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Rav Chaim's Unlearned Torah Supporter



Tombstone of Rav Chaim of Volozhin

The Chofetz Chaim writes from sefarim that one who supports Torah, although he was an *Am Ha'aretz* (Torah ignorant) in this world he merits that he will know the Torah in the future. This is easy to understand because he has reward

for the Torah he supported and the great pleasure in Gan Eden is Torah. Consequently, how can he have pleasure in Gan Eden otherwise?

After one of the supporters of the Volozhiner yeshiva died, Rav Chaim Volozhiner would learn Mishnayos in his memory. One day Rav Chaim Volozhiner was leaning a difficult Mishna that he was unable to understand. From his exertion, he got tired and fell asleep.

While asleep, the deceased appeared to him in a dream, explaining to him the Mishna, as if he was an expert in that Mishna although he was ignorant in Torah throughout his life.

When Rav Chaim Volozhiner awoke, he exclaimed, “I knew that one who supports Torah receives Gan Eden. But I didn’t know that it would happen so quickly” (as this story took place just a few days after this supporter’s death.).

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5780 email of Fascinating Insights on the Parsha.

The Rusty Penny

By Tuvia Bolton



Artwork by Sefira Ross

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812, founder of Chabad Chassidism) was raising money to ransom Jewish prisoners.

He went first to a city that was famous for its miser. It seems that this stingy man, despite his considerable wealth, was loath to share his blessings, no matter how worthy or urgent the cause. Rabbis and beggars alike avoided his home. Anyone who did unwittingly end up on his doorstep was offered a single rusty copper coin, which even the most desperate pauper would promptly refuse.

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman arrived in the town, the elders of the community graciously received him. But when he announced that he wanted to visit the house of the miser and wanted two rabbis to accompany him, he was met with serious resistance. The rebbe was adamant, however, and they finally acquiesced and gave him the escort he requested.

The next afternoon the three of them were standing in front of the miser's mansion. Before knocking on the door, the rebbe turned to his companions and requested that they not utter a word, no matter what they hear or see. Several moments later they were sitting in the luxurious front room, and the owner was returning from his safe with a small velvet money pouch.

“A Touching Story Indeed!”

“Yes,” said the rich man. “A touching story indeed! Widows and orphans in captivity. Ah, the suffering of the Jewish people! When will it all end? Here, Rabbi, take my humble donation.”

To the miser's surprise, the rebbe seemed pleased by the gift. He was actually smiling at him warmly as he put the coin into his pocket and said, “Thank you, Mr. Solomons. May G-d bless and protect you always.” The rebbe then proceeded to write him a receipt, adding all sorts of blessings in a most beautiful script.

“Thank you again, my friend,” said the rebbe as he stood and warmly shook the man's hand, looking him deeply in the eyes with admiration. “And now,” he added, turning to his two companions, “we must be on our way. We have a lot of collecting to do tonight.”

As the three rabbis walked to the door, the rebbe turned and bade his host yet another warm farewell. “You should have thrown it back in his face,” hissed one of the rabbis after they heard the door close behind them.

“Don't turn around and don't say a word,” whispered the rebbe as they walked down the path to the front gate.

They Heard the Door Opening Behind Them

Suddenly they heard the door opening behind them and the miser calling: “Rabbis, rabbis, please come back for a minute. Hello, hello, please, I must speak to you, please . . . please come back in.”

In a few minutes they were again sitting in the warm, plush drawing room, but this time the rich man was pacing back and forth restlessly. He stopped for an instant and turned to the rebbe. “Exactly how much money do you need to ransom these prisoners?”

“About five thousand rubles,” the rebbe replied.

“Well, here is one thousand . . . I have decided to give one thousand rubles; you may count it if you want,” said the miser as he took a tightly bound stack of bills from his jacket pocket and laid it on the table. The other rabbis were astounded. They stared at the money and were even afraid to look up at the miser, lest he change his mind.

But the Rebbe again shook Mr. Solomons’ hand, warmly thanking him, and wrote him a beautiful receipt replete with blessings and praises, exactly like the first time.

“That was a Miracle!”

“That was a miracle!” whispered one of the rabbis to the rebbe as they left the house and were again walking toward the gate. Once more the rebbe signaled him to be still. Suddenly the door of the house again opened behind them. “Rabbis, please, I have changed my mind. Please come in once more. I want to speak with you,” Mr. Solomons called out.

