**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas terumah 5782**

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**The Chida and the**

**Cheese Merchant**



 The Chida, Rebbe Chaim David Azulai, zt”l, once made an ocean voyage on a trip to Italy. On the ship, there was also a Jewish merchant who was carrying a large shipment of non-Kosher cheese.

 During the voyage, the merchant tried to persuade the Chida to give him a Hechsher, a Kashrus certificate for his non-Kosher cheese, so that he could sell it to the Jewish communities as well as the non-Jewish communities.

 However, the Chida knew that the cheese was not Kosher, so he firmly refused the proposals of the merchant. Seeing that persuasion wasn’t working, he decided to coerce the Chida into giving the Hechsher by force. He hired a few of the ship’s sailors, and they attacked the Chida in the middle of the night, and threatened to throw him into the sea if he didn’t meet the merchant’s request.

**Forced to Write a Certificate**

**For the Evil Merchant**

 With no other choice, he was forced to write certificate for the evil merchant. He signed the letter and dated it with a pasuk from Parshah Bo: Tuesday, from the week of “This is how you must eat it, with your belt tied to your waist” from the book of Shemos, of the year 5513.

 When the merchant arrived in Italy, he announced that he had cheese from Israel that was Kosher L’Mehadrin, with the Hashgacha of the famous Gaon, the Chida. As was customary amongst the Jews, the merchant was asked to present his Hashgacha certificate to the local Rav.

 The Rav carefully read the wording of the letter, and when he reached the concluding sentence, he stopped, astonished at why the Chida would add the words “from the Book of Shemos” after writing the Pasuk. Wasn’t it common knowledge that this Pasuk was found in Sefer Shemos (Parashas Bo 12:11)? There had to be some kind of deeper meaning.

**The Brilliant Intention of the Chida**

 The Rav thought about it for a while, until it suddenly became clear to him. The Chida’s intention of the word Shemos was not to reference the name of the Parshah, but rather to the Rashei Taivos, Sh”nayim M”ikra V”Echod T”argum (שמו״ת, (which is the Mitzvah to say the weekly Parshah twice and the translation of it into Aramaic by Onkelos one time, and it was a hint for him to look at the Targum on the Pasuk that was quoted.

 The Rav then looked at the Targum on this Pasuk and the words, ‘your belt tied to your waist’, in Aramaic is, ‘Chartzeichon Yehon Asirin’, which means ‘your waist tied with a belt’. However, Chartzeichon, in Hebrew, can also refer to cheese, and Asirin sounds like the word ‘Asur’, which means forbidden.

 The Rav understood the message. The Chida was hinting that the cheese was Asur, and it was forbidden. The Rav immediately ordered the merchant to be imprisoned in the community jail, and during the investigation, the merchant admitted that he obtained the Hechsher from the Chida with force and violence. The Rav subsequently said, “Baruch Hashem, for He gave wisdom to those who fear Him!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bo 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.*

**Story #1257**

**The Letter from**

**An Orphan Janitor**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 There was a Jew named Yisroel who lived the last thirty-some years of his life in Israel, in the city of Bnei Brak, holding the same janitorial job throughout. He was a very simple, hardworking, genuine person, yet he never really was able to read Hebrew.

 Born in the USA, Yisroel had a difficult childhood. When he was nine years old his father passed away. His mother, thinking that her child would hamper her chances of remarrying, put him into a Jewish orphanage.
 The orphanage advertised that they were strictly religious and promised her that her child would not transgress the Shabbat. But they lied. They sensed that she wouldn't check up on him and soon poor little Yisroel found himself working seven days a week.

 He felt that something was wrong, but because he was young, really hadn't received much of a Jewish education and was quiet by nature, he didn't make any problems. Instead, he suffered silently and prayed for some sort of miracle.



 And that’s what happened. One day when he was eleven or twelve, he saw a very impressive photo of an elderly bearded Jew in a newspaper, and below it was an article. The man, who was called Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He had been in a Russian Communist prison but now lived in Brooklyn, and he loved to help people and he made miracles.
 Yisroel said to himself, 'He will understand me,' and decided to write him a letter. It took him a few days to get up the courage and, because he wasn't such a good writer, a few more to actually write it.

 Then there were the problems of getting a stamp and envelope and putting the letter in a mailbox without being noticed. But his simple determination prevailed and finally he proudly managed to sneak it off in the post.

 The letter began with his sad story and ended with a request for a blessing to not have to work on Shabbos, or even better yet, to get out of the place completely. But after three weeks of not getting a reply he just gave a sigh, and said to himself, 'Looks like I won't get an answer,' and forgot about the entire incident.

