**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Matos 5771**

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**Chassidic Story #712**

**Exile and Redemption**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000g800:001E7OND00001mFF&count=1310563663&randid=1086093054&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1086093054##)

One week nearly three hundred years ago, in the area of Sali, Morocco, a plague broke out amongst the cattle. As a result, all the Jewish-slaughtered animals were found to be traife (disqualified). Only one calf was kosher mehadrin, acceptable without question, and that was the one slaughtered specifically for the Tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar, the Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh.

When one of the wealthy men in the city heard about this, he rushed to the Rabbi Chaim's house, hoping to get some meat in honor of Shabbat. He offered an enormous price for a piece, but the Ohr Hachaim refused, saying, "This is not a butcher shop, and the meat is reserved for the poor Torah scholars of our city."

**His Custom to Distribute Meat**

**To Poor Torah Scholars**

Indeed, every week it was his custom to distribute meat to the poor Torah scholars in honor of Shabbat. While they were speaking, one of Rabbi Chaim's customers walked in. Upset, the rich man exclaimed, "Huh? You call this one a Talmid Chacham [wise student i.e., accomplished Torah scholar]?"

The Ohr Hachaim ignored his comment and gave the scholar his portion. The rich man realized the futileness of his endeavor, and stalked out in anger.

That night, the Ohr Hachayim had a dream in which he was told from Heaven that since he had not protested against the embarrassment of a Talmid Chacham, he would have to go into exile for a full year. Immediately, Rabbi Chaim packed his few belongings and set out on his long arduous journey, traveling from one town or village to another, making sure not to sleep two nights in the same place. He often went to sleep hungry, yet he accepted his pain with love and prayed to the One Above to forgive him for his sin.

One Friday many months later, the Ohr Hachayim found himself on the outskirts of a city. He sat down on a stone to rest his weak body and reflected on the first verse of the weekly Torah reading, Eem bahukotai tailaihu. When he continued walking towards the city, deep in thought and attachment to the Creator, forty two original explanations of this verse occurred to him!

**Invited by the Shamash for Shabat**

Later, when he arrived in town, he went directly to the local shul. The shamash [caretaker] invited him to his home for Shabbat. At the conclusion of the Friday night meal, the shamash told his guest of the local custom to join the meal at the house of the Rabbi of the city. So they went together, joining the throngs already gathered, waiting to hear the Rabbi’s pearls of wisdom.

When the time came and all eyes turned towards the head of the table, the Rabbi was still sitting quietly, in a trance-like state. After a few more moments, he roused himself and began to speak. He transmitted fourteen brilliant explanations on the first verse of the weekly Torah reading, Eem bahukotai tailaihu, and then concluded, "These explanations I just heard in Heaven, in the name of the holy tzadik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar."

**Guest Downplays the**

**Honor of the Ohr Hachayim**

"Mr. Chaim ben-Atar [i.e. not a tzadik, not a rabbi “ed.]!" the unknown guest called out. All eyes turned to see who had the chutzpa to dishonor the Ohr Hachayim, and were prepared to punish him. However, the shamash, feeling responsible for his guest, requested them to leave the poor man alone.

At the conclusion of his Shabbat day meal, the Rabbi expounded on a second set of fourteen interpretations, saying that these too he had heard in Heaven in the name of the holy tzadik, Rabbi Chaim Ben-Atar.

The same scenario repeated itself. Again the anonymous guest screamed out, "Mr. Chaim Ben-Atar," heightening the irritation of the townsmen.

Before the Third Meal, the shamash warned his guest to behave properly. To no avail. The scene repeated itself a third time. They decided to lock the disrespectful guest in a room until after Shabbat, and to keep him locked up until fitting measures would be decided upon.

That night, a sudden strong storm swept through the city, causing much damage. The townspeople franticly rushed to the Rabbi for his prayer and blessing. The Rabbi told them that he had just been informed from Heaven that Gehinom closes on Shabbat, and it does not reopen on Saturday night until the Ohr Hachayim recites Havdala [the separation ceremony to enter into the new week]. Since the tzadik could not make havdala, being that he is currently locked in a room, a great uproar ensued above, which is the cause of such a harrowing storm below.

Upon hearing this and realizing their mistake, the townsmen immediately released their holy guest from his confinement. Rabbi Chayim understood that this was his sign that his repentance had been accepted in Heaven, and the next day set out to return to his home.

**228th Yahrzeit of the Ohr Hachaim**

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a passage in Lma'an Yishme'u #72, <[avreicheilubavitch@gmail.com](mailto:avreicheilubavitch@gmail.com)>, translated from Toldot Ohr HaChaim.

Connection: Seasonal -- 228th yahrzeit of the Ohr HaChaim

Biographical Note: Rabbi Chaim (ben Moshe) Ibn Atar (1696 “ 15 Tammuz 1743) is best known as the author of one of the most important and popular commentaries on the Torah: the Ohr HaChaim. He established a major yeshiva in Israel, after moving there from Morocco. Chassidic tradition is that the main reason the Baal Shem Tov twice tried so hard (and failed) to get to the Holy Land was that he said if he could join the Ohr HaChaim there, together they could bring Moshiach. The Ohr HaChaim is buried outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.

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

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**The Wonders of Creation**

**The Heron**

The heron can stand like a rock for hours in water that reaches its knees, as if it were a statue. Its neck is angled, its sharp long beak is pointed downward, and its eyes examine the water. It waits patiently and suddenly, in a moment, its neck goes down, its beak opens, and it comes up dripping with a fluttering fish.

The black heron, which lives in Madagascar in Africa, has another method. When it spies a school of fish, it opens up its wings to some two meters wide. Startled by the sudden darkness, the fish are paralyzed for a moment, and the heron attacks.

There are over sixty species of heron, from the giant heron of Africa, which reaches a meter and a half tall, to those that are the size of a dove. They have many colors. There are some as black as night, and some are white as snow. There is the blue heron and the grey heron.

Some have a blue-green head with a brown-red neck, and are as big as a crow. This one gains its food using trickery. It finds a worm in the reeds, and picks it up gently with its beak. It dips it in the water and then waits, like a fisherman who uses bait. The fish comes to taste the bait and becomes trapped in the heron's beak. The heron lifts it beak to the sky, and with a practiced move, overturns the fish into its long throat. Of all ways to hunt food, this is the rarest. There are few animals which use an object or a tool to get what they want.