They entered the house for a third time as the miser turned to them and said, “I have decided to give the entire sum needed for the ransom. Here it is; please count it to see that I have not made a mistake.”

“What is the meaning of this?” wondered the rebbe’s astonished companions after they had left the rich man’s home for the third time that evening. “How did you get that notorious miser to give 5,000 rubles?”

“That man is no miser,” said Rabbi Schneur Zalman. “No Jewish soul truly is. But how could he desire to give, if he never in his life experienced the joy of giving? Everyone to whom he gave that rusty penny of his threw it back in his face.”

Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Tavo 5780 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

L’Maaseh

The Ksav Sofer’s Scarf

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a, once related a story that happened with the Ksav Sofer (Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, zt”l, 1815-1871). A Jew in the city of Pressburg became gravely ill and it became clear that there was not much time left for him. The most prominent physicians were consulted and various drugs were administered, but it was to no avail, and his condition did not get better.

The members of the family were G-d-fearing Jews who understood that one does not give up hope, but rather he places his trust in Hashem, the Healer of all

flesh. The children of this sick individual went to the Rav of the city, the venerable Ksav Sofer, and after relating the patient's history and the present situation, they implored him for a Brachah, a blessing that would intercede in the Heavenly Tribunal, so that their father would live.



The Ksav Sofer

The Ksav Sofer listened, and suddenly took off the scarf that was wrapped around his neck, and handed it to the family members. He said, “Here, take this scarf and place it on the forehead of the patient, and with the help of Hashem, he will arise from his illness!”

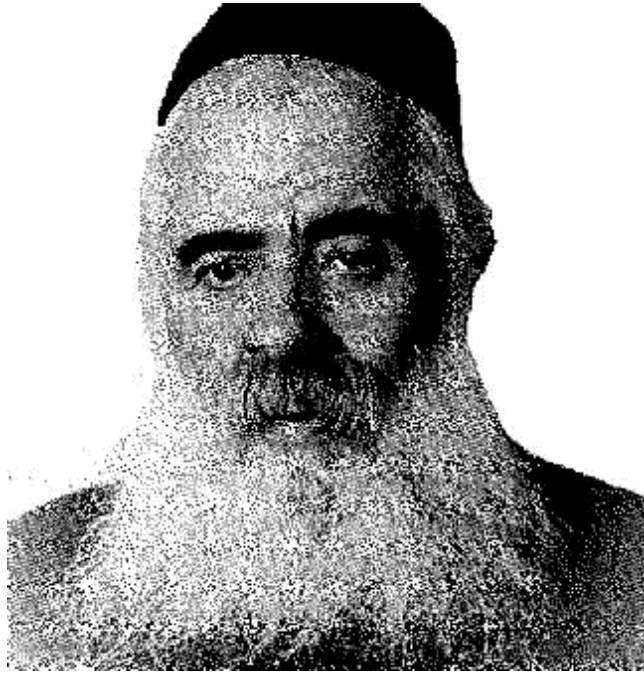
The family did as the Ksav Sofer advised them, and soon enough, with the help of Hashem, the patient was completely cured! It was a miracle!

The students who were always present in the Ksav Sofer’s home questioned him concerning the "holy" scarf. Did he perhaps "treat" it with the holy Names of Hashem? Was it immersed in Kabbalah, Mysticism?

The Ksav Sofer shook his head and said, “I have been wearing this scarf for a long time. It rests on my shoulders, as I constantly study Torah. It is a part of my ritual of Torah study, and Torah is the greatest healer of all ills. I felt that the scarf contained within it enough Kedushah to provide the medicinal and therapeutic qualities that were necessary to heal the patient. It has soaked up and absorbed so much Torah that it can heal someone who is sick!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Seitzei 5780 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Sensitivity of a Teacher Towards His Student



Rav Mordechai Rogov, zt"l, Rosh Yeshivah of Bais Medrash L'Torah in Skokie, Illinois, was a distinguished Torah scholar and Mussar personality, and following World War II he moved to Chicago.

His son once came home to discover Rav Rogov upset, and his eyes seemed moist from crying. Concerned, he asked his father if he felt well.

