**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Matos-masei 5772**

Volume 3, Issue #44 2 Menachem Av 5772/July 21, 2012

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**Absolute Soul**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin of Lev L'Achim related the following story: In November 1938, before the onset of World War II, some Jewish children had the opportunity to escape from Nazi Germany and resettle in England through what became known as kindertransport.

Unfortunately, there were not enough religious families able to accept these children and other families who were willing to take them were not willing to raise the children with Jewish traditions.

**A Frantic Campaign to Secure**

**Funding for Every Jewish Child**

The Chief Rabbi of London, Rabbi Yechezkel Abramski, embarked on a frantic campaign to secure funding to ensure that every child would be placed in a proper Jewish environment.

Rabbi Abramski called one wealthy Jewish industrialist and begged him for a donation sizable enough to ensure that the children would be raised in proper Jewish environment. "It is pikuach nefesh!" cried Rabbi Abramski.

At that point, the tycoon became incensed. "Rabbi," he said, "Please do not use that term flippantly. I know what pikuach nefesh is. Pikuach nefesh means a matter of life and death! When I was young, my parents were very observant. When my baby sister was young, she was very sick. We had to call the doctor, but it was on Shabbos.

**Our Rabbi Taught us About Pikuach Nefesh**

“My father was very conscientious of the sanctity of Shabbos. He would never desecrate Shabbos. But our rabbi told us that since this is a matter of life and death, we were allowed to desecrate the Shabbos! He called it pikuach nefesh.

“Rabbi Abramski," the man implored, "with all due respect. The children are already here in England. They are safe from the Nazis. The only issue is where to place them. How they are raised is not pikuach nefesh!" With that, the man politely bade farewell and hung up the phone.

That Friday evening, the wealthy man was sitting at dinner, when the telephone rang incessantly. Finally, the man got up from his meal and answered the phone.

**His Face Went Pallid**

As he listened to the voice on the other end of the line, his face went pallid.

"This is Abramski. Please. I would not call on the Sabbath if I did not think this was pikuach nefesh. Again, I implore you. We need the funds to ensure that these children will be raised as Jews."

Needless to say, the man responded immediately [after Shabbos] to the appeal.

We understand matters of life and death, justice and injustice, war and peace, in corporeal terms. It is difficult to view spirituality in those terms as well.

The Torah teaches us that our enemies are not merely those who threaten our physical existence, but those who threaten our spiritual existence as well. Throughout the generations, we faced those who would annihilate us physically and others who would be just as happy to see us disappear as Jews.

**Greater Dangers with Assimilation**

What our enemies were unable to do to the Jewish people with bullets and gas, they have succeeded in doing with assimilation and spiritual attrition.

People fail to equate the severity of spiritual disorders with those of a physical nature. They may scoff at a prohibited marriage in the eyes of the Torah, or seek a leniency to absolve themselves from following matrimonial law, yet they will leave no stone unturned in searching for a genetic incompatibility or suspect health issue.

The Torah teaches us that the two - the physical world and the spiritual world are inseparable. An attack on spirituality, breaches the borders of our very essence, and our response must be in kind. It is essential to know that when we do some serious soul-searching there is really something out there waiting to be found.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**In the Public Eye**

In last week's portion Pinchas, we read about the zealous actions of Pinchas who took action to protect Hashem's honor and to prevent the Bnai Yisroel (Children of Yisroel) from sinning.

The essence of Pinchas' act was a "Kidush Hashem;" which means sanctifying Hashem's name. Whenever a Jew acts according to the Torah, especially in public, he causes Hashem's name to be sanctified.

Why is that? Because when an onlooker sees a Jew acting properly according to the beautiful ways of the Torah, then the onlooker is himself encouraged to follow in the ways of the Torah. The following true story illustrates the power to influence others with our actions.

As the principal of Yesodei HaTorah School in Manchester, England, Rabbi Yonason Yodaiken has extensive experience in the field of children's education. A Jewish organization in Melbourne, Australia once invited him to give a series of lectures on the familiar topic of the Jewish concept of education. Rabbi Yodaiken set out from Manchester, England one fine Sunday morning.

But the first leg of his long journey, from England to Brussels, was miserable. The plane fought to stay on course as the wind buffeted the jumbo jet whichever way it pleased. Even the pilot admitted that it had been the most uncomfortable, turbulent flight he had ever experienced. Not only that, but Rabbi Yodaiken discovered that the kosher meals he had ordered were nowhere to be seen.