We have already said that these exceptions are a sign for us, a way to teach us a lesson. Is that not how the evil inclination treats us? It waits with eternal patience, shows us some tempting bait, and when we try to hunt the bait, we find ourselves hunted instead.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Aram Soba Newsletter, published by Bnei Yosef Congregation in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Rabbi Samson’s**

**Great Escape**

**By Rabbi Nissan Mindel**

Some three hundred years ago, in the city of Vienna, capital of Austria, there lived a famous rabbi, Rabbi Samson Wertheimer. (Rabbi Samson Wertheimer was born in Worms in 1658 and died in Vienna at the age of 66. Through his great friend, Samuel Oppenheimer, the great financier, Rabbi Samson was presented to the royal court and, together, they were of great assistance to King Leopold the First. Later, after the death of Oppenheimer, Rabbi Samson took over his post, which he kept also during the reign of King Joseph.)

This rabbi was renowned not only on account of his riches and high government position, but also on account of his wisdom and fine character. He was King Leopold’s Finance-Minister, and was entrusted with all the financial secrets of the country. He also supplied much of the war material for the army in the great war with Spain at that time.

Rabbi Samson used his great influence at court to benefit his oppressed Jewish brethren, and with his great wealth he supported the poor and needy. He took great pride in his Judaism, and he fought against those who told malicious lies about the Jewish people and their traditions. His piety and kindliness made him beloved by all Jews.

**Arouses the Hatred of a Certain Bishop**

At that time a certain bishop (who was surely a direct descendant of the wicked Haman) won the king’s favor. The bishop could not bear to see the king giving so much honor to, and having so much faith in, a Jew. He tried all methods to place Rabbi Samson in the king’s disfavor. Try as he would, the bishop could not find any excuse to cause the king to mistrust him.

The bishop once came to the king and said: “Your majesty, there is a Jew whom you have trusted with all the wealth of the kingdom. Do you know if he is faithful and honest? Maybe he enriches himself at the king’s expense? Do you know if he has earned his wealth honestly?” The king replied: “I certainly do have faith in him. Have you any proof that he has cheated me?”

**Challenges the King to Test the Honesty of Rabbi Sampson**

“I have no doubt whatsoever that he cheats you”; continued the bishop, “but I also have a way to prove to your majesty that my accusations are not groundless. I bribed a bookkeeper of your Jewish finance minister, and he gave me a copy of his books. I didn’t believe my eyes when I saw what a huge amount of money he has amassed! Let the king ask him how much he is worth and see what he answers you. If his answer will conform to the amount written in his books, then I will also admit that he is an honest man. But if he states a sum less than that mentioned in the books, then you know that he is a swindler. The king may then give him over into my hands, and you can rest assured that he will receive his just punishment.”

**The King Agrees to Question**

**His Finance Minister**

“Very well! I am willing to try out your test,” the king answered. “You will then see that all your suspicions are groundless.”

“One condition, I would ask of your majesty,” the bishop went on. “If it will be proven that Wertheimer has lied, he must be burnt alive, and, meanwhile, your majesty can have the furnace heated, so that the death sentence can be carried out immediately.”

The king allowed himself to be influenced, and the furnace was prepared. Meanwhile the king gave orders to his hangmen that, if a person, no matter who it may be, should come to them and ask in the king’s name: “Have you carried out the king’s order?” they should straight away grab him and throw him into the furnace without any questions!

The bishop left the palace in high spirits, rubbing his hands gleefully at the thought of ridding himself of his Jewish enemy, Wertheimer.

**The King Begins a “Friendly**

**Conversation” with the Rabbi**

The king then had his Finance Minister Rabbi Samson Wertheimer brought before him. He did not tell him that this was a matter of life and-death, but just started a friendly discussion with him. The king led the conversation up to the point where the king asked him about his personal welfare and inquired if he was satisfied.

“Praised be the Almighty, I cannot complain,” the rabbi answered humbly.

**“How Much is Your Personal Wealth?”**

“Do you receive suitable pay for your devoted service? About how much is your personal wealth, my good friend?” the king asked matter-of-factly.

“The king has to be told an exact amount, and that is difficult to estimate on the spot.”

“I don’t mean to the exact gulden,” the king interrupted. “How much are you certain of, that you have no doubts about?”

Rabbi Samson Wertheimer thought for a moment and then mentioned a certain amount.

The king could hardly restrain his astonishment and anger. Rabbi Samson had mentioned an amount roughly one-tenth of the amount he was supposed to own, according to the books. It looked as if the bishop was right. His trustworthy and reliable finance minister had apparently fooled him!

**The King Sends Him to the Executioners**

The king then told him to go to the furnace and ask the hangmen if they had carried out the king’s orders.

Rabbi Samson went to carry out the king’s order, not dreaming that he was going to a certain death.

On the way he met a Jew who was very pleased to meet him. “Worthy rabbi, today my newborn son is eight days old. I have to carry out the holy mitzvah of circumcision, and I cannot find another *mohel*. I beg of you, Rabbi, please come with me and perform the ceremony.”

In addition to his many qualifications, Rabbi Samson Wertheimer was a mohel. He was always happy to carry out this great mitzvah, and never charged any money for it. Now Rabbi Samson was at a loss what to do. “The king sent me on an errand; how can I delay? I am obliged to carry out his order.”

“And I have been sent by the King of Kings!” the Jew persisted. ‘The sacred mitzvah of circumcision can certainly not be delayed! I will not leave you, dear rabbi, until you grant my wish”

**The Rabbi Agrees to Perform the Great Mitzvah**

The rabbi, seeing that such a great Mitzvah came his way, did not hesitate too long, and went with the Jew.

The house was already filled with guests. Rabbi Samson was greeted with great honor and joy. After the ceremony, a meal in honor of the mitzvah was served, and wine was drunk, with everyone expressing good wishes for a healthy life.

As soon as Rabbi Samson drank a glass of wine he felt slightly dizzy; he lay down for a while and soon fell asleep. No one wanted to awaken the honored guest.

**The Bishop is Unable to Sleep**

That night, the bishop could not sleep. He had heard that the king had sent his Jewish finance minister to his certain death. He also had heard that the king had confiscated Rabbi Samson’s possessions; the bishop was in the seventh heaven. “I must go personally and make sure,” the bishop thought. “I will still manage to see the Jew’s bones burning in the furnace.” and with a devilish smirk on his face he went to the furnace.

“I have come to see with my own eyes if you have carried out the king’s orders!” the bishop remarked gaily.

“Aha! We are waiting for you” the hangmen answered. They grabbed hold of him and started dragging him towards the furnace.