 Then, one morning, there it was! A letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to him! A miracle letter!

**The First Letter that**

**He Had Ever Received**

 First: it was the first letter he ever received in his life! Second: It was the first time anyone paid attention to him. Third: this great, holy Rabbi actually noticed him!

And two more miracles: no one intercepted and destroyed the letter he sent, and another that the same thing didn't happen to this letter he received.

 He took the envelope to his room, closed the door, sat down, opened it and began to read.

 The Rebbe wrote that he was happy to hear from him; that Jews must always be strong and proud to be G-d's people and that he shouldn't worry. Then he wished him *mazal tov* on his upcoming Bar-Mitzva (13th birthday when Jewish males must begin to observe the Commandments) and assured him that when he began putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries), things would get better.

 Sure enough, when Yisroel turned 13 his mother bought him a pair of *tefillin*. A few weeks later the orphanage miraculously decided to find him a job 'outside' and, again miraculously, his new boss did not require him to work on Shabbat.

 The Rebbe's blessings all came true and when he reached the age of 15, he had saved enough to move out of the orphanage completely.



 But he didn't forget the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak. As time passed, he became more attached to him and his chasidim and by 1950 when the Rebbe passed away and was replaced by his dynamic son-in-law Rabbi Menachem Mendel, Yisroel despite his handicaps, considered himself to be a full-fledged Chabad chasid.

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  But the new Chabad Rebbe was more demanding. He explained often and at great length deep existential and kabalistic concepts, such as how G-d creates all being constantly, the eternal uniqueness of the Jewish people and how the Torah is the blueprint of it all. But he always managed to put these ideas in a simple inspiring way

 For instance, how we can learn to serve G-d from electrical appliances.
 We are surrounded by electrical appliances: lights, ovens, telephones computers etc. that are activated by a completely invisible power; electricity. These appliances provide powerful and positive things as light, warmth, motion, and communication to benefit man. But only if we push the right button to turn them on.

 Similarly, in each Jew (and each human) is an invisible power called the soul. This power, like electricity, is invisible, but it has the ability to illuminate, warm up and bring blessing and meaning to the world.

**Pushing the Proper Button**

 We only have to push the proper button; find a way to motivate each Jew. And when we do, we find that a little light and good pushes away much darkness and bad. We can stop the pain, suffering, war and ignorance in the world.
 Yisroel took this idea seriously, as did all the other chasidim. Soon young men and newlywed couples began traveling throughout the world to spread the ideas of *chasidut*, but Yisroel didn't know what to do in order to participate in this mission.

 He was very shy, spoke with a bit of a stutter, didn't have any talent for writing or teaching or much of anything else. He couldn't give a lot of charity because he didn't have much money. He tried to learn Torah but couldn't really concentrate for long. All he could do was be honest, nice and pray.

**Worthy of Another Miracle**

 So, he prayed for another miracle. And again, it worked! He had a brainstorm.

The previous Rebbe had written three small booklets translated into English. Each contained forty-some pages of simple explanations on chasidic ideas about G-d, the Jews and Torah and other interesting things.

 Yisroel bought three pamphlets, bound them together with a piece of cardboard, wrote on the cover: "Chasidut Chabad-Lubavitch", tucked it in his coat pocket and went to the Brooklyn Public Library. After strolling over to the 'Judaism' section, he took a book from the shelf, pretended to be reading it and then, when he was sure that no one was watching, put the book back on the shelf *with* his Chassidic creation next to it, and made his departure. (Something like how he secretly mailed that letter to the Rebbe).

 He calmly left the library, looking straight ahead, feeling as though he had just completed a mission-impossible espionage job! He had planted a seed of Judaism in the world, and prayed that it would bear fruit.

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 One night, years later Yisroel was riding the subway home from work in an almost empty subway car. Only one other person was sitting there, reading his newspaper. Yisroel looked his way just as the other fellow also looked up from his paper and a conversation ensued.

 Yisroel told him he lived in Crown Heights and was a Lubavitcher. The other fellow, also a Jew, replied that he lived in Monsey and although he wasn't a Chassid, Lubavitch made him religious.

**Not From an Observant Family**

 His story was like this. He was not from an observant family, and until about five years ago knew almost nothing about Judaism. But then, one day he happened to be in the Brooklyn library looking for a book on Judaism when he noticed a strange booklet in the bookcase that seemed out of place. He took it out, saw it had a makeshift cardboard cover with a crudely handwritten title about *chasidut*, opened it up from curiosity and, although he didn't really understand much of what it said, he couldn't put it down!

