**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Noach 5774**

**Volume 5, Issue 5 1 Cheshvon 5774/ October 5, 2013**

*For a free subscription, please forward your request to* [***keren18@juno.com***](mailto:keren18@juno.com)

**To Exalt and Sanctify**

**By Chana Keren**

*For the third time that week Yidel Eisner\* debated with himself. To say something and appear meddlesome? Yet how could he remain silent when he might be able to help? As the men intoning the mourner’s Kaddish took three steps back, he decided that today would be the day. He would say what he had to say and hope for the best.*

*Yidel didn’t actually know the fellow he wanted to approach. It was a Minchah minyan, held in a heimish Manhattan office on weekdays only for working men in the vicinity. But he was sure, without a doubt, that the man he felt impelled to question had been saying Kaddish for three consecutive years! He had been reciting Kaddish the whole time that Yidel was in the year of mourning for his mother, and the other man was still saying it.*

**A Discreet Explanation**

*“Reb Yid,” he said, trying for a light, half-humorous effect, “you do know that Kaddish is only meant to be said for eleven months, right?” The man he had questioned, Menashe Weiser, had a quiet, shy quality about him. He smiled diffidently and murmured a discreet explanation. Yidel was intrigued.*

*This is Menashe’s story, the story of a man who has been saying Kaddish for six consecutive years.*

MENASHE GREW UP in an assimilated Jewish family in the heart of New Jersey. They had achieved much of the American Dream — suburban living, a politician in the family, a cousin who was a famous entertainment star, another a tenured college professor. But no one was religious, and barely a sentiment was spared for *Yiddishkeit*. Against all odds, Menashe had become a *baal teshuvah* during his college years. By graduation he was fully *shomer Shabbos*.

***\*All names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.***

For twenty-five years, life was a predictable series of ups and downs. Marriage, the birth of his children, *parnassah* and its accompanying woes, family trips, and then the sudden passing of his father when Menashe was forty-five. Papa had been a strong and healthy eighty five, but the heart attack was quick and final.

Menashe strengthened himself, noting that his father hadn’t suffered, had lived a long and productive life, and had merited to be the only patriarch in the extended family to have Jewish grandchildren. After *shivah*, Menashe began the yearlong experience of being a *chiyuv* — making sure never to miss a *minyan*, leading the *davening*. It was hard, but everyone did it when he had to, and he was happy that Papa had a son to say *Kaddish* for him.

**Not Everyone Has a Kaddishel**

After all, not everyone has a *Kaddishel*. Two years earlier, his father-in-law had passed on. Because his father was still alive, *halachah* did not permit Menashe to recite *Kaddish* on Dad’s behalf. There had been only one son, Steve. A wealthy, prominent businessman, he flew all over the world signing deals, but *Kaddish* for his departed father was of no concern to him. And he wouldn’t pay anyone to do it, either. So Menashe and his wife, Esti, had dipped into their meager savings to pay a *kollel yungerman* to say *Kaddish* for eleven months, although Esti wished it could have been done by a family member.

As the eleven-month mark of reciting *Kaddish* for his father drew near, Menashe felt relief. It had been a struggle, but he was pleased to have succeeded in his final filial duty. But only days before his obligatory *Kaddish* recital was finished, he got a call from Nebraska.

**His Best Friend in the World**

Menashe learned twice a week with someone through Torah Umesorah’s Partners in Torah program. Alex and Menashe had been learning together for more than five years. Alex, a bit of a loner, would come to New York a few times a year to join Menashe’s family for Shabbos and Yom Tov, and he would tell anyone who asked, and some who didn’t, that Menashe was his best friend in the world. In truth, Menashe might have been his only friend in the world.

Now Alex was panic-stricken because the doctors warned that his father's time on earth was coming to an end. Menashe used the tools of friendship, as well as the sensitivity he had developed from his own recent experience, to comfort and strengthen Alex. And two days later, when Alex’s father passed on, Menashe flew to Nebraska to be at Alex’s side and to ensure that a proper Jewish burial would be arranged for Baruch ben Meir.

However, when Menashe broached the topic of *Kaddish*, he was surprised that Alex balked. Alex said he was not prepared to take on the onus of saying *Kaddish* three times a day, claiming that his medical condition made it impossible for him to get up in time for *minyan* every morning. He would try, he said, to say *Kaddish* every afternoon and evening — but could make no commitment.