They took little notice of the bishop’s protests and cries. They stopped up his mouth and threw him into the furnace.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Samson woke up and hurried home. It was already after midnight, and he felt disturbed at having to leave the king’s order until the next day.

He found the house in an uproar. His family were worrying about him because all his possessions had been sealed by the king’s servants and they felt that they were all in great danger..

In the morning, straight after morning prayers, Rabbi Samson hastened to carry out his king’s command.

“Yes! We carried out our orders to the letter,” the hangmen replied. “You should have seen the bishop tremble but it served him right I always knew he was a false person” one of the hangmen remarked with a smile.

**Unable to Understand What Had Happened**

Rabbi Samson remained standing, unable to understand what had happened. He ran to the king and became even more bewildered when he saw the king looking at him, as if he, Rabbi Samson, were a ghost.

Rabbi Samson excused himself for having been unable to carry out the royal command the same day, due to a most urgent matter, and he was forced to postpone it till the following day. He hastened to reassure the king, however, that his command had been carried out, and the bishop had been burned according to the king’s order. On the other hand, he could not understand why the king had confiscated all his property that he, Rabbi Samson, had so honestly earned.

**The King Breaks Out in Uncontrollable Laughter**

The king suddenly broke out into uncontrollable laughter. He laughed and laughed until he could hardly remain standing. He then embraced Rabbi Samson and pressed him to his heart, and continued to laugh joyfully, tears coming to his eyes.

Rabbi Samson regarded the king in amazement and waited patiently until the king would come to himself.

Finally the king told him the whole story about the bishop’s accusation, and what a remarkable escape the rabbi had enjoyed from the certain death that the bishop had prepared for him, but had himself suffered.

**“Why Did You Deny the Truth…?”**

“I am now assured that you are a religious, G‑dly man, whom your great G‑d has saved from a certain and unearned death,” the king said earnestly. “But tell me, why did you deny the truth and not admit the full amount of your riches?”

“G‑d forbid!” Rabbi Samson replied. “I would not tell the king a lie. When the king asked me how much I was sure I possessed, I could not state the amount in the books. That was not definitely mine. Only yesterday I had this amount, and today the king confiscated everything. The only certain possessions that I have are those that I have donated to charity. They cannot be taken away from me. I am used to giving a tenth of my earnings to charity, and therefore that is the amount that I stated.”

The king was extremely pleased with Rabbi Samson’s explanation.

“There can be no question any more of confiscating your properties,” the king remarked, beaming. “I grant you them once more, with pleasure. Please tell me how I can repay you for the unpleasantness I caused you so unnecessarily?” the king asked.

“The king has already sufficiently rewarded me, with his trust and friendship,” Rabbi Samson replied. “Even so, I would like to ask a favor of his majesty: I would like to build a large synagogue in Vienna, where my devoted brethren would be able to come to serve G‑d.”

Rabbi Samson’s wish was granted and a great synagogue was erected in the capital, known as “Rabbi Samson’s Synagogue.”

Rabbi Samson lived out his years in Torah study, charity and good deeds, and he accomplished a lot of good both for the Jews and for the country. Before his death he willed a large part of his possessions to charity: this “Wertheimer Fund” existed till the first World War, and gave much help to charitable causes.

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

**The Woman’s Donation**

**To Rabbi Sonnenfeld**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“Then you will be free of any obligation before Hashem and Israel.” (Bemidbar 32:22)

A wealthy childless woman approached the Rabbi of the city of Budapest. In her hand was a large sum of money – 400 zehuvim – and she asked the Rabbi to accept it on condition that he would pray for her to bear a child.

“I will give you some advice,” responded the Rabbi. “Send the money to Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the Rabbi of Jerusalem. He is a great saddik, and Hashem will surely listen to his prayers and grant you a child.” The woman accepted his advice and sent the money to the Rabbi of Jerusalem.

Several weeks later, the husband of the woman approached the Rabbi of Budapest. “Why did you send the money without my knowledge?” he asked angrily. “I demand that you send a letter to the Rabbi of Jerusalem requesting that my money be returned at once.” The Rabbi was upset by the husband’s demand and said, “I will give you the entire sum of money from my own pocket, just so long as I do not have to ask Rabbi Sonnenfeld to return the money!”

The Postman Arrives with

A Letter from Jerusalem

As they continued to discuss the matter, the postman arrived with an envelope for the Rabbi. The Rabbi opened the envelope and was astounded to see that it contained a letter from Rabbi Sonnenfeld and 400 zehuvim! The letter read as follows: “I received your letter along with 400 zehuvim. But since you write that a woman gave you the money, I fear that she may have done so without the consent of her husband. I am therefore sending the money to you, and I request that you return it to the woman as quickly as possible. This, of course, did not prevent me from fulfilling her request, and I have prayed on the woman’s behalf. May it be His will that the prayers will be accepted by our Father in Heaven.”

A wonderful story told by Rabbi Yisrael Bronstein that teaches us to always be free of any misunderstandings between us.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.*

**Man, Oh, Manischewitz**

**By Jonathan D. Sarna**



**Holy Matzo: Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz, a supervising rabbi at Manischewitz, compares a regular sheet of matzo with the giant matzo on the machine behind him at the firm’s Newark factory. (Photo by Peter Morehand)**

“Holy Matzo!” a recent Forward headline read. The accompanying article announced the baking of the “world’s largest matzo” — 82 square feet — to mark the opening of the new Manischewitz matzo factory in Newark, N.J.

The matzo proved ephemeral; it was soon broken up and distributed. What I found fascinating at the factory’s opening (which I attended) was an off-the-cuff remark by Israel’s chief rabbi, Yona Metzger, before he blessed the plant. “Who knew,” he quipped, “that the world’s largest manufacturers of gefilte fish were two Moroccan Jews from Casablanca?”

Manischewitz, founded in 1888 in Cincinnati, once symbolized the emergence of Eastern European Jews on American soil. Dov Behr Manischewitz, the company’s founder, hailed from Memel in Lithuania and spun gold in the New World by discovering new ways to combine flour and water. The technological innovations introduced by Manischewitz and his sons revolutionized the production of matzo in America and catapulted Manischewitz’s company into the world’s largest producer of Passover matzo.

What had been, before the founding of Manischewitz, a product that for the most part was handmade, locally distributed and round became, thanks to the man from Memel, a universally recognized brand of matzo: produced and packaged by patented machines, distributed internationally and shaped in the form of a square.

