

DEDICATION



This year, we are approaching on 21 Sivan/June 1st - the seventh yahrtzeit of Nechama (Nina) bas Noach, my wife of almost 30 years and the mother of our six daughters – Chana, Adina, Yocheved, Elisheva, Rivka and Chava. It seems like just yesterday...

...It seems like just yesterday when I got that special phone call from Mrs. Miriam Langsam when I was living in the Kensington section of Brooklyn. A friend of hers from Toronto had called to ask if she knew of a nice man for a special woman then living in Toronto and originally from Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. I don't know why Mrs. Langsam thought to call me, but I agreed to meet that female Canadian and I guess the rest is history.

Today there are nine grandchildren who miss you and I trust that you Nechama are enjoying nachas from them and davening on high in Gan Eden for the welfare of your family who remember you every day. We live in a crazy world that seemingly is getting worse and we can only pray for the speedy coming of Moshiach when our family will again be reunited.

To commemorate this bittersweet anniversary, I have put together this collection of stories and articles from my weekly emails – Shabbos Stories for the Parsha and the Brooklyn Torah Gazette. I hope you will read these inspiring features as a zechus for Nechama's neshama.

Daniel Keren
Brooklyn, New York
13 Sivan 5781/May 24, 2021

Believe In Our Chachamim

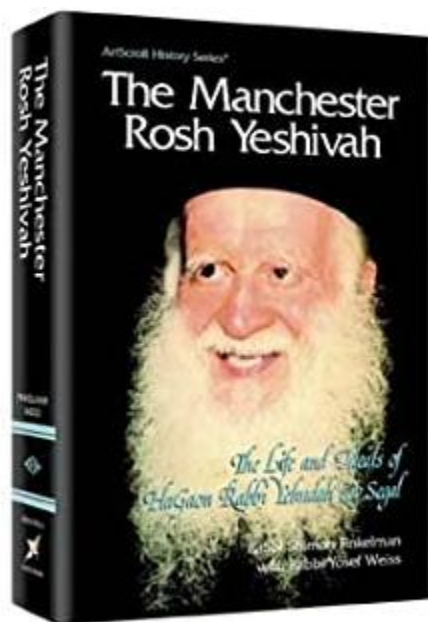
By Rabbi David Ashear

One branch of *emunah* is called *emunat chachamim*, believing in the veracity of the words of our Sages. At the time of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the *Gemara* tells us that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai met up with the Roman General Vespasian. He told him, “Peace be upon you Emperor.”

Vespasian told Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai that he was obligated in the death penalty because he was not the emperor; Nero was.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai then replied, “I know for a fact that you are the Emperor, because you are about to destroy our Temple, and it says in the *pasuk* – the Lebanon will fall by the mighty.’ And my Rabbis have taught, the word Lebanon refers to the Beit HaMikdash and the word *אדיר*-mighty refers to an emperor. Only an emperor will be able to destroy the Beit HaMikdash.”

Right after that conversation, a messenger came and told Vespasian the Emperor Nero committed suicide and he was appointed the new emperor instead.



The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva pointed out from this story the absolute *emunah* that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai had in the words of the Sages. The *pasuk* did not clearly say that an emperor will destroy the Beit HaMikdash. It was only through the *derashot* of *Chazal* that this interpretation came to light.

Hashem ensures to plant in every generation *chachamim* who will lead the people in the way they need to be lead, and we also have a mitzvah to believe in our *chachamim*.

The *sefer Midrash Shemuel* writes, part of believing in the words of the *chachamim* is believing in their advice and their guarantees.

A man told me, his father ingrained in him from a young age to have *emunat chachamim*. In the year 2010, he was already 37 years old and still not married. His rabbi came over to him one day and said, “You need to learn Torah every single day.”

He replied that he has a difficult schedule and has to rush to work. He didn’t have the time. The rabbi then said, “If you will commit to learn Torah every single day from 6:15 am sharp until 7:00, I guarantee you, you will be engaged by Tu B’Shvat.”

This conversation took place in the beginning of November and Tu B’Shvat was just a few months away. The man believed in the words of his rabbi and, therefore, the next day he showed up at 6:10 and made sure to be there on time. For the next few months, he ensured to always be early to fulfill his part of the deal. The week of Tu B’Shvat, he got engaged. And he has been learning ever since.



Rav Chaim Kanievsky

But the story didn’t end there. Baruch Hashem, a year later, he and his wife had a beautiful baby girl. But then his wife had trouble conceiving. Three years went by without a child. They went to Israel at the end of January for vacation and, while they were there, the man went to Rav Chaim Kanievsky to get a *beracha* to have a child. He said, “My wife has been having trouble conceiving for three years,” and he added that he really wanted a baby boy.

When Rav Chaim saw him, he told him to remove the jewelry that he was wearing. At that time the man had a bracelet and a ring on that were both

sentimental to him. He asked why, and then found out the Rabbi ruled that it was forbidden because it was lady-like.

The man then told Rav Chaim, “I will listen to anything the Rav tells me to do, but can the Rav please give me a guarantee that I will have a baby boy?” Rav Chaim said yes. This man testified, exactly nine months and one day from that meeting, his wife gave birth to a healthy baby boy. He believed in the words of the *chachamim*, and Hashem rewarded his belief.

We are not supposed to veer from the words of our Rabbis to the right or to the left. It is a mitzvah to listen to our *chachamim*. And like all *mitzvot*, Hashem will reward us for our efforts.

Reprinted from the April 19, 2021 email of Living Emunah.

What Should I Tell Him?

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser



Every night I wonder to myself if I should leave the ringer on my phone on or off. A dilemma ensues in my mind as to whether I should simply aim for an undisturbed, good night's sleep, or perhaps I should keep the possibility available that someone will need me in case of an emergency.

One night at 3:00 am, my phone began ringing. Waking up from amidst a deep sleep, I grabbed the phone and picked up. “Rabbi, Rabbi!” I heard yelling on the other end, “I’m going to jump! That’s it, I’m done with my life! I don’t care about anybody or anything! I’m jumping!”

I immediately broke out into a cold sweat, now fully alert and aware of the severity of the matter at hand. “Who is this?” I innocently asked. But instead of

getting a name, I only heard more frustrated yelling. “I’ve gone through enough of life; I don’t need to experience any more pain!”

As the caller continued speaking, I soon recognized that it was a young woman who had attended a few of my classes in Manhattan.

Wasn’t Sure What My Next Step Should Be

Unprepared to receive such a heavy phone call in the middle of the night, I wasn’t sure what my next step should be, although I knew I needed to move quickly. Of course, I wanted to genuinely show the woman that, despite her despairing thoughts, there was a purpose to her life and she should never give up, but how would I do that on the phone as she stood several flights up a building about to end it?

My positive affirmations of how commendable it was of her to attend my Torah lectures did nothing to sway her, nor did my pleading to spare her parents the agony they would experience if she would jumped. I was troubled with what I could say to her, though I was quite sure that I was her last stop before everything would sadly be over.

But then I said to her, “Wait a minute, just tell me one thing. What should I tell your chassan?” A moment of silence settled in between us.

“My chassan?” the woman said. “What are you talking about rabbi? I don’t have a chassan... I’m not even going out with anybody now!”

But I repeated myself again. “What should I tell your chassan?” It was clear that the girl was quite confused. “Allow me to explain,” I said.

Forty Days Before a Person is Born

“Our Sages tell us that forty days before you were born a Heavenly voice announced that you will marry someone (Sotah 2a). And so, I ask you, if you jump, what should I tell your chassan...?”

The girl paused for another moment before responding. “You mean I have a chassan and one day I will get married?”

“Yes, absolutely. You can rest assured one thousand percent. With G-d’s help, you will have a chassan who will be proud of you and you will be proud of him.”

I then heard sobbing tears from the other end of the line and a bang. I could tell that the phone had dropped. Panicking, I immediately began mumbling words of Tehillim.

But then, within moments, someone came back on the phone. “Hello, this is Officer Constanza. G-d bless you, Rabbi... We have her... she is now safe...”

Reprinted the Parshat Vayishlach Newsletter email of Torahanytime.com as compiled and edited by Elan Perchik.

A Tale of Two Apples



A little boy was holding two apples, one in each hand. His mother came in and softly asked her son with a smile: “Darling, could Mommy have one of your apples?”

The boy looked up at his mom for a few seconds, and then he quickly bit into each apple.

The mother felt the smile on her face freeze, as she tried hard not to reveal her disappointment in her son’s failure to share.

But then, the boy handed one of his bitten apples to his mom with a huge, loving smile and said: “Here, Mommy. Take this one. It’s sweeter.”

No matter who you are, how experienced you are, and how knowledgeable you think you are, be careful. What you see may not be the reality.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeishev 5781 email of Migdal Ohr.

Yehuda’s Story

Hello, My name is Yehuda Zimberg. I'm from New York, I am 26 years old, and I have a stutter.

I have been stuttering since I was eight years old. There wasn't any traumatic experience that caused it; it just popped up out of the blue. I would not consider it a terrible stutter, but a stutter nonetheless. The fear and humiliation of stuttering made me very self-conscious and I became shy, quiet, and reserved.

This was not the person I wanted to be, but rather the person I became due to my stutter. My parents took me to get speech therapy and constantly reassured

me that everything would be fine. I met with wonderful people who helped along the way (Deirdre Casey, Uri, and Phil Schneider, Yanky Kaufman to name a few), but my ego was at a point where I was too stubborn and proud to get help or let people help me. Over the years,

I learned to deal with my stutter - I wasn't happy about it but I learned how to live with it.

Fast forward a few years later, I am in Israel learning in Yeshiva. I was in Jerusalem one day and went into Manny's Book Store. As I was browsing the shelves, a title jumped out at me: "The Gift of Stuttering." I thought to myself: "who is this sick guy calling stuttering a gift?! Stuttering is a curse!"

Of course, I picked up a copy, skimmed through the pages, became intrigued, and purchased the book. Moe Mernick is the author's name, and the book is about his personal journey confronting life challenges, i.e., Stuttering.



Moe Mernick and Yehuda Zimberg

While reading through the book, I could not help but note that Moe and I have a lot in common. I have a stutter; Moe has a stutter. I am a Kohen; Moe is a Kohen. I use Preparation H... Never mind the last part, but you get the idea.

I Felt Like I Was Meeting an Old Friend

The way that Moe was describing his struggles made me feel like I was meeting an old friend who understood everything that I was going through. Even the little things that were easy for someone else, such as being asked your name, ordering food, or talking on the phone, Moe and I found extremely difficult.

However, I think the point that spoke to me most is that Moe has this confidence to embrace his stutter; to be open and forthcoming about it. He writes that when he would meet new people, he would often say, "I would like to introduce you to my stutter; he might pop up soon to say hi." He showed that a stutter is not

something to hold you back from accomplishing your goals. It is not something to be afraid of. It is just another piece of the puzzle, making up the larger picture of one's life. To me, the very idea of being forthcoming and open about stuttering was taboo. The very thought that I could introduce myself to someone and say I have a stutter was something I never dared to do until I read Moe's story.

My time in Israel came to a close, and I returned to New York to begin dating. Using Moe's openness technique, I started the dates off by introducing myself and my stutter. People were so taken aback that I was comfortable with my speech! They saw this as a plus in my personality.

Long story short, I got married to a wonderful girl, and we now have a child! I work as a Concierge in a nursing home, which forces me to meet and talk with people and their families every day. A job your typical stuttering person wouldn't be signing up for! I do not believe I would've had the confidence to pursue this job or get married if I hadn't read *The Gift of Stuttering*.

Got Hooked to the Teachings of Reb Noach Weinberg

Another thing that happened during my time in Israel is that I got hooked to the teachings of Reb Noach Weinberg. Since then, I have invested a lot into buying his books and other similar reading material to help deepen my connection to Judaism and hopefully some else's.

My sister joined Partners in Torah almost 2 years ago, and she says it has changed her life. We speak on the phone pretty often, and I offer books or reading material that may help her and her partner deepen their connection to Judaism. She has been telling me for the past year: "Yehuda, you've got to join Partners in Torah!" I kept pushing her off saying I do not think I am ready to take on such an undertaking.

Then, a few weeks ago, she sent me an email showing how the Shabbat Project and Partners in Torah were teaming up for a "get your feet wet 3-week learning experience." She said the material is given to you by Partners in Torah, and all you have to do is read off a paper 30 minutes a week for 3 weeks. I told her I would think about it.

After debating in my head for a few days, I hesitantly agreed, but only this one time! She was very excited and sent me a link to sign up. The form asked what the best time available to learn is; I filled out from 5-8 AM, not really thinking someone is available at those times because A: it would be too early, and B: people are on their way to work.

Looking Out for a Text or Email

After I submitted it, I was told it might take a few days until they find someone compatible. They said to be on the lookout for a text or an email to notify me if they found me a partner.

A few days later, I got a text saying they found me a partner and that I should check my email for more information. I logged onto my email nervously and saw they partnered me up to learn with someone from Israel at 5:00 AM on Tuesdays.

What was my partner's name? None other than... Mr. Moe Mernick. I did a double-take, and I reread the email slowly to make sure my eyes were working properly. I quickly called my sister to tell her they found me a partner, and his name is Moe Mernick.

She got very excited over the phone and asked, "Do you know who that is?!"

I said, "Unless there are two Moe Mernick's, the one I am thinking about is the one who wrote the book *The Gift of Stuttering*."

"Do You Know Who He Is?"

She replied, "I know, but do you know who that is?!" Now I know that I have a stutter, but I did not know she also has one! So I told her again,

"Yes, he is the author of the book that has influenced me in a great way!"

She said, "Not only that... Moe Mernick is also in charge of Partners in Torah!"

When Moe and I started on that first Tuesday at 5 am, just to be sure, I asked him if he is the one who wrote the book, and he responded yes! I then proceeded to tell him all that you have just read and said, "What are the odds that the algorithm set us up?!"

The three weeks of learning ended, and so did our official learning partnership. But I finally took the plunge and signed up to be a participant for Partners in Torah!

Looking back at the 3-week learning experience, I am still so awed at the amazing "coincidence" that I was paired up with Moe Mernick!

This why I truly believe our partnership is truly A Match Made in Heaven.

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5781 email of Partners in Torah. If you would like information on becoming a Partner, click Partners in Torah.

An Easy Path to Gan Eden

By Rabbi Reuven Semah

There is a famous joke:

Yoni (not his real name) was a good Jew. He would do all the misvot he could and occasionally find time for some learning. However, with every misvah, he would always look for the most lenient opinion, always happy to rely on the one Rabbi who said that it was ok to do less. But at least he had someone to rely on in every misvah, and he was happy with how he lived his life.

After 120 years, Yoni was summoned to the Heavenly Court. Yoni wasn't scared; he knew that he had kept all the misvot, even if every one of them had been according to whichever leniency he could find. So he waited for the verdict. "Gan Eden" was the call. Just as Yoni had expected!

So off he went with his accompanying angels towards Gan Eden. After a long journey, the angels finally showed him a wooden door with a little window and ushered him inside. Slightly surprised, Yoni peeked inside and saw a small room containing a bed and a desk and nothing else.

As the angels turned to leave he exclaimed, "I think there has been a mistake. Didn't you hear I was told that I can go to Gan Eden?" With a smile on their faces the angels responded, "This is Gan Eden according to the most lenient opinion!"

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayesheb 5781 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace (compiled by Rabbi David Bibi. Originally published in the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin email.