**Saddened by the Fact There**

**Was No One to Say Kaddish**

In vain, Menashe tried repeatedly to explain the significance of a son saying *Kaddish* for his father. Menashe was frustrated and annoyed. What was the point of all the learning they had done in the past five years? But he was also saddened because it seemed that Baruch ben Meir would not have *Kaddish* said for his *neshamah*.

Maybe, Menashe mused, he could do it himself. Unable to bear the thought of a man not having *Kaddish* said for him, Menashe resolved to do so and informed Alex, who was pleased and surprisingly appreciative.

And so Menashe began to say *Kaddish* again for a man he had never met, and with no thought of remuneration.

**Uncle Joseph Had Passed Away**

And when it was almost over, another cal lcame in. It was Cousin Donald, the famous entertainer who had barely deigned to speak to Menashe since he had, in Don’s words, “gone off the deep end with all that religious stuff.” Cousin Donald, who was married to a Chinese woman and was always on tour, was sorry to inform Menashe that his father, Menashe’s Uncle Joseph, had passed away. This time Menashe didn’t even hesitate. Uncle Joseph had always been a second father figure to him, welcoming him into his home, expressing concern for his well-being, asking after Esti and the children even when other relatives expressed disdain for his lifestyle.

Menashe would say *Kaddish* for Uncle Joseph this year. Donald couldn’t have cared less, but Menashe called Aunt Arlene offering this final merit for her husband’s soul. Joseph’s wife, who remembered her bearded rabbinical Russian grandfather, tearfully thanked Menashe.

Six months into Uncle Joseph’s year, Alex’s mother passed away. This time there was no discussion; Alex simply assumed that Menashe would say *Kaddish* for her. Since he had lost his own mother at the tender age of fifteen, Menashe was allowed to do so, and he did not let Alex, or Malya bas Yeruchom, down.

**A Baal Teshuvah in**

**The Sandwich Generation**

By now Menashe had been saying *Kaddish* for more than four years, without a break. He notes that all the people he had said *Kaddish* for were in their eighties or nineties at the time of their passing, something for which he is grateful. Saying *Kaddish* for a younger person would have been painful and traumatic. “I guess,” he says wryly, “it’s the hazard of my position — being the only religious male in the family on all sides!”

As a *baal teshuvah* in the sandwich generation, he felt a responsibility to all the members of the earlier generation who had left this world. Four and a half years of *Kaddish* had come to an end. Menashe went back to *davening* quietly at his place in shul. For one whole month! And then Uncle Benjamin died.

**Another Uncle to Say Kaddish for**

Uncle Benjamin was the third and last of the brothers. Menashe simply told Aunt Judith and the cousins that he would be honored to say *Kaddish* for his uncle. Once again, the aunt was grateful and the cousins indifferent.

“This is it,” said Menashe as Benjamin’s eleven months drew to a close. “My father’s generation is gone.” *Kaddish* was over. Or so he thought.

Then Esti got a call from her sobbing mother, whose last surviving sister, Tante Irene, way off in South America, whom Menashe had met only twice, had died in her sleep. Could Menashe … would Menashe … please…?

**Hadn’t He Done Enough?**

He didn’t want to. Hadn’t he done enough? But how could he not? No one else would take care of saying *Kaddish* for Ita bas Shmuel. And Esti wanted him to, very badly. He had said *Kaddish* for two years for Alex’s parents, who weren’t related to him and whom he had never met. He would say *Kaddish* for Irene.

Yidel Eisner realized that Menashe, by reciting *Kaddish*, elevates souls who would otherwise not be remembered and would not be able to rise to higher spheres. He is the *Kaddishel*, the “memorial son” to a generation that lost its way but had one member find his way back. And Menashe will not let them down; he will perform this last *chessed shel emes* with kindness and concern, thereby sanctifying the Name of Hashem.

And so, Menashe Weiser steps up for *Kaddish* once again. His voice rings out loud and clear.

“*Yisgadel v’yiskadesh* … May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified … May He give reign to His Kingship in your lifetimes and in your days ...”

