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**When the Baal Shem**

**Tov Laughed**

**By**[**Asharon Baltazar**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/22307/jewish/Baltazar-Asharon.htm)



**Illustrated by the Rivka Korf Studio, Miami**

 Hunger was a familiar guest in Reb Shabtai’s home. Work didn’t come by so often for the bookbinder, and since Reb Shabtai and his wife, Perel, refused to collect charity, they regularly went to bed enduring the throbs of an empty

stomach. Once, before Shabbat, they hadn’t a single coin in the house—not for wine, *challah*, or even two stubs of wax for candles.

 Despair cut through Reb Shabtai’s heart like a fiery poker. Although the image of a barren table smothered in darkness was heartbreaking indeed, the couple agreed to follow the Talmudic adage, “Better make your Shabbat profane than to rely on the largesse of others.”

**Spent Friday Afternoon in the Synagogue**

 On Friday afternoon, Reb Shabtai left for the synagogue, where he, as usual, spent the rest of the day reading Psalms and the weekly Torah portion. This, coupled with the peaceful silence, helped somewhat ease his burdened mind. When the sky turned orange tinged with red, Reb Shabtai began to prepare to welcome the Shabbat while the synagogue around him filled up.

 As much as Reb Shabtai would have preferred that they last forever, the evening services eventually drew to a close. He remained in his seat and stared blankly at his *siddur*, sneaking occasional glances at the others leaving—he didn’t want anyone pestering him as to why his windows were dark. The synagogue fell quiet as before, and Reb Shabtai finally decided it was time to come home.

 Something, however, wasn’t right.

 The sight of candles twinkling warmly from behind the grubby window made Reb Shabtai’s heart sink. He was quite sure that was his home. Had Perel really been unable to contain herself from borrowing the candles? Or perhaps worse—money?

**His Bewilderment Grew Further**

 His bewilderment grew further as he crossed the front door to discover Perel beaming next to a table laden with a bottle of wine, two glazed loaves of fluffy *challah*, and an assortment of delicacies. He studied all of this quietly. A demand for the meaning of this would undoubtedly distress Perel, so Reb Shabtai resolved to simply leave it unaddressed. He returned Perel’s smile.

 “It was a miracle, Shabtai,” said Perel, discerning her husband’s unasked question. “While you were gone, I began to clean the house and came across a pair of gloves I didn’t know we even had. The gloves, Shabtai, had big golden buttons! They were quite expensive, too, because once I snipped them off, they sold for a sizable amount. Everything you see here—” she motioned to the lavish table “— was bought with that money.”

 A sudden surge of gratitude warmed Reb Shabtai’s heart; G‑d had delivered in their time of need. He danced around the small table, clapping his hands with a spontaneous song on his lips. Perel laughed, the worries of poverty usually etched on her face now gone without a trace.

 Miles away, sitting at his own Shabbat table, the Baal Shem Tov also began to laugh. The hearty sound reverberated around the room, despite the large crowd of students gathered there. This prompted a few of them to exchange curious stares, but no one attempted to inquire about the reason, nor did the Baal Shem Tov explain.

**The Baal Shem Tov is Asked Why He Laughed**

 After *havdalah* the next day, Reb Ze’ev Kitzes asked the Baal Shem Tov for the meaning of his Friday night laugh. The Baal Shem Tov provided no answer, instead requesting his wagon driver to ready the horses for himself and his students. With a respectful silence, the students piled into the wagon after the Baal Shem Tov; they were accustomed to the occasional mysterious outing.

 The wagon didn’t stop until it had arrived in the Polish city of Opatow (Apta) the next morning. By the order of the Baal Shem Tov, one of the students hurried off to find Reb Shabtai, a bookbinder. A wide-eyed Reb Shabtai soon stood in the front of the Baal Shem Tov.

 “Tell me what happened on Shabbat night,” said the Baal Shem Tov gently.

And so Reb Shabtai did: he recounted the couple’s grim certainty that they’d fast that Shabbat, the unexpected gift from Above, and his dance around the table to praise G‑d. The Baal Shem Tov nodded along, his beard failing to hide a wide smile.

**The Entirety of Heaven Rejoiced**

 “The entirety of Heaven rejoiced in your moments of pure joy,” smiled the Baal Shem Tov. “Now tell me, what do you want to be blessed with?”

 Reb Shabtai thought for a few moments, scrunching up his face wistfully. “I don’t need silver or gold. It’s obvious the one thing Perel and I want is children.”