The Importance of Proper Behavior in the Shul



Someone once asked Rav Avigdor Miller, zt"l, "In the Shul that I daven (pray) in, people are always talking and making noise. Should I try to make some sort of quiet by making a scene about it, or should I just leave and find a quieter Shul?"

Rav Avigdor replied, “The best thing to do is to leave that place altogether, unless you are a very important personality there. Otherwise, you are not going to change them. It’s a great tragedy, this tragedy of talking in the Shuls. It’s a Bizayon, a disgrace, for HaKadosh Boruch Hu.

If a gentile, L’Havdil, would come into a Shul and see what type of place it is, he would lose all interest, and all respect. You have to realize that it’s a great cancer of our nation, Chas V’Shalom. It’s a terrible cancer. And if you cannot heal it — and you can’t go and get into a fight with them — then find a better place to daven, and at least rescue yourself!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeira 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilla as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

A Wedding Feast For Everyone

By Shloimy Weber
(shloimy.yweber@gmail.com)



When Rav Mattisyahu Salomon and family moved to Lakewood, they quickly developed a close friendship with their neighbors, the Epsteins. When one

of the Salomon girls got engaged, the Epsteins were thrilled and couldn't wait to dance at her wedding. Sadly, Rabbi Epstein passed away a few weeks after the engagement. The Epsteins were plunged into mourning, and knew that attending the wedding would be out of the question.

On the day of the wedding, the Epsteins came home to find a note that read, "To our dear friends, the Epsteins: Please do not prepare dinner this evening. Your dinner will be served to all of you shortly. We will miss you at the wedding, but we wanted you to share in our happiness, so the caterer will be at your home with the wedding meal shortly. May we share future simchas, the Salomons."

A truck soon arrived from the wedding hall, bringing the full meal, including dessert, for the whole family. Not only that, but the Salomons sent someone with fresh photos from the wedding, so the Epsteins could enjoy the wedding while they ate the wedding feast! Although the Epstein's weren't literally by the wedding, the Salomon's, who were obviously busy with a million different other things, did not leave them out.

Comment: Parsha Vayigash lists everybody who went down to Mitzrayim. The reason the Pasuk (Bereishis 46:6) did this is to teach us to never leave somebody else out, or forget about others. May we always remember this important rule, and always think about others, rather than only ourselves.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5781 email of Torah Sweets Weekly edited by Mendel Berlin.

A Russian Doll and an Unlikely Legacy of Kindness

By Sofya Tamarkin



A true story that we need to hear during these difficult times.

My grandmother, Zelda, was born in July, 1924 in a city called Samara on the Volga River in the former Soviet Union. There was so much despair, hunger and poverty after the World War I and the Communist Revolution of 1917. Her mother died when she was just three, during the birth of her younger sister. Her oldest sister, Rachel, was five at the time.

The three sisters were raised by their loving and forever exhausted

father, David, who worked around the clock to feed his three daughters.

There were not many real toys back then in the Soviet Union. Children made their own dolls out of old rags, carrying them around as if they were real babies.

Growing up, I loved hearing my grandmother tell me stories about her childhood. This story, which I will retell using my grandmother's voice, is one is my favorite:

One day, I drew a face on an old piece of cloth, stuffed it with grass and made a baby to play with. We had a neighbor, a girl my age named Olya from a Jewish family living nearby.

They were a real family with a mother and a father. When we were about 7 or 8, this girl's parents bought her a real doll. It had arms and legs and even hair. It was made out of plastic and had beautiful eyes.



Olya always carried it with her, making sure that everyone knew that she had a real doll. She kept on walking by our house showing off her doll. I pretended not to pay attention, as if I didn't care. Of course I cared, but I didn't want her to know how much I wished I had a real family and a real doll to play with.

She must have been very annoyed that I was ignoring her, so she ran up to me and in a teasing voice said, pointing at my rag doll, "Your doll is not real!"

I wasn't going to take her insults. "And yours isn't real either... it's not a real baby. It's plastic!"

She became very mad and pulled my handmade doll out of my hands. It ripped open and the grass fell to the ground. She kept screaming, "It's not real, it's not real!"

Well, I knew how to stand up for myself. I didn't have a mother to save me, my father was always busy, so I had to fend for myself. I grabbed her toy out of her hands, yelling, "This is fake!" and yanked the hands off the doll. A real calamity for an 8-year-old girl.

Her Parents Came to Talk to My Father

Her parents came over to talk to my father about the "incident" that evening. I was embarrassed for my defiance.

They were very angry and demanded that Papa pays for the damage that I caused. This doll was expensive. Then they saw the exhaustion on Papa's face and his reluctance to argue. He was raising three daughters alone, without a wife to lean on.

I think they realized that Papa had no energy to fight with them and told him not to worry about it. A few days later they returned with a little toy for me. These were kind and empathic people who understood our family's despair.

Years later I ended up in the same medical school class as that girl,

Olya, during the World War II. We were both embarrassed about what had happened and laughed about it.

Olya and I had fought side by side to save the lives of wounded soldiers during the war. We had to heal real legs and arms on real soldiers, not the plastic ones.

Olya's generous and kind parents taught me that there is no point in being bitter.



This past May, my grandmother passed away at the age of 95. I thought about her and the unforgettable kindness of Olya's parents when I recently stopped by a Goodwill store in Philadelphia. As I

entered, I noticed a doll calling me with her plastic eyes. I felt as if my grandmother was speaking to me from the other side.

Picked Up the Toy And Saw the Label

I picked up the toy and saw that the label was still attached, and the writing was in a familiar Russian language.

Unbelievably, this doll was made in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. It looked exactly like Olya's doll all those decades ago.

I couldn't believe the "coincidence" and understood the message. Now is the time when we need to be particularly sensitive and empathetic towards the people around us. These are difficult times and kindness is particularly important for everyone.

Kindness is truly eternal. My grandmother, Olya and her parents are all gone, yet the legacy of their generosity stayed behind for many decades. So many decades later we are still inspired by the story.

So go ahead, change the world through one act of kindness at a time.

Reprinted from the December 26, 2020 website of Aish.com Mrs. Tamarkin is a speaker and is available for speaking engagements via Zoom and can be contacted by her email howdoigrow@hotmail.com

The Legacy of Rebbe Preida

The Gemara in Eiruvim (54b) tells the incredible episode concerning Rebbe Preida, who had a student who was educationally challenged. Rebbe Preida would have to repeat each lesson four hundred times before the student would grasp it.

One day, Rebbe Preida had to leave and attend to a certain matter involving a Mitzvah, but prior to leaving, he taught his student the usual four hundred times. However, for some reason, the student still did not grasp the lesson.

Rebbe Preida asked him why today was different when they learned the topic the same amount of times as they usually did? The student answered, “From the very moment that the Rebbe was notified that he must attend to a Mitzvah, my attention was diverted. I was concerned that at any moment, the Rebbe will leave me, and I could not concentrate well.”

He Teaches the Student for Another Four Hundred Times

Rebbe Preida then said to him, “Pay attention, and I will teach you.” He then taught him the lesson another four hundred times. At that moment, a Heavenly voice was heard, and it asked Rebbe Preida, “As a reward for your patience, do you prefer that four hundred years be added to your life, or that you and your generation merit life in Olam Haba?”

Rebbe Preida replied, “I ask that I and my generation merit the life of Olam Haba.”

Hashem said, “Give him both rewards!”

Teaching Torah – A Labor of Love

Rav A. Leib Scheinbaum writes that this is a truly powerful story about an incredible Rebbe who would give up so much of his time to teach one student. This is how important Torah was to him. He toiled and labored a labor of love, so that his student would achieve proficiency in his Torah lessons!

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a, learns an important lesson from here, that in order to achieve success in Torah, one must exhibit patience. Not every Sugya is simple. At times, one must work with great intensity over the lessons of Chazal, and this requires patience and perseverance.

Rebbe Preida accepted upon himself to teach this student, because it helped him develop his own Middah of Savlanus, patience. From teaching this student, he would himself become a better student, and develop greater patience in dealing with his own learning.

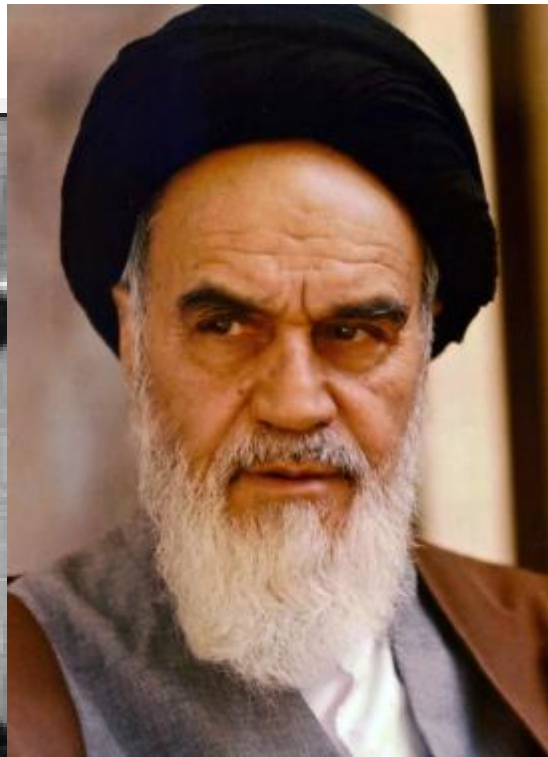
One more lesson we can learn from this is that Rebbe Prieda did not lose out because of the extra time he invested. In fact, he gained by receiving both rewards. Hashem calculates the amount of work that a person expends for Torah study, and rewards him accordingly!

Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

Story #1211

Special Favor from the Most Unexpected Source

From the desk of Yeracchmiel Tilles



Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg/The Ayatollah Khomeini

This amazing story took place many years ago in Iran. It was related by a witness, Rabbi Yehuda Ezrachian, one of the Rabbanim in Iran at the time. HaRav

Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg (now deceased), a beloved student of HaRabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, later in life became the chief rabbi of Mexico. He was an erudite scholar, and he was also a man of action with expansive ties to heads of state and prominent personalities.

The Persian Islamic Revolution Broke Out in 1979

The year was 1979, when the Islamic revolution broke out after the Persian Shah (ruler) was deposed and replaced by the notorious Ayatollah Khomeini, a rabid hater of Israel. Until that year, ties between Iran and the West were cordial. After the revolution, however, all those ties were cut off immediately.

There was an American consulate in Teheran at the time. When the revolution broke out, demonstrators sent by the new government, which hated the West - especially America – stormed the American consulate and took everyone inside hostage. They then presented a list of demands to the American government as a condition for their release.

Exhausting negotiations dragged on for a year and a half between representatives of the American government and of the Iranian regime. In the meantime, more than fifty captives were living in the consulate compound, among them Jews, under deplorable conditions. As the negotiation continued, with no end in sight, the captives were suffering.

A Delegation of Four Neutral Clergymen

During that time, the Americans managed to arrange for a delegation of four neutral clergymen to enter Iran, and to visit the captives in the consulate to provide them with some encouragement. Three prominent priests were chosen for the mission, along with Rabbi Hirschberg, for the Jewish captives.

It was Chanukah when Rabbi Hirschberg arrived at the consulate. He lit the Chanukah candles with the captives, offered them effusive encouragement. He spoke to them about the story of Chanukah - how a handful of Jews prevailed over masses of non-Jews in battle. His message infused them with hope and inner strength; some even grew closer to their heritage as a result. As Rabbi Hirschberg's visit drew to a close and he was preparing to return home with the rest of the delegation, they were surprised to discover that they were not being allowed to leave just yet.

The evil Khomeini, seeking to humiliate the Americans and promote himself, demanded their public attendance at a mass Muslim event that was scheduled to take place in Teheran's central square. Millions were expected to be in attendance. The center point of the ceremony was a high dais on which senior regime officials – including Khomeini - were seated. Alongside them were the four American representatives, Rabbi Hirschberg among them.

More than a Million Muslim Men in the Square

Many more than a million Muslim men filled the square and the surrounding streets. The prayers began, in Persian. When the signal to bow was given, the religious figures on the stage all knelt on their knees and bowed – including the Christian priests. After them, the millions of Muslim men all bowed too, and also prostrated themselves, as is their custom.

Of all the millions, one man remained standing tall – Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg, similar to Chananya, Mishael and Azariah in their time,¹ He did not move, standing out among the masses. The Ayatollah Khomeini sensed something, and flew into a rage. He immediately summoned Rabbi Hirschberg to him, and through a translator, asked him why he had not bowed, while his three American friends, the Christian priests, had?

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai – despite being overcome with fear and sure he was going to be sent to his death– did not display any of his inner angst. He turned to the translator and politely asked him to explain to the ruler that our Torah states that one must not bow in idol worship, and because he did not understand Persian, he did not know to whom everyone was bowing. As such, he was forbidden from joining them. It is possible that the priests who did bow were familiar with the Persian language and knew to whom they were bowing. But because he did not know, he was compelled to remain standing.

The Rabbi's Response Took the Evil Ruler by Surprise

His innocent words of truth took the evil ruler by surprise, and also found favor in his eyes. Instead of killing Rabbi Hirschberg or otherwise punishing him, he instructed the interpreter to tell the rabbi that he liked his answer. He was impressed by the fact that he was not a flatterer like the three priests in the delegation were. This was a truly remarkable turn of events. Khomeini was known for his burning hatred of Jews, and yet, he respected and admired the Jewish rabbi for adhering to his religion.

When Reb Avraham Mordechai understood from the translator how much of an impression his words had made on the Ayatollah, he decided to utilize the opportunity to try to help his Jewish brethren in Iran. He asked to set up a meeting to discuss their plight with him. The Ayatollah agreed and told him when to come. At the appointed hour, Reb Avraham Mordechai arrived at the Ayatollah's residence.

When the audience began, the Rabbi said with tears in his eyes: "I want to plead for my Jewish brethren who live here. I have learned that the remaining Jewish residents are suffering terribly at the hand of their neighbors and enemies.

Perhaps the ruler in his compassion can save them and help prevent this persecution.”

The Defense Strategy of the Humble Rabbi

The Ayatollah first tried to argue that the Jews were collaborating with his enemies. But Rabbi Hirschberg, with his humble nature, was able to influence him by calmly proving that the Jews had no hatred for the ruler and the revolution at all. On the contrary, they hoped and yearned for the new government to protect them from their harassers.

Surprisingly, the ruler agreed to the request, whereupon Rabbi Avraham Mordechai seized the moment to make one more petition, relating to something he had become aware of during his conversations with members of the community. When the revolution broke out, a curfew was imposed throughout Iran, each night, until the early morning hours. This was very difficult for many Jews, who were used to going to pray in their shuls (synagogues) at dawn so they could then go to work.

Now, due to the curfew, they could not fulfill their religious practices. Once more he received help from Heaven. The Ayatollah agreed to this request as well. He promised he would issue an order to the Iranian police commander that from that day on, if they saw a person during the curfew in the early dawn hours carrying a tallit and tefillin case, they should accept that as a sign that he is not an enemy of the revolution, but rather a Jew performing his religious duty and rising early to pray in synagogue.

The Remarkable Accomplishment Made Waves

This remarkable accomplishment made waves, and generated tremendous encouragement throughout the community, as everyone was able to see how a Jew who fulfills the commandments of his religion proudly and is not afraid of scoffers or those who threaten him ultimately merited to find such special favor in the most unexpected place.

Source: Adapted and expanded by Yerachmiel Tilles from the version on [//bneyemunim.co.il](http://bneyemunim.co.il), where Mipikudecha Asichah, Vol. II p. 21, is cited as the source.