His father explained that a student had approached him that day and cried bitterly that he had been unable to achieve success in learning Torah. "Please, Rebbe, give me a Brachah!" the boy asked.

He attempted to encourage the student, but, unfortunately, learning was only one of his problems. He had other troubles as well. The Rav explained that he did his best to encourage the young man, but Rav Rogov was clearly still distressed by his student's pain and, even now, many hours later, was still concerned about his student's condition.

The sensitivity Rav Rogov had to another individual was extraordinary!

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Seitzei 5780 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Cracked Egg: Thoughts for Teshuvah



A poor country woman had no food to give her many children. One day she found an egg and told her children their worries for food were over.

“I shall take this egg and ask the neighbors if we can put it under their hen until a chick is hatched. We won’t eat the chick, but we will set her on other eggs until they hatch into chickens. They in turn will lay many more eggs and we’ll hatch them into chickens as well.

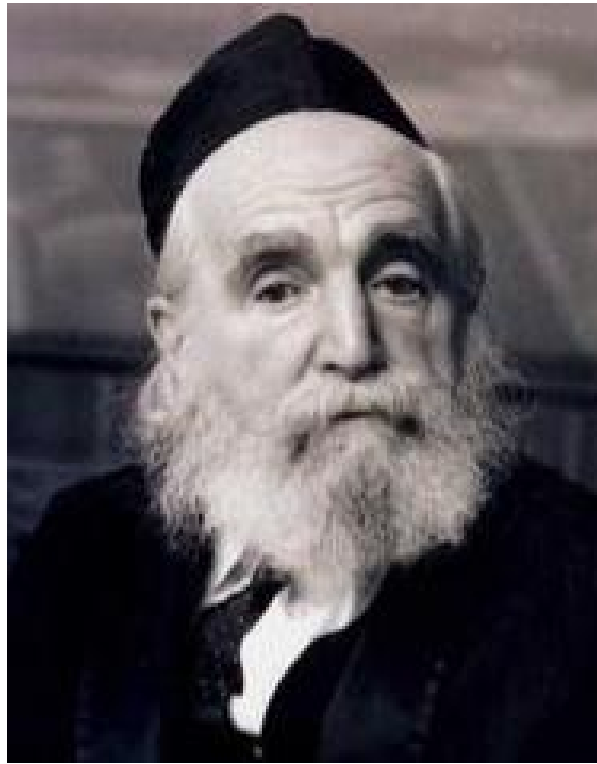
Then we’ll sell some of the chickens and the eggs and buy a cow, and raise the cow until she bears calves. Then we’ll sell some of the calves and buy a field. Then we’ll have a field and cows and milk and chickens and eggs and we won’t need anything more.”

As she was speaking and playing with the egg, it fell out of her hands and broke, shattering all her dreams and hopes for a rosy future.

R’ Chaim of Sanz would relay this parable each year in Elul, saying, “Each of us resembles the lady in the story. When the days of teshuvah arrive, we resolve to do this and to do that, making elaborate schemes to rectify so many things. Yet the days slip by, out of our hands and hearts, and thought does not lead to the action we had planned, so we remain as we were before. We must therefore take every precaution to ensure that our resolutions of teshuvah come to fruition.” (Rosh Hashanah Stories & Parables)

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5780 email of The Weekly Vort.

Rav Moshe's Phone Call



Two men collaborated on an important project and achieved much success. Then they didn't see eye-to-eye on certain things and one of them suggested that the partnership be dissolved.

A few days later, this man received a call from **Rav Moshe Feinstein**, O'BM, who had learned of what had transpired. After hearing the man's feelings on the matter, Reb Moshe said, "I understand what's bothering you. Certainly, you have a valid point, but you must weigh the consequences of your decision.

The two of you have accomplished so much for the Jewish people, and there is so much more you can do. You're much more effective as a team than as individuals. For the sake of the Jewish people, you should overlook your differences and continue working together."

The man heeded Rav Moshe's advice and – with his partner went on to even greater success. (adapted from Artscroll's "The Story of Reb Moshe" by Shimon Finkelman.)

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5780 email of Torah Sweets Weekly

Two Russian-Born Crypto-Jews Rediscovered Their Identity

By Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin



My family tree hangs over my Shabbat candles.