*Amen!*

*Reprinted from a recent issue of Inyan, the Hamodia Magazine.*

**No Time to Retire**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“Noah, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard.” (*Beresheet* 9:20)

When Noah emerged from the ark, he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk. It seems that while Noah did nothing wrong by planting a vineyard, the Sages teach that he was remiss in making that his first priority upon leaving the haven in which he had been spared from the destruction. He was supposed to replant the world, and he should have started with necessities, not wine.

Rabbi Frand quotes Rabbi Leibel Hyman who explains that what made Noah mundane was that he chose to look at his past accomplishments, his heroic salvation of all animal life in the ark, and say, “I did enough. Now it’s time to retire, to relax with a glass of wine.”

**A Lesson for Each and Every Jew**

This lesson applies to each and every Jew, to this very day.

Some commentators write that the most difficult test for Abraham was the need to obtain a burial plot for Sarah after all he had been through with the test of the sacrifice of Isaac. But how could that compare to the test of the sacrifice? There he was commanded to sacrifice his only son!

The answer is that one of the most difficult tasks is to keep moving, to keep building, no matter what our prior accomplishments may have been. Abraham could justifiably have said, “I did more than enough.” But he didn’t. He kept on moving and doing, and every Jew, as a descendent of Abraham, doesn’t rest on his laurels. He keeps going.

One of the greatest myths that American culture has invented is the marvel of early retirement. Every American dreams of the day when he will be able to relax on his porch with a cup of wine (or a bottle of beer perhaps). But this is a fallacy. At the age of 82, Sumner Redstone, CEO of Viacom, said, “You retire, you die.”

Even if retirement is the great American dream, it shouldn’t be ours. Americans, as sons of Noah, earn their retirement honestly. It is their heritage from their great-grandfather Noah. These are not wicked or evil goals, just plain and mundane.

We trace our roots back to Abraham *Abinu*, who at the ripe old age of 137 was still overcoming daunting challenges, without looking to put up his feet to relax. While those around us follow the ordinary path of Noah, we follow Abraham and build as long as we can.

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

**Attorney for Israel**

**Baruch Cohen Knows**

**The Art of the Fight.**

**By** [**Judy Gruen**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48865962.html)

At the end of his second year in law school, Baruch Cohen was invited to interview for a job with a Wall Street law firm. This was a total surprise, as he had not applied for a position with the “white shoe” firm, which normally courted straight-A, Ivy League waspy students. Baruch, in contrast, attended a mid-level law school, was obviously Jewish, and didn’t have a perfect GPA. The dean told him, “I have no idea why you got this opportunity but I suggest you not wear your yarmulke to the interview. And make sure those white strings aren’t coming out of your belt.”

**From a Long Line of Orthodox Rabbis**

Coming from a long line of orthodox rabbis and committed to his Judaism, Baruch was torn. “I grew up in a tough Far Rockaway neighborhood,” he recalls. “Where I come from, anyone telling me to take off my [kippah](http://www.aish.com/ci/be/48901292.html) was usually angling for a fight.” He asked advice from rabbis and orthodox attorneys he knew: wear the kippah for the interview or not? Everyone advised he remove it for this potentially career-making opportunity.

With his kippah in his pocket, Baruch walked into the interview feeling almost as if he were shirtless. He was stunned to see that the attorney sitting there wore a huge velvet yarmulke and tzitzit. His first question to Baruch was, “Where’s your yarmulke?”

Too shocked to speak, Baruch learned that this attorney had seen him clerking in court, noticed his kippah and decided to offer him an interview. As the young law student stood there defenseless, the elder man laced into him. “You’re a sellout,” he said. “This is a firm of leaders, not followers.” The interview ended before it began.



Baruch Cohen holding a Kassam

Rocket that Hamas fired into Sderot

**A Commitment to Never**

**Apologize for Being Jewish**

This event was a defining moment, sharpening Baruch Cohen’s commitment to never apologize for who he was.

This event, which took place more than 25 years ago, was a defining moment, sharpening Baruch Cohen’s commitment to never apologize for who he was. “Ever since that day, I have worn my kippah everywhere, at bench trials and any other professional venue. If someone has a problem with my kippah, it’s their problem, not mine. Orthodox Jewish attorneys should not feel like second-class citizens in the American judicial system. Our Torah pioneered all the core concepts of law.”