 The Baal Shem Tov blessed the couple with a child, and one year later, he arrived in Opatow once more to serve as *sandek* for the baby boy at his *brit*. Yisrael—named to honor the Baal Shem Tov—would later serve Jewry as one of its most inspiring leaders: Rabbi Yisrael, the [Maggid](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4575422/jewish/What-Is-a-Maggid.htm) (preacher) of Kozienice (Kozhnitz).

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nasso 5780 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Bad Neighbours**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**



**Rabbi David Ashear, is the mechaber of the well-known**

**"Living Emunah" series published by ArtScroll**

 One of the neighbours in a building in Israel named Yehuda decided to do construction. The noise, mess and dust were very disruptive to all the neighbours who all shared the same backyard. It was hard to have constant background drilling and noise from the machines, but they decided that they did not want to cause machlokes and therefore, all the neighbours kept quiet.

 Yehuda was building illegally and even started to go a few feet past the boundary into the backyard. The neighbours, however, did not want to make machlokes and left it alone. For a whole year, the neighbours put up with the noise and mess.

**A Year Later…**

 A year later, another person from the same complex, Rafael, decided to do some construction. When the construction started, the first person to complain was Yehuda.

 “What do you think you’re doing here? You’re waking me up in the morning with all the noise of the tractors!”

 Rafael was shocked that Yehuda was complaining after all that Yehuda had put the other neighbours through. Yehuda complained to the building department who stopped the construction for a time period.

 Rafael was beside himself. By the time the project was finished, he could not believe the audacity of Yehuda. Then one morning, Rafael received a phone call in his office, “Do you know Yehuda?”

 Tentatively he answered, “Yes.”

 “We have you down as one of his neighbours. Right?”

 “Yeah.”

**“We’re Thinking of Hiring Him”**

 “We’re calling as a reference. We’re thinking of hiring him. He has applied for a job with us. Can you give us some information? Is he a good person?” Rafael’s first reaction was the opportunity for sweet revenge. However, he stopped himself and told the caller, “Can you call me back in an hour. I’m not ready right now to talk.”

 For the next hour, Rafael worked hard on his emunah. He told himself again and again, “It’s all Hashem. It’s only from Hashem. Will I ruin this man’s life now because of what he did to me? It wasn’t him – he was just a messenger from Hashem.” It was a very hard struggle, but Rafael worked on himself. He knew that Yehudah was a smart man and would make a good businessman there. It was a big nisayon.

 When they called him back an hour later, Rafael passed the test. He told them that Yehudah was great at business and gave a beautiful report. Yehuda got the job with a great salary.

 A few days later, Rafael’s wife got a phone call. She had been an experienced assistant principal for years and then a year ago had lost her job. She was looking for an appropriate position ever since. Within three days of the Rafael giving a good report, she got an offer from one of the most prominent Beis Yaakov schools in the community. They were looking for someone to fill an assistant principal position that just opened up. She got the best job with the best salary.

**Rafael Strengthened Himself in Emunah**

 Rafael strengthened himself in Emunah, reminding himself that it was all from Hashem. If you do good and overcome the tests that come your way, you will only gain. You will gain in both worlds. You will gain here as it will release all your stress and animosities and your reward in Olam Habah will be infinite. There is only Hashem in the world. That’s all we need to know. Everything in life is between me and Hashem. People are only messengers.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nasso 5780 email of Oneg Shabbos (London, U.K.) Originally published in the TorahAnyTimes.com Newsletter.*

**Shine Our Light**

**Onto Other People**

 Chana, a 23-year old spending some time in Israel, was asked by her friend for a picture of a particular view in the Old City. Despite not feeling great, she decides to do the favour. Not thinking clearly, she doesn’t notice that she has mistakenly boarded an Arab bus heading into Eastern Jerusalem, a very unsafe area.

 She falls asleep, but once she wakes up and realises her mistake she is far from safety. With no return buses heading her way, and her phone completely out of battery she heads down the dark streets towards a settlement.

 She knocks on a house. Prepares a story in her head that may keep her safe. ‘Chana?!?’ exclaims the girl who opened the door. The girl takes her in, hugs her and pulls a card off the shelf.

**Completely Taken by Surprise**

 Chana is taken completely by surprise, but then suddenly realises who this is. A staff member in a hotel that she had stayed in 6 months earlier. During that trip, she had made a great effort to write down the names of the staff, from receptionists to waitress, and to discover their interests.