Reprinted from the Parshat Tetzaveh 5781 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascentof safed.

The Chesed in the Naming of a Daughter



The two oldest children of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt”l, received names from Rav Elyashiv’s side of the family. The oldest son Shlomo was named after Rav Elyashiv’s grandfather, the Leshem, and their second child, Batsheva Esther, was named after Rav Elyashiv’s grandmother, the Leshem’s wife.

One of the Elyashiv’s neighbors on Rechov Chanan, an elderly widow named Sarah Rochel Goldman, never had children, R”L. One day, Mrs. Goldman dejectedly said to Rebbetzin Elyashiv, “Shayna Chaya, when I pass on from this world, what will I leave behind? I will never have anyone named after me, as I have no children. There will be no remembrance of me at all.”

Rebbetzin Shayna Chaya was under 30 years old and expecting her third child at that time. Her empathy for her elderly neighbor was so deep that she went home crying. She and Rav Elyashiv decided that if this child was a daughter, they would name her Sarah Rochel. Although according to the Ashkenazi custom, a baby is not named after a living person, Rav Elyashiv felt that in this particular

case, the Chesed of raising the spirits of the lonely widow took precedence over the custom.

The Older Woman's Life is Invigorated

A short while later the baby was born, and it was a girl. Mrs. Goldman was elated to learn that the Elyashivs had named their newborn daughter in her honor. The baby brought new life to the older woman. Before every Yom Tov, she would visit and bring candy for her young namesake, along with apologies that she was unable to afford more expensive gifts.

One day, when Sarah Rochel Elyashiv was about 10 years old, she and her sister Batsheva met Mrs. Goldman, who was already past 80 years old. Mrs. Goldman asked the two girls to stand next to each other, and she observed that Sarah Rochel was slightly taller than her sister, who was a year and a half older.

The old lady jokingly said, "I assume that Sarah Rochel is taller because she has one virtue that Batsheva doesn't have. She was named after me!"

Mrs. Goldman passed away about two years later, right before the Bas Mitzvah of Sarah Rochel.

A Question to Her Father

Rebetzin Sarah Rachel (Elyashiv) Yisraelson once asked her father if he had any reservations about naming Sarah Rochel after Mrs. Goldman. After all, the woman was still alive when she was named in her honor, and Mrs. Goldman did have a very difficult life, and she was not Bentched with children.

Rav Elyashiv told his daughter, "If one does Chesed, no harm will befall them!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Lesson of the Lost Microchip

There was an amazing story told by powerofspeech.org about an eleven-year-old boy from Bet Shemesh who controlled his *yetzer hara*. One winter, his family went on a trip to Mount Hermon to see the snow, and he brought his pride and joy, his expensive digital camera.

The boy, Baruch, had such a passion for photography; he took 567 pictures on the mountain, and he was eager to upload them onto his computer. His little

brothers were so excited to see the pictures, and they tried to look at the camera, but Baruch was emphatic that no one could touch it, and they had to wait for him to upload the pictures.

On the drive back home, Baruch fell asleep, and his precocious brother turned on the camera, and accidentally deleted all the pictures! Baruch woke up to his siblings panicking in the car, frantically trying to figure out how to get them back.



Baruch said, “It’s okay, I’ll be able to access the pictures from the memory card.” Unbeknownst to him, another one of his mischievous, but well-meaning, brothers had somehow gotten ahold of the camera back at Mount Hermon, opened it up, and left the mysterious little memory chip on the snowy parking lot at the bottom of the mountain.

To say that Baruch was angry when he found the memory card missing would be an incredible understatement. His anger towered over Mount Hermon, making it seem like an anthill.

Before he had a chance to react, his older sister Rivkah asked her father to pull over so she could talk to Baruch. Rivkah was kind, smart, and a role model to all her siblings. She was 27 years old and still waiting for her *naseeb*. Baruch’s father pulled over, and Rivkah took Baruch for a little walk on the side of the highway.

“Baruch,” she said, “I know you must be so frustrated and angry right now. But I once heard that if a person controls his anger, his *yetzer hara*, even if he’s 100% right, at that moment, he can ask Hashem for anything, and Hashem will look on him favorably.”

Instantly Calmed Down...And Made a Silent Wish

Baruch took a deep breath and thought of something he wanted. Instantly, he calmed down, and silently wished that in the *zechut* of controlling his anger, his sister should find her match. He got back in the car the picture of calm, while everyone looked at Rivkah and Baruch in amazement and appreciation.

Two weeks later, Baruch's father received a call from an acquaintance, "Did you lose a memory card on Mount Hermon? An American *yeshivah* student, Eliezer, found it and started showing the pictures to a few people to see if he could track down the owner to return it, and I spotted your family."

A few days later, Baruch and his father got into their car to drive to Jerusalem to get the memory card from this young man. Eliezer turned out to be just the perfect kind of boy for the wonderful Rivkah, and apparently Hashem agreed. Shortly after, Eliezer and Rivkah got married. The very memory chip that led Eliezer to Rivkah was a message for all of *B'nei Yisrael*. When we control our anger and our *yetzer hara*, even when we're right, miracles will happen,

May we all realize that while the sacrifices we make for Hashem and our Torah can sometimes be very difficult, Hashem hand-picked these tests and difficulties for us to triumph over and grow stronger in our devotion to Him. We must know that these tests are ultimately for our benefit!

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5781 email of Rabbi Amram Sananes as written by Jack Rahmey

Trying to Reach the Right Person for the Entry Permits

Who does not need money before the Chag? The more a person sets aside for his expenses, the more his expenses become, especially if he needs clothes and shoes and extra food for the holiday. I [recently] met a friend who told me he was trying to get a couple into the country for their son's wedding, but it is very difficult. Entry is barred to a nonresident.

He told me that this was so important to them, they were willing to give a large sum of money to whoever could get them in. The amount offered could make Pesach for five families.

First, I davened to Hashem that if this was for me, He should help me find a way and I not try for nothing. Then I called people I knew to find out how to get

the couple into the country. After a day-and-a-half of calls, I knew what had to be done, but I could not connect with the right person.

Again, I davened to Hashem to help me. About five minutes later, I met a friend who whenever we meet, we share divrei Torah on the parsha, and I remembered that he is connected and I asked for his help. He connected me with someone who connected me with someone else and the ball started rolling.

Frustrated by the Challenges

I had to connect with a certain person. This took another two days. I was frustrated by the challenges and not seeing results and on the other hand, I needed the money. I went to daven Mincha and stayed after to learn. I davened to the Creator and asked, if I am to get the money then let it come already and if not, then please help me prepare for Yom Tov without much effort.

From there I went to wash the car and I began to talk to another customer there. His name was the same as the one who was supposed to help me. I asked him if he knew him, and he told me they are cousins. When he heard the issue, he told me his cousin was not the person to speak to and he gave me the name of someone who can take care of it in one moment.

I was amazed at the hashgacha, as I never thought I would make a connection at a carwash. He called the man and asked him to help me. He approved the permits and everyone was jubilant. He asked for nothing in return and would not take anything offered. He just wanted to help another Jew.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5781 email of Tiv Hakehila.

The Rebbe's Advice To the Parents of an Off-the-Path Son

By Daniel Keren

The following story was heard recently on Shabbos Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5781 at the Bris Avrohom Shul in Hillside, New Jersey by the rav – Rabbi Mordechi Kanelsky. He noted

the importance in that week's Torah reading of observing and celebrating Shabbos properly.

He recalled a story that happened perhaps 40 years ago. One of the greatest heartbreaks for parents of a child raised in a frum (religious) home is when one of the children rebels and goes off the derech (off the path of leading a life based on our holy and traditional Torah values.)



Nothing the mother or father could say or do had any influence on the teenage boy. In quick succession, he took off his kipa from his head, dropped out of yeshiva, started dressing in the latest fashions of the secular world, began eating traif (non-kosher food,) stopped observing Shabbos and to emphasize his rejection of his parent's "out-dated" values moved out of their home in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and moved to an apartment with other defiant youth in Manhattan.

The Completely Devastated Parents

Completely devastated the parents wrote in to the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, zt"l) for any advice and hope on reaching out successfully to their rebellious son.



The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l

The quick response from their world renowned Jewish spiritual leader left them shaking their heads. Instead of proposing a scheme to attract their son's attention or a spiritual plan of reciting particular Tehillim (chapters of Psalms) or some similar scheme; the Rebbe simple wrote back that they should improve the quality of their Shabbos Sedah.

Not knowing what this could do to bring back their son, they nevertheless as devoted chassidim of the Lubavitcher Rebbe decided to act upon his strange advice.

The Mother's Question to Each Child

That week a couple of days before Shabbos, the mother went to each of the children and asked them if they had a particular favorite dish that they might like to eat for the Shabbos meal, the perplexed children gave seemingly outlandish suggestions. One child asked for roasted duck. Another child was more simple and wanted spaghetti and meatballs. Yet another child wanted a fancy desert – lemon moraine pie.

And that Shabbos, the children were shocked to their cores when their mother brought out to each child the special dish that had been requested.

A Two-Hour Nap to Be Rested for Shabbos

Not only that, but the father who was accustomed to rushing home an hour before candlelight and getting into his special Shabbos kapota (Chassidic suit) and going to the mikva before arriving in shul with just minutes to spare, came home a few hours earlier that Shabbos. He took a two-hour nap so that he could be rested for the Shabbos meal.

So instead of falling asleep at the meal, the father was wide awake. The children were further surprised when their father who had usually rushed the meal, asked each child if they had a particular song or nigun that they would like to have sung. The mother asked each child if they had a particular dvar Torah or Torah insight they would like to share with the family.

Again the Children were Flabbergasted

The next week, the children were absolutely flabbergasted when the mother again approached them individually to inquire what special dish they would like her to prepare.

And this continued for the next few weeks. What had previously been a rote 30-minute excuse of a Shabbos meal

turned into a delightful two-hour celebration that everyone in the family enjoyed and looked forward to.

About a month after this transformation of the Shabbos seudah (meal), the rebellious son called home to talk to one of his siblings. He was told about what happened and how the mother really cared about what each child wanted to eat and how the father wanted to sing the children's favorite Shabbos songs and hear their Divrei Torah. Shabbos had become a fantastic experience.

The off-the-derech son was shocked and thought to himself that he had to see this for himself. It happened to be Friday afternoon shortly before candle lighting when he had made his phone call.

Travels on the Subway on Shabbos

He immediately hopped onto a subway train without a kipa and dressed like a non-religious teenager travelled on the Shabbos. When he knocked on his family's door, his mother and father cheerfully invited him in. His mother apologized for not having asked him before Shabbos for his favorite dish. She asked him what he would like her to prepare for the next Shabbos. After that meal, he left and took the subway back to his Manhattan apartment.

That Shabbos experienced not only had transformed the parents and the siblings, but it also began to affect the neshama of the rebellious son. After a few weeks, he started coming in time before Shabbos and again began wearing a kipa and the clothing of a frum Jew and stopped eating traif. Shortly thereafter, he moved back into the family home and resumed learning in Yeshiva. Such is the power of a beautiful Shabbos meal.

Trust Hashem

By Rabbi David Ashear

I heard a story which took place about 25 years ago in Israel. A young man was already engaged to be married and the *chatan's* grandmother who was very wealthy told him that she wanted to purchase the engagement ring. She bought something magnificent for 50,000 shekel and told her grandson to tell the bride that it was a special gift from her.



The *chatan* himself was learning in yeshiva and planned to live a *kollel* lifestyle, but he didn't want to be disrespectful to his grandmother so he accepted the extravagant gift. He gave it to his *kallah* a few days before the wedding. She was awestruck at the size of the diamond.

The ring itself was a little loose on her finger and she told her husband about it. He told his parents and they said to him, "Grandma spent a lot of money on this, just tell her to say thank you and keep it the way it is."

So she put it on her finger and planned to eventually adjust the size. During the *sheva berachot*, a friend of the bride's asked to see the ring and when she stuck out her hand, she noticed the ring was gone. When the family of the *chatan* found out that she lost the ring, they began heaping shame upon her. They called her names, asking how she could be so careless, and she was totally humiliated from that episode. This took place in the beginning of the month of Sivan when they got married.

The Lost Engagement Ring is Found Again

About four months later, at the end of Elul, the *chatan* put on a suit of his that he wore during *sheva berachot*. He was showing his wife that he gained weight and the jacket no longer fit him so well, but as he was putting his hands on the jacket, he felt something in the pocket. He stuck his hand in the pocket and he pulled out his wife's engagement ring.

Turned out, she never lost it. He had it with him the whole time and it was he who didn't realize it. He told her how sorry he was that she had to go through all the embarrassment she suffered. He immediately called his family members to tell them about it. They all apologized profusely to her, but the damage was done. It was hard for her to forgive and for the next 15 years, she said she had negative feelings towards her husband for indirectly causing her all that embarrassment.

She kept it hidden inside and tried not to show it. Then, 15 years later, they had seven children, were happily married on the outside, but deep down she still had a grudge. The man's grandmother passed away and his wife told him she no longer wanted the ring which caused her so much anguish. She asked if she could sell it and get a new one. "Sure," her husband replied, "if that's what will make you happy, it's fine with me."

Going to the Grandma's Jewelry Store

They all knew about the jewelry store that grandma used to frequent, so she went there and asked the jeweler how much he would give her for that ring. He studied it and said it's worth 53,000 shekel. She then told him that it was he who originally sold that ring to her husband's grandmother. He looked at the ring again and said, "Nope, this ring's not from me. I have a way to tell my merchandise and I know for a fact I did not sell this ring to her."

The woman was determined to prove him wrong. She went back to her house to look for the certificate of sale so she could show it to him. She turned over the house until she finally found it. And she saw, just like her husband said, it was a 50,000 shekel ring. But then, as she studied it closer, she saw something on that certificate which made her begin to cry. She called her husband and said, "Yossi, when are you coming home?"

“What’s wrong?” he asked. She said she needed to speak to him face to face, it was very important. Right away, he left his office and came home. When he arrived he said, “What is it?”

She told him, “I can’t believe it. For 15 years you hid this from me.”

“What?” he asked.

“The ring. This ring was not purchased by your grandmother. It was purchased by you.”

Revealing Her Discovery of the Certificate

“What are you talking about?” he replied. She showed him the certificate. It said the ring was 50,000 shekel. But it also had a date of purchase on the bottom. It said 14 Elul. They got married three and a half months prior to that when she received the first ring. She told him, “You felt so bad for me you must have borrowed money and spent years trying to pay it back to get me a new ring.

“And you made believe that you had it in your jacket the whole time because you wanted to save me from the shame from your family. And you never told me about it. All these years I thought you were the cause of my shame but you are an angel. I’m so sorry for holding a grudge against you.”

There are people walking around, *lo alenu*, with a grudge against Hashem. They may feel that Hashem hurt them or humiliated them or held back goodness from them and they can’t look past it. They have become less enthusiastic to follow Torah and mitzvot as a result.

One day, we’re all going to see what we thought was Hashem hurting us was in actuality Hashem turning over the world to help us in the best way possible. He does everything for our benefit. We’re then going to say, “I can’t believe it, I totally misjudged Hashem.”

But now, before Hashem reveals this to us, we have a chance to show our emunah and say to him, “I trust You. I know what You are doing is exactly what I need and I know you are doing it to help me. I’m going to love you no matter what and continue serving You to the best of my ability.”

If we can do that, then when Hashem finally reveals His plans to us, we’ll be in a state of jubilation, reaping the rewards for believing in Him the entire time.