 It was something about chasidic Judaism and had a completely different angle on G-d, the Jewish people and the Torah. For the first time he saw that Judaism was something very deep and alive. That really got him interested and eventually made him an observant Jew.

 So, our Yisroel the janitor actually saw the fruits of his labors!

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***Source:***Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the first-hand report of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton on his yeshiva website, *OhrTmimim.org*, who also wrote that with Yisroel he had a deep brotherly connection.

***Connection*:** Tuesday night-Wednesday is Yud Sh'vat, the anniversary of the passing of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1950, and the anniversary of the *official*acceptance of his son-in-law to be 7th Rebbe in 1951.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Beshalach 5782 email of KabbalaOnline,org, a project of Ascent of Safed.* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) *ascent@ascentofsafed.com*

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**Words Can Save**

**By Rabbi YY Jacobson**



 Some time ago I was at a Shabbaton when a young man came over to me and shared what a difficult time he had growing up in the school system. By the time he was fourteen years old, he had been expelled from eight yeshivas. Why so many?

 “Everybody wanted me,” he said.

 “I like the attitude,” I shot back.

 The truth… nobody could deal with him. At home, his father was even harsher than the principals. He would come home and his father would punish him, double the amount, because of what happened in school. Instead of feeling the safety and the embrace of his father, he was given distance and apathy. When he turned fourteen, his father put him on a plane to Israel. “Even he couldn’t stand me,” the man said.

**“I Had No Other Place to Go”**

 When I arrived, I started going to one Slonimer shul in Bnei Brak. I had no other place to go. Every day, there stood a ninety-five-year-old man, whom I later learned was Asher Arkovitch. He had been a Partisan in the Second World War and survived. He got married, but for the past ten years, his wife had been ill, and he had taken care of her. Recently, she had passed away, leaving Reb Asher, at age 95, alone.

 But even with his loss, Reb Asher davened as if he was truly talking to G-d. It was a real, bona fide conversation. You could feel his words in the room.

 One morning, after everyone had filed out of the shul, those who remained were the boy and Reb Asher. With just the two of them, Reb Asher turned to him and said, “I haven’t seen you around before. What are you doing here?”

 The boy told him exactly the situation. “I haven't had luck in any school system. I was expelled from eight schools, and my father sent me here to Israel.”

**Informing Others of Their Own Greatness**

 Reb Asher looked the boy in the eye and gently said, “You know, we say every day in the prayer of Ashrei, ‘Le’hodia livnei ha’adam gevurosav … - To inform mankind of Your [G-d’s] greatness.” Literally, it means that G-d wants us to spread recognition about His strength and royalty. But the Maggid of Lechevitch provided another interpretation. You know why we talk so much about G-d's infinity and majesty? To inform each and every person of their own greatness.

 With every person you meet, draw out their strength and let them know about it. Show them their own beauty, their own glory, their own profundity, their own holiness. We talk about G-d's greatness, not because He needs our compliments, but because we need to do the same to others. If G-d is great, that means He didn't make a mistake when He created you. If G-d is omniscient and omnipresent, that means that when He created you, He was making the statement that the world is incomplete without your contribution. Make others cognizant of their own power, of their own fortitude, of their own majesty, of their own creativity, of their own inner, infinite dignity and light and gift.

 “Rabbi Jacobson,” said this man, now an adult, standing in front of me, “I got into another yeshiva in Israel, and six months later, I was expelled. I then got into a tenth school a half a year later, until the principal said, “You're not for us.”

**A 15-Year-Old with a Record of Ten Expulsions**

 Here I was, 15 years old with a record of ten schools expelling me. I had nobody to turn to. I didn’t have a father to call. I was so lost in the world that I decided I can't live any longer. The pain was just too deep. The loneliness, the solitariness was just too profound.

 One morning I walked to the roof of a tall building. It was 11 o'clock in the morning. I began pacing at the edge of the roof, about to jump and take myself out of my agony. And suddenly, I had a flashback of that conversation I had one year ago when this old Jew. Asher Arkovitch found me and told me, ‘Whatever happens, never forget about your strength.’

 And there and then, on that rooftop, I told myself, ‘You know, before I jump, I first have to become aware of my strengths and then I'll make a decision.’ I walked back. I went down. I got my life together, and here I am today, married with three beautiful children and an extraordinary wife. And I built a successful business.

 I looked at the man who had tears streaming down his eyes. My eyes also moistened. Would Reb Asher ever have known the impact his words had on that morning in a Slonimer Shul in Bnei Brak to a fourteen-year-old boy? Could he have imagined the life-altering influence? They literally saved a life from suicide.
Don’t be stingy with words. Don't be stingy with gestures. Don't be stingy with hugs. Don't be stingy with embraces. Don't be stingy with letting every person you meet know about their strengths, their beauty, their amazing gifts.