 She proactively made it a point to acknowledge and connect with every person that she could. Before she left she wrote thank you cards to them. This was the card the house owner had pulled off the shelf, thinking that Chana had come to visit.

**A Potentially Life-Saving Lift**

 The girl and her Uncle give Chana a potentially life-saving lift to home territory. In Parsha Nasso the priests are told to bless the people with the following blessing: ‘May Hashem shine His face upon you’ (Bamidbar 6:25). Bearing in mind that we are supposed to emulate G-d, what is the practical application of this verse?

 Greeting people. ‘Greet every person with a pleasant expression’ says Shamai in Pirkei Avos. Show people that we notice and acknowledge their existence. Chana’s story is an amazing story of Hashgacha Pratis, but we already know that Hashem can do anything.

 Perhaps the more powerful message, is what we can learn from a girl who takes the time to pay attention to every person. In a time that we may not be able to greet people in person, let’s try and think of how we can show people that we acknowledge their existence virtually.

 To specifically try and think of people who would appreciate our contact, perhaps the cleaner from our office, or hairdresser that we are not able to use at the moment, someone elderly, or isolated. Let’s shine our light onto other people and make them feel valued. (Story heard first-hand by Rabbi Yoel Gold. Torah idea from ‘Love Your Neighbour’ by Zelig Pliskin)

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**Life Is A Test...**

 We all experience life’s challenges in one way or another and no one is exempt. A young Rabbi from a fairly wealthy family told a story of his parents who had been married for a few years with no children. His mother had already had two miscarriages and was now in her sixth month of her third pregnancy, hoping for her first child.

 One day she didn’t feel well and was rushed to the hospital. The doctors determined that the baby was putting her life in jeopardy and they needed to terminate the pregnancy immediately.

 At that time, his parents were not observant at all. Nevertheless, his father, desperate to have a child, made a pledge in front of all the people there. He said, “I promise that if this baby is born healthy, I’ll send him to the most religious school in our community!”

**Miraculously, Just a Short While Later**

 Miraculously, just a short while later, the doctors declared that the situation had changed and the pregnancy could continue. A few months later, a healthy baby boy was born, and a few years later, the father fulfilled his pledge and sent him to the most observant yeshivah in his community.

 That child eventually brought his parents closer to religion and today they are among the most observant people in their community. The baby grew up to become the very Rabbi who was telling over this story and in his own right is bringing many young people back to Torah.

 The father, of course now very happy with his new life, got up to speak one day and said, “What seemed to be the darkest time in my life turned out to be my biggest beracha.” He was just so thankful to Hashem for helping him come back to Torah!



**Baby during a brit milah ceremony**

 Hardships can come in many different forms but Hashem, in His kindness, brings them in ways that enable us to improve and draw closer to Him. This is yet another aspect of Hashem’s Hesed. May Hashem open our eyes to see and appreciate all His kindness and know that everything that Hashem does is only good!

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nasso 5780 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

**The Old Lady’s Request**

 A story is told of an old lady who was nearing the end of her life. As she lay on her death bed surrounded by her loving family, she asked them to honour what she was about to ask of them to do, even though it might seem a bit strange to them.

 “Please can you all leave this room and go to the nearby forest. Each of you is to find a twig or small branch and then bring it back to me here. Go!”

 Out of respect, they all left the room and heeded their mother’s wish. When they returned, each member of the family was carrying a twig. The old lady asked them to give their twigs to her. She reached over to the drawer next to her bed and pulled out some string. Holding all the twigs together she tied a string around them, making them into one bundle.

 The family looked on, puzzled. The old lady then passed the bundle to the child standing closest and asked, “Please snap this bundle of twigs.” The child tried but to no avail.

 She passed the bundle to the next family member and asked of them the same. They too could not break the bundle. When they had all tried and failed to snap the bundle of twigs, she asked for the bundle back.

 She untied the string and picked up one individual twig. She snapped it easily. She picked up another and snapped that one too. She stopped only after she had snapped the last twig.

 With her remaining energy, she looked lovingly at all her family and said, “As long as the twigs were together in one bundle, they couldn’t be broken. It was only when each twig was taken separately that they were easily snapped. “Stay together as one and each of you will be stronger.”