Rabbi Yodaiken and his fellow passengers were relieved when the plane finally landed safely in Brussels. But because of the dangerously high winds, they were forced to stay cooped up on the plane indefinitely, unable to taxi to the gate. Passengers indulged in the drinks and snacks provided by the airline, but Rabbi Yodaiken abstained. None of the refreshments were not kosher. Instead, he ate the sandwich and fruit that he had prudently brought along for the trip.   
After eight long hours of waiting on the tarmac, the passengers were finally allowed their first glimpse of the Brussels airport. Rabbi Yodaiken stretched his legs gratefully as he walked down the corridor. He crossed the threshold into the airport and joined the hordes of stranded travelers. People had made themselves comfortable among piles of luggage on waiting area benches, on the floor and in the restaurants.

Rabbi Yodaiken approached the flight attendant at the desk to inquire about his next flight to Singapore, where he would continue on to Melbourne. The attendant tapped a few keys on her computer and looked up at the harried passenger. "I'm sorry, sir. That flight has been delayed until two o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"Two o'clock? But that's in twenty hours!" Rabbi Yodaiken exclaimed. Apparently, he was unable to leave the airport to go buy kosher food.

Rabbi Yodaiken leaned over the desk and said. "Listen, I'm Jewish and I maintain a strictly kosher diet. Is there any way to get some kosher food on the [next leg of the] flight?"

"Well, with this weather, there's no food coming in from outside the airport. But there is an El Al flight stuck here as well. We'll do our best to get you something to eat," the attendant reassured him.

But the airport's best wasn't good enough. When Rabbi Yodaiken boarded his next flight to Singapore on Monday afternoon, he was still hungry. Torah learning and some small talk with the pleasant doctor sitting next to him served as a minor distraction.

Then the dinner cart came rolling down the aisle. "A meal, sir?" The flight attendant extended a steaming tray. The smell filled the cabin.

Rabbi Yodaiken lifted his eyes from his sefer. "Thank you, but I ordered a kosher meal."

"Oh, of course!" the flight attendant said. "Wait just a moment, sir. I'll see what we have."

Ten minutes later, the flight attendant was back. "I'm sorry, we don't have any kosher meals on board. Can I offer you anything else?" Rabbi Yodaiken's neighbor was watching the exchange quietly. He looked at Rabbi Yodaiken to hear his response. "No, thank you," Rabbi Yodaiken politely declined. "I only eat kosher." And he turned his attention back to the open page on his lap.

But the flight from Brussels to Singapore was long. The flight attendant returned time and again. "How about a vegetarian meal? Can I get you some peanuts?"

"Thank you," Rabbi Yodaiken replied with a smile, "but I really can't eat any of that. I appreciate your concern. I'll be fine." The hunger pangs subsided with some fresh fruit and a few drinks, but they surfaced again during the final leg of the journey to Melbourne.

The doctor observed silently as Rabbi Yodaiken refused the meals offered to him again and again. "Sir, you haven't eaten anything the entire flight!" the flight attendant admonished her passenger. There was just one hour remaining until estimated arrival time. "Will you at least take this meal?" Despite his hunger, it did not even occur to Rabbi Yodaiken to accept the non-kosher food.

"Thanks for your concern," he reiterated. "It won't be too long now. I'll be able to get kosher food in Melbourne."

"I'm sorry," the stewardess apologized. "I wish we could have given you something!" And with a regretful smile, she whisked the rejected meal back to the cabin. Rabbi Yodaiken and the doctor watched her retreat.

"I've been wanting to tell you something this whole flight," the doctor began suddenly, turning toward his seatmate. "I had to build up the nerve, but it's now or never. You see—I'm Jewish."

Rabbi Yodaiken raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Really?" he asked, encouraging the doctor to continue. "After the war, my father gave me strict instructions never to tell anyone about my religion. And I didn't. You are the first person I've shared this with in over fifty years. I've never been to a synagogue or affiliated with anything even remotely Jewish. But I've been watching you this whole time. You must be starving! And still you refuse every bit of food that's offered to you. Where do you get such tremendous self-control? What motivates you? It must be your religion."   
 Pulling out a pen and paper, the Jewish doctor scribbled his address and phone number and handed it to Rabbi Yodaiken. "I live here in Melbourne, and I would like to learn more about Judaism from you. Let's keep in touch." And they did.