After my family's immigration to the United States in 1989, I began to familiarize myself with my Jewish heritage and Torah values. Born in the former Soviet Union, I was deprived of any connection to Judaism, and as I was becoming more familiar with the traditions of my people, I was eager to share the knowledge with family and friends.

The most enthusiastic recipient of my newly acquired information was my grandmother, Zelda. Born in 1924, just seven years after the Russian Communist

Revolution of 1917, my grandmother remembered some strange customs of her own grandmother, such as looking for crumbs around the house during springtime. Nearly 65 years had passed since her childhood, but she understood that her grandmother was secretly cleaning in preparation for the holiday of Passover.



My grandmother Zelda and Rabbi and Rebbetzin Shemtov at my son's bar mitzvah in 2013.

Zelda remembered her father putting on black “boxes” in a corner of the room—just to see those same “boxes” (*tefillin*) when my sons, her great-grandchildren, put them on for the first time at their bar mitzvahs. Perhaps this is what the phrase “coming full circle” means.

Zelda died on May 6, 2020.s

During the last seven years of my grandmother’s life, I visited her on Friday afternoons to light Shabbat candles and make a blessing over the wine and challah. I arrived in the afternoon because I needed to be home with my own family before

the actual onset of Shabbat. These were joyous visits for both of us. Despite the fact that my grandmother was succumbing to dementia, she somehow learned the prayers by heart. It's hard to believe that only a few months ago we were clapping and singing our traditional jingle "one more week of life ... thank you, thank you, thank you."



My great grandparents Chaya Kozhensky and Nachum Rabovetsky.

My grandmother believed in G-d with absolute certainty, despite the fact that she spent 65 years of her life in an atheist country. Zelda lost her mother at the age of 3, lived through poverty and starvation, was widowed at 34 and cared for her ill daughter. She spent her life healing people as a doctor, saving countless lives. Yet these challenges didn't diminish her joy and faith. Every week, Zelda told me that she loves G-d and knows that He loves each of us!

I frequently also think about my paternal great-grandparents, Nachum and Chaya Rabovetsky. Together with their 11-year-old son, they fled Vinitsya, a city

in Ukraine, in a futile attempt to escape the Holocaust. Nachum was shot when they were caught on the road, while his wife and son were able to escape. Eventually, Chaya, my great-grandmother, died in a ghetto. Both she and my great-grandfather have no graves.

In her later years, my grandmother Zelda had a home health aide, Svetlana, who immigrated to the United States from Ternopil, a city in western Ukraine. Svetlana prepared for our weekly Shabbat celebrations by getting the wine and challah ready.



Svetlana, my grandmother's home health aide, with whom I stay in touch.

One day, as I was washing my grandmother's hands before eating challah, Svetlana smiled and said that she, too, was Jewish. I was surprised because she often mentioned her Greek Orthodox beliefs and wore a crucifix around her neck. She told me that her grandmother was Jewish and had a traditional name, Faina

(Russian for Feyga). From then on, I offered to include her in our Shabbat celebrations, and she cautiously agreed.

My Grandmother's Neighbor Reveals Her Jewish Background

Then one week, together with Svetlana, we unexpectedly discovered another Jewish woman's rich past. My grandmother was having renovations done in her apartment, and her neighbor, who was in her 80s and also an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, stopped by to see the finished product. She arrived just as we were about to make kiddush, the blessing over wine.

I explained that we were preparing for Shabbat and would be happy to include her. I wasn't surprised that this neighbor was confused by my offer, as most Jewish people from the former Soviet Union are unfamiliar with Jewish customs due to the Communist repression.

She cautiously sat down to observe the ceremony. I poured some wine into a kiddush cup and recited the blessing, *Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam borei pri hagafen*, "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine."

Suddenly, we heard this elderly woman sobbing, and I couldn't understand what had upset her so much. She explained that the last time she'd heard those words was almost 80 years ago, recited by her grandfather at his Shabbat table! She couldn't imagine that there were still people who knew this sacred text. I assured her that there are still many people around the world who are bound by their connection to our heritage, the Torah, and the Almighty.

Feeling an Undeniable Connection to the Blessing

Even after eight decades of not participating in any Jewish prayers, this woman felt an undeniable connection to the blessing. It was a testament to an eternal Jewish bond that transcends time.