 As Klal Yisroel, we need each other. Perhaps, now more than ever before We need to embrace our differences, respect each other and remember that we are united by our desire to serve Hashem לשמה .Then we will be able to draw strength from one another and find the resilience to survive the Golus until its end, may it be speedily in our days. M

*Reprinted from the Parshat Behaalosecha 5780 email of Oneg Shabbos (London, UK)*

**The Rebbe’s Tish that**

**Started with the Soup Course.**

**As Told By Peretz Klein**

 Rav Schneider told me this story himself: I was born and raised in Brazil. When I was a teenager, I went to learn in Gateshead, England and I couldn’t always travel bein hazmanim back home to Brazil. One time, my friend from Yeshiva invited me to spend bein hazmanim with his family who lived in Belgium. I graciously accepted the offer. On a Friday morning, we went to daven shacharis with the famous holy Rebbe, Rav Itzik’l (HaRav Moshe Yitzchock Gevertzman of Przeworsk zy”a, who lived from 1882 to 1976. After davening, the Rebbe noticing a new face and greeted me warmly. He asked me some questions: where I’m from, where I learn. He then he invited me to be his personal guest at the Shabbos Seuda that night.

[](https://www.geni.com/photo/view/5347675759290059455?album_type=photos_of_me&photo_id=6000000027508906795)

 Naturally I accepted the honour and I went that night to daven with the holy Rebbe. After davening was over, I was in for a little shock. Instead of starting the Seuda, the Rebbe and his family sat down to learn. After a while, I realized this is not stopping so fast. I was a little confused as to the schedule, so I asked someone what’s going on.

 They explained that the Rebbe and his family would learn for the next few hours while the oilum goes home to have the seuda with their families; then the Rebbe would first start his Tish for all his chassidim to come and watch, starting at the beginning with “Shalom Aleichem”, as is common by most Chassidishe court. I didn’t know about this! I felt my empty stomach turn over, as I hadn’t eaten properly all day long. It would be several hours till I would have any food to eat. All of a sudden, the Rebbe called me over and asked if I’m hungry. I didn’t have a choice and I simply said “Yes, I am”.

 The Rebbe took me warmly and made Kiddush for me; he washed with me, ate challah with me, and had the fish course with me. Then he went back to continue his learning, until the time would come when all his chassidim would come to watch him have his Friday night Seudas Shabbos.

 But that njght, the Rebbe’s Tish didn’t have the beautiful zemiros of Shalom Aleichem, Aishes Chayil, etc. The crowd didn’t get to hear their Rebbe’s derhoiben Kiddush. They didn’t see him wash his hands and eat the challah and fish.

 This week, the Tish began with the soup course. Why? Because the holy Rebbe, whose mind was famous for being comfortable in the highest heavens, also cared about the grumbles of a young stranger’s empty stomach!

*Reprinted from the Parshat Behaalosecha 5780 email of Oneg Shabbos (London, UK)*

**A Chossid Makes**

**An Environment**

**By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon**

 *27th of Sivan was the (34th) yahrzeit of my mother, Rebbetzin Cheyena Avtzon. I chose to write a tribute about her life this week. However, it is not just about her, it is living example of how an individual can have a positive impact on an entire community, and we as chassidim are instructed to be Lamplighters and Create an environment.*

 The [Lubavitcher] Rebbe [zt”l] writes in Hayom Yom (entry for the 30th of Adar 1), “A chossid makes an environment,” and that aptly describes my mother throughout her life.

 My mother was the oldest child of Reb Leibel and Aidella Karasik. When she was around six years old, her father was imprisoned and exiled to Siberia for three years. His crime was that when the Russian authorities noticed at the border in Tishrei of 5688 (1927) that the Frierdiker Rebbe had packed up *seforim* that he was informed that he had to leave in Russia, they were therefore considering rescinding the exit permission granted.

 So he [my mother’s father] (and two other chassidim) took responsibility of packing those *seforim* saying that they did it on their own, after the Rebbe told them that he cannot take them along with him.

**Persevering in Her Shmiras Shabbos**

 She went to school and excelled in math. Yet not one Shabbos did she write anything in class. Either she disappeared for the day, (by hiding in the basement of a neighbor, Reb Getzel Rubashkin) or having her hands bandaged. Yes, she acted as if she was clumsy and her hands would constantly need to be bandaged or even in a sling. But this way she persevered in *Shmiras Shabbos*.

 This is in addition to the fact that she had to walk quite a few miles to the school, as she went to a school where they weren’t aware that her father was the rabbi of the community.

 After her petira, we were told by her peers that grew up in Russia, our parents would always tell us, “Look at Leibke’s daughters. They are strong in their yiddishkeit, even though their father was in prison, so you can be strong as well.”