Rabbi Yodaiken later heard about the doctor's first Rosh Hashanah in a shul. And he also heard about how the doctor experienced the beauty of a real Shabbos. "It's a long journey," the doctor wrote, "but I'm on my way back to my roots." (Rabbi Yosef Weiss - Visions of Greatness Volume 7, p.189)

Let us take advantage of the tremendous opportunity we have to influence others through our observance of mitzvahs in public. Let us learn from the example of Pinchas, who acted to sanctify Hashem's name by "doing the right thing" in public.

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

**Do We Really Need**

**So Many Rabbis?**

**By David Bibi**

After writing about the Shulchan Aruch Learning Program and Yeshivat Pirchei Shoshanim last week, someone asked me, “Do we really need so many rabbis?”.

I realized that there was much more here than a simple question. It was a double edged question. “Do we really need so many rabbis?” was the first part, but the second and unmentioned part was, and “who will support them”? As we continued the conversation, I was able to draw that question out.

It is interesting to note that the commentaries explain that Joshua as a “leader”, 38 years prior when the spies were selected, was a leader of 50. Which would have made him one of 12,000 “leaders” of 50, and let’s not forget that there were also 60,000 leaders of ten. So in essence even in Moses time there were lots of Rabbis. If they needed so many then, wouldn’t we need as many now?

At the Semicha ceremony we were honored to have a Harav Hagaon Rabbi Chaim Walkin Shlit"a speak to us. I knew that the Rabbi had something to do with the Mir Yeshiva in China. I quickly googled him and learned that Rabbi Chaim Walkin is the scion of a rabbinical family. His grandfather, Rabbi Aron Walkin, was the Chief Rabbi of Pinsk, Belarus, and a Torah giant of his day.

His maternal grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Londinsky, headed the yeshiva in Radin with the Chafetz Chaim. His uncle and namesake, Rabbi Chaim Walkin, served as the last dean of the Volozhin yeshiva until World War II. Rabbi Walkin's father, Rabbi Shmuel Walkin, was active in rescue of Jews during World War II from Europe. He headed the Jewish community in Shanghai, and was famous for his warmth and care of all the refugees. Upon arrival in the U.S. in 1946, he founded a synagogue for the refugee families and provided for their needs. The Shanghai refugees were his closest family until his death in 1979.

Rabbi Walkin, who was born in Shanghai told us that after arriving in America, his father worked feverishly over the next two years to bring the students to New York. If you have never read or heard the story of the Mir in Shanghai, google it!

At the time getting into America was difficult. But if a Rabbi was invited by a congregation, he would be permitted entry. Rabbi Shmuel Walkin went to see Secretary of State, Dean Acheson.

Mr. Acheson looked at his request for entry for the entire Yeshiva and every one was listed as a Rabbi. He turned to Rabbi Shmuel and said, “we know that the objective of the Nazis was first to annihilate all the Rabbis, So how could it be that all the people who are stuck in Shanghai are Rabbis? If they were the first to be attacked and killed, how is it possible?”

Rabbi Walkin said that his father prayed that an answer from heaven. And he turned to Mr Acheson and said, “Mr. Secretary let me explain. Our education is different from what one comes to expect in other societies.

“By us, the basic Jewish education leads to the rabbinate, from lower school, through high school through houses of higher learning, everyone completing their education would by nature become an ordained rabbi, but historically only so many rabbis were needed. So many left and entered other fields along the way. Now though, after the holocaust where our rabbis were decimated by the evil Nazis, everyone who can, must follow his natural education through the system to the rabbinate”.

Said Rabbi Walkin, “And now 64 years later, I see now how right my father was.” Then in Yiddish he stated, that this Rabbi is within every Jew. We see today that semicha is being bestowed upon doctors, lawyers, professionals, successful businessmen, and people from all walks of life. Given how far so many Jews today are from the connections that their grandparents had, it is incumbent upon each of us in this generation, whoever can, must.

This answers the first question and begins to answer the second as well. Almost everyone receiving Semicha was not looking for his semicha to be his pay check. These were professionals who just wished to do a bit more. Each has a desire to learn and teach and help their communities.