**Delivering Matzo to 80% of**

**The American Jewish Population**

By the 1920s, Manischewitz produced 1.25 million matzos per day and claimed that it delivered matzo to “80% of the Jewish population of America and Canada.” Building on its success, it branched out into other Jewish foods, like gefilte fish, chicken soup and borscht. In 1947, it licensed its name to a line of sweet kosher wines produced by the Monarch Wine Co.

Thanks to one of the most brilliant advertising campaigns in the history of American kosher food, “Man, oh, Manischewitz” became a well-known slogan. Apollo 17 astronaut Eugene Cernan actually exclaimed that phrase during a moonwalk in 1973.

Eventually, like such well-known, family-based ethnic food companies as Ronzoni, Franco-American, La Choy and Lender’s, Manischewitz outgrew the family that established it. Bernard Manischewitz sold the company to Kohlberg & Co., L.L.C., in 1990; Kohlberg sold it to RAB Enterprises in 1998, and in 2007 it was sold again, this time to Harbinger Capital Partners.

**Manischewitz Has Moved Far**

**From Its Eastern European Roots**

Today, the Manischewitz Co. has moved far from its Eastern European roots. Indeed, its Moroccan-born co-CEOs, Alain Bankier and Paul Bensabat, reflect the changing face of America’s increasingly diverse and polychrome Jewish community. Sephardic Jews with roots in the Middle East, often known as Mizrahi Jews, form part of a sub-community that now comprises somewhere between 4% and 10% of all American Jews. And their numbers are growing.

America’s earliest Sephardic Jews arrived back in 1654. They maintained close ties with the Iberian-Jewish diaspora, incorporated Portuguese into their prayers and, in many cases, preserved memories of time spent practicing Judaism underground, as crypto-Jews in the face of Jewish expulsions. By the American Revolution, however, Central European Ashkenazim, with whom they tended to intermarry, outnumbered this elite group of Sephardim (today known as Western Sephardim). Few of their descendants maintain Sephardic traditions today.

A second group of Sephardic Jews arrived early in the 20th century from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, places like Salonica, Monastir (today known as Bitola), and the islands of Rhodes and Marmara. These Levantine Jews (today known as Eastern Sephardim) spoke Ladino and numbered in the thousands, but were dwarfed by the more than 2 million Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews who arrived at about the same time. For years, Ladino-speaking Jews harbored grievances against insensitive Ashkenazim who questioned their Jewishness, viewing them with disdain. In cities like New York, Seattle, Los Angeles and Atlanta, they proudly maintained their distinctiveness by establishing synagogues and sub-communities of their own.

**Descended from Families with**

**Generations of Experience in Business**

Alain Bankier and Paul Bensabat represent the arrival of a large third wave of Sephardic Jews, with roots in Arab lands. These Jews, like so many before them, came to America seeking opportunity and to escape persecution and privation. Descending from families that have, in many cases, generations of experience in business, they appreciate the freedoms that America extends to them. Now that this immigrant group has mastered English and even begun earning advanced degrees (both Bankier and Bensabat boast MBAs from New York University), they are rapidly climbing the ladder to success.

So it is more than just a curiosity that an Eastern European Jewish firm named Manischewitz is currently headed by two Moroccan Jews from Casablanca; it is a sign that a whole new community of Jews is emerging on the American scene. While the “world’s largest matzo” may have been ephemeral, the rise of Mizrahi and other immigrant Jews will change the face — and the tastes — of the 21st-century American Jewish community.

Jonathan D. Sarna is the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University, and chief historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History. His newest book, “When General Grant Expelled the Jews,” will be published next year by Schocken/Nextbook.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the AJOP (Association for Jewish Outreach Programs) Newsletter. The article originally appeared in the July 22, 2011 issue of The Forward.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Besht and the Rich Man**

The saintly Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (founder of Chasidism, known also by the acronym "Besht") was sitting in his room. A light knock on the door interrupted his thoughts as his attendant announced a visitor.

The visitor was a prosperous looking middle-aged Jewish man. "I have heard of the fame of the saintly Rabbi. I wished to see the Rabbi's holy face and receive his blessing, though I am not in need of anything, thank G-d," said the visitor.

The Besht studied the man's face. Then he said, "It is written, 'G-d directs the steps of man.' This means that no Jew goes anywhere without being directed by Divine Providence. Though you may not know it, you have not come here of your own free will."

**The Besht Begins to Tell a Story**

The gentleman looked puzzled, but waited for the Baal Shem Tov to continue. To his great surprise the Besht began to tell a story:

"Once, there lived two boys who were best of friends. They went to yeshiva together from the time they were small children. The years flew by, and soon the boys were married businessmen. Each one went to live in a different town.

"At first, both did very well and became quite wealthy. Later, however, one of them made many bad business deal after another, until he lost his entire fortune.

"The poor man remembered his more fortunate friend and decided to seek his help. Arriving at his friend's house he was warmly welcomed. They chatted, remembering old times. Eventually the host asked his visitor the reason for the surprise visit. The visitor poured out his heart, saying that he came to seek help.

**The Host Called His Bookkeeper**

**To Figure Out His Finances**

"The host told him that he had nothing to worry about. He called his book-keeper and ordered him to draw up a balance of his affairs. To the amazement of the clerk and the visitor, he ordered half of his fortune transferred to his impoverished friend. 'My friend,' he said, 'we always shared everything we had. I am now going to share everything I have with you again!'

"The poor man returned home rich again. He set up his business and shortly doubled his fortune. But what happened to his friend? His fortune took a turn for the worse. Soon, he was very poor.

"It was now his turn to seek the aid of his friend, whom he had helped in his hour of need. He went to his friend's house. He was made to wait quite a while, and finally, out came the servant with word that his master did not remember the name of the visitor, and in any case was too busy to see him.

"The poor man could hardly believe his ears. 'Confidentially,' the servant added, 'ever since my master regained his riches, he has become a hard man with no sympathy for anyone!'

**The Poor Man Dies from His Humiliation**

"There was nothing for the poor man to do but return home. He could not get over the humiliation and disappointment he had suffered and he soon died.

"On the very same day, the rich man in the other town had an accident and died too. The two souls ascended to heaven and appeared for judgment. The soul of the poor man who had treated his friend so generously was told of his great reward and the Gates of Paradise were thrown open for him. But the other soul was condemned to suffer atonement, until the soul became pure and clean again.