 During, the six years my parents were in Paris, although she was blessed with a nice size family, and my father was away for many months fundraising for the yeshiva, many of the other survivors looked up to her for strength in general and especially in their emunah. Although, she was younger than many of them, her wisdom and kindness was appreciated by them for years to come.

**Refusing to Terminate Her Pregnancy**

 A short while after settling in Detroit, she was extremely sick and the doctor told her, you are fortunate to have been blessed with six children, you cannot have any more. When she became pregnant some months later, he informed her that he is going to terminate the pregnancy.

 Although she was a recent immigrant she informed the doctor that she will not allow that to happen and when she informed the Rebbe of this, the Rebbe blessed her to have many other children.

 Reb Shimon Lazaroff once told me, (in the 1980’s), now it is common for chassidishe families in America to have large families, but your parents did it when it wasn’t popular. They made it popular.

 Her chessed and hachnasos orchim in Detroit was exemplary. One by one she encouraged families and individuals, married and single, to become more meticulous, one mitzvah at a time.

 There was a neighbor from a very distinguished Litvish family, who lost his father in his youth and when he joined the Israeli army, became less observant. After his marriage he settled in Detroit and had seven children in nine years. They were living a frum lifestyle of a typical Young Israel Jew and registered all their children in the yeshiva. Over a period of time the husband began feeling that their children should have a similar chinuch as his. When he informed this to his wife and stated that he would like to be more mehuder in all mitzvos, she felt he was going too fast.

 She agreed that they should continue raising their children in accordance to Torah and mitzvos, but she personally felt that modern orthodox is proper, and she can’t commit to more than what they are doing presently. So with broken hearts they divorced for the sake of chinuch of their children.

 However, he was worried if and how he will succeed on his own; who will help him raise the children? The biggest problem would be, who will be there for them the few hours after school, until he comes home from his work?

**My Mother Offer to Keep**

**An Eye on His Children**

 My mother told him, ….don’t worry, we will see that it works out, let the children come to my house until you return from work. I will keep an eye on them. I already prepare a large supper, so the pot will be filled up a little more.

 He protested saying, you have *boruch Hashem* your own children, in addition to helping out with other children in the neighborhood. It is too much to ask of you.

 My mother replied, … when there is room in the heart there is room in the house. About taking care of the children, it will make my job easier as they can do their homework with my children.

 However, he was still hesitant saying, I am afraid that your husband will turn them into chassidim.

 My father, said … you have nothing to be fearful of, most days by the time I come home you are already home, so they will be with you. On Shabbos they are with you, and the stories I will tell them, I know some stories of *tzaddikim* that predate the time of Chassidim. That should be your only worry, that they will get an extra dose of *yiras shomayim*.

**Each and Every Child Became a**

**Wonderful Ehrliche Jew**

 Boruch Hashem this arrangement worked out for many years, guiding them through different stages and skills. Each and every one of those children are wonderful ehrliche Jews, some are Rabbonim and mechanchim, role models in their communities.

 Being that they hung around the house, many other of the youth in the neighborhood would also join the “club”. Some of them later said, only because of your mother did I remain frum. My parents were too European for me and I thought yiddishkeit and America clashes. But your mother was as frum as they were, but she understood us American children, with all of our American *meshigasin* and she demonstrated that it is not a contradiction.

 Then there is the entire Russian Jewish community in Detroit that she helped them not only in giving them the opportunity to have a bris milah, and obtain mezuzos, but help them find apartments and settle down. Though her ongoing relationship, she was able to enroll those who desired that their children go to the yeshiva, but had difficulty in paying tuition for almost nothing.

 Yes, she made an environment.

 A year after her *petirah* the Detroit community felt it their obligation to acknowledge her tremendous contribution to the community, especially as it came to the delicate topic of convincing American ladies about *taharas hamishpacha*, and ultimately spearheading the building of a beautiful mikva in the 1960’s, and they placed a plaque in the mikva to honor her. As I noted in last year’s tribute, the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe gave her continuous guidance and brochos in this endeavor.

 Although the community was and remained Litvish, and knew that she was a proud Lubavitcher, they respected her and accepted her as part of their community. They encouraged their children to help her with her activities on behalf of Russian Jewry and additional aspects, because Rebbetzin Avtzon is encouraging Yiddishkeit. She made the environment. It was an environment of truth and understanding, one that everyone felt comfortable to join and participate in.

*Reprinted from the Weekly Story of Rabbi Avtzon from Parshas Shelach 5780. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Chabad Rebbeim and their chassidim. He can be contacted at* *avtzonbooks@gmail.com*