The rabbis of the Talmud were by and large gainfully employed in every trade from blacksmith to tanner. The rishonim too were often gainfully employed. Both Rambam and Ramban were physicians. Rashi ran a vineyard and winery. Don Isaac Abarbanel served as finance minister to the nations of Spain and Portugal. The Arizal was in the textile business.

At the same time though we (in my shul) certainly need professional rabbis whose only responsibility is to their congregations. I know in my own Shul, there are certainly congregants who would rather have a full time Rabbi. (A full time administrator and bookkeeper too).

I’m not sure if it’s because they can’t threaten the rabbi with docking his (my) salary (can’t take something from nothing) or perhaps they want to have more control or they simply want someone who can give them 60 hours a week (I stop at 30). But with finances as they are, the unsalaried rabbi is a tough deal to beat.

So to the guy who asked me if there are too many rabbis. There are certainly not! As to the other question, everything works in balance.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**An Audacious Promise**

**By** [**Yerachmiel Tilles**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/1080/jewish/Yerachmiel-Tilles.htm)

Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel, the **rebbe of Kopischnitz** (1888–1967), followed the ways of his predecessor and namesake, the Apter Rov (1748–1825), as an *ohev yisrael*, a lover of his people. In post–World War II America, he carried the pain and suffering of countless individuals on his weak and frail shoulders. Indeed, often when he heard the problems of others he would break down in uncontrollable weeping. The grief of his fellow Jews tormented him much more than his own afflictions, and countless times the rebbe put his name and honor at risk in an attempt to help others.



**Immigrants at Ellis Island**

Once, a broken survivor of the Nazi inferno showed up at the rebbe’s door. He had just arrived from Europe, and was hoping to settle in America. His wife, however, had been refused entry due to her ill health, and was on Ellis Island awaiting imminent deportation. The man was inconsolable, and indicated that if his wife was indeed deported, he wouldn’t think twice about taking his own life. “Don’t worry, please don’t worry,” implored the rebbe. “I promise you that by next week your wife will be here together with you!” Upon hearing the rebbe’s words, an immediate feeling of calm overtook the distressed man. Greatly relieved, he went away a new person.

Rabbi Morgenshtern, one of the rebbe’s disciples who had witnessed the scene, gathered up his courage and asked the rebbe how it was possible for him to make an outrageous guarantee like that with such ease. It was no less than promising a miracle!

“You saw how desperate the poor man was,” the rebbe replied. “My first concern was to calm him down, and thank G‑d, I succeeded. At least for the next week he will feel better. If after a week he sees that I was wrong and his wife was deported, he will say, ‘Avrohom Yehoshua is not a real rebbe, Avrohom Yehoshua is a liar.’ But at least for a week I succeeded in bringing some peace into his life.”

With that the Rebbe took his Tehillim (book of Psalms) and began to recite its verses with intense emotion. As the tears were streaming down his face, he could be heard pleading, “Please, G‑d, please, see to it that Avrohom Yehoshua didn’t say a lie. I was only trying to help a Jew in a pathetic situation. Please don’t let me be a liar. Please help this poor woman into the country . . .” In this fashion his prayers continued long into the night.

The Almighty heard his prayers. The woman was granted permission to stay in America, and was reunited with her husband.

**Biographical note:** Rabbi **Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel of Kopischnitz** (1888–1967) was named after his paternal ancestor, the Apter Rebbe. After World War I he moved to Vienna, and after World War II, to the Lower East Side of New York. Wherever he lived, he was renowned for his supreme kindness and great *ahavat yisrael* (love of one’s fellow Jew). His dedication to refugees of the wars was especially extraordinary. He opened an orphanage in Petach Tikvah, Israel, called Beit Avraham, which exists until this day.

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

**Who's Who**

**Herod**

Herod, who became the ruler of Judea, was the eldest son of Antipater, a descendant of slaves of the Hasmonian kings. A cruel and bloody tyrant, his rule lasted from 3725-3757 (36-4 bce), and wreaked unprecedented suffering upon the Jewish people. He destroyed the royal house of the Hasmonians, murdering even his wife, Mariamne.

In penance for the murder of most of the Jewish Sages, he built the magnificent reconstruction of the Second Holy Temple, which was described thus, "He who did not see Herod's building has never in his life seen a truly grand building."

