Menachem Mendel Schneerson**. Although a relatively new member of the Chabad community in England, he was quite familiar with how the Rebbe’s advice and blessings had impacted many people’s lives in virtually every area of human experience.

Once, during a private audience, he put forth a tongue-in-cheek proposal for the Rebbe to partner with him in a business venture! The Rebbe’s expression became serious and said, “Fair enough. But remember that in a partnership, neither partner gets to make a move without the consent of the other. Do we have a deal?”

Mr. Katsch was of course excited about this lucky opportunity to partner with the tzadik. So even though at the same time he was somewhat skeptical about the Rebbe’s knowledge of the fur trade, he readily accepted the deal. The Rebbe gave him a token amount of dollars to seal the arrangement.

The Rebbe then advised him to make a large purchase of a rare fur that had never even been on the man’s radar screen: muskrat fur! The dealer went home and placed a large order for this unusual fabric.

When he reported back to New York, the Rebbe responded that the buy was far too conservative. A much larger quantity should have been purchased. On the Rebbe's say-so, Katsch went out and bought astronomical quantities of the stuff -- to the point of investing his entire personal fortune to pay for the shipments, and also borrowing large sums to purchase even more.

To the man’s chagrin, shortly after the acquisitions the value of this unusual fur began to plummet. Perhaps, he thought, he should hedge his investment and sell off a significant percentage of what he had purchased.

As promised, he contacted the Rebbe for his consent. To his surprise, the Rebbe did not grant consent and reminded him of their agreement with regard to unilateral moves.

The price of the fur continued to sink. And with it sank Mr. Katsch's spirits; it seemed to him that he would certainly be ruined. Every day, he watched his fortune slipping further and further away. All pleas to the Rebbe were met with the same answer: “Don’t sell.”

Facing financial ruin, he finally began to question his entire relationship with the Rebbe and Chabad-Lubavitch. Perhaps it was all a mistake. With each day’s devaluation of his inventory, his distance from the Chabad community widened.

The bleeding continued for nearly half a year altogether. One day, the price took a slight tick back up. He again consulted the Rebbe. But the Rebbe still withheld consent. When the price rose to where he could break even, the Rebbe still would not green-light the sell-off.

The price of the fur continued to rise incrementally. At each juncture, Mr. Katsch desired to sell, and always the Rebbe advised him to wait. Although by now his disillusionment was coated with heavy layers of bitterness, he continued to honor his agreement with the Rebbe.

Shortly thereafter, a famous fashion designer put out a line that called for extensive use of a rare material: muskrat fur! The industry was soon astonished to discover that a man in England had the market cornered. When Katsch reported this to the Rebbe, he was told that the time had come to sell.

The inventory went fast. Even after repaying the loans and subtracting his costs, he made many millions in profit. He excitedly boarded a plane to hand the Rebbe a check for his share. The Rebbe declined, requesting that the man give the money to charity instead.

Katsch then asked the Rebbe if they could perhaps pursue another venture together. The Rebbe smiled as he demurred: “I’m sorry... You’re a shvacher shutaf, a weak partner too weak-hearted.”

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Moshe Bryski on //Chabad.org, the rendition of Eliyahu Touger in Keeping In Touch “ Vol. 2, and, from my special source in London, a relative, who supplied a number of little-known details.

Connection: The **3rd** day of the Jewish month of **Tammuz** (2013: Tues., June 11) is the yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Biographical note: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* (11 Nissan 1902 - 3 Tammuz 1994), became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, passed away in Brooklyn on 10 Shvat 1950. He is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Jewish leaders of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

Editor’s note: Mr. Katsch received a lot of personal attention and encouragement from the Rebbe. I heard that one time in a private audience, he moaned about his smoking addiction. The doctors had warned him that he had to quit immediately or he could die soon. The Rebbe responded: “I will take care of that.” After he exited the Rebbe’s room, the first time he tried to take a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket, his hand became stiff and he couldn’t bend his finger to grasp the pack. And so it was every time thereafter. So quitting turned out to be not so difficult after all!