Reprinted from the April 14, 2021 email of Living Emunah.

The Unique Zechus Of the Ridvaz



The Ridvaz was the Rav of Slutzk, and was one of the greatest leaders of his generation. One day he became critically ill, and it became clear that his life was hanging in the balance. His Neshamah was brought before the Bais Din Shel Ma'alah, the Heavenly Court, where he was informed that it had been decreed that he pass away before his time, and he was asked to state whether he had any significant Zechisim, merits, that might alter the decree.

The Ridvaz asked the Bais Din if serving as the Rav of Slutzk, one of the largest Jewish communities of the time, was a great enough merit. The Heavenly Court considered this, and concluded that it was not sufficient. Someone else could be the Rav of Slutzk.

The Ridvaz then mentioned that he was in the middle of writing his acclaimed commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi. If he passed away now, it would not be completed. The Bais Din considered this claim, and then rejected it. There were already a number of other fine commentaries on the Yerushalmi.

In a final attempt to save his life, the Ridvaz argued that every Erev Shabbos, after Chatzos, he had the practice to stop all his weekday activities, and simply sit and eagerly await the arrival of Shabbos. Surely, the sincere longing that he had shown for Shabbos was a great source of merit, he thought. After deliberation, the Heavenly Court accepted this argument, and in this Zechus, the Ridvaz was granted another 30 years of life!

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Son's Friend



A man once went to see the Admor of Belz, Rav Aharon Rokei'ach, zt"l, and he told the Rebbe about his son, who until that point had done so well in his learning and Avodas Hashem, but recently his son had changed for the worse, and it was greatly distressing him. He asked Rav Rokei'ach what he could do to help his son.

The Rav answered, "Go see who his friends are."

The man did as the Rebbe instructed, and went to speak with his son's Rosh Yeshivah, and asked him who his son's friends are. The Rosh Yeshivah, however, responded that the boys his son was together with were all exceptional students, who took their learning very seriously.

The man went back to Rav Rokei'ach and told him this, but the Rebbe again instructed him to investigate his son's friends. When the man told him that he had done this already, the Rebbe simply repeated himself, and told him to investigate the friends.

The man understood that this was not such a simple matter, and he undertook to investigate his son's friends a little better. After spending some time on it, he realized that the friend that his son was closest with looked like a righteous individual on the outside, but on the inside, he was a very troubled person with a lot of conflict and had damaging qualities.

After some more work, the man was able to have his son separate from this boy, and he was happy to see his son return to the way he was before, growing in learning Torah and serving Hashem.

The man went back to Rav Rokei'ach to inform him of the good news, and the Rebbe said to him, "After Birchas HaShachar, in Davening, we ask Hashem to help us establish our ways in Torah, and, among other things, to distance us from a Chaveir Ra, a bad friend. Then, immediately in the next paragraph, we repeat this request and ask Hashem to save us today and every day from a Chaveir Ra, a bad friend. What is the reason for saying this twice? The answer is that when it comes to dealing with friends that are a bad influence, asking only one time is not enough. We have to ask Hashem for help twice to save us!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Memory of a Young Yerushalmi Masmid

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, had unparalleled Hasmadah, diligence in learning Torah. Once, an older tourist traveled to Yerushalayim from abroad, but he was in fact originally from the holy city of Yerushalayim, and had returned for a trip to his childhood home in Mei'ah She'arim. For hours, the gentleman wandered the familiar streets and alleyways of his youth with his family, reminiscing, "This was the shop of so and so, here is the Shuk, there are the Shteiblach, everything in Mei'ah She'arim is the same as it was when I left forty-six years ago! Only the people have changed. Generations have come and gone!"

The man continued walking with his children and grandchildren, proudly taking it all in. At one point, he stopped and pointed. "I remember this place. This is the Ohel Sarah Bais Medrash. It looks exactly the same as I remember it from my childhood."

The man walked inside. "You know, many years ago, when I was a kid, there was a young man, a really special person, who sat in this Bais Medrash here and learned with an incredibly sweet tune. We children used to love listening to the sound of his learning. If only there would be such Masmidim nowadays! I wonder where that young man is today. I wonder where he lives and what he is doing now."

The tourist entered the Bais Medrash and saw an elderly man with a white beard, learning out loud with a pleasant tune. He walked over and said, “Excuse me, Reb Yid, I’m trying to remember, over forty years ago there was a young man who sat here and learned in exactly the same spot you’re sitting in. He was really special, always sitting and learning. Nothing disturbed him. Perhaps you remember him? I’m very curious to find out where he is today.”



The old man raised his hand dismissively and continued learning. The tourist stood on the side, listening to him learn as old memories washed over him. Suddenly, the truth dawned on him, that he was speaking to the same person who he had seen learning there so long ago, and that he was now in fact the Gadol HaDor, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv!

He said, “I don’t believe it! It’s him! It’s the same tune! It’s the same learning!” He couldn’t contain his amazement, and when he got back outside, he exclaimed, “Nothing has changed at all in Mei’ah She’arim in the past forty-six years! Even the Masmid who sits and learns in Ohel Sarah is the same one, exactly as he did back then!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Amazing Value Of a Loaf of Bread

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser



The Torah (*Devarim* 21) tells us that when a corpse is found between two cities, the elders of the nearest city must declare their innocence vis-à-vis his death. The Talmud (*Sotah* 45b) elaborates that they affirm that they didn't send him from their city without food and drink.

R' Yisroel Salanter, founder of the *mussar* movement, asks: What connection is there between their assertion and the person's murder? Would escorting him and giving him provisions have prevented his murder?

R' Yisroel Salanter answers that self-confidence and hope empower an individual and make him feel worthwhile. Without it, a person despairs and becomes resigned to his fate. He becomes dispirited and disconsolate, feels alone, and loses his impulse for self-preservation such that death seems a worthwhile option.

On the other hand, when a person escorts a stranger and gives him provisions, he demonstrates to him that someone cares about him. The individual is

then invigorated to defend himself if he is accosted, and his potential murderer might back off as a result.

Three Gifts of the Great Chassidic Master

The great chassidic master R' Moshe Leib of Sassov was a disciple of R' Shmelke of Nikolsburg for seven years. When R' Moshe Leib departed, R' Shmelke gave him provisions for the way, which included a loaf of bread, a gold coin, and a white coat.

On the road, R' Moshe Leib heard loud bitter crying and set out to discover its source. He soon discovered a Jew who had been incarcerated by the local *poritz* (feudal landowner) because he didn't have money to pay his rent. To boost his spirits, R' Moshe Leib gave handed him his loaf of bread through the barred window of the prison. He then braced himself and headed to the *poritz* to try to secure the Jew's release.

The irate *poritz* protested that the Jew owed him a few hundred zlotys. R' Moshe Leib offered the valuable gold coin in his possession to cover some of the rent. But the *poritz* refused to accept it and had R' Moshe Leib removed from his presence. The Sassover, renowned for his *ahavas Yisroel*, was set to continue his journey but found it difficult to abandon his brother, so he returned to the *poritz* to plead on behalf of the Jew.

Enraged to See Moshe Leib Again

Enraged to see him again, the *poritz* ordered that R' Moshe Leib be thrown to the dogs. As he was being led to his execution, R' Leib recalled the white coat R' Shmelke had given him and put it on. As soon as he did, the dogs, which had been rushing towards him, retreated and returned to their kennels.

When the *poritz* witnessed this scene, he realized that R' Moshe Leib was a holy man, became overcome with fright, and quickly ordered the release of the poor Jew from prison.

How potent is *tzeidah l'derech*, reviving an individual in many different ways.

Reprinted from the April 29, 2021 edition of The Jewish Press.

Story #1221

A Son for a Son

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles
editor@ascentofsafed.com



Yerachmiel Tilles

[Editor's note: This story is based on Story #596 in this series from 12 years ago, but the writing has been extensively revised and, more importantly, much detail has been added (see Source note at end) names instead of pseudonyms, etc.]

In the early 2000's, Gadi Rimon, an Israeli Defense Force soldier stationed outside of Ramallah, was shot by an Arab terrorist. It happened very early in the morning, and no one else was awake to hear it. Gadi passed out and was bleeding steadily, his life heading toward a silent end.

Another Soldier Did Hear the Shot

However, another soldier, Shlomo Bergman, who was stationed nearby, heard the shot and went to investigate. He found a fellow Israeli soldier bleeding to death. He tried the best he could to stop the bleeding and called for help. While waiting, he kept applying pressure to the wound--literally holding Gadi's life in his hands.

Gadi was taken to the nearest Israeli hospital where he underwent emergency surgery. Gadi's parents were notified and they rushed to the hospital. Imagine the fear of the parents who were only told, "Your son has been injured and is in the hospital undergoing surgery."

The Doctor Talks to the Parents

When they arrived the doctor, Rafi Beket, told them that Gadi was shot and had needed many units of blood, but will recover and be alright. However, had it not been for the immediate actions of the other soldier, their son would have bled to death.

It was a miracle that the other soldier heard what no one else heard, and managed to locate Gadi as quickly as he did. The parents wanted to thank that soldier, but he had just left the hospital after hearing that the soldier he helped would survive.

Unable to Discover the Son's Savior

While recuperating at home, Gadi and his parents called the army to find out the name of the other soldier so they could thank him personally. Unfortunately, that soldier's name was not recorded and although they tried other paths of enquiry, they were unable to track down who that other soldier was.

Gadi's mother, Tamar Rimon, knew that the important thing of course is that Gadi is well, yet she could not help feeling that as long as she couldn't meet and thank the soldier who bravely saved her son's life--the entire frightening episode would not be fully over. Not being able to express gratitude to the soldier continued to give her an empty feeling.

But then she had an idea.

A Grocery Store in Ashdod

The couple owned a grocery store in Ashdod, so they decided to put up a sign in the store, describing what happened, figuring that Israel is a small country and eventually they might find out who the mystery soldier was.

Nearly a year passed with no response. Finally, one morning about a year later, a woman customer from out of town noticed, upon exiting, the sign hanging by the door of the store. Anat Bergman recalled how happy her son Shlomo was when he came home one Friday night and told them how he heard a shot and was able to save another soldier's life. She went back and told her son's story to Tamar Rimon, who was behind the counter that morning. The two stories matched and the two women fell into each other's arms.

After a few emotional minutes, they decided to try to reach their sons on cell phones and see if they could meet at the store. Fortunately it turned out that both the young men and even the fathers were able to all meet there that afternoon.

The families gathered for an emotional rendezvous. The soldiers recounted army experiences and finally after all this time Tamar Rimon could stand up and thank Shlomo Bergman for saving her son Gadi's life. Or, as she put it, "You

saved my world". She looked forward to feeling completion after all this time by thanking the soldier. Little did she know that the story was hardly complete.

A Private Talk Amongst Women

After the tearful thank you, Anat privately asked Tamar to speak with her outside. The two women went out alone, whereupon Shlomo's mother startled Gadi's mother by asking her, "Look at me – don't you remember me?"

"No, I'm sorry. Did we meet before? When? Where?"

"Yes, we did," Anat replied. "You see there is a particular reason I came into your store today. I used to live here, and this time although I was just passing by, I wanted to give you my business, even though I was only buying a few things. I just can't believe you are the mother of the boy whose life my son saved."

"What are you talking about?" Gadi's mother exclaimed.

The other woman answered, "Twenty-two years ago I used to live around here and came all the time to buy milk and bread. One day you noticed that I looked really down and you were very nice and asked me why I seemed so down and I confided in you. I said that I was going through a very difficult time, and on top of that I was pregnant and planning on having an abortion.

"As soon as I said abortion you called your husband over and the two of you seemed to forget about your own store and business. You just sat down and patiently listened to me. I still remember clearly what you said.

Convinced to Have the Baby

"You told me that it is true that I was going through a hard time but sometimes the good things in life come through difficulty, and the best things come through the biggest difficulties. You spoke of the joy of being a mother and that the most beautiful word to hear in the Hebrew language is "Ima" (Mommy) when spoken by one's child. You both spoke and spoke until I was convinced that I really should have this baby. So you see, G-d paid you back!"

Tamar's eyes opened wide. Anat continued.

"I had a boy twenty-one years ago that you saved by telling me to think twice before doing the abortion." With happy tears she declared, "My beloved Shlomo wouldn't have been alive if not for you. And lo, he was the one who grew up to save your precious Gadi's life!"

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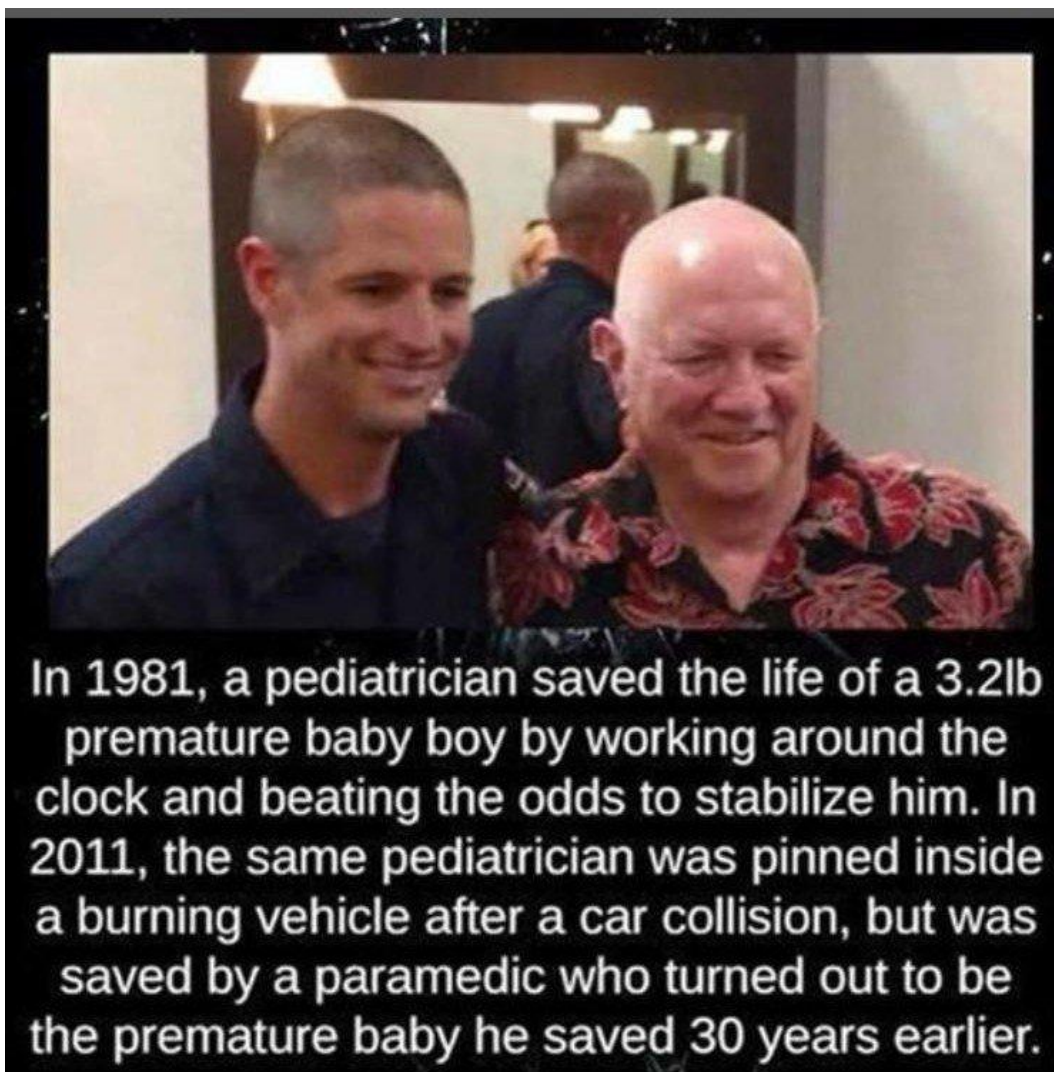
Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from [friendsofefrat.org](http://friendsofefrat.org), \* the website of a wonderful organization, EFRAT, that dedicatedly (and non-violently!) works to prevent abortions by Jewish mothers in Israel, through counseling and financial incentives. Updated this week with the actual names and a few more facts from a clip sent to me of a television news report at the time of the episode,

\* This site is no longer functional. The new, much more professional, site, has 16 very short but worthy stories, but no longer includes the above long one. Connection -- Weekly reading, which includes a detailed section on the relative evaluations of Jewish lives (young vs. old, etc.) when a pledge is made to the Holy Temple do donate someone's economic worth.