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

**What’s the Right Thing to Do?**

**For Whom the Bell Rings**

**Question:** It often happens that I hear someone ringing my doorbell while I am in the middle of a telephone conversation. While I am hesitant to interrupt my telephone talk by going to the door, I do appreciate the anxiety of the person at the door who is ringing. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** Your sensitivity towards the feelings of others is to be complimented. In regard to the question of priorities which you propose, the determination must be made as to who will suffer most from your action. Let us draw a comparison between the discomfort caused to your telephone partner who is asked to hold on for a minute and that of a person at the door who receives no response to his ringing.

The person on the phone is aware that you are on the line and will be resuming the discussion once you answer at the door. The person at the door has no indication of whether you are at home and suffers some anxious moments until you finally show.

The investment of effort to reach you by the phone caller was no more than pressing a few buttons, while the person at the door made a considerable effort to come to your home.

The conclusion is that you should ask the party on the phone to hold on while you see who is at your door.

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

**A Slice of Life**

**G-d Will Repay You**

**By Rabbi Eli Gutnick**

I am a sofer (scribe) working in Melbourne, Australia. One day, Mr. Leon Schnall came to see me, together with his rabbi, to buy many mezuzot for his new home. I gave Leon the choice of two types of mezuzot: standard mezuzot, which would cost at total of $650, or higher quality mezuzot, which would cost a total of $810.

Unsure, he asked his rabbi which ones he should get. His rabbi explained to him the idea of hiddur mitzva - that if you spend extra effort or money to beautify a mitzva (commandment), "G-d will repay you." Leon chose to purchase the mehudar mezuzot and wrote out a check for $810.

Some weeks later, I got a phone call from Leon, and he began to tell me an amazing story. When he had come to buy mezuzot, he was putting his old home on the market. Initially, the real estate agents had told him he could expect to receive between $600,000 and $660,000 for the unit. However, on the morning of the auction, the agent told Leon that he would "probably get around $650,000." Unexpectedly, the unit sold for a whopping $810,000.

A few hours after the auction, still stunned by his good fortune, Leon was sitting at the upsherin (the first haircut at the age of 3 years old) of his rabbi's son. It was there that he remembered the words of his rabbi, that "G-d will repay you," and realized that the amount he received at the auction corresponded perfectly with the price of the mehudar mezuzot.

Even more amazing, perhaps, was the correspondence between the price of the standard mezuzot and the expected auction price. For the extra $160 that Leon spent, G-d repaid him a thousand-fold!

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Surprise for the Police**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

Responsibility for communal funds was always a prime concern of the late mashgiach of Yeshivat Slobodka in Bnei Brak, Rabbi Moshe Tokatsinsky. During a fundraising visit to London on behalf of the yeshiva, he was the victim of a robbery while traveling in the “Underground”.

He reported the incident to the local police and provided them with precise descriptions of the robbers who were soon apprehended along with the cash they had stolen.

Here came the catch that stood in the way of a happy ending. The police asked the rabbi to prove that the money found on the robbers really was stolen from him.

To their surprise the rabbi pulled out a piece of paper on which were listed the serial numbers of all the bills which people had given him for the support of the yeshiva. He had foresightedly anticipated the possibility of such a scenario and had taken the precaution that probably no one else would have thought of.

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

**It Once Happened**

**Two Honest Merchants**

Many years ago, in the time when the Holy Temple stood, there lived in Jerusalem two storekeepers named Rabbi Elazar ben Tzadok and Abba Shaul ben Botnit.

The two men were neighbors and friends and had known each other most of their lives. But in addition to being friends, they shared a wonderful and rare character trait - absolute and strict honesty.

It is related in the Talmud that as a favor to their fellow Jews, these two men would prepare stores of wine and oil before every holiday so that the people of Jerusalem would have what they needed to celebrate the holidays properly.

Tens of thousands of Jews would stream into Jerusalem for the holidays and would be welcomed into homes throughout the city. With so many guests, it was no wonder that their gracious hosts would sometimes run out of oil or wine during a festival.

Whenever that happened, they could go to Rabbi Elazar or Abba Shaul and take what they needed. Of course, no money would pass hands on a festival, but there would be no lack of those two necessities to prepare for the festive meals.

Even during the intermediate days of the pilgrimage festivals of Sukkot and Passover, the two generous merchants would prepare in advance and make their goods available to those in need so that they could spend their time studying Torah.