A successful L.A. business and litigation attorney, Baruch Cohen says that today, it’s common to see observant attorneys wearing kippahs in the courtroom, and he has never personally encountered flack from judges for it. But among the [many articles](http://www.jlaw.com/) he has written on the intersection of Jewish and civil law, one was based on a Texas judge who demanded an orthodox attorney remove his kippah in her courtroom or she would not allow him to argue his case there.

[**Defending Israel**](http://www.aish.com/jw/id/How_Can_You_Defend_Israel.html)

Baruch’s persona as an observant Jew, especially in the very public arena of courthouses, makes him a magnet for questions about Israel and Judaism. Once a Jewish colleague cornered him at the courthouse. “I can’t understand why Israel won’t make peace with the Palestinians,” the man asked.

Baruch was outraged at the man’s naiveté. “This was a stacked question, so I employed a technique to get him to see the truth. Knowing the man was around 60, I asked him if he had ever had a CAT scan or MRI.”

“That’s an invasive question,” the man countered.

Baruch repeated the question, and as he retells the story, he clearly savors the memory of the duel. His colleague admitted that he had not only had these medical scans but that a tumor had been discovered along the way.

Did you decide to make peace with the tumor or did you go to battle with it to save your life?

Baruch then went in for the kill: “Did you decide to make peace with the tumor or did you go to battle with it to save your life?” The other lawyer was so startled by the analogy that he actually invited Baruch to make a presentation on Israel to a group of lawyers, all of whom had biases against Israel.

**Lawyers Should be Evidence-Based**

“Lawyers are supposed to be evidence-based, which means they should be on the forefront of defending Israel,” Baruch observes. In 2010, during the Gaza flotilla crisis, he was so outraged by the drumbeat of overwhelmingly negative press against Israel that he launched a blog called [American Trial Attorneys in Defense of Israel](http://attorneysdefendingisrael.blogspot.com/).

The blog includes links to Israel-related news articles, videos (including from Aish.com) blog posts and other commentary, and even the occasional parody, all meant to educate and enlighten readers about Jewish spirituality and Israel realpolitik. He credits Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz’s books *Chutzpah* and *The Case for Israel* in particular as an inspiration for his own advocacy.

“In a court of law, I’d have the opportunity to impeach Israel’s defamers. My blog is a cyberspace court of law,” he says. A Jewish judge confided to Baruch that his notions about [Israel](http://www.aish.com/jw/me/) had previously been formed by the reflexively leftist editorial pages of the Los Angeles Times.

This judge, whose name had been floated as a U.S. Supreme Court nominee, has since done a complete turnaround on Israel in part from reading the blog, and has even taken groups of colleagues there. Baruch is satisfied that the blog is having an impact. “Besides, the attorney reading the blog today might be a senator tomorrow.” Baruch has spoken several times on the case for Israel, including on behalf of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA.)

**A Man Who Loves a Good Fight**

It is clear when talking to Baruch Cohen that this man loves a good fight. “I’m a student of Sun Tzu's [*The Art of War*](http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/84101077.html),” he says. “I'm tenacious like a pit bull when in fight-mode.” From his spacious ninth-floor office in midtown Los Angeles with floor-to-ceiling windows, on a clear day he can see all the way to the Pacific Ocean from one view and the skyscrapers downtown from the opposite view. Before a big case, he likes to pace the office in his stocking feet, practicing his arguments. “This is my lucky stress-reliever and helps focus my mind, like Bruce Willis in *Diehard*.”

It’s not surprising that a man who channels Bruce Willis and Sun Tzu would also boast of his “aggressive” legal tactics in advertisements for his practice. He was also delighted to hear that an attorney from the opposing side in one case was warned, “Be afraid, be very afraid” of going against him. Don’t these “scorched earth” tactics and overt aggressiveness feed into negative Jewish stereotypes? Aren’t they at odds with ideals of Jewish justice and sensitivity?

**Aggressive But Not Abrasive**

“Not at all,” he states. “I’m aggressive but not abrasive. When a client is pursued wrongfully, it’s therapeutic to have someone strong on their side. It is rehabilitative for a broken and downtrodden client to have someone willing to fight for them to the max. As long as it is done with honesty and integrity, I see no contradiction. And sometimes the best offense is a good defense.”