Soon after, Svetlana shared with me her full story. Her mother, Galina, was born in 1939 to a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father in the small city of Birobidzhan on the Trans-Siberian Railway near the Russian-Chinese border. Due to unknown circumstances, her grandmother, Faina, left little Galina with her husband and moved away to live with another man, so Svetlana's mother was raised by her father and his new wife.

Galina grew up resentful of her mother's heritage, married a non-Jewish man, and raised Svetlana and her sister as Greek-Orthodox Christians. When the Soviet Union fell apart, many Jewish people reconnected to their heritage and immigrated to Israel. One day, Galina shared the family secret—that her biological mother was Jewish—with her two daughters. Svetlana was 47 years old at the time and had raised her own daughter with Christian traditions. She wrote inquiries to

try to connect with her maternal grandmother, Faina, only to discover that she had already passed. Years went by, and Svetlana hadn't experienced any Jewish customs nor met anyone who knew about Jewish traditions.

Svetlana was surprised that 10 years after her secret was exposed, her job brought her to these weekly Shabbat celebrations. This was just the time that I was becoming more committed to my heritage and had started visiting my grandmother on Friday afternoons.

No Soul is Ever Lost

No soul is ever lost. Hope and faith are the driving forces behind our collective Jewish heritage.

When someone described a fellow Jew as “possessing no Jewish knowledge” or “far from his or her heritage,” the Lubavitcher Rebbe corrected the person by stating that a Jew is never “far.” In one moment, a person can realize the gift of his or her Jewish identity.

My grandmother left this world with Svetlana by her side. After her death, I reassured Svetlana that we would continue to be in each other's lives, celebrating our weekly Shabbat. I was overjoyed that she wanted to keep my grandmother's kiddush cup—not as a memory, but as a tool that she proudly uses every week while reading from my handwritten instructions. We call each other before every Shabbat and sing a familiar song, “One more week of life ... thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Looking at the Family Tree When Lighting the Shabbat Candles

Every week as I light my Shabbat candles, I look up at the family tree that hangs above the candelabra. I feel that the souls of my ancestors are hovering over the light. Their souls are eternal sparks turning into a bright flame. I like to think that my great-grandparents have found their resting place in the Shabbat lights of their descendants.

Hope is not lost, our fire cannot be extinguished, and another week of life calls for the familiar words of gratitude: “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Reprinted from the website of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Born in the Soviet Union, Sofya Sara Esther lives in Philadelphia, runs an orthopedic company, and holds an MBA degree. She teaches Torah, travels the world, and is involved with RAJE (Russian American Jewish Experience) and other outreach organizations. Email Sofya for questions about self-growth and achieving life purpose.

The Innkeeper's Terrible Sin



Once, Rav Saadyah Gaon, zt"l, stayed at an inn where the innkeeper was unaware of the identity of Rav Saadyah Gaon. He treated the Sage like he would any other guest and gave him a simple room to stay in.

When word got out that Rav Saadyah Gaon, the leader of the generation was in town, all the townsfolk flocked to the inn to meet him. When the innkeeper saw the crowds coming to see his guest, he finally realized who his illustrious guest was, and approached Rav Saadyah Gaon with tears running down his cheeks.

"Rebbi, please forgive me!"

"Forgive you?" asked Rav Saadyah Gaon, "You have treated me very well. What have you done wrong?"

"Rebbe!" replied the innkeeper, "I didn't know who you were! If I had known that the great Rav Saadyah Gaon was staying at my inn, I would have treated you like royalty!"

When Rav Saadyah Gaon heard these sincere words, he burst into tears himself.

"From what you have said," explained Rav Saadyah, "I realized the extent of our obligation towards Hashem, our King. Just as your service of me changed as you recognized my identity, so it is with my service of Hashem.

"With each passing day I discover new levels of Hashem's kindness towards me. I realize that whatever respect and service I offered yesterday was quite

insufficient, since I have seen so much more kindness from Him today! Had I known then what I know about Hashem now, I would have served Him with even greater devotion and intensity!"

Rav Saadyah Gaon taught that life is about constant rediscovery about Hashem's greatness and continuous kindness towards us. He thereby taught his disciples to examine their ways each and every day, even if they felt certain that they had not sinned, because with each passing day, one can recognize Hashem on a new and deeper level than the day before!



A street sign at the intersection of Se'adya Ga'on and HaHashmona'im streets in Tel Aviv.

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5780 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.