Not only did they practice these deeds of great kindness, but even on regular workdays they were outstanding in their adherence to the mitzva of honesty. When they would finish pouring the contents of one of their containers into a customer's container, they would sit their container on top of that of the customer and allow the dregs of the jug to drip into the customer's receptacle. Only then were they sure that they had given the customer everything that was due him.

Despite their stringencies, the two rabbis feared that a bit of oil and wine would still cling to the edges of the jugs. So what did they do? Each man had a special container into which he would pour the last tiny drops. Over many years, they accumulated three hundred barrels of oil and three hundred barrels of wine.

One day, they decided to bring all of these barrels to the Holy Temple. After all, they did not consider it their property, yet they could not give it to the customers either. They decided to consecrate it to the Holy Temple. When the porters arrived, they were met by the treasurers of the Temple.

"What have you brought?" they asked.

"We have brought three hundred barrels of wine and three hundred barrels of oil for use in the Holy Temple. It has taken us many years to accumulate it, allowing it to drip from the sides of our jugs. We did not want to benefit from anything which does not belong to us, and we couldn't give it to our customers."

"It was certainly not necessary to collect those small leftovers," remarked the treasurers. "Your customers understand that tiny drops adhere to the sides of your jugs, and they expect there to be some waste."

"Nevertheless," the men continued, "We don't want anything that is not rightfully ours."

"Since you wish to keep such a high standard, we will accept your offering. The oil and wine will be used for the good of the community. We will sell them and from the profits we will dig wells for the pilgrims to have water on the festivals. The residents of the city will also be able to use them. So you see, even your own customers will benefit from your offering, and your own minds can be at ease."

The two merchants left the precincts of the Holy Temple with hearts full of joy, knowing that they never departed from their customs of strict honesty and kindness.

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

**A Community's Twist on Genetic Tests**

**Orthodox Jews Screen for Recessive Diseases**

**Before Marrying, But Are Only Told So Much**

**By Amy Dockser Marcus**

NEW YORK—In Williamsburg, a bustling Brooklyn enclave across the East River from Manhattan, a sect of ultra-Orthodox Jews dresses in garb common to 18th- and 19th-century Europe and adheres to even more-ancient religious traditions. Yet they are wrestling with the most modern of questions: When it comes to genetic testing, how much does a person need to know?

The community has deployed a unique screening program that addresses a genetic issue arising from the fact that Jews in Central and Eastern Europe once lived and married within small, tightly bound communities. As a result, Jews who trace ancestry to this region have a higher risk of carrying gene mutations that could lead to bearing children with a number of devastating hereditary genetic conditions.

Many Jews who know their ancestry now get tested to see if they carry such mutations. But in many Orthodox communities, the kind of genetic screening typically used in the wider world is complicated by privacy needs, religious prohibitions, and clashes with some of their communal values.

So community members devised an approach to identify people carrying gene mutations for the same diseases who, if they were to marry one another, might bear children with lethal conditions (such offspring have a 1 in 4 chance of inheriting a so-called recessive condition.)

Rabbi Josef Ekstein, who had four children die of Tay-Sachs disease, a fatal neurodegenerative condition, founded a program called Dor Yeshorim to screen people and create a database with the test results while providing participants with anonymity. Young people—typically from age 17 to their early 20s—who get tested are assigned a personal identification number and birth date without the year. The program screens for nine conditions common among Ashkenazi Jews—those who can trace ancestry to Central and Eastern Europe—and the information is kept in a database by Dor Yeshorim, which means "upright generation" in Hebrew.

Before a couple is betrothed, or sometimes even meet, their families call Dor Yeshorim with the identification data and are told whether the prospective couple is "compatible" or—if both carry a gene mutation for the same disease—"not compatible." In the latter case, the relationship is typically abandoned.

The program is unusual not for what it tells people, but for what it doesn't.

Typically, a person who is sent for or requests genetic screening is told if he or she is a carrier for a wide variety of conditions.

Rabbi Ekstein, though, tells a recent visitor that he didn't envision Dor Yeshorim that way. "We are a prevention program," he says. The purpose isn't to expand an individual's personal medical knowledge, but to prevent the births of doomed children by alerting potential spouses to the risk.

How much to reveal to people remains a contentious issue in the gene-testing field. Some geneticists argue that scientists still have no grasp of most gene mutations' relevance, and that sharing information whose meaning is uncertain is potentially harmful. In some cases, people might endlessly worry or alter their lives because of a mutation for which there is no effective treatment or that turns out to be benign; others may ignore medical advice because genes show they aren't predisposed to a particular condition, even though screening can't rule out the possibility a disease will develop.