Baruch is an avid fan of [Aish.com](http://www.aish.com/). “There is nothing out there in the Jewish community as vast and comprehensive as Aish.com for [Torah](http://www.aish.com/tp/) insights, [history](http://www.aish.com/jl/h/cc/), or [inspiration](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/). When someone asks me a question about Judaism, nine times out of ten I’ll find the perfect thing on Aish.com, copy the article in an email, and highlight the areas of particular interest to that person. It lends credibility to what I have said and expands on it.”

Fighting on behalf of clients and on behalf of the State of Israel is nothing compared to the fight Baruch and his wife, Adina, fought for two and half years to save the life of their eldest daughter, Hindy. Diagnosed with cancer just days after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Hindy passed away at 17. Asked about the impact of his daughter’s death, Baruch sighs heavily and momentarily hangs his head.



Baruch and son Yehuda holding Sefer

Torah dedicated to Hindy Cohen

“Without question this was the darkest and most traumatic event of our lives. This sort of tragic death can crush a person. In my darkness, Rabbi Boruch Gradon handed me a letter from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, written to the head of the Lakewood Yeshiva after the head of the yeshiva became a bereaved parent. I was so lost, but began to feel lifted knowing that the [Torah offers strength and direction](http://www.aish.com/sp/ph/Life-after-Death-Aishcom-Ebook.html), even for this type of tragedy.”

**Collecting Letters on the Subject of Consolation**

Baruch began collecting other such letters, written by righteous and deeply knowledgeable Jews on the topic of consolation. He translated letters from Hebrew, but also collected letters written in English, including one from Abraham Lincoln, who lost two sons.

Baruch became consumed by this project, eventually collecting 700 pages of letters, poems and songs that helped him grieve and heal. He published the book, called *Reb Yochanan’s Bone: Inspiration to the Bereaved Parent,* named for a rabbi of the Talmudic era who lost 10 children. Baruch has given away approximately 250 copies of this book to others struggling through bereavement.

Being wrapped in my grief was isolating me from everyone. I couldn’t allow the darkness to consume me.”

“If anyone had suggested when I was in the darkest point in my grief that there was ever a day I could be happy, laugh and sing again, I would have said it’s impossible. That day eventually came after years of hard work, attending a group for bereaved parents, humbling myself to learn from the writings of others, and realizing that it’s not only about me. Being wrapped in my grief was isolating me from everyone.”

**Focusing on Other Members of the Family**

“People [grieve](http://www.aish.com/jl/l/dam/ABCs_of_Death__Mourning.html) differently, at different paces. Learning to respect my wife’s space was an extremely important epiphany,” he observes. “The moment I was able to focus on how other members of my family were coping it became healing for me.”

Baruch realized that as a trial attorney, his business was about understanding other people’s causes. “I decided to be my own lawyer, to champion my own cause. Grief had become the greatest adversary of my life. It has a gravitational force of its own, and I couldn’t allow the darkness to consume me.”

“Eventually, I started to carve out a path to recognize happiness from tragedy, *simcha m’toch tzara.* God measures the tragedy and sends us signs that He’s still with us. God gave me many signs showing me He had not abandoned me, and that was a substantial lifeline.”

**Inspired by a Line from Lecha Dodi**

“One Friday night at shul, I was still in my own personal hell, not paying attention to the davening. Then I heard the line from Lecha Dodi, “*Too long have I dwelled in the valley of tears*,” and I felt that was a signal from G-d. I decided that was time to get my second wind. The book was finished, we had dedicated a Torah scroll in Hindy’s memory, my in-laws had dedicated an ambulance in her memory to Hatzalah, and we had founded the Hindy Cohen Memorial Fund at Bais Yaakov of Los Angeles, where Hindy went to school.” This fund sponsors an annual day of learning for parents, as well as the Halleli Song and Dance Production, produced by the school every other year. “The time had come to reclaim some happiness.”