"The first soul said sadly, "How can I enjoy the happiness of Paradise knowing that my friend is not with me, and is being punished on my account?" The soul was given permission to pronounce judgement in this case. Without hesitation, the soul said that both of them should again be sent into bodies, to live their lives anew, so that the other soul could make amends where it had failed. Selflessly, this soul accepted a life of poverty again, in order to help the other soul.

**Two Baby Boys Were Born in Two Different Towns**

"Some time afterwards, two baby boys were born in two different towns, one rich and one poor. When the poor boy grew up, he went from door to door begging alms. One day he arrived in the town where the rich man lived, and knocked at his door. The rich man opened the door, and upon seeing a beggar, exclaimed, 'You are a stranger in this town if you do not know that I do not give alms to any beggar, not even local ones!'

"The beggar had not eaten for three days. He collapsed and died.

"Now what do you think of this rich man?" the saintly Baal Shem Tov concluded, his keen eyes piercing through the visitor.

The Baal Shem Tov's visitor grew pale and frightened. His eyes filled with tears, but he could not utter a word, for he remembered the beggar who had knocked at his door a few days before he made his way to the Baal Shem Tov. The pale and haggard face of the dead beggar which had made no impression on him then, now began to torment him, and he wept bitterly.

"Is there any hope for me? Is there anything I can do to save my soul?" the visitor pleaded.

The Baal Shem Tov replied, "Yes, there is something you can do. You must try to find the survivors of the poor man and ask their forgiveness. You must provide them with all their needs for the rest of their lives and distribute the rest of your fortune to the poor and needy. Then, pray to G-d with all your heart, for He is near to all who call unto Him in truth."

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

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller**

**Understanding Misfortune**

**QUESTION:** Why must Hashem reprimand people by conditions of misfortune?



**ANSWER:** The answer is, it's in the hands of men. If when peace is in the world, like now, everyone utilized the opportunity to express his enthusiastic gratitude to Hashem, then nothing else is needed.

It's because they keep quiet when things are good and they forget, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to remind them. Otherwise nothing would happen that would be a misfortune to the world. It's only when people neglect to utilize Sholom; this is now Sholom. Everyday we ask Hashem for Sholom. But you have it now!!

In Eretz Yisroel there is Sholom now, are they shouting to Hashem in happiness? Remember you were all wearing gas masks not long ago? Everybody had a gas mask. You were frightened! Many didn’t cry out to Hashem, only a few. But now they took off the gas masks. Hashem says, you forgot Me again, maybe Chalila I have to send some more gas masks on you again to remind you? And therefore any misfortune is just a reminder that we failed to cry out when things were going well, and right now things are going well.

Oh, there’s a recession, there's this, there's that, we’re in Galus. Look, today we have more luxuries than any generation ever had before. You have to appreciate that, you have to be grateful for them. Did you eat a big breakfast? Or even a small breakfast? You have to be grateful to Hashem. Eat a lunch? You have to thank Hashem. A supper? You have to thank Hashem.

You have a warm house, you come home and it's not cold. Summer time it's air conditioned. All these are luxuries, and we are Mechuyav (obligated) to thank Hashem at all times.

You're well? Nothing is wrong with you right now? Sometimes one little thing happens to remind you, a finger, an ear, an eye, small things once in a while. It's just to remind you. Why were you quiet when nothing was wrong with you? And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu is really bestowing a benefit on us in His great benevolence, to wake us up from our sleep. Because we are missing the whole purpose of being in this world; which is, the purpose of becoming aware of Hashem.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller.*

**A Torah Scroll’s Unlikely Journey**

**To a Remote Uganda Village**

**By Scott Farwell**

DALLAS — Dr. Isador Lieberman, a world-renowned spinal surgeon, is the kind of guy whose work life is scheduled to the minute.

So, when a man appeared unannounced in his office 11 years ago with vague questions and a hard-to-decipher accent, Lieberman's response was frosty.

"Can't you see I'm busy?" he said to his secretary. "Does he have an appointment? Who is he? What does he want?"

She shrugged and offered thinly, "He's pretty persistent."

"OK," he relented, "bring him in."

The decision changed the trajectory of Lieberman's life.

Next month, he will lead a small team of Texans into the foothills of Mount Elgon, a towering, dormant volcano in eastern Uganda. He will carry a dirt-proof, waterproof, insect-proof acrylic cylinder containing the most sacred document in Judaism: a Torah scroll.

How did a 51-year-old Jewish physician from Plano, Texas, end up delivering an ancient Hebrew text to a remote village in Uganda?

The story begins in the early 1900s with an elephant hunter named Semei Kakungulu.

Protestant missionaries and European colonialists swarmed across Africa, importing Christianity while exporting the continent's natural resources.

Kakungulu, a charismatic and opportunistic leader of the Baganda tribe, learned to read the Bible in Swahili and to understand the language and ambitions of the British, eventually helping them conquer vast swaths of his homeland.

**Called Traitor of Uganda’s First King**

Some called him a traitor; others called him Uganda's first king.

But as Kakungulu's power grew, he became disillusioned with the moral and political agenda of the white men. Around 1917, he retreated to the jungles encircling Mount Elgon and began meditating on the Old Testament.

He claimed a conversion to Judaism, wrote a 90-page manual of rules and prayers and planted a Jewish community called the Abayudaya, which flourished even after Kakungulu died of tetanus in 1928.

Ugandan leader Idi Amin outlawed Judaism soon after he seized power in 1971, and later proclaimed that Adolf Hitler "was right to burn 6 million Jews."

The Abayudaya fractured in the face of persecution, but some tribesmen continued to worship in private, honoring the Sabbath on Saturdays and circumcising their sons.

**About 1,500 of the Abayudaya Remain Today**

Religious freedom was eventually restored in Uganda, and today about 1,500 of the Abayudaya remain in a scattering of villages on what was once Kakungulu's estate.

They exist in relative obscurity, unknown to many Jews — including Lieberman, until he came upon a collection of clay huts imprinted with menorahs and Stars of David last year.

Lieberman, who runs a spinal surgery mission in Uganda, celebrated a Friday evening religious service last year with about 200 Jews in a small village called Putti.

"In typical fashion, it was a culture shock to us North Americans, as privileged as we are," he said. "I saw how they lived, and their grass hut, which was their synagogue."

Villagers danced and sang, blending African rhythm with traditional Jewish rituals.

Lieberman's spirits soared, until religious leaders opened a small wooden box, the Aron Kodesh, which in Hebrew means "Holy Ark."

"I saw this little paper Torah scroll, maybe 12 inches high, one of those things you buy in some Judaica shop for kids to draw on with crayons," he said. "I was just troubled by that."