Many believe people have a right to know everything, and withholding any information amounts to a kind of genomic paternalism.

Rabbi Ekstein recognizes that, in some respects, withholding all information other than people's compatibility may seem old-fashioned in an age when technology can tell people about all kinds of genetic risks. He argues that too often, people don't consider the "negative part of knowing" one is at risk. Everyone talks about the right to know, the rabbi says, but there should be equal attention paid to "the right not to know."

Those who use Dor Yeshorim aren't told for which diseases they are carriers unless they insist. Among the concerns: If word were to get out in the tightknit Orthodox community, the stigma of carrying a faulty gene might make it hard to find a spouse not just for that person, but for his or her siblings as well. And screening is done only for recessive diseases, for which each parent must contribute a faulty gene in order for a child to be affected.

Yaniv Erlich, a geneticist at the Whitehead Institute in Cambridge, Mass., who works with Dor Yeshorim on research projects, says the group's decision to share only what it considers "actionable information" is a stance taken by many geneticists. What's unusual is that, in this case, "the marriage is the actionable information," he says.

Dor Yeshorim's story is really Rabbi Ekstein's story.

The rabbi's first child, a boy born in 1965, seemed to be developing normally. But at around 6 months old, he started losing muscle tone, had seizures and experienced trouble swallowing. Eventually, he went blind. The boy was diagnosed with Tay-Sachs at age 2, and died at age 4. Four more children were born; three also died of Tay-Sachs.

After burying his fourth child, Rabbi Ekstein says, "it came to my mind that maybe this has a purpose." Screening tests had been developed that could let people know if they were carriers of diseases and, while it was too late to help him and his wife—who have five healthy children—Rabbi Ekstein sought a way to help others in the community.

In Williamsburg, which boasts one of the largest populations of Satmar Hasidic Jews—a branch with roots in Hungary and Romania—couples tend to have many children, and find spouses who are usually chosen or approved by their families. In most cases, abortion is prohibited, sperm and egg donation isn't an option and in vitro fertilization is financially prohibitive. The only practical way to stop children from being born with these diseases is to prevent carriers from marrying.

Rabbis and other community leaders debated Dor Yeshorim's mission for some time before giving their approval. A paramount concern was the confidentiality aspect. There also was considerable debate about which diseases to test for: How severe does a disease have to be to justify providing information that could thwart marriage plans?

Today, the number of children born with Tay-Sachs in the Jewish community in the U.S. and Canada each year has dropped to between three and six from between 30 and 40. The Dor Yeshorim database now includes information from 330,000-340,000 people from Orthodox communities around the world. One in 100 prospective couples are found to be incompatible, the group estimates.

Still, researchers believe that while risk can be lowered, it can never be completely eliminated. In genetics and love, says Edwin Kolodny, professor emeritus in neurology at New York University Medical Center and chairman of Dor Yeshorim's medical advisory board, "Marriage in most situations remains a lottery where we just take our chances."

Reprinted from last week’s email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Projects) Update Newsletter. The article was originally published in the July 9, 2012 edition of the Wall Street Journal.

**Saved by a Match**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

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Towards the end of 1930s, Poland was under rule of a semi-fascist clique called the "Government of Colonels." During this period the Jewish community, which constituted approximately ten percent of Poland's total population, was in an extremely precarious position. New edicts were being issued daily, edicts which were strangling the economic and cultural life of the Jewish minority.

After Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, the Poles were only too happy to step up their acts of anti-Semitism. One very popular ploy was to accuse a Jew of insulting the Polish people or the Polish government. The accused would be brought before a judge, usually an anti-Semite himself, who would almost always sentence the Jew to a lengthy prison term.

The Polish Treasury Department also had a hand in reducing the Jews to financial ruin. Its officers routinely interpreted the laws in a manner which served to economically break Jewish merchants and artisans. When, as often happened, a Jew was unable to meet the excessive taxes, a tax collector would come to his home or place of business and confiscate his merchandise and household furnishings.

In 1935, in the tiny village of Kreszowice, near Cracow, there lived a Jew by the name of Israel Weiner. It happened that he fell behind with his tax payments, and his home was visited by the tax collector, accompanied by a policeman. They had come to requisition his belongings in lieu of the unpaid taxes.