Finally, he felt the pain migrating out of him at a healthy pace. But based on his experiences, he has been shocked at the well-meaning yet insensitive things people often say when paying a condolence call. “Don’t try to suggest to anyone in this situation that they know why the tragedy happened, or that the bereaved family was ‘chosen’ for this mission because of any elevated spiritual status. I found that maddening, and I rebelled against it all.”

At a huge price, Baruch says the experience made him a deeper person. “I had never noticed people in wheelchairs until I went to Disneyland pushing a wheelchair, and then all I noticed was wheelchairs. I used to have some envy for the trappings of the rich and famous. Now the very oxygen I breathe is different. I can sense pain in a person, and I focus on good people with good values.”

**Emerging from Many Years**

**Of an Emotional Wilderness**

Despite his many years in an emotional wilderness, Baruch says that his daughter’s death does not define him. “I know my child wants me to be in a positive mindset. I don’t wear it on my sleeve, but will share it with people who complain bitterly about their lives. I try to convey to them, ‘I am with you in your pain. You are not alone.’”

In public talks, Baruch emphasizes what he has learned about how to trust in G-d, the power of imagination, learning to rid yourself of envy, and how to care out happiness from any scenario you are in. “If you are sick in bed, okay, you are not blind. If you are blind, well, you are alive. I believe that G-d is always holding and supporting you.”

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Aish.com*

**Thoughts that Count**

These are the generations of Noach: Noach was a just, perfect man in his generation (Gen. 6:9)

Rashi comments: This verse teaches us that the most important legacy of a righteous person is his good deeds. A righteous person is not defined by his lineage or by his noble ancestry, but by his own actions and behavior. *(Divrei Yisrael)*

A window shall you make for the ark (Gen. 6:16)

The Hebrew word for "ark" is "tayva," which also has the meaning of "word." A Jew's job is to make a "window," as it were, for the words he utters in prayer or in the study of Torah, and to let them illuminate, as the sun shines at midday. *(Baal Shem Tov)*

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim.”*

**Making a Loan to an Unknown Stranger**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

"Rabbi you have a visitor" announced Rab Yaakov's servant. Rab Yaakov looked up from his desk and saw entering the room a Russian nobleman dressed in his most formal and elegant uniform standing erect like a king.

Rabbi Yaakov, the head of the Jewish community in Bohemia, a Chassid (follower) of the Baal Shem Tov and a very successful businessman, was well acquainted with the gentile nobility.

"Hello" he said cordially as he formally stood and extended his hand to his visitor, "With whom do I have the honor of speaking".

**Unable to Reveal His Name**

"I cannot tell you my name" said the stranger, shaking Rab Yaakov's hand, "but I come on a very important and desperate mission; I must borrow from you five hundred Gulden (about $100,000)."

"Excuse me, but how do you expect me to….” Rab Yaakov stood back a half-step and looked the visitor in the eyes to see if he was normal, "…to loan you such a sum without knowing you? Have you any backers, any letters of reference, any credentials, any collateral, anything at all?"

"I have nothing and I can say nothing. You only have my word and my oath to G-d that I will pay."

Rab Yaakov couldn't believe his ears. He wanted to just tell the man to leave but something told him not to.

**Decides to Travel tothe Holy Baal Shem Tov**

He sat for a minute deep in thought as the visitor just stood looking straight ahead and finally answered. "I won't say no or yes, I must travel to my rabbi, the Holy Baal Shem Tov, and ask him. Please return tomorrow night."

But Rab Yaakov was in for a surprise. When he asked the Baal Shem he enthusiastically encouraged him to make the loan but only on condition that he get some sort of written receipt. The next evening the nobleman reappeared, took the money, wrote an IOU that contained only the words "I owe Rab Yaakov 500 guilden" with no name or address and walked out the door into the night.

In the course of the next few years, when he happened to see the IOU among his papers, Rab Yaakov remembered the loan for a few seconds and thanked G-d that his businesses and investments succeeded so he didn't really feel the loss. But still it puzzled him as to why the Besh't insisted on such a worthless IOU and in the course of time he totally forgot the entire incident.

**A Time for Tragedy**

Fifteen years later tragedy visited.

The local Bishop, a vile anti-Semite spread a blood libel against the Jews and succeeded in getting all the local clergy to sigh an edict evicting all of them from Bohemia. The decree was to become effective six months from its signing and spelled disaster for tens of thousands of families.