 Every person is a manifestation of Hashem in this world. This is true of anyone. And what about your own children? Never take your sight off that target. When you believe in your children, you allow them to believe in themselves.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemot 5782 email of the TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik.*

**A Giant in Torah**

**By Rabbi Uri Lati**

 Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was once on a bus when an Israeli female soldier boarded, and looking for a seat, found her place right next to him.



 Faced with this, Rav Shlomo Zalman was in a quandary. If he would get up and move seats, it would be an insult to her. And yet, on the other hand, to remain there posed certain hashkafik considerations.

 What should he do? He pressed the signal to indicate to the bus driver that he wanted to get off the bus. As the bus slowed down, Rav Shlomo Zalman got off and waited for the next one, which came fifty minutes later.

 Why did he do all of this? So as not to embarrass another person. While taking into account the sensitive viewpoints of remaining seated next to her, one might say that it’s also not respectful to the rabbi to inconvenience himself and get off the bus for this.

 But, once this was a value and principle, Rav Shlomo Zalman held firm too, it made no difference. He

needed to do something. But what to do? Nothing at the expense of

embarrassing someone else. And if it meant getting off and waiting close to

an hour for another bus to take him to the very same destination the first bus was taking him to, so be it. That is what a man with Torah care and character does. That is how a Jew remains firm in his convictions and principles and yet doesn’t in any which way show disregard for the respect and dignity another deserves. That was Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l. His life and legacy are a guidepost for us all.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeitzei 5782 email of TheTorahAnyTimes Newsletter. Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik.*

**Journeying From**

**The Forest of Despair**

**By Natalia Thalheim**

 It was about a year after I began to become observant that I asked my older brother to tell me his story. All I knew was that he had been religious for decades and that his reality was beginning to appeal to me. He was the oldest of us four kids born to parents who survived the Holocaust.

 Our mother had been raised in a traditional home in Eastern Europe, and our father was from Communist Russia where religious identity was forbidden. Their compromise: a lukewarm form of Judaism. My brother asked to go to Hebrew School at age six, which paved the way for the rest of us to receive a Jewish education.

**Joined Some Friends on a Cross-Country Ski Trip**

 When he was in college, my brother joined some friends on a cross-country ski trip during winter break. The first day went well. Somewhat sore on the second day, yet still possessed with an adventurous spirit, the group set out with greater ambition, choosing more challenging trails.

 Late in the afternoon, as the other guys briskly traversed forward, my brother lagged behind. At a fork in the trail, his companions decided to play a trick on him. They went ahead in another direction, without letting him know. Proceeding slowly, he soon realized he had lost sight of his buddies. He was tired and cold and unsure of which path to take. He was deep in the woods, alone.

 Despite his age (late adolescence, being a time of presumed invincibility) and his size (he was a big guy), my brother began to become fearful. Dusk was rapidly approaching. He had no idea how to get home; no food, no flashlight, no map. In the stillness of the woods, where everything was the white and brown and blue-black colors of the winter woods, he became aware of the minutest sounds – snow crunching underfoot, his arms swinging, his ski poles being planted in the earth. Mostly, he heard the staccato rhythm of his own quickened breathing dominate the stillness. Anxiety mounting, he longed for company. He made his own voice a friend. He decided to sing. He sang a tune he remembered from Hebrew School – the tune to a familiar prayer, Adon Olam, which means Master of the world.



 In the quiet of the forest, in the company of the words, he became comforted. As he sang, it dawned on him that G-d is the Master of the world. G-d put him in that forest. G-d would take him out. And He did. Singing and striding, my brother was led to a clearing. A short distance ahead he spotted his surprised friends and rejoined them, completing the last leg of the trail before nightfall.

 G-d guided my brother along many other dark trails in the two dozen years that followed that incident. He travelled to the Former Soviet Union, to the death camps of Europe, and to the Holy Land. He gave up a PhD program in philosophy, moving from atheist to believer. He enrolled in a program of Rabbinic Studies, and with G-d's help, my brother continued to find his way.

 He became observant, married and raised children. Always, he filled his home with Jewish books and music. He studied medicine and put his heart into helping others, particularly Russian Jews and singles in his neighborhood. But as life would have it, sometimes he still struggled to stay on the trail, to find his way home when it was dark.

 When my brother died suddenly at age forty-three, eleven years ago, his sixteen-year-old son came to live with me and my husband for a few months. In the unbearable darkness of my young nephew's horror and grief, only the Jewish music that his father loved offered solace. History repeated itself. Heartfelt melodies about trust and faith gradually guided my nephew out of the forest of despair.