The Torah consists of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and is the foundation for the Old Testament. It is used in religious services for ritual readings and teaching.

Lieberman listened as community members described their struggle to live as Orthodox Jews and their desire to undergo conversion and be recognized by rabbinical authorities in Israel.

**The Abayudaya Are Not Accepted as Jewish by All Jews**

The Abayudaya are not accepted as Jewish by all Jews. Under Orthodox law, a person who was not born into the faith must undergo conversion.

"I don't know what came over me, but I said, 'I'm going to work on getting you a Sefer Torah,' " Lieberman said. "I had no idea what it would take to get one, the logistics involved, the resources needed.

"And that just triggered this incredible chain of events."

A turning point in the story, Lieberman said, was the afternoon 11 years ago when the man showed up unannounced in his office.

His name was Mark Kayanja. He had traveled from Uganda to learn spine surgery.

Lieberman was skeptical.

"Mark, do you have a license?"

No.

"Do you have any support?"

No.

**Starts Off Working in Research Lab**

Kayanja interrupted. He said he'd do anything, including work for free.

"I started him off in our research lab," Lieberman said. "Within six months, I realized I was dealing with — this is no stretch — one of the smartest human beings I've ever had the privilege of being associated with."

Kayanja, today a spinal surgeon in Cleveland, was the first graduate of an orthopedic program in Uganda to train abroad.

Lieberman was his mentor at the Lerner Research Institute's Cleveland Clinic, but in some ways, he learned more than he taught.

"He was always asking me about Uganda, what the conditions are like, what is the state of spine surgery there, what could be done to improve it," Kayanja said.

"I told him a lot of the patients have conditions that are treatable, especially the children."

Lieberman said Kayanja began a relentless campaign.

"He pestered me for four years, 'Let's go to Uganda. We need to work in Uganda,' " Lieberman remembered, laughing. "I was like, 'OK, Mark. May 2005, we'll go to Uganda. Now get back to work.' "

**Airline Tickets for Uganda**

In April 2005, Kayanja appeared in Lieberman's office again with airline tickets and a list of patients.

"At that point, I realized I did promise," Lieberman said. "We did go to Uganda. I was hooked, and we've been going back ever since."

In six years, Lieberman, Kayanja and other physicians have operated on more than 200 patients through the Uganda Spine Surgery Mission, which is operated under the auspices of a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, Health Volunteers Overseas.

Their work focuses on treating spinal injuries, correcting children's congenital deformities and training local doctors.

After a few years volunteering in Uganda, Lieberman began hearing rumors about Jews living in remote villages in the shadow of an ancient volcano.

Last year, he set out to find them.

**Six Hour Drive to Remote “Jewish” Village**

It took about six hours to drive from Uganda's capital of Kampala to Mbale, a city of about 80,000 near the country's eastern border with Kenya.

From there, Lieberman's group followed red-clay motorcycle trails into the jungle. It was nearly dark by the time they arrived in Putti, a village of about 200 subsistence farmers who live in mud huts without electricity or running water.

Tribal leaders seemed thrilled at the prospect of having a legitimate parchment scroll.

"When you're looking at a village that's struggling to survive, a Torah doesn't seem like the first thing they need," said Lieberman.

"From a religious standpoint, sure, but when you look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there's no Torah scroll on there."

After he returned to his home in Dallas, Lieberman said, he received emails nearly every day from the religious leader in Putti, Rabbi Enosh Keki Mainah. He either walked or caught a ride to the nearest Internet cafe about seven miles away from his home.

"He was like, 'We're so thankful that you promised to bring us a Torah. We can't wait until next year to see our new Sefer Torah,' " Lieberman said. "And I'm thinking to myself, 'Oh, my God, what have I gotten myself into?' "

His anxiety grew as he started making calls.

Lieberman learned that Torah scrolls can cost $25,000 or more and often require expensive repairs. To withstand the climate in rural Uganda, the parchment document would need a special protective case.

In December, he scheduled a meeting at a Starbucks in Plano with Rabbi Nasanya Zakon, director of the Dallas Area Torah Association, and Rabbi Avraham Bloomenstiel, an expert in the rare art of writing and repairing Torah scrolls.

**“You Couldn’t Write a Sitcom Like This.”**

"That place was empty," Lieberman said. "And we're sitting there, drinking tea with Christmas music in the background, planning how to get a Torah scroll into Uganda. And I'm thinking, 'This is not real. You couldn't write a sitcom like this.' "

Months later, Bloomenstiel — who was admitted to Harvard University at 16 and later received a master's degree in music from the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University — found five stolen Torahs in a police evidence locker in Brooklyn. They had gone unclaimed for more than a decade and were available for purchase.

With the help of donors, Lieberman bought one of the ancient texts for $12,000 — a scroll created in Poland about the time his father was a prisoner at Nazi death camps in Buchenwald, Germany, and Auschwitz, Poland. He survived and ultimately immigrated to Canada.

**A Feeling that Something is Guiding All of Us**

"I must admit that I was a less-than-enthusiastic religious Jew until my father passed away in 2001," Lieberman said. "Some things have happened the last few years that are just not explainable to me. I feel like there's something guiding all of us."

Bloomenstiel said it's hard not to see Divine intervention in the story of the Torah scroll and how it has intersected with lives on three continents.

"Here we have a story that starts with a leader of the Baganda tribe who is living in the jungle and develops a connection with Judaism," he said.

"Then Izzy contacts me to get a Torah scroll that was written pre-World War II, somehow survived being stolen, ends up in an evidence locker in Brooklyn and now has found its way to a synagogue in the mountains of Uganda."

The journey may also challenge some people's religious reference points.

"Judaism is always thought of as an ethnicity, but it's not — it's a community of the soul," Bloomenstiel said.

"This story has the potential to remind the greater community that you have to step outside of this very narrow European view of what it means to be Jewish."

*Reprinted from an email of JewishWorldReview.com from July 21, 2011*

**The Miser, the Unhappy**

**Wife and the Mikva**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

This week's Torah portion begins with the laws of vows, the most basic of which is "Keeping your promises".

This Shabbat is also the first in the 'Three weeks" of mourning preceding the 9th of Av; the Hebrew date when, some 2500 years ago the first and 490 years later the second Temples were destroyed.

Vows are very potent means to rise above the distractions and temptations of nature; external and internal. For instance if a short tempered person vows never again to get angry again then nothing in the world will make him mad, as long as the vow is before his eyes.