Among Israel Weiner's possessions was his greatly valued sewing machine. When not in use, it was draped with a linen cover adorned by an embroidered white eagle, the Polish national emblem. The tax collector ordered Weiner to lift this cover so that he and his companion could inspect what was beneath it.

When they were through, Weiner lowered the cover back onto the smooth surface but, in his nervousness, did not take care to center it properly and one side hung down lower than the other. Within a few moments the cover began to slip and soon, unnoticed by Weiner, it was on the floor.

The tax collector ordered Weiner to show him another piece of furniture. As Weiner began to cross the room, followed by the two men, his foot caught hold of the crumpled cover on the floor, and he stepped on the cloth.

"Aha!" cried the policeman gleefully. "See how this Jew treats they symbol of his country!" Despite Israel Weiner's pleas and explanations, despite his pointing out that he used the cloth decorated with the Polish national symbol to cover his most prized possession, charges were drawn up and he was summoned to court.

A day was set for the trial, and a magistrate appointed. To Weiner's dismay, the judge was a notorious anti-Semite, and he knew that the probability of a severe sentence was high.

On the eve of the trial, the nervous and depressed defendant went to the Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Bentzion Halberstam, for a blessing. Weeping profusely, he told the rebbe his woeful story. The rebbe gave his blessing, expressing his hope and belief that G-d would help the desperate man, and then added some very strange instructions.

"Tomorrow, when you go to court," the rebbe said, "take with you a matchbox containing only one match. Then, when you notice a member of the court taking out a cigar or a cigarette during the proceedings as someone inevitable will you, Israel, will step forward and offer him your matchbox."

Weiner was puzzled until the rebbe explained the rest of the plan, and advised him to inform his lawyer about it. "You have nothing to lose, and much to gain," said the rebbe.

The next day at court, as expected, the public prosecutor released his venom on the trembling Jew.

"Would you dare tread upon your Holy Scroll?" he challenged, his voice full of thunder. "For such a disrespectful act against his country, this man deserves the maximum sentence under the law!"

As the prosecutor continue to rant, the judge, becoming excited at the prospect of meting out a harsh punishment to this helpless Jew, began to fumble in his pocket for a cigarette. Israel, alert to such a move as he had been instructed, quickly stepped forward and offered his matchbox containing only one match to the judge.

Absent-mindedly, the judge accepted the matchbox, lit his cigarette and tossed the empty matchbox into the waste basket. However, in those days all matches were distributed solely by the Polish government, so every matchbox bore the emblem of the Polish national eagle.

The defense lawyer, who had been waiting for this moment, jumped out of his seat. "Your honor," he cried, "I must bring a very urgent matter to your attention!"

All eyes were on him. How dare he interrupt the proceeding with such an outburst? In a ringing voice, the lawyer for the defense continued his bid for attention. "The honor of our national symbol, the Polish white eagle, has been insulted in this very room, only a moment ago!" he boomed.

As everyone stared at him in astonishment, he continued. "Look into the waste basket! You will see the image of the Polish white eagle imprinted on a matchbox, amidst the refuse. The honor of our beloved country is at stake! And it is His Honor, the magistrate himself, who is guilty of this violation!"

Stifled laughter was heard from the back of the courtroom, and then the laughter became louder and the audience began to applaud.

The defendant then sprang up, wringing his hands, and cried out, "Your Honor, I am the father of small children! Please have mercy on me! I am a devout patriot; I cover my most cherished possession with our beloved national symbol. My stepping on the while eagle emblem that was on my sewing machine cover was no more an act of disrespect than was your casting an empty matchbox into the garbage!"

The room was silent for a moment, the judge shifted in his seat.

"Case dismissed!" he said.

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition in "Glimpses of Greatness" by Rabbi David Koppelman [Moznaim].

Connection: Seasonal upcoming 71st yahrzeit of the Bobover Rebbe.

Biographical note: Rabbi Ben Zion Halberstam of Bobov (1874- 4 Menachem Av 1941) at age thirty-one succeeded his father, the first of the dynasty, as Rebbe of Bobov. He is often referred to as the Kedushas Tzion, after the commentary on the Torah that he wrote. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1941. His successor was his son Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam (1907-2000), who rebuilt Bobov in the United States.

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

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