Rab Yaakov sped to the Baal Shem Tov for help but the Besh't told him that his only chance would be to speak to the only man in the world that had the power to rescind the evil decree. None other than the Pope himself.

The very idea sent shivers down Rab Yaakov's spine. Any Jew caught traveling in Italy especially in the 'holy' city of Rome, would almost certainly die. According to Catholicism, the Jews were the murders of god, the enemies of mankind and were it not for the hope they could be 'converted' there was no reason not to simply exterminate them.

**Bidding Farewell to His Family**

The next day Rab Yaakov bade his wife and family farewell, perhaps for the last time, set off on a ship and after several weeks, arrived on the shores of Italy.

Disguised as a simple peasant, he rented a donkey and cart and began traveling according to a map he brought along.

He just kept praying that the holiness of his task, the Baal Shem's blessing and his excellent disguise would protect him. After all he did know a bit of Italian; certainly HaShem would make a miracle. How to get to the Pope would definitely be a problem but he would cross that bridge when he came to it.

On the third day of his journey as he was driving slowly through some town saying Psalms by heart suddenly he noticed his wagon was becoming surrounded by peasants.

He only understood a bit of what they were saying but he got the point quickly when someone jumped on the cart, grabbed his nose and yelled 'It's a Jew all right! Kill the Jew!!" and rocks started flying at him from all directions.

Rab Yaakov sensed that this was the end. Possibly this is why the Besh't sent him; sacrificing his life would save the Jews of Bohemia. He closed his eyes, said 'Shma Yiroel!' and prepared to meet his Maker when suddenly a voice rang out and everyone became quiet.

**A Tall Important Man**

**Strides Through the Crowd**

Yaakov opened his eyes and saw a tall important-looking middle aged man striding through the crowd.

He walked up to Rab Yaakov took a close look at his face, smiled wickedly, took out a long sword from a sheath that was hanging from his belt yelled out 'I'll take care of this Jew' myself. Move aside!

He motioned to his victim to get off the wagon, to put his hands behind his back and to walk before him. They walked this way for about fifteen minutes until they reached a large mansion. He told Rab Yaakov to enter and as soon as they were inside he closed the door, told Rab Yaakov to turn and face him, dropped his sword to the ground and threw his arms around him hugging him for several minutes saying in Russian, "Ahh thank G-d!! It is you. It is you!! Thank G-d I came in time."

Rav Yaakov was sure it was some sort of mistake; he had never seen this man before in his life.

**“Do You Remember Me?”**

"Do you remember me?" the man said as he held Yaakov at arms length and gazed lovingly into his eyes "You saved my life!!"

Yes, it was he. It was the nobleman that borrowed the money fifteen years ago. They shook hands gratefully both exclaiming "It is a miracle!!! Thank G-d a miracle!!"

They sat and when Rab Yaakov explained the reason for his trip the stranger seemed even happier. "My dear friend, I can help you, I am nothing less than a Duke and a very influential one at that. Do you know how much power a Duke has here in Italy? And to top it off I have very good connections with the Pope. I can arrange a meeting.

It was like some sort of a dream. The next evening they were actually sitting before the Pope and Yaakov the Jew was explaining how it was the Pope's duty to dispel these anti-Semitic superstitions and teach forbearance and tolerance and true justice.

The next day the Pope called a meeting of the Cardinal Court and put forth the suggestion that they rescind the Bohemian expulsion. When they objected, as he knew they would, he clapped his hands and a huge book was brought forth, put it on an ornate table and the Pope announced:

**Looking for a Sign from Heaven**

"This is a book containing all the Papal decisions in history from the foundation of the Church. It is, needless to say, full of cases against the Jews. I suggest we open the book and to whichever page it falls we will take it as a sign from heaven what to do in this case."

The Cardinals agreed, the book was opened to an arbitrary page and the scribe read: "In the year 1456 a Jew called Yehuda was accused of poisoning the well of the Church grounds in Venice."

The Cardinals winked and smiled at one another in glee.

"But" the scribe continued reading, "the charges were discovered to be false and due to the lies of the priest Thaddeus who was relieved of his position for two months because of the trouble he caused to the court."