## APPENDIX

"Heavenly supervision strikes again!

I just received this striking example with the same theme as the above story.



*Reprinted from the Parshat Behar-Bechukosai 5781 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*



# **The Money in the Barrel**

**By Hillel Baron**

There was once a young man living in Prague who struggled to make a living. He eventually convinced his wife that he needed to leave home to seek his fortune elsewhere. He explained that after he made a nice sum of money, he would return home to establish a business.

The young man traveled to another town, and kept in touch with his family. But after a while, he stopped communicating. Eventually, his family began to give up on ever seeing him again—they assumed something must have happened to him.

## **The Wine Merchant**

A wine merchant from Prague, who traveled to the countryside every year to purchase kosher wine at wholesale prices, happened to travel to the place where the young man was living. Arriving at the local winemaker's shop, he encountered the young man himself. He invited him to sit down and talk, and convinced him to come back home. After the young man agreed, the merchant offered him a ride in his wagon, which by then was filled with the wine he had purchased.

The young man had a bundle of money he had amassed throughout his years away. He began to worry that the merchant's workers may notice and try to steal it, so he hung the bundle from his neck with the bulge under the back of his shirt. After a while, however, he grew worried about this arrangement too. So when no one was looking, he broke the seal on one of the wine barrels, lowered his bundle into it, and then closed the barrel. Finally, he could relax.

When they arrived in Prague, the businessman said to the young man: "Before I drive you home, let me first drop off the wine at my storage facility." As the barrels were unloaded, the young man tried to keep track of the barrel with his money so that he could return later to retrieve it.

## **Watching the Barrels Being Unloaded**

But as he watched the barrels being unloaded, he saw that every single one of them was sealed. He couldn't locate the barrel in which he had hidden his money. So he approached the businessman and told him what he had done. "Where is my money now?" he asked. "I see that all the barrels are now sealed." The businessman became visibly agitated, and said, "How dare you suspect me. I'm sorry but I don't know where your money is."

The young man was understandably devastated. He had worked for years to earn this money, and it was the reason he had been separated from his family for all this time. He went off to the chief rabbi of the city, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793), known as the “Noda B’Yehudah,” and asked for his help. The rabbi agreed to summon the businessman and question him.

Immediately after the questioning began, the businessman again became enraged, and started shouting, “How could this be? I did this man a favor! He should thank me for what I did for him —now he’s turning around and accusing me of theft?!”

### **Aware of the Talmudic Passage**

The Noda B’ Yehudah was aware of the Talmudic<sup>1</sup> passage which states that there are three ways through which one’s true character can be known: By the cup (how one acts when they have been drinking), the pocket (how one spends their money) and by anger (how they react to adversity and confrontation).

Realizing that the businessman’s quickness to anger revealed strong feelings of guilt, he advised: “If it was not you who took the money and resealed the barrel, then it must have been one of your non-Jewish workers. If a gentile touches unsealed wine, the wine is no longer kosher. Since we do not know which barrel it was, I must reluctantly rule that all of your wine is non-kosher, and may not be sold to Jews.”

Realizing that he stood to lose many more times than the sum he had stolen, the merchant admitted his guilt. “It wasn’t the gentiles!” he cried. “I myself have taken the money from this man. It is I who am guilty.”

The rabbi instructed him to return the money and beg the young man for forgiveness. He also told him how to do *teshuvah*<sup>2</sup> for what he had done. From then on, he became a righteous man.

*Does it ever happen that after we help someone, we are tempted to be dishonest with that person, “justified” by the fact that this person “owes us”? Does it happen that we are dishonest once, and it leads to even greater dishonesty which gets us into further trouble? How would we help a person realize that they must do teshuvah?*

(Source: Sefer Hamasiyot, p. 171)

### **FOOTNOTES**

1. Eruvin, 65a.

2. (lit. “return”); repentance, return to a Jew’s true essence.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Behar-Bechukosai 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

# **“Like A Malach” – The Post That Moved Thousands of Israelis**



**Moshe Natan Neta, z'l, 14, and Yehoshua, z'l, 9, England.**

Yakir Asaraf, a secular Israeli, who like many others was shocked by the immensity of the Meron tragedy, decided that he had to do something to share in the families' pain, and he and a friend went to pay a shiva call to the England family of Jerusalem, who lost their two sons, Moshe Natan Neta, z'l, 14, and Yehoshua, z'l, 9.

He wrote a Facebook post about his experience, which quickly went viral and moved thousands of Israelis.

“It could be that I just experienced one of the most significant moments of my life,” Asaraf wrote. “I just left the shiva of the England family, who lost their two sons at Meron. And my heart is simply bursting with mixed emotions, my eyes are filled with sad tears, but my heart is full of simcha.”

“When my friend Maor and I, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, entered their home, we really stood out in the Chareidi crowd. Some people looked up and two

wonderful Chareidim quickly got up and let us sit, mamash opposite Menachem Mendel, the father who lost his two sons just days ago.”

“The father noticed us and quickly stopped speaking in Yiddish with the other menachamim and turned to me and Maor in Hebrew.”



**Yakir Asaraf (Facebook profile)**

“‘I’m happy you came,’ he said, and his eyes are wet with tears but his face is radiant. “When are we already zochech to meet together – you and I?” he said.

“Maor and I looked at him with sparkling eyes as if he’s a malach talking to us.

““You should know that what’s happening here is the truth,” he said. ‘You and I are both pained by the great loss. We’re giving chizzuk to each other. It doesn’t matter if you’re chilonim (secular) or Chareidim – we’re Jews.’”

“Everyone else in the room – in eerie silence – is quietly listening to Menachem Mendel talk to us.

““I want you to invite me to your simchos!”” I say.

““And I’ll invite you to my simchos!”” he responds.

“A few minutes of silence and he looks down and mumbles; ‘Mi K’Amcha Yisrael.’”

After the tefillah, we approach him and before we had a chance to say words of comfort, he says, ‘Thank you for coming. You were mechazeik me.’”

“Maor and I leave the house, looking at each other, but unable to speak. We can’t process what just happened, and while I’m writing these words, I still can’t process it.

“This meeting represents the truth of our Am, the endless Ahavas HaChinum we have for each other, our shared pain, the tremendous emunah that continues to unite us.”

“I’ll end with a tefillah l’Yoshevi Ba’Meromim – for Ahavas Chinam between us, and for besuros tovos, and for all the families of the victims to be zocheh to true nachas, and that I’m zocheh to be invited to the smachos of the wonderful Menachem Mendel.”

*Reprinted from the May 5, 2021 website of Yeshiva World News.*

## Saved By the Enemy



Moshe trudged through the deep snow, shivering in his rags and shuffling along as quickly as he could to avoid yet another beating from the Nazi guard. He and the other concentration camp inmates had already been savagely beaten earlier that morning before they were ordered out of the camp. Now, he marched along as best as he could, one of a double line of men who were ordered to build railroad tracks for their enemies.

Soon, they arrived at the unfinished tracks. Moshe wearily bent over his task, hammering and banging all day long as they laid new rails. The overseer



watched his prisoners carefully, eager to spot the first sign of slacking or laziness that would allow him to unleash a fresh string of expletives and another beating.

Whenever the inmates completed a section of the track, a train was sent down the mountainside to test the efficiency of the newly-finished rails. Moshe and the others quaked at the thought of their tormentors finding fault in their work.

There came a time when Moshe felt that all his strength was gone. His arms trembled as he tried to lift up the heavy hammer. Feebly, he pounded at the track as the rails swam in front of his eyes.

Suddenly a shout rang out. "Everyone off the tracks! They're sending a train down!" All the inmates ran off the tracks to safety - except Moshe. Utterly exhausted, he simply collapsed right where he was, lying across the tracks as the train thundered down the mountainside.

Later, he found out how his life had been saved. The overseer had spotted Moshe lying on the track and pounced on him. "Lazy, dirty Jew!" the man bellowed. "Get up and get back to work!" When Moshe did not respond, the overseer exploded with rage and reached out a beefy hand to grab the unconscious Jew by his ragged shirt and lift him bodily off the tracks.

"How dare you disobey me?" he bellowed, shaking Moshe violently before tossing him to one side with disgust. Moments later, the train roared along the tracks, shaking the rails from side to side as it passed over the point where Moshe had been lying only moments earlier.

Years later, when Moshe emigrated to America, he related this story to Rav Aharon Kotler. R' Aharon smiled and noted, "If it is Hashem's will that one should live, then even a murderer can be the savior." (Visions of Greatness II by Rabbi Yosef Weiss, z"l)

Reprinted from the Parshat Behar Bechukotai 5781 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace (edited by Rabbi David Bibi.)

# The Chossid's Loud Prayers



A Stoliner chossid was once in a town for Shabbos. The Rabbi of the town hosted him for Shabbos, and in their lively conversation at the meal Friday night, the chossid informed the Rabbi, that his custom is to daven every word loud. The Rabbi warned him, that he must daven silently the entire time.

Wanting to keep the peace and avoid any confrontation, the chossid put all his efforts to daven silently. However, when a person is davening with feeling and emotion, how long can one remain silent. By the time, he came to *Boruch She'umar*, the people sitting next to him heard him and in Birchas krias Shema, the entire shul heard him. After davening, the Rov and the entire congregation congratulated him on such a heartfelt davening.

The chossid was perplexed, last night the Rov warned him not to daven loudly, and now the Rov is thanking him for doing so?

The Rabbi explained; "When you told me you plan on davening loud that was noise that I wanted to stop. But today when it burst forth from your heart, that was music to the ears, and that is what we enjoyed and thanked you for."

*Excerpted from the April 29, 2021 email of The Weekly Story by Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon.*

# The Gratitude of Rav Elazar Shach



Rabbi Asher Bergman writes that in the beginning of Rav Elazar Shach's married life, Rav Shach and his family rented an apartment in Yerushalayim from Rav Alter Shub. Although Rav Shach paid rent for his living quarters, he nonetheless felt gratitude towards the Shub family for giving this benefit to him.

Rav Shach considered it his duty to treat the Shub family exceptionally well, even extending this treatment to the family's children. Many years after Rav Shach moved to Bnei Brak, it happened that some of Rav Alter Shub's grandchildren found themselves in Bnei Brak late one evening, without any means of transportation available for them to take them home to Yerushalayim.

Rav Shach was overjoyed at the opportunity to host them in his home for the night, as a way of expressing his gratitude to his 'landlord', which was how he referred to Rav Alter. Later, Rebbetzin Guttel Shach quietly told the guests that Rav Shach had been planning to go out somewhere that night, but because of the Mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim and HaKaras HaTov that had come his way, he had stayed at home!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah (compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)*

# The Brocha of the Rebbe



Once, a man brought his ten-year-old son to visit Rav Aharon Karlin, zt”l. As they were sitting and talking, Rav Aharon asked for a bowl of apples to be brought in. Rav Aharon and his guests each took an apple, and with great Kavanah, Rav Aharon said the Brachah of Borei Pri HaEitz, and he began to eat.

The boy thought to himself, ‘What is the difference between me and the Rebbe? He eats apples, and I also eat apples. He says a Brachah, and so do I. Even I could be the Rebbe someday!’

Rav Aharon, almost as if he were aware of the boy’s thoughts, turned to the child and said, “You know, my son, there is a big difference between the two of us. When you wake up in the morning and look out the window, you can see that there is a beautiful apple tree in your yard. You can see the juicy, red apples growing on it and all you can think of is when you can eat those apples.

“You run to wash your hands, get dressed as quickly as possible, and run out to the apple tree. You quickly decide which apple is going to be for your breakfast, and you open your mouth for that first delicious bite. You almost take that bite of the apple until you remember, just in time, that you must say a Brachah before eating an apple. So, you say the Brachah in order to eat.”

The boy and his father listened, captivated to the words of the great Rebbe. Rav Aharon continued, “However, my son, when I wake up in the morning, it is different. When I look out the window, I also see a beautiful apple tree, and it

makes me think about the wonder of Hashem's creation. I contemplate how this apple tree began as a small seed in the ground, and how it slowly grew year by year until one day blossoms began to flower, and then apples appeared.

"I run to wash my hands before I quickly go outside to take a closer look at this amazing creation. In awe of Hashem and His creation, the apple tree, I want to say a Brachah on the apple tree and its fruits. I begin to say the Brachah of Borei Pri HaEitz, but then I remember, in order to say a Brachah, I need an apple. That's the difference between us. You say a Brachah in order to eat, and I eat only so I am able to say a Brachah!"

The Karliner Rebbe taught that one should use food as an opportunity to grow in Ruchniyus and getting closer to Hashem, and not just to satisfy a craving!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5781 email of Torah U'Tefilah (compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

# Parents Should Feel At Ease

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

A parent may feel anxiety when a child of theirs goes away for an extended period of time, for example, if they go away to yeshiva or to seminary. The parent had been used to watching over their child at all times, knowing where he or she is and expecting them to be home at a certain time. And now they feel helpless and worried.

We must know, even when a child is close by, it is Hashem who is watching over him and He knows how to watch over our children much better than any parent could. When the child is away, it is the same Hashem who is looking after him there, and a parent should feel at ease knowing this.

## **Child was Unable to Sleep Through the Night**

A woman told me, her four year old son hasn't been sleeping through the night. She spoke to her sister recently to get an idea of how to correct it. Her sister suggested that she take the child to the bathroom, while he's sleeping, before she goes to sleep. Perhaps, that would help him sleep better. That same night, she decided to try it. As she was bringing her son to the bathroom, she saw a round bulge in his cheek.

She put her hand in his mouth and took out a small bouncy ball. He must have put it in his mouth before he went to sleep. She began crying tears of thanks to Hashem for setting up the circumstance in a way that she would take her son out



of his bed on that night, the first time she ever did such a thing. She shudders at the thought of what could have happened. Hashem watches over our children much better than we ever could.

### **Devastating News from His Friends**

A man who we'll call Joe told me, ten years ago when he was first married, his best friend told him his wife just got back from the doctor and they were devastated by what he told them. The friend's wife was expecting their first child and the doctor told them that the baby had severe medical issues and it was pointless for them to continue on with the pregnancy and, therefore, he suggested terminating it. They were both crying over the news.

The friend told Joe that the doctor gave him the weekend to think about it but they already decided they were going to listen to him. That Shabbat, Joe was sitting in shul like he always did, and the rabbi in shul announced there was a guest from Israel that would be speaking. His name was Rabbi Yaakov Weiner, the dean of the Jerusalem Center for Research on Medicine and Halacha.