**The Serious Repercussions of a Vow Not Kept**

But, if a vow is not kept, its power of good can actually backfire with serious repercussions (which is the reason that today we are advised to never make any vows and even simple promises should be accompanied by the term "Bli Neder" i.e. I'm not vowing).

But the Torah (which means 'Teaching') is eternal and vital teaching for every human, moment of our lives in every situation.

So if vows are a thing of the past what is the vital message from this commandment today?

To understand this here is a story I heard the other night about a pupil of the Baal Shem Tov some 250 years ago in the Ukraine.

A Pupil of Besh't (Baal Shem Tov) was asked to accept the job of Rabbi in a small town of some 5,000 Jews. He asked the Besh't if he should accept the job and when the answer was positive he gathered all his belongings and made the move without even seeing the place. As soon as he arrived he took a tour and discovered to his dismay that the only mikva (specially built immersion pool visited once a month by married Jewish women) there was in total disrepair and had to be totally rebuilt.

The Rabbi gathered the elders of the community and discovered that the reason was lack of funds. Everyone in the Jewish community was on the verge of poverty except for one very tightfisted wealthy man who was separated from his wife and had no need for the mikva.

Being that this was his only hope the Rabbi visited him, was cordially received at that door, warmly invited in and treated to what seemed like genuine hospitality.

**The Miser Recognizes the**

**Community’s Need for a Mikva**

"I understand that you probably have come regarding the Mikva, correct Rabbi?| Well, first of all allow me to congratulate you on your new appointment in our community. Secondly, you probably heard unfavorable things about me. Well the fact is that I have been ignoring them because I need help and I'm sure that none of them has the ability to give it to me.

"Let me get to the point. You, being a pupil of the holy Baal Shem Tov, certainly possess supernatural powers, correct? Well, I need a supernatural favor and if you promise to help me, I'm willing to pay for an entire new Mikva. In fact I'll give you as much money as you want.

**My Wife and I Hate Each Other**

"You see, my wife and I don't get along. In fact we hate each other. I would like to divorce her but she is demanding that I give her all my money and possessions first. So we now live apart and both of us are suffering."

The Rabbi said, "What would you like me to do? To talk to her? I'll be glad to try to…."

But the miser cut the rabbi short, shook his head no and said. "I've tried that. In fact I've tried everything. There is only one solution….that she should, well, leave. If you know what I mean." And the miser pointed up to heaven.

"What?!" Gasped the Rabbi. "Why that is insane! And it's totally forbidden. To take someone's life? How can you even request such a thing?!"

But the miser wasn't moved. "Listen Rabbi, do you want the mikva?" The Rabbi shook his head yes. "I mean, who knows if that old mikva is even kosher! And, well about my wife…. after all, everyone dies eventually, don't they? So really what am I asking you? Only to make peace in Israel! Nu? do we have a deal? I'll build the mikva and you take care of her….. okay? Everyone benefits! Is it a deal?" The miser stuck out his hand, the Rabbi thought for a minute, took it and the agreement was made.

That Shabbat in Synagogue before the reading of the Torah an announcement was made that, after a change of heart, the rich man vowed to build the entire mikva! Everyone stood and applauded while the rich man feigned embarrassment, smiling and blushing all over and enjoying every second.

That next day the builders arrived, work began and just a few weeks later the mikva was almost finished. As was expected the workers and their manager went to the Rabbi for payment and the Rabbi told them he would get the money from the donor and they should return in a week.

**Miser Refuses to Pay the**

**Rabbi the Money for the Mikva**

But when the Rabbi went to the house of the miser and asked for money he was flatly refused. "Money? You want money? But I want something too! Have you forgotten? Listen, Rabbi, you keep your side of the deal and I'll keep mine. I pay AFTER you take care of my wife.

The Rabbi calmly replied. "How can I do that? You made it impossible. The fact is that the angel of death looked for your wife but he couldn't find her! He couldn't find her because, well, you don't treat her like a wife and she doesn't treat you as her husband, in fact you are like strangers. You live in separate houses, never talk, and never even see each other. No wonder he couldn’t recognize her! If you want the job to get done you have to cooperate! Be man and wife. Understand?”

**Listens to the Rabbi and Starts Treating His Wife Nicely**

The miser shook his head yes and knew what he had to do. The next day he sent his wife a bouquet of roses and a box of chocolates. The day after, he personally delivered another bunch of flowers and some new expensive dresses. The third day he wrote her a poem attached to a bottle of perfume, and on the fourth day she began writing to him as well.

"Aha! It's working!!" he said to himself rubbing his hands in glee as he sent her an invitation to eat at his home. "Soon I'll be rid of her!"

But strangely something else was happening… he began to actually enjoy her presence. He even told a joke; the first joke of his life … and she laughed! She moved back home, began cooking for him, they began talking and he totally forgot about his agreement with the Rabbi until she suddenly fell sick and was having trouble breathing.

The miser realized what was happening. Suddenly he remembered; the curse! It was taking effect! He ran to the Rabbi and begged him to call off the deal, he regretted the whole thing. What could he do?

The Rabbi smiled and explained. "My dear friend, I never cursed or even promised to curse your wife. G-d forbid! When I promised to do what I have to I intended to get the mikva built and make peace between you and your wife. That's why I had your vow announced in the Synagogue this Shabbat.

**“Your Wife is Now Sick Because of You”**

The reason your wife is now sick is because of you. You took a vow in public to build the mikva and it is known that one who breaks such a vow brings misfortune on his family. That is the reason she is so ill. So if you want her to get better you have no recourse but to keep your vow and pay for the mikva. Then the curse will be off!

Of course the miser gladly complied, paid for the entire mikva and due to the wisdom of the Besht's pupil, both a mikva and a marriage in Israel were built anew.

This answers our questions. From our story we see that the miser totally changed both his and his wife's natures because of the vow he made.

**Possible to Draw on this Power in a More Positive Way**

True, today we are careful not to make vows but, on the other hand the power to overcome nature, including our own nature, still exists. And it is possible to draw on this power in a more positive way than the miser - without taking a vow.

Indeed, the basic book of Chabad 'Chassidut' called The "Tanya" explains that just before we are born our soul was already administered a vow 'To be a 'Tzadik' i.e. a totally holy person.

In other words, each of us already has the power of this oath ringing in our souls and once we connect to it we can change ourselves and the world around us.

Because these teachings are designed to negate all the negative forces of 'nature' that caused the destruction of the first two Temples, bring Moshiach and transform the mourning of these three weeks to joy and happiness.