The Cardinals had no choice but to agree with the 'sign from heaven'! A decree was signed nullifying the Bohemian expulsion and Rav Yaakov returned joyously and full of gratitude with the Duke to his palace.

**Returns an Old Outstanding Loan**

When they arrived the Duke took Rav Yaakov into his study, closed the door, took out a stack of money out of one of his desk drawers and said. "I'm returning the loan; exactly 500 Gulder. I would like to give you interest but I cannot. You see..." he was unable to finish and tears were streaming from his eyes. Suddenly he burst out weeping and fell to his knees …

"I am a JEW!!!"

It took several minutes for him to calm down but finally he sat Yaakov down and began to tell the story.

"You see, I was born to a Jewish family in Russia, my name was Ariah Leib but poverty drove us from place to place until finally we ended up in Paris. It's not important how, but I got involved with the wrong crowd and before my parents knew what happened I left Judaism and began traveling the world.

"I lived a totally wanton life until fate brought me to Italy and I found favor in the eyes of a very powerful and rich Duke. He was an old man when I met him and my keen wit and business sense made him so fond of me that, because he had no children of his own, he adopted me as his son.

"I had everything one could ask for, power, youth, success, pleasure and when he died I inherited even more.

**Sentenced to Death on False Charges**

"But it also brought me enemies; people that were jealous of my power and riches. They were very clever, they plotted behind my back bribed witnesses, forged papers and before I knew it I was charged with treason and sentenced to death.

"My friends, who believed I was innocent, succeeded after several years of court battles in getting the court to agree that if I would pay an exorbitant fine to release me from prison and even return my title and the rights to my properties.

"My friends helped me with some of the money I took loans on my properties but after all I still lacked some five hundred gulden, a small fortune, and had exhausted all my sources in Italy.

"So I asked for permission to return to Paris to collect there and it was granted but it wasn't so easy. First of all people didn't remember me and I was simply ashamed to ask for loans but also something else was happening inside of me.

**Affected by the Sound of the Ram’s Horn**

"I didn't understand what it was until one day as I was walking in the streets I happened to pass by a Synagogue and suddenly heard from inside the sound of a Shofar, the ram's horn the Jews sound on Rosh HaShanna. Suddenly I felt drawn into the building and once inside I began to feel a strange revulsion for everything I had done in my past and a great yearning for the G-d of my fathers, the G-d of Israel.

"I took a prayer shawl out of the box at the door, put it over my head entered and began weeping uncontrollably.

"Then after several minutes I was approached by one of the congregants who took me aside heard my story and told me that as soon as the holiday is over I should travel to the Baal Shem Tov in the city of Mezibuz in the Ukraine and ask his advice.

"Well I did so, it took me a while but when I saw the face of the Baal Shem Tov I decided then and there to forfeit all my money, title and past and never return to Italy again but become a totally new man….a Jew!

"But he didn't agree. He told me that the only way to completely cleanse my soul is to return to Italy, take back my title and lands and live secretly as a Jew but most important to develop connections with the Pope.

"He gave me your address, told me to dress up in my finest clothes go to your house and ask you for the money I needed but under no circumstances to divulge my identity. That is why I couldn't sign the IOU.

"When I asked him how will I know when and if I have been completely forgiven, he answered, 'When you save an entire Jewish community.' That means …now."

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Twenty Dollars – And**

**Help From Above**

**By Jodi Jakob**

I returned to work after the pre-summer Memorial Day weekend and found on my desk a brochure sent from the American Friends of Kupat Ha’ir. It described a tragedy that had recently taken place in Eretz Yisrael. A tzedakah campaign had been created after the father of 13 children was suddenly killed in a car accident, leaving behind a wife and the 13 children – including a six-day-old baby.

Despite struggling with many expenses, I decided to express concern by writing out a check for $20. I happily mailed it that morning.

**An Earth-Shattering Phone Call**

Later that day, I received an earth-shattering call from my daughter. She timidly said that two of our children had just been involved in a serious car accident. Though the car was totaled, both were, Baruch Hashem, able to walk out of the overturned vehicle uninjured. Hatzolah medics told my son and daughter that they had never seen anyone walk away unharmed from an accident of this magnitude.

There are more aspects to our miracle. My son considered filling