The rabbi brought up many current issues on medical *halacha* and even discussed the topic of medical issues with fetuses. After Shabbat, Joe called his friend and said, "Please, don't do anything until you speak with this rabbi that I heard today in shul. He has extensive knowledge in this area and will advise you exactly how you should proceed."

The next day, the friend met with the rabbi and the rabbi told him, according to *halacha*, he should continue on with the pregnancy and, *b'ezrat Hashem*, everything will be okay. Baruch Hashem, the couple listened to the rabbi and today that child is the top student in his class. The doctor was way off on the diagnosis. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the baby. Hashem orchestrated the events to unfold the way they did in order to save that baby's life.

Hashem knows things we could never know. He gives life, and He maintains life and we should be so happy to know that He is the one who is guarding us and our children at all times in all places.

*Reprinted from the April 20, 2021 email of Living Emunah.*

# A Child of Chernobyl Recalls Being Taken in By Chabad

By Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin



Rachel and Zeev, as children in Soviet Union with their brother, Yevgeni.

As most citizens who lived in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s, I have a powerful association with the word “Chernobyl.” This word describes a nuclear explosion that occurred on April 26, 1986, in Ukraine and affected the lives of millions of people.

Thankfully, I grew up in a city called Saratov on the Volga River, deep in Russia and far from the deadly source of radiation. Yet I remember how children were sent out of the danger zone to live with relatives across the entire Soviet territory. As a child, I heard stories of horrific illnesses that resulted from exposure to radiation.

We had many relatives and friends on my father’s side of the family who lived in Ukraine, in a city called Vinnitsa. During the months of July and August, my parents welcomed many guests to our bungalow to spend the summer months

away from the contaminated region. The consequences of this accident were horrendous, and everyone wanted to help.



On Aug. 3, 1990, a Friday afternoon, the first plane of 196 Jewish children evacuated from regions effected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster landed in Ben-Gurion International Airport. Spurred by the Lubavitcher Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—Children of Chernobyl would eventually organize 100 flights, rescuing 3,000 children from the former Soviet Union.

Three decades after my immigration to the United States in 1989, I learned about the impact of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his response to this crisis. The Rebbe set in motion a plan to create the largest-ever rescue mission of children affected by the accident. More than 3,000 children were saved through the project that came to be known as “Chabad’s Children of Chernobyl.” Under the Rebbe’s directive, the umbrella organization of Chabad in Israel took responsibility for evacuating and resettling rescued children in Israel.



On Aug. 4, 1990, the first airplane carrying 196 Jewish children landed at Ben-Gurion Airport. The effort it took to rescue and aid these children during the post-Soviet era is difficult to fathom. When I learned about this operation, I was hoping to meet a person who was rescued. I made a few inquiries and learned that a young mother in our community and her brother were part of this rescue operation. Perhaps it is by Divine Providence that she had lived in Vinnitsa, the same city where my father was born.



**Rabbi Josef Aronov, chairman of Chabad in Israel, holds two recently arrived children.**

This is what Raya, now Rachel, remembers:

“Growing up as a Jewish child in Ukraine in the 1980s was challenging. Some non-Jewish neighbors called us ‘dirty Jews,’ and I felt that we were different. But it didn’t really register in my young mind who was this ‘Jew’ in me and what that really meant. There was no Shabbat, no Jewish holidays, no kosher food or anything Jewish that I knew about.

“A few months prior to the big political change during the ‘Perestroika’ in the late 1980s, we began to see some Orthodox rabbis arriving in Vinnitsa. These were *shluchim* sent by the Rebbe. They opened a Sunday school and gathered us for a big meal on Pesach; later in the year, they built a huge Sukkah in our yard. I was mesmerized by how many people were able to fit inside of it. People kept

coming and coming. So many 'lost' Jews were finally starting to learn about their heritage.



**Girls lived at the dormitory of Kfar Chabad's Beth Rivkah school, where house mothers, counselors and staff worked to make them feel at home.**

“Just around that time, my parents decided to immigrate to Israel. They shared this information with me and my brother, and I remember how surprised I was to hear of a place called ‘Israel.’ Apparently, this was a country where all the Jewish people lived. I thought to myself, ‘Why did they keep this secret from us?’

“Soon after, my father heard of the Chabad program that was established for children who experienced health problems due to the radiation. My brother suffered asthma attacks, and the doctors suggested a change of climate. My brother and I joined the special program that took children from the greater Chernobyl area and transported them to the beautiful Israeli village called Kfar Chabad. I was 9, and my brother was 8 when we took the long train to Moscow to meet the other children and our chaperons.

“We left right before Chanukah in 1990. It was a cold Russian winter, and it was snowing. We took the bus to see the lighting of the first giant Chanukah menorah in Moscow, organized by Chabad. We were given our own menorahs to light together with our parents and were explained the importance of light hidden in the darkness.



**The abandoned synagogue building in Chernobyl. The city and the surrounding regions were heavily Jewish areas, and in Jewish history the town's name is most often associated with Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl, a famed colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)**

“The next day, we said goodbye to our parents. From that time, we traveled as a group, under the supervision of Chabad *shluchim*. My brother and I were reassured by our parents that they planned to join us soon. Yet we were so young, and the separation was stressful.

“My brother and I held hands when we walked inside the airplane. When we landed in Israel, we were surprised by the beautiful warm weather. We were dressed warmly for the Russian winter and began to shed layers of clothes upon arrival. In a way, it was like shedding the layers of confinement of the Soviet Union.

“People greeted us at the airport, singing and welcoming us. It was like a dream. Sitting on the bus ride from the airport to Kfar Chabad, I didn’t want to



miss a minute of the experience. There were hundreds of orange trees along the way. To this day, orange is my favorite color.



Aside from providing a healthier environment, Children of Chernobyl had medical staff on hand to care for the youngsters, some of whom were seriously ill when they came to Israel.

“In Kfar Chabad, we had everything we could possibly need. We had three meals a day. We were enrolled in a school and surrounded by people who genuinely cared for us.

“A few weeks after our arrival, on Jan. 17, 1991, the Gulf War broke out in Israel. We were introduced to Scud missiles, bunkers and gas masks. Our counselors taught us how to put on a gas mask and how to use special Epi-pens in case there was a chemical explosion. My parents were still in Ukraine, and they were very worried about our well-being.

Despite the chaos, our Chabad chaperons made us feel protected, and the situation was utilized to teach us about prayer and miracles. We were taught that G-d sometimes sends complicated events to ask us to pray to Him. All of us prayed together and then on Purim, we learned that the war was over.

“Three months later, my parents finally arrived in Israel. We moved to Bat Yam and later to Afula. Unfortunately, my parents were not familiar with the Jewish traditions. It was a difficult adjustment for them with so many new things:

language, country, people and societal norms. Only years later, in the United States, did my brother and I reconnect to our heritage.



**Rachel and her husband, Shlomo.**

“When I light the Chanukah candles, I think of my first little menorah that we lit in Moscow. As I sit in our family Sukkah, I remember everyone being welcomed in that Sukkah in Vinnitsa. And when I celebrate Purim, I re-experience the joy of learning that the Gulf War had ended and another ‘Haman’ was destroyed once again. On Pesach night, when I hear my children sing the ‘Ma Nishtana,’ I recall staying up all night in the warm embrace of a Chabad family who welcomed my brother and me during our time at Kfar Chabad.

“Two decades after my brother and I were taken out of Ukraine, my brother slowly returned to a life of Torah observance. When my husband and I struggled with infertility, my brother guided us. He organized a *chuppah* ceremony for us at ‘770,’ Chabad headquarters, and inspired us to keep the laws of Shabbat, family purity and kosher. Soon after our transformation, G-d granted us our first child, and then three more. Thank G-d, today we raise our family with our Jewish values and faith.”

Rachel’s brother, Zeev, added his own memories of Kfar Chabad: “I was younger than my sister and my memories are not as vivid. My sister and I were separated for most of the week. I lived with the boys, and she lived with the girls.

We saw each other every week when we visited families that hosted us for Shabbat. The warm feeling of the Shabbat experience stayed with me for many years.



**Rachel and her children.**

“I built a special bond with my counselor, Moshe Reuven Asman. Children would earn tickets for the mitzvahs that could later be redeemed for prizes. I earned \$80 in mitzvah points but did not have a chance to redeem them for gifts because our parents arrived, and we left the program. The memories of these three months planted a seed that sprouted during my teen years. Even months after departing from Kfar Chabad, I continued to wear a *kippah* in order to feel that new strong connection to Judaism.

“When I was 15, my sister and I moved to the United States to join our grandmother in Philadelphia. I was enrolled in a Torah Academy and soon was relearning the same concepts that were introduced to me at Kfar Chabad. After two years of exploring my connection to Judaism, I decided to return to Israel and enroll in a yeshivah. I studied at Tomchei Tmimim Yeshiva in Migdal Ha-Emek, under the leadership of Rabbi Goldberg.



“I was so excited to learn Chassidic teachings. It offered joyous spirituality, unconditional love and soulful connection to my heritage. I was so hungry for the knowledge of Judaism and these ideas spoke to my soul.



**Zeev with Esther and their children.**

“I spent four years learning in Israel and afterwards joined the Chabad Yeshiva at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights. During these years, I gained insight into the most important concepts of my life.

“Soon after, I was introduced to my wife, Esther, who was also influenced by Chabad while finding her own path in a different part of the world. Esther grew up in Brazil, and after we married, we decided to emulate the unconditional kindness we saw along our path of return. Together, we dedicated our lives to working with Russian Jewry in Staten Island. We are both molded by the Rebbe’s teachings and hope to spread the light of unconditional love to every Jew.”

This is the story of two of “Chabad’s Children of Chernobyl” who were not just rescued physically, but were inspired spiritually by their short encounter in Kfar Chabad.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

# Fulfill Your Potential

Hashem created every person with a unique potential that we need to discover and tap into in order to fulfill our mission in this world. One of the reasons people underachieve is because they don't have enough belief in themselves.

Looking at the life of Rabbi Akiva, he might have been voted least likely to succeed in Torah. He was an *am ha'arertz* at the age of 40, and until that point he did not have a pleasant experience with religion. He said about himself that he had a hatred towards the Rabbis and had a difficult time comprehending the words of Torah.

## From His Wife's Inspiration, He Became the Gadol HaDor

But then, his soon-to-be wife Rachel saw potential greatness inside of him. She believed in him and she gave him *chizuk* to try to succeed. And from that inspiration, Rabbi Akiva became the Gadol HaDor and master of Torah She'Baal Peh. He had it in him the entire time, he just needed to believe in it.

If we only knew how much potential we really had, we would soar to great heights. Rabbi Naftali Horowitz gave a *meshal* to bring out the point. One summer while his family was in the Catskills and he was staying in Brooklyn during the week, it was a Sunday night and he saw that the toothpaste container in his bathroom was empty, but he was too tired to go to the basement and get a new one, so he squeezed it hard and, lo and behold, there was enough toothpaste to use.

The next night, once again, he forgot to bring up the new toothpaste container and, once again, he squeezed the one that was there and there was enough toothpaste to use. This ended up happening every single night of that week and every single night, there was more toothpaste to use.

## How Much Usable Toothpaste is Wasted

He thought to himself, how much good, usable toothpaste must there be in the landfills, due to people discarding the containers without using them to their fullest. Then he thought, how many people must there be buried in cemeteries that had so much potential that was not used to its fullest.

Sometimes, Hashem puts people in circumstances they would rather not be in, but those circumstances might very well be Hashem squeezing them to help them get out all of their untapped potential.

In the year 2007, a soccer player named Snir Gueta was the star of the Israel national under 21 team. He went on to play professionally and had a very bright future in soccer ahead of him. But, at the age of 24, he began becoming more religious and more learned and was faced with a dilemma because playing professional soccer meant he had to play on Shabbat.

Heroically, he decided to give up on his dream and, instead, keep Shabbat properly. His father tried to convince him that he could still play without technically violating Shabbat but he would not hear of it. His father had invested so much in him and was disappointed with his decision.



Snir Gueta as a popular soccer player and today as a rabbi

Snir Gueta started going to more classes and learning more Torah and began discovering the tremendous potential that had been hidden inside of him. Just four years later, he started giving classes in people's homes, inspiring hundreds to come closer to Hashem. People from all backgrounds flocked to hear him.

Now, at the age of 33, he is a rabbi who has tens of thousands of people that he inspires on a daily basis. A man that used to fill stadiums with fans coming to watch him play soccer now has thousands coming to hear his divrei Torah. Someone asked the Rabbi what his father thinks of him now, and he replied, "My father is so proud of me. When I am giving speeches, he tells people, 'Look, that's my son!'"



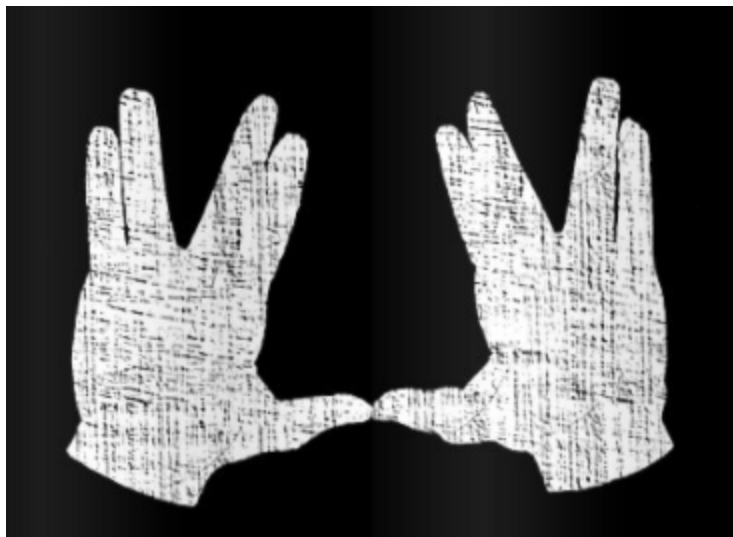
Everybody has endless potential inside of them. If we would believe in ourselves more and act on that belief, *b'ezrat Hashem*, we will bring out more of our potential into action.

*Reprinted from the May 11, 2021 email of Living Emunah by Rabbi David Ashear.*

## Story #1223

# The Incomparable Blessing

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles  
[editor@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:editor@ascentofsafed.com)



It was one of the festival days of Passover at a synagogue in Westchester County, NY. The rabbi of the *shul*, a Chabad emissary, was standing near the front door, warmly greeting each arriving member of the congregation.

He looks at his watch. It's 9.30, and everyone is still waiting for a tenth to complete the *minyan* -- a familiar story for Chabad houses across the world.

Finally, a man of about 80 years walks into the *shul*. The Rabbi is overjoyed to see him. The man is a regular, and every *Yom Tov* it is the same story: although he is often the 10th, yet he always leaves before the blessing of the Kohanim at the end of the *Musaf* service. [1]

The rabbi is each time puzzled by this man's strange behavior.

This time he determines to question him about it. "Sir, can we have a chat before the prayers start - that is, if you don't mind. Please tell me, why do you always leave before *Birchat Kohanim*?"

The man obliges. He first rolls up his sleeve to reveal a tattooed number on his arm, and then proceeds to tell his story:

The year was approximately 1942. The setting was in one of the barracks in Auschwitz.

In the middle of the night, a group gathers together. An elderly Jew everyone referred to as “The Rabbi” beckons everyone closer.

Everyone huddles around. He whispers, “Friends, we need to experience going our going out of Egypt this year, our very own Pesach Seder in Auschwitz!”