That is why two of the main jobs of Moshiach will be to build the Third Temple, and gather all the Jews to Israel.

But it all depends on us to draw on this power of good within us and do just one more good deed, say one more good word or even think one more good thought. We can be rejoicing with....**Moshiach NOW!**

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Hearing the Horn**

**Blast of the Elephant**

In this week's portion Mattos the Torah tells us how the Bnai Yisroel used horn blasts in their battles against Midian. In this vein, the Midrash discusses some of the other uses of horn blasts in Jewish communal life.

The Midrash tells us that in earlier times, the custom on erev  Shabbos (Friday afternoon) was to blow three horn blasts to inform the public that the Holy Shabbos was approaching. The attendant of the shul would go up onto the highest roof of the city and there he would blow the horn.

**The First Horn Blasts for Those**

**Workers Farthest Away from the City**

The first set of horn blasts was blown earliest in the day, in order to give notice of Shabbos to those workers in the fields who were the farthest away from the city. The second set of blasts was later in the day and was directed at those working even closer to the city.  The third set of blasts began as the final moments of Shabbos approached. By the end of the third set of blasts, all of the residents of the city were to cease from all the creative labors which are forbidden on Shabbos.

It is interesting to note that to this very day, many Jewish communities in cities such as Jerusalem and Monsey, New York, use horns to announce the arrival of Shabbos.

Besides the interesting historical value of this discussion in the Midrash, what spiritual lesson can we take out of the fact that Shabbos is announced with horn blasts? The commentators teach us a beautiful and inspirational lesson based on this section of the Midrash.

**The World is Compared to**

**The Six Days of the Week**

This world is compared to the six days of the week, while the World to Come is compared to Shabbos.(See Sanhedrin 97a) As we approach the World to Come, which is a time of the eternal Shabbos, horn blasts are being blown to call Jews home to Torah and mitzvahs. The first set of blasts is now being blown.

As we mentioned above, in earlier times, this first blast was to call those workers home who were furthest away, in order to give them enough time to come home. So too, as we approach the redemption and the World to Come, the world of the eternal Shabbos, the first horn blast has been blown for those Jews furthest away to come home to Torah observance.

We should recognize certain events in our lives as the horn blast calling us home. The further we are away from Hashem, Torah and mitzvahs, the sooner we must begin coming home, in order to be ready for the days of the eternal Shabbos.  The following amazing and even humorous true story illustrates how one Jew heard the horn blast and made his way home.

**A Jewish Chaplain in the South African Army**

Rabbi Eliezer Sandler was fortunate; in 1973, he became the first full-time Chief Jewish chaplain in the South African army since World War II.  As part of his duties, Rabbi Sandler would visit bases throughout South Africa and Namibia. At that time, the army was fighting terrorist elements who were trying to destroy the fabric of South African society.

On his first visit to a certain base, Rabbi Sandler was told that there were three injured Jewish servicemen in the infirmary.

"I will go there at once," said Rabbi Sandler. The first two patients were clearly ill, their faces were gaunt and pale. One wore a cast from the hip down. The other was recovering from malaria. But the third patient surprised Rabbi Sandler. This third patient was a tall healthy-looking soldier who did not seem to be hurting in any way.

**“I Was Trampled by an Elephant”**

"Why are you here?" Asked Rabbi Sandler in puzzlement. "I am recovering from shock." The young soldier explained.  "You see, I was trampled by an elephant."

"An elephant!" Said Rabbi Sandler in astonishment. The soldier nodded and said: "Let me tell you my story: I was part of a reconnaissance patrol. We were roaming though the jungle, looking for the enemy. Now remember, this is a wild jungle. Besides the human enemy, we also have to contend with the danger of wild animals such as lions and tigers. And when you see those animals close up in the African jungle, they look a lot larger than when you see them in a zoo!"

"As the radio man, I always carry radio equipment on my back. The radio gear is a big heavy package. If we spot the enemy, it is my job to call it in on the radio.

"Well, one day we happened to bump into a huge elephant. By buddies were bored and they decided to have some fun by teasing the elephant, pulling at its ears and tail. Nothing much happened at first. But eventually the elephant got angry. He raised his tusks in the air, he blasted his horn and trumpeted his war march, and started coming for us.

"We got the message, and we started running away as fast as we could. But my radio pack was heavy; it slowed me down. I tripped over a root on the jungle floor and fell flat on my face. Seconds later, the elephant ran right over me!"

"Now, elephants are pretty heavy. (An adult male African elephant can be up to 11 feet tall and weigh up to 6 metric tons!)  The radio pack on my back was squashed to the size of a penny. So why am I still alive? That is just it. It was an absolute miracle. The ground happened to be soft sand, and when the elephant ran over me I sank right into the ground. I ended up completely unhurt. I am here just to recover from the shock."

**Shocked by the Soldier’s Amazing Story**

Rabbi Sandler was in shock himself when the soldier completed his amazing story. "I have never heard a story like that," Rabbi Sandler began to say. "You know, you have to bench gomel (the thanksgiving blessing) and offer thanks to G-d for saving you."

"I have never heard of that," said the soldier with interest. "How does it work?"

"You have to go to a shul and make the blessing with a minyan." Rabbi Sandler explained.

The soldier raised up hands and said "I am afraid that I still do not know what you are talking about."

Rabbi Sandler explained to the under-affiliated soldier some of the basics of Jewish ritual, including the idea of praying together in minyan (a quorum of ten men) in a shul. The young man listened intently. Unfortunately, he had grown up without any real Jewish education. After hearing what Rabbi Sandler had to say, the soldier was even more interested in giving thanks to G-d, but there was no synagogue or minyan in the African jungle.

**The Soldier Did More than Just Bench Gomel**

After his recovery, the soldier returned home to Johannesburg, South Africa, where he finally had the opportunity to "bench gomel" in a shul on a day when the community read from the Torah. However, the soldier did not stop at just "benching gomel." He was determined to find out more about his heritage, the heritage which he was deprived of while growing up.

Little by little, the young man learned more and more about Torah and mitzvahs. Today, the young soldier has come home and is totally Torah observant. All of his Torah is because of the foot of an elephant! (Visions of Greatness  Vol. 5, Rabbi Yosef Weiss, p.90)

In our story, the soldier heard the horn blast from an elephant. We should recognize the horn blasts in our own lives.  These blasts are sounded to bring us home to Torah observance; so that we will be prepared for the times of the eternal Shabbos, the World to Come.

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