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

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

**Moisés Ville Journal**

**By Simon Romero**

**Outpost on Pampas Where Jews Once Found Refuge Wilts as They Leave**

MOISÉS VILLE, Argentina — At its height in the 1940s, this outpost on Argentina’s grasslands had four synagogues for a population of 5,000, a theater for Yiddish-language acting troupes, a newspaper filled with feverish debates about the creation of the state of Israel and saloons where [Jewish gauchos](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1054670/) galloping in from the pampas could nurse a drink alongside [fellow cowhands](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/226956/gaucho).

Many historical buildings in Moisés Ville are boarded up.



**Abel Gerson is the only one of his siblings to remain in Moisés Ville, founded by Jews fleeing the pogroms of the Czarist Russian empire. (Photo by Mauricio Lima for The New York Times.)**

Now, Moisés Ville, founded in 1889 by Jews fleeing the pogroms of the Czarist Russian empire, has only about 200 Jews among its 2,000 residents. The last regularly functioning synagogue lacks a rabbi. The Hebrew school halted classes this year because of the dwindling number of Jewish children. Some of the last remaining Jewish gauchos have swapped their horses for Ford pickup trucks, and they now ponder the future of their way of life.

“There are various types of gauchos: those who look for trouble; those who are valiant soldiers; those who meekly take orders,” said Arminio Seiferheld, 70, who owns a small herd of Braford cattle and lives in a modest house shaded by palm trees. His leathery skin attests to a lifetime spent roaming the plains in harsh weather.

“I’m the type of gaucho who is still here, a survivor in a place where we once thrived,” he said, dressed in bombachas, the loosefitting pants worn by Argentina’s horsemen. His parents, Jews who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s, made their way to Moisés Ville when it was a linchpin for more than a dozen Jewish farming colonies scattered across Argentina’s grassy plains, known as the pampas.

These days Moisés Ville, with many of its historical buildings boarded up (some of them Art Deco gems), is not quite a heartbreak of a town, but it feels pangs as traditions continue to fade. Captured over the decades in [writings and film](http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=97383), its rise and fall ranks among the most remarkable chapters in the history of Argentina’s Jews, who at 250,000 are Latin America’s largest Jewish population.

[Alberto Gerchunoff](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0007_0_07194.html), an Argentine writer who was born in what is now Ukraine in the 1880s but arrived here in 1889 as the child of a settler, described the culture of Argentina’s first rural Jewish settlements in short stories. Tragedy enveloped his early experience here, as it did for many other pioneers from Eastern Europe, when a gaucho killed his father.

His family moved to Entre Ríos, a province with a cluster of Jewish farming colonies, and he went on to write “The Jewish Gauchos,” a 1910 classic of Argentine literature about the travails of those making their way from oppressed European shtetls to the seemingly endless plains of Argentina, a ranching power that [then ranked among the world’s richest nations](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/what-happened-to-argentina/).

Hearing about Argentina’s openness to large waves of immigrants from Europe, 136 families came here in 1889 from the Pale of Settlement, the area of the Russian empire where Jews were allowed to live. They thought they had been promised fertile land to till, but upon their arrival they were abandoned at an unfinished train station.

Throughout the first winter, the settlers begged for food from passers-by. Dozens of children died from diseases and exposure. “There was no cemetery yet, so their bodies were placed in kerosene cans,” said Eva Guelbert de Rosenthal, 66, the director of Moisés Ville’s small museum, which preserves the town’s history.

Reports of their plight reached Buenos Aires and, eventually, Europe. Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a German-Jewish banker and philanthropist, bought land for the pioneers, establishing Moisés Ville as a precursor to a more ambitious colonization project with the aim of resettling Jews in places like Argentina, Canada, the Palestinian territories and the United States.

Financed by philanthropists, towns with names like Sonnenfeld, Lucien Ville (after the baron’s son) and Ingeniero Miguel Sajaroff began to dot the pampas. Lacking secondary schools in their new settlements, many parents sent their children to Moisés Ville’s boardinghouses. A school here for teachers of Hebrew trained educators from across Argentina until a decade ago.