Everyone was thinking the same thing, “Has the Rabbi finally snapped?”

Look,” he continued, “we don't need '*marror*' (~the bitter herbs), [2] this place is full of bitterness. But if we could at least get *matzah*. Yankel, do you think you can manage to get two kilos of flour?”

Yankel somehow gets the flour. “The Rabbi” meticulously watches over the first matzah ever made in Auschwitz. It's Erev Pesach afternoon, only a few hours till Seder night. Everyone is looking forward to being part of a unique Seder.

When night falls, Chayim, who is keeping watch, makes sure nobody is around before he gives the all-clear.

Jews from the surrounding barracks quickly scurry in to crowd around “The Rabbi,” who makes the blessings over the matzah. Everyone receives a small piece to nibble and quickly swallow. Then they take turns reciting the *Hagadah*, as much as they can recall by heart.

Suddenly, there is a loud thud! Dogs start barking. A group of soldiers burst in through the door.

Their officer-in-charge glares at each of the Jews sitting on the floor. He yells, “Who is responsible?” If you tell me now, the rest of you will live; but if you don't....”

'The Rabbi' instantly raises his hand. “I am. I am the one responsible for all of this.”

The officer shouts, “Tomorrow I will shoot this man dead where all the Jews in Auschwitz can see him!”

The next day, Nazi soldiers tie him up and throw his battered body to the ground in full view of all the Jews prisoners, who were forced to assemble for the occasion. Their eyes are frozen to the center of the muddy grounds where “The Rabbi” lies in pain. The officer reaches for his gun.

“The Rabbi,” with all the courage and strength he can muster, cries out, ‘Please grant me my last words!’

The soldiers, officers, and senior camp administrators laugh mockingly at him. The officer with the gun chuckles menacingly. “What do you want to say? What do you have? Nothing!”

'The Rabbi' bravely struggles to stand. He exclaims, "That's where you are wrong. What I can do is bless my brothers!"

Then, before he can be interrupted, he begins *Birchat Kohanim*:

"May G-d bless you and guard you.

"May G-d make His countenance shine upon and be gracious to you.

"May G-d turn his countenance toward you and grant you peace."

The man paused his story for a few moments, then stated firmly that he had been present at these events, and that he was so shaken by them that he felt compelled to change. He made an oath to himself that if he survived, he would lead a more traditional Jewish life.

Thankfully, he did survive.

One time, a few years after he was redeemed from Auschwitz, he went into a non-kosher restaurant and ordered lunch. Suddenly, he had a flashback back to that Passover in Auschwitz. He clearly pictured 'The Rabbi' and his emotional priestly blessing before he was murdered. Quickly he left money on the table for his yet-to-be-served order and fled the restaurant.

When his daughter asked for his consent for her to marry a non-Jew, the same flashback occurred. He couldn't run, but he did decide to further turn his life around.

"So, you see, Rabbi," he concluded his explanation, 'the memory of the priestly blessing that was given by that holy martyr in Auschwitz still is with me -- and to me, no other priestly blessing can ever be its equal!"

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Source: Submitted by Baruch Gordon, who wrote it based on the rendition he heard from Chabad Shliach Rabbi Shabtai Slavicki of Antwerp during an online *farbrengen* in April 2020.

Connection : The source of the 'Blessing if the Kohanim' text is in the Parshat Nasso reading (Num. 6:22-27).

[1]Outside of Israel, the Kohens in the congregation recite the Priestly Blessing towards the end of the Cantor's repetition of the Musaf prayer on the first two and last two days of Pesach and Sukkot, the two days of Shavuot, and on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. [In Israel it is recited much more often.]

[2]Nearly always horseradish and/or Romaine lettuce.

Reprinted from the Parshat Nasso 5781email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.

The Exceptional Concern For a Summer Camper

Rav Yoel Gold relates the following story. It was the first day of the new season at Camp Machanayim, and the counselors had gathered for their annual staff meeting.

Following the usual safety speeches, division head Eliav Friedman stood up to make the same announcement he had given the summer before, and the summer before that, stating that if any counselor were to notice a camper who looked homesick, left out, or just sad, he was to approach the boy and talk to him, buy him a treat from the canteen, and make him feel included.

He told the staff, “When I was a camper in Camp Morris, I was having a hard time. I was homesick. There was one guy, Ezry Fireworker, who looked after me. He played catch with me and schmoozed with me, and gave me the time of day when no one else cared. He made me feel like there was nothing he would rather do than play with me. It absolutely changed my summer.”

Eliav now pays his debt forward by putting his staff on the lookout for other such children. Hearing a personal story like this helps the staff appreciate the power of a simple gesture.



Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

The owner of Camp Machanayim, Rabbi Goldstein, had heard this story before, but this time he was inspired to do something. What an impact that counselor had had on Eliav so many years ago! And what an impact he was indirectly having on all the children who passed through Camp Machanayim's gates!

Rabbi Goldstein called Camp Morris and tracked down Ezry Fireworker, now some 15 years older. He couldn't wait to recount the story and share with Ezry the far-reaching results of his kindness. He called Ezry Fireworker, introduced himself, and told his story.

Ezry listened quietly. “To be honest,” he said, “I don't remember

an Eliav Friedman.” Rabbi Goldstein was disappointed, but Ezry went on. “I don’t remember his case specifically because I did this all the time in Camp Morris. “When I was a kid in Camp Agudah, my grandmother was rushed to the hospital one Friday afternoon.

“My family couldn’t talk to me. I was worried and all alone, and I was terribly homesick. Then someone took interest and asked me what was wrong. Even though he was busy and I knew it, he spent time comforting me. I knew what a small gesture and some personal attention could do for a camper, so as a counselor, I made sure to look out for kids like that.”

explained, the memory still making him emotional all those years later.

“He invited me into his bungalow, told me that everything would be okay, talked with me for a few minutes, and gave me a treat.” It was that concern for every child that Ezry later sought to emulate as a counselor. It was that concern that he displayed toward young Eliav Friedman so many years later, and it was that concern that Eliav encouraged his staff to show the campers!

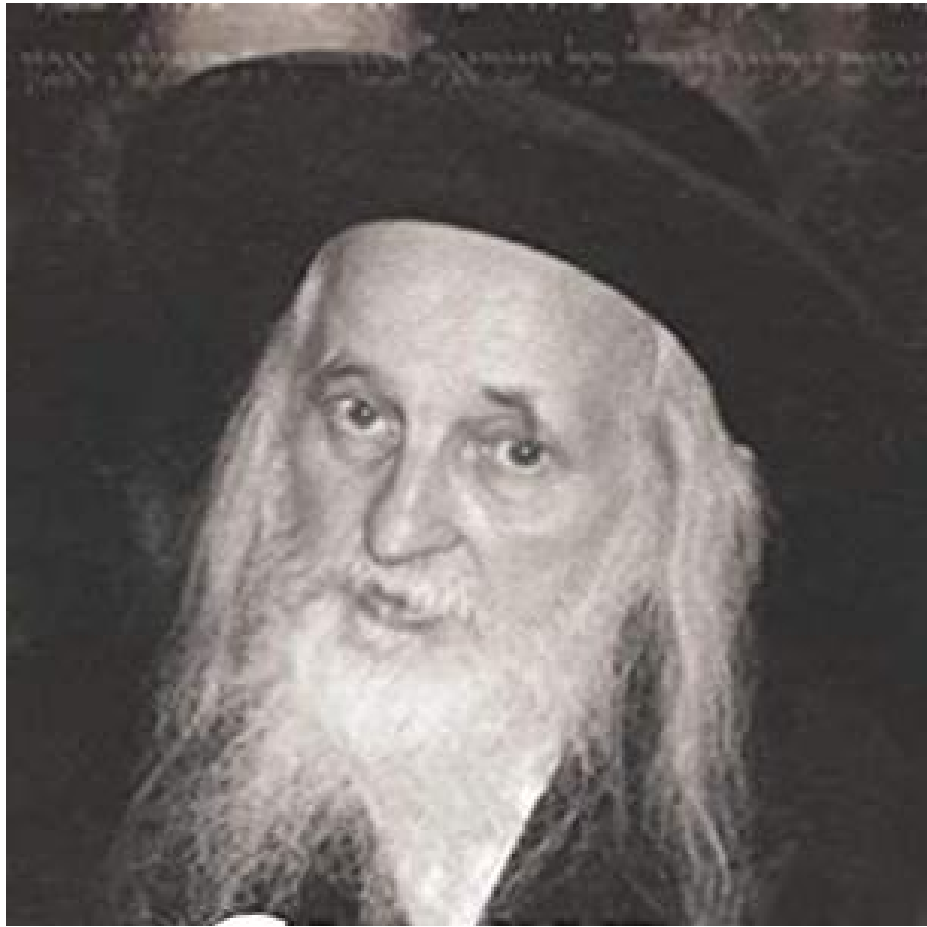
Reprinted from the Parshas Beshalach 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah (compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)

Another Link to The Cycle of Chesed

Rabbi Goldstein couldn’t believe it. Another link in a beautiful cycle of Chesed. He said, “Wow. That’s amazing! Who was it that spent time with you?” Ezry told him that in Camp Agudah in the 1980’s, it was common for Roshei Yeshivah to come to camp for Shabbos in order to provide the campers with living role models of what it meant to live a Torah life.

He said, “One Shabbos, Camp Agudah’s guest was Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky. It was he who spotted me as a sad young boy on the sidelines. He noticed me,” Ezry

Words to Live By



Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum

A woman living in New Jersey became seriously ill. There was a certain machine available in New York which could help alleviate her condition, but it was expensive to use. She could not afford the cost on her husband's meager salary, and their New Jersey insurance company would not cover out-of-state treatment.

People told the couple that if they gave a New York address and switched to a New York insurance company whose policies did cover use of this machine, then they would not have to pay. There was not much danger that the company would investigate whether they indeed lived in New York.

They were reluctant to proceed with a falsehood, even if the treatment was life-saving, but a friend insisted, "You are required to use that address! This is a question of life and death!"

The woman was still reluctant to benefit from a lie, saying, “We have always been completely honest; shall we now save my life with a lie?” She and her husband decided to consult Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rav. Upon hearing the question, he asked incredulously, “You would say a lie?”

“But it is a question of pikuah nefesh, saving a life,” the man said.

“Do you mean to tell me that people die in New Jersey and in New York they live? It’s impossible! I am sure that if you are faithful to the truth you will find that you can make use of the machine.”

The man investigated further and discovered that there was indeed such a machine in a certain hospital in New Jersey. His wife was treated there and cured. (Gut Voch by Avrohom Barash)

Reprinted from the Parshat Toledot 5781 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace (edited by Rabbi David Bibi).

The Rav and the Bar Mitzvah Boy

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky once attended a bar mitzvah where the bar mitzvah boy had a difficult time with the Torah reading. In the middle of the reading, for a personal reason Rav Yaakov had to briefly leave the shul.

When Rav Yaakov returned, he was asked if he wanted the portion to be read again from the point where he had left. Rav Yaakov declined this offer, explaining that he was concerned that the bar mitzvah boy would think that the portion was being read again because he had read poorly.

Rav Yaakov continued: Krias Hatorah (the public Torah reading) is a Rabbinic mitzvah, but the requirement that we not cause hurt or embarrassment to our fellow Jew is mandated by the Torah. It would be wrong to violate a Torah mitzvah in order to fulfill a rabbinical mitzvah. (From Table Talk + Mitzvah Dilemma), a parsha sheet (www.achim.org)

Reprinted from Parsha Achrei Mos-Kedoshim files of Parshasheets.com

The Tears of the Chofetz Chaim

By Shloimy Weber



The Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim, OB”M, was in dire financial straits. The Chofetz Chaim visited one of Russia’s wealthiest Jews to ask for help. This man owned a number of large factories, some of which operated on Shabbos. The wealthy man was moved by the Chofetz Chaim’s request and immediately gave him a very large donation. When the Chofetz Chaim saw the sum the man had contributed, he burst into tears. The wealthy man was distraught and pleaded: “Rebbe, I’ll give you more money, but please stop crying!”

“It’s not the size of your donation that’s causing me so much anguish,” responded the Chofetz Chaim. “What pains me so is that a Jew like you, with such a good, kind heart, will have to suffer in Gehinnom because of violating Shabbos!” Deeply moved by the Chofetz Chaim’s sincere pain for his lot, the wealthy man gave his word that he would close all his factories on Shabbos.

Comment: In this week’s Parsha, we learn of the infamous characters Dasan and Aviram, making their debut by breaking out a fight amongst the people. Moshe encountered them, and told them to stop fighting (explaining that just raising a hand to another is considered an Aveirah). If we were in the same situation, what would we do? Let’s make sure to be sensitive enough to Hashem’s honor, like Moshe Rabbeinu and the Chofetz Chaim, and not be bystanders following the false secular “mind your own business” mentality.

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5781 email of Torah Sweets Weekly (edited by Mendel Berlin).

Explaining a Tragedy

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon



Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

Last month, we were all pained from the horrific tragedy that befell Klal Yisroel, in Meron. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who symbolizes life, and whose name has the numerical equivalent of mechayeh hameisim (bringing life to the dead), and on his day of celebration, at his burial site, such an unimaginable event can occur.

When I replied to those who reached out to me for an explanation, that we have to have faith, and it is something that can't be explained, some of them replied, Rabbi, sorry to say but that is somewhat of a cop out. I will now try to explain why it is an answer and not a cop out. Your feedback is always appreciated.

The Completely Non-Religious Israeli Jew

This week, someone forwarded to me the following story.

There was an Israeli Jew who was completely non-religious. For some reason he “happened” to be in New York for Tishrei and his host was the Rebbe’s secretary, Rabbi Binyomin Klein.

Although he never kept Yom Kippur, out of respect for his host, he refrained from eating or drinking, and came into the shul to see what religious people do on

this solemn day. Being that he was an Israeli, and fluent in Hebrew, he had a machzor with him, and was following the prayers.

When the chazzan came to the repetition of the Musaf tefilah, and began chanting the story of the Ten Martyrs, he couldn't contain himself, and demanded from those next to him to explain the answer that G-d Almighty gave the angels.

Hashem's Response to the Angels' Protest

The angels protested. Is this the appropriate reward for those who devoted their entire life and essence to learn and teach Your Torah?! Hashem replied, be quiet and accept it, or else I will revert the world to nothingness! What type of answer is this, the man inquired? Finally an entity has the courage to ask, but where is the answer?

Most people replied to him, we don't understand it, but we have faith that Hashem who is our Creator understands better than we. However, the person was not placated by this explanation, he demanded an answer.

So the people around him, pointed to an elder chossid, Reb Zushe Wilomovsky (or perhaps to Reb Dovid Chanzin), and said, ask him.

Hearing the question Reb Zushe replied:

There was a king that was making a wedding for his only child. Everyone understands that in general everything in the palace is always on the highest standards of excellence and beauty, but in honor of this momentous occasion, the king demanded that it be elevated to even higher levels, a step higher .

Only the tastiest foods will be served, the servants should seek out the most exotic animals, fish, fowl, and produce. The best musicians would be assembled from the entire country, and so on.

The King's Offer of Wealth or Lifetime Imprisonment

The king also ordered the finest silk and material for the clothing the royal family would be wearing, and then search for an experienced tailor to custom-make them. The king's offer was a generous one, If you make the clothing to my liking, you will be paid enough to live comfortable for the remainder of your life. However, if I am disappointed for whatever reason, you will be thrown into prison and languish there for the rest of your life.