 Today, my nephew and his siblings are traversing their individual life trails. Each strives to find his or her own connection with G-d. I am grateful to have heard my brother tell his story shortly before he passed away when Torah observance was so new to me. I wish I had been closer to my brother during those years when he sang at his Shabbat table, celebrated the births of his children, and taught Torah to the people he welcomed into his home.

 But this I know: if G-d guided my brother out of his personal darkness, He will certainly continue to illuminate the way until redemption reunites us with our loved ones. May it be speedily in our days.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Beshalach 5782 email of the Lamplighter.*

**The Rewards of Celebrating Tu B’Shvat with Delicious Fruits**

 A fascinating story about how one can become enriched from following the minhag to eat fruit on Tu B’Shvat, was told by an Israeli Jew after a trip he took to France. The man would often fly on business to various cities, and on one occasion, he found himself in Paris in mid-February. He went to daven in a nearby synagogue and it was there that he learned that that very day was Tu B’Shvat.

 He had a flight back to Israel to catch later in the day, so he quickly hurried out to the local fruit market and purchased some fruit to take along on his flight. The fruit seller was a religious Jew and when he noticed the man picking up some of the most exotic and expensive items, he felt compelled to ask.

 “Tell me, sir, why are you buying so much fruit - and such an exotic selection, just to take back to Israel? Aren’t there many exotic fruits in the Holy Land?”

 The man replied, “Why, today is Tu B’Shvat and this is a custom that my family adheres to year after year.”

 The owner of the fruit market smiled and said, “That is a fine custom, indeed. My family follows it as well. Allow me to tell you a story that took place many years ago with my own ancestor.”

 He brought the man into a back room and rummaged around until he found a certain gadget which he held up in his hand. “Do you see this? This fruit press is how my grandfather became rich!”

**Knew a Great Story was Coming**

 The traveling Jew knew that a great story was forthcoming and so he waited with anticipation. “Many years ago, my grandfather was once traveling on business much like you, and he found himself in Moscow on the day of Tu B’Shvat. He, too, wished to buy some fruit for the holiday so he went out and found a local fruit seller. In Moscow, it was quite cold and most of the fruit hadn’t even ripened yet but this did not deter my grandfather and he bought a sizable amount of fruit.

 “The merchant was surprised that someone would spend so much money on unripened fruit and couldn’t help but inquire about it. My grandfather told him almost the exact words that you just told me. But that merchant wasn’t Jewish and could not understand how a person can spend his money on an old custom that had no bearing on his life - especially since the fruit he was buying was barely edible! “The Russian merchant picked up a tool - it was this fruit presser to be exact - and showed it to my grandfather. ‘Do you want to know what I do with my money?’ he asked, and lowered his voice surreptitiously. In the next motion, he began to unscrew the bottom of the handle and pulled off the adjoining piece. Then, he poured a handful of gold coins into his hand. ‘I hide all my money in this machine. It contains my life savings. But I know it’s safe here and it won’t be wasted on silly things - or unripened fruit!’”

**Fondly Gazed at the Fruit Press in His Hand**

 The Parisian fruit seller gazed at the fruit press in his hand fondly and continued to relate his story. “My grandfather always remembered that merchant and the lesson he learned on that day. A Jew uses his money for mitzvos - but what does an old Muscovite use his money for? I will tell you.”

 He smiled again as he recalled his grandfather. “A number of years went by and my grandfather was in Moscow again on business, at the same time of year. He decided to go back to the same shop and buy some more fruit. But this time, as he approached, he saw a crowd of people hanging around and a buzz of activity.

 He asked someone what was happening and was told that the old Russian merchant had passed on and his two sons were in the process of liquidating the shop. Now is the time for bargains, he was told.

 So, my grandfather pushed to the front where he saw two younger men selling everything in their father’s store. ‘I am looking for a small fruit press.’ he asked the younger men. ‘Do you perhaps have one that I can buy?’

 ‘A fruit press?’ The son looked around and saw an old rusty press on the table. ‘Here, do you want this? It’s old and worthless and I have no use for it. Take it for free!’



 My grandfather smiled inwardly and happily accepted the press. When he got back to his lodgings, he opened it up and found more than just a handful of gold coins! He found a veritable treasure! He took it home and became a very wealthy man.”

 Pointing to the ancient fruit press, the Parisian market owner concluded, “It has been an accepted custom in our family to indulge in exotic fruit on Tu B’Shvat, for it was this very minhag that made our family rich in the first place!” (TT Moadim Ketanim)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Beshalach 5782 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman’s Torah Tavlin.*