Yiddish remained the dominant household language here for generations, spoken by everyone from gauchos to pharmacists and itinerant salesmen. One of Moisés Ville’s two libraries still holds hundreds of tomes in Yiddish by writers like Simon Dubnow, a Russian-Jewish historian, and [Sholem Asch](http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/801/aschs-passion), a novelist born in Poland.

“An Israeli researcher recently came here and stood in awe of our books, explaining that their value was immeasurable,” said Analía Fischer, 51, a Hebrew teacher here who no longer has any students.

Ms. Fischer guided a visitor one recent morning into the 700-seat Kadima Theater, which was inaugurated in 1929 with a concert featuring a soprano from Moscow. Recent windstorms had torn holes in the theater’s roof, and rain had damaged the elegant structure, still perched above the plaza but rarely used now by anyone in Moisés Ville.

Since the 1950s, hundreds of Moisesvillenses, as the town’s residents are known, have emigrated to Israel. Many others moved to larger Argentine cities like Buenos Aires or Rosario. Some went to the United States or Europe, fleeing the wild swings in Argentina’s economy. Residents joke that they plant wheat but sow doctors, a way of explaining that opportunities elsewhere beckon educated, young people.

What is left is a town that appears ready to fade into history. Stars of David persist on weathered building facades. Octogenarians ramble down streets named in honor of Baron de Hirsch and Theodor Herzl, the Budapest-born writer who was the founder of modern Zionism.

Some traditions refuse to die. Bernardino and Aníbal Urban, two brothers in their 60s descended from Italian immigrants who own the bakery La Central, still make challah, the braided bread eaten on the Sabbath and holidays, and an array of Jewish pastries. “The whole town likes this stuff,” said Aníbal Urban. “It’s part of us now whether you’re Jewish or not.”

On Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, Mr. Seiferheld, the self-described gaucho, still blows the shofar, or horn. For regular services each Friday evening, to solemnly welcome the Sabbath, he and a small group of others make do without a rabbi. At least they still have two synagogues in fine condition to choose from.

Some of the older Jews of Moisés Ville shrug and look to the ground when asked about what comes next for their outpost. Young people, as they might well do in small towns anywhere, complain of the tedium. Large-scale soybean farms are steadily displacing cattle ranches, once the source of great tales, from the surrounding pampas.

But while many trends which seem irreversible, exceptions persist. Abel Gerson, 29, the only one of his three siblings to remain in Moisés Ville, smiles when describing what keeps him here. Bespectacled and clad in bombachas and a boina, the beretlike cap of the gauchos, he still raises cattle, reaching his herd in a battered Ford pickup.

“I grew up here, so I can’t really see myself doing anything as satisfying as this,” Mr. Gerson said. Then, as he departed toward the range, he waved and said, “Shalom.”

*Reprinted from the June 10, 2013 edition of The New York Times.*

**It Once Happened**

**A Betrayal in Tunisia**

Ibrahim the Muslim and Refael the Jew had been business partners for many years. Ibrahim, who lived in the Tunisian city of Kairoan, where the soil was excellent and the price of produce low, was Refael's wholesale supplier of wheat and barley. Refael would then resell the grain in his city of Tunis.

Although Ibrahim was outwardly pleasant and polite toward Refael, in his heart he was bitterly jealous of his success.

One day Ibrahim came up with a plan. "I'm getting too old for this business," he told Refael. "Why don't you come to Kairoan and buy the grain yourself? I'll tell you where to go and introduce you to all the right people."

Refael looked at his partner in surprise. "But you know that it is forbidden for a Jew to set foot in Kairoan..."

"Nonsense!" Ibrahim reassured him with a wave of the hand. "You speak Arabic fluently. If you dress like one of us, no one will ever know that you are Jewish."

Back in the not so distant past, Kairoan had been a bustling center of Jewish life. With its fertile soil and well-developed commercial infrastructure, the city had been an important stop along the North African trade route. In fact, there had been so many Jewish merchants in Kairoan that they had formed the backbone of the city's economy. The Arabs had even coined a clever phrase: "A marketplace without Jews is like a judge without witnesses..."

Gradually, however, the Muslims had begun to make life difficult for their Jewish neighbors. Many Jews simply abandoned their homes and businesses and settled elsewhere. But even this was not enough; they declared Kairoan a "holy" city and off-limits to anyone Jewish. The law had stood for several generations.

Despite some misgivings, Refael agreed to the plan. He dressed up as an Arab and nonchalantly walked through the gates of Kairoan. Ibrahim quickly led the Jew into a narrow alleyway.

"Stay here, I'll be right back," Ibrahim told him. A few minutes later he returned with two policemen. "There he is, the despicable Jew who dared set foot in our holy city!" he cried, pointing at Refael.

By the time Refael figured out that his partner had betrayed him, his hands and feet were in chains. The policemen then threw him into a dark cell.

For three days and nights Refael languished in his cell without anyone even checking to see if he was alive. Lucky for him, he still had his knapsack, so he was able to eat some food he had brought along.

Refael's fourth night in jail was Shabbat. After making Kiddush on the last of his bread Refael began to sing zemirot, the traditional Shabbat songs. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he thought of happier times and circumstances. When he had finished singing, he began to recite the Psalms he knew by heart.

Suddenly, there was a rustling sound from the doorway. Refael held his breath, too frightened to breathe. A minute later he could discern a thin strip of light at the edge of the room. When he went over to investigate he found that the door was open a crack. With a slight push the door was completely open.

His heart pounding, Refael crept outside and began to run as fast as his feet could take him through the darkened streets. When he reminded himself that he was dressed as an Arab, he slowed down to avoid arousing suspicion. By the next morning he was already home in Tunis.

Refael knew that his life was still in danger; the police would surely come after him when they realized that he had escaped. He decided to seek the advice of the saintly Rabbi Yeshua Bassis of Tunis. "Go to your house and wait there," the Rabbi reassured him. "Everything will be all right."

Now, at that time the ruler of Tunisia was Chamuda Pasha, a wise and temperate leader who paid no attention to the Muslims' incitement against the Jews. On the contrary, he was grateful for the Jews' contributions to society, and considered Rabbi Yeshua Bassis his personal friend. When Rabbi Yeshua told the Pasha what had happened to Refael, he immediately issued an order for "the rebellious Jew who dared to enter Kairoan" to be brought before him.

A few days later the police were forced to admit defeat. Embarrassed by their incompetence, they stood before the Pasha empty-handed.

At that very moment the Pasha sent for Refael, who was waiting in the next room. The Pasha declared to his shocked audience, "G-d made a miracle and released him from prison. No doubt, it is also a sign that He wants the Jews to return to Kairoan..."

The decree against the Jews was rescinded, and the Jews of Tunisia were not restricted as to where they could live.

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



**Meet the Mensch of Steel.**

**By** [**Simcha Weinstein**](http://www.aish.com/authors/94998634.html)

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the two ordinary young men who created an extraordinary hero, lived twelve blocks apart from each other in Cleveland. The pair collaborated on stories for their high school newspaper and shared a passion for science fiction and pulp comics.

It was the 1930s, and comic book publishing was in its infancy. Like many young Jews with artistic aspirations, Siegel and Shuster yearned to break into this fledgling industry. Comic book publishers actively hired Jews, who were largely excluded from more "legitimate" illustration work.

The 1930s were also, arguably, the most anti-Semitic period in American history. Nazi sympathizer Fritz Kuhn of the German-American Bund led legions of rabid followers on marches through many cities, including Siegel and Shuster's hometown.

Radio superstar Father Charles E. Coughlin of the pro-fascist Christian Front was one of the nation's most powerful men. And Ivy League colleges kept the number of Jewish students to a minimum, while country clubs and even entire neighborhoods barred Jews altogether.

So Siegel and Shuster began submitting treatments under the pseudonym Bernard J. Kenton, just to be on the safe side. Throughout the Great Depression, the two boys scraped together every penny they could just to cover postage. Shuster sketched on cheap brown wrapping paper.

From these humble beginnings, Siegel and Shuster carved out a character that embodied their adolescent frustrations, served as a mouthpiece of the oppressed, and became an American icon. Many years later, Jerry Siegel recalled the birth of Superman:

"The story would begin with you as a child on far-off planet Krypton. Like the others of that world, you had super-powers. The child's scientist-father was mocked and denounced by the Science Council. They did not believe his claim that Krypton would soon explode from internal stresses. Convinced that his prediction was valid, the boy's father had been constructing a model rocket ship. As the planet began to perish, the baby's parents knew its end was close. There was not space enough for three people in the small model craft. They put the baby into it."

The idea of for this new superhero came to them in 1934. It would take another four years before Superman would be transformed from a feverish dream to a full-fledged hero. In 1938, Detective Comics, Inc., was looking for a character to launch its new magazine, Action Comics. They paid young Siegel and Shuster $130 for the first thirteen pages of Superman. Action Comics #1 came out in June of that year.

Superman's original name on Krypton also reveals Biblical underpinnings. Superman is named Kal-El and his father Jor-El. The suffix "El" is one of the ancient names for G-d, used throughout the Bible. It is also found in the names of great prophets like Samuel and and Daniel and angels such as Michael and Gavriel. We may never know whether Siegel and Shuster were aware of these precise Hebrew translations; nevertheless, the name could not be more apt.

Like the biblical Moses, Superman is discovered and raised in a foreign culture. Baby Moses is found by Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, and raised in the royal palace. Superman is found by Jonathan and Martha Kent in a Midwestern cornfield and given the name Clark.

From the onset, both Batya and the Kent’s realize that these foundling boys are extraordinary. Superman leads a double life as the stuttering, spectacle-wearing reporter whose true identity no one suspects. In the same way, for his own safety, Moses kept his Israelite roots hidden for a time.

While the invincible Superman may have stood the test of time, the lives of his creators were not as triumphant. From the beginning, Siegel and Shuster were so busy they had to hire assistants, but while DC Comics was making millions, Superman's creators weren't sharing the wealth. The two men were paid a salary, but their initial payment back in 1938 had included all rights. They had sold their percentage of a goldmine for $130 and were eventually fired from their own creation.

Lawsuits followed. None were successful. Siegel and Shuster tried and failed to create new characters. Their names were familiar only to comic book aficionados. Then, rumors began to circulate in the early 1970s that a big budget Superman movie was in the works. DC Comics received $3 million for the rights to film Superman. Once again, Siegel and Shuster were left out of the equation.

This time, the two men tried a new approach. They bypassed their lawyers and went straight to the media. Newspapers across the world picked up the story of Siegel and Shuster, the poor boys who'd created an American icon, made DC Comics rich – and were now penniless and forgotten. That Shuster was now going blind added to the story's poignancy.

Legally, DC Comics owed Siegel and Shuster nothing, but bad publicity was costing the company dearly. A financial settlement was reached, and the names "Siegel and Shuster" appeared in Superman comics once more.

My 2006 best-selling book, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey* chronicled how Jewish history, culture, & values helped shape the early years of the comic book industry. Like Siegel and Shuster, the early comic book creators were almost all Jewish, and as children of immigrants, they spent their lives trying to escape the second-class mentality which was forced on them by the outside world. Their fight for truth, justice, and the American Way is portrayed by the superheroes they created. The dual identity given to their creations mirrors their own desire to live two lives privately as a Jew, and publicly as an American.

In 2013, "Siegel and Shuster’s" creation returns to save the world again. In today's again of uncertainty and turmoil, the world needs the Jewish values that underpin the Mensch of Steel more than ever.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**Today in Jewish History: Tammuz 4**

**Yahrtzeit of Rabbeinu Tam**

****

Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yaakov Ben Meir Tam (1100-1171), Talmudic commentator known as Rabbeinu Tam. A grandson of Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam was the greatest sage of his time, and Jews flocked to his academy in France to hear his Talmudic discourses.

These lectures served as the basis for the Tosfot commentary, which was compiled by his students and today is printed on every standard page of the Talmud. Rabbeinu Tam was an extremely successful wine merchant and financier.

When his home was attacked by Crusaders in 1146, he was stabbed repeatedly in the head, and dragged out to a field to die. He miraculously survived, and lived another 25 years.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*