Understandably, almost all the tailors in the town were hesitant to accept such a challenging condition, however, there were a few tailors who were extremely confident in their expertise who came forward. The King chose a Jewish tailor who had an impressive reputation. This infuriated his advisors, and they said to the king, the Jews are thieves, even if he makes a most exquisite garment and receives the king's generous payment, that is not enough for him. He is going to steal some of the excess material. After all the material has golden threads and small precious stones in it.

So the king added another condition to the contract, if you are accused by eye witnesses that you stole any amount of the material, you will be killed.

Knowing that he has never held on to any ones excess material, the Jew agreed

Two months later, the tailor brought all the garments and the king and Queen were raving about its luster and beauty, it was beyond their expectations. Even the advisors admitted that they were a masterpiece. The king instructed the royal treasurer to fill up the bags that the garments were brought in with coins and precious stones, as payment to the tailor.

The Wicked Advisor's Lie to the King

But then one of the advisors said, your majesty, we were told that the tailor held on to two yards of material.

Hearing this, the king was fuming with rage and according to the agreement the tailor was to be put to death. Knowing that declaring his innocence wouldn't help him, the doomed man simply asked for the garments and a pair of scissors as his final wish.

The king was aghast, the tailor wants to stick it to me. But it wouldn't look nice if he didn't grant the man's final wish, so they were given to the tailor.

When it was brought to him, he began with great care to undo all the stitches and placed the pieces next to each other unfolding all the folds and opening up all the hems. While the king was aghast that the garments were now destroyed, he saw that all the material was accounted for nothing was stolen and spared his life.

Turning to the tailor, the king asked why did you have to undo the stitches, and destroy two months of labor?

The Only Way to Answer the King

That was the only way to answer His majesty's accusation, replied the tailor. Any other answer I would have given would have been rejected by the so called "eye-witnesses." But, yes, sorry to say, now there is no garment.

Turning to this Jew, Reb Zushe concluded, Hashem was telling the angels, if you want the answer, I can give it to you, but the only way to do so, is to turn the world into nothingness. Accept the fact that there is a reason.

May Hashem comfort all the families and indeed all of Israel that they should only experience revealed kindness.

Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Lubavitcher Rebbeim and their chassidim. He can be contacted at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

Reprinted from the Parshat Bamidbar 5781 email of Rabbi Avtzon's Weekly Story.

The Power of Shabbat



Rabbi David Sutton told a story about a struggling family in Poland in the early 1900's that decided to send one of their nine children — a 12-year-old girl named Rose — to America, where they hoped she would have an easier life. They managed to save money for a one-way ticket, and her father brought her to the dock.

Knowing this was likely the last time he would ever see his daughter again, Rose's father said to her, "Rose, remember that Hashem is watching you every step of the way. Remember His laws and observe them. Never forget that the Jewish people have kept Shabbat throughout the ages, and Shabbat will protect you. Things will be hard in your new country, but never forget who you are. Keep Shabbat no matter what sacrifices you will have to make."

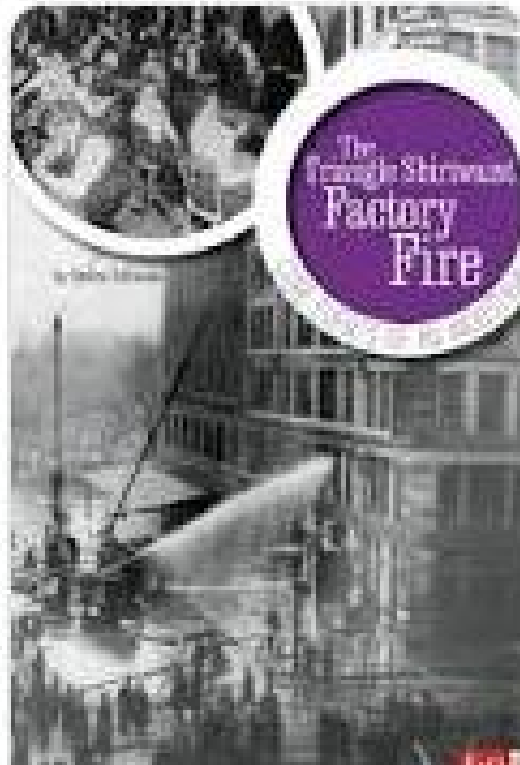
Continued to Observe Shabbos

Rose arrived in the U.S. and moved in with relatives who had abandoned their "old-fashioned" religious lifestyle. They gave her new clothes, a haircut, and she looked like a typical American girl. Nevertheless, she remained faithful to her father's parting words, and continued observing Shabbat. She got a job, and every week she came up with a different excuse why she could not come to work on Saturday. After several weeks, Rose's manager figured out what was going on, and called her over.

"I am pleased with your work," he told her, "but your weekly absences on Saturday must end. Come in this Saturday, or you'll be looking for a different job." Rose's relatives pressured her to go to work to save her job and her *parnassah*. When Shabbat came, she decided to remain strong. Rather than confronting her relatives, she left the house as though she were going to work, but actually went to

a park bench and sat among the pigeons. Rose spent the day sitting on the bench and staring into the sky.

At the end of the day, when she approached the house, she heard her cousin Joe shout, “Rose! Where have you been?” Rose assumed that the family found out she was not at work and were angry at her. She started crying and said, “Joe, what will I do? Everyone will be angry with me!” Joe looked at her and said, “Rose, didn’t you hear?” “Hear what?” Rose asked.



Joe informed her that the factory where she worked had caught fire. This was the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that erupted on Saturday, March 25, 1911. Rose Goldstein was among some 40 of the 190 factory workers who were not killed. Many workers were trapped inside the building or jumped to their deaths. “Don’t you see, Rose?” her cousin said tearfully, “Because you kept the Shabbos, your life was saved.”

Hashem asks us to put our trust in Him every seventh year for *shemittah*, and every seventh day for Shabbat. From this story, we learn that not only will our livelihood be saved, but our lives as well.

Reprinted from the Parashat Behar-Bechukotai 5781 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

Sitting in the Front Row

The Unusual Shadchan (Matchmaker)

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton



Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerohn

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber (1861-1920) was a holy genius whose main concern was the Jewish people and whose main occupation was prayer, learning or teaching Torah.

But he was a very delicate person who often had problems with his health that forced him to travel to warmer climates for a rest. On one such trip he was accompanied by his only son Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (who years later would be the next Rebbe).

In general, the Rebbe slept very little, if at all, at nights and it was his custom to rest, sitting on a couch every afternoon, not really asleep but also not totally awake, for a half hour or so. On this vacation, It happened to be Wednesday afternoon, he sat on a comfortable chair for his usual rest but this time it was for much longer than usual.

The Rebbe Suddenly Stood Up

His son, a bit worried, tried to signal, with subtle noises, that the half-hour had passed; scuffling his feet and moving things around in the room but to no avail. Two hours later the Rebbe suddenly stood and asked, "Where am I? What day is it today? What section of the Torah are we in?" As though he had seen or experienced something very unusual.

That evening he took an unusually long time praying the evening prayer, singing the words slowly and quietly with great emotion and then, the next morning after his prayers, he asked his son how much cash they had on hand.

There was only enough for minor expenses, but his son took the hint, went to a local pawnbroker with his silver-topped cane that had been a present from his father, and came home with twenty rubles a small fortune in those days.

His father, the Rebbe, took the money and asked his son to wait in the room while he went shopping. A half hour later a package was brought to the room and in the next few hours delivery boys kept bringing more and more parcels, all recently purchased from various women's clothing stores.

Who Were the Clothes Bought for?

All this was very strange, his father had made this vacation trip because he was tired and weak and now he was out shopping, which was also very unusual, especially that he was shopping on his own. Possibly the clothes were meant the Rebbe's granddaughters (Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak's daughters). But in fact, they weren't.

It was early afternoon when his father returned told him to pack all the presents in his suitcase and that they were checking out of the hotel. On the way out his son paid the bill at the front desk and followed his father to the train station where, without any explanation, he told him to buy tickets to Pressburg.

His son did as told but his curiosity was growing.

When they arrived in Pressburg terminal two hours later he asked his father where they were going as he began flagging down a carriage, but his father shook his head and said no need for a carriage, they would go by foot.

This also didn't make sense, their baggage was heavy, the Rebbe, after all his efforts should have been exhausted, especially due to his frail health, but the Rebbe was never wrong, and they began walking.

Asked a Yeshiva Student for Directions to a Hotel

On the way the Rebbe stopped a young yeshiva student who was walking quickly toward them, obviously in a hurry to somewhere and asked him for directions to a certain hotel. But the young man replied quickly,

"I'm sorry, please ask someone else I have no time!" and continued walking.

But the Rebbe reprimanded him saying, "Is that any way to treat strangers? Is that the how you fulfill the commandment of accepting guests?"

The young man, realizing he was wrong, stopped, apologized, caught his breath and explained exactly how to get to the hotel. And added that maybe they should consider another hotel as the owner of the hotel that he mentioned just died suddenly yesterday afternoon and his wife and daughters were just beginning the 'seven' (Shiva) day mourning period.

The Rebbe thanked him, he and his son continued to the hotel and entered to see in a corner of the reception room, a woman and three young girls, probably her daughters, sitting and weeping with several comforters around them. Obviously, these were the mourners the young man mentioned.

Leaves the Room for a Stroll

The bellboy showed them to a room and the Rebbe, rather than resting a bit after the journey, told his son to leave the suitcase in the room and come with him for a stroll.

This really surprised the Rebbe's son. It was as though his father had totally regained his health and vigor and didn't have to rest at all.

The Rebbe led the way to a large Yeshiva (Torah academy) building, entered and made his way to a large room where some hundred young men were sitting and learning aloud. The Rebbe went from table to table asking the boys questions about the Tractate they were learning and listened to their replies.

One of the pupils really made a good impression and the Rebbe praised him highly. Then he saw the young man they had met earlier on the street and spoke with him for a few minutes as well, and finally they walked back to their hotel.

All this was a great mystery to the Rebbe's son; it seemed that all the events of the last two days had no real connection to anything, and certainly not to a vacation, but he didn't ask for an explanation.

Shortly everything became clear.

The Rebbe entered the hotel, approached the woman and her daughters, in the corner of the reception room, sat down and said a few consoling words. Then, motioning toward the girls asked the widow why her daughters were not married.

The woman moaned, almost began to cry and then said that even before her husband passed away, she had had no luck in finding fitting matches for them but now it would be impossible; she hadn't enough money to even buy nice clothes for them.

Directs His Son to Bring Down the Packages

At this point the Rebbe told his son to go to up their room and bring down the packages.

Moments later when he returned the Rebbe gave the packages to the woman and said, "Here are dresses and clothes for your two oldest daughters. And regarding finding a groom, well, I have two excellent candidates" and suggested the two young men he had spoken to earlier; the one he praised highly and the one they had first met on the street.

The Rebbe arranged it that that very evening they would meet and, in fact, several days thereafter both couples decided to marry!

Years later the Rebbe's son happened to be in Pressburg and, by chance, meet the youngest daughter. She thanked G-d that she too was now happily married and that her two sisters were doing wonderfully with the husbands that his father had arraigned!

One was the Rabbi of a large city and the other the head of a Yeshiva.

The name of their departed father, incidentally was Rabbi Avraham Bick author of the book 'Bikuray Aviv' on the Torah, and the time that he suddenly passed away coincided exactly with the time the Rebbe was 'unconscious' in the beginning of our story.

Reprinted from the Shavuot 5781 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.

Who Deserves a Greater Reward?

A journalist in Israel was writing an article about Baalei Teshuva, people who chose to come closer to Hashem and learn about their Jewish heritage. After a class, he stopped one of the men who was leaving and posed this question: "Who do you think will get more reward, you, or someone who has been religious his entire life?"

He thought the man would refer to the dictum of Chazal that "in the place where penitents stand, even the completely righteous cannot."

Without hesitation the man replied, "Definitely, one who has always been observant will get more reward." He explained. "They will be rewarded because they think there is something better out there, yet they don't pursue it. I know that the world without Torah and without G-d is empty. For me, coming here is the only logical response, so why do I deserve reward?"

Reprinted from the Bamidbar-Shavuot 5781 email of Midgal Ohr (edited by Jonathan Gewirtz).

The Shidduch of the Future Divrei Chaim

The following story is well-known. I repeat it due to its powerful lesson and as a segue into another story, whose lesson is also quite appropriate and significant. The Baruch Taam, Horav Baruch Frankel Teumim, zl, was an illustrious Rav and leader of Galician and Moravian Jewry.

His son, Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl, m'Komarna, travelled to Tarnograd, Ukraine, to meet the young man who had distinguished himself as the illui, genius, of Tarnograd, who later became known as Horav Chaim Sanzer, the Divrei Chaim.

After speaking in learning with the young man, Rav Yehoshua Heshel was so impressed that he could not wait to return home to encourage his parents to take this young man as a husband for his sister. When word went out that the Baruch Taam was taking a son-in-law from Tarnograd, the students in his yeshivah became visibly upset. After all, it was not as if the Baruch Taam's yeshivah did not include young men who were brilliant scholars. Why go elsewhere when an "identical" scholar could be found in one's own yeshivah?

The students even sent "spies" to check out the illui of Tarnograd. They discovered that, indeed, he was a Talmudic scholar without peer, righteous and ethical to match. He did, however, have one physical impediment: he limped badly, as one leg was shorter than the other.

"How could our illustrious Rav take a son-in-law who is not physically perfect?" was the foolish question that the jealous young men were asking. [Such a comment in and of itself explains why they were passed over.] "Why did Rav Yehoshua Heshel not inform his father and sister of this "development"? [After meeting the young man, he was so utterly impressed that he felt his physical impediment did not matter.]

The Daughter Demanded a Say in the Matter

The Baruch Taam asked his son the same question: "Why did you not inform me of his condition?" Rav Yehoshua Heshel explained that his father might not have agreed to the match. He felt that once he met Rav Chaim, he would be so overjoyed that his condition would go unnoticed. While this rationale assuaged the Baruch Taam, his daughter, Rachel Faige, who was a special young woman in her own right, demanded to have a say in the matter.

She wanted to meet the man whom everyone wanted and expected her to marry. It was settled – Rav Chaim was coming for a visit to meet with the Baruch

Taam, and (if that went well) afterwards he would meet his daughter. The Baruch Taam was very impressed with the young man's brilliance. He could not believe that such a young person was so erudite. Nonetheless, his daughter would have to reconcile herself to one condition.

The future chassan and kallah met for a short while, and, after their meeting, the kallah fully agreed to the match. What did they talk about? The traditional tale is that Rav Chaim asked her to look in the mirror. What she saw unnerved and frightened her, because she saw herself bent and limping in pain. Her face portrayed the extreme pain that she was experiencing with each step.

The Original Heavenly Decree

Rav Chaim said, "You see now what was the original Heavenly decree. Knowing that I was your predestined chassan, I prayed before He Who rests upon High to transfer this impediment to me. I have experienced this pain for years, so that you would not endure the agony and shame. Now, if you want to forgo and ignore this, I absolve you from the shidduch."

Rachel Faige understood that before her stood an unusual, saintly man. She acquiesced to the marriage and, as a result, merited to be the progenitress of the Admorim of Shiniev, Kishanev, Sanz, Gorlitz and Bobov. Not all yichus is positive. Even the most negative yichus, however, can be (by the right, positive-thinking person) ameliorated and used favourably.

Reprinted from the Shavuot 5781 email of Peninim on the Torah (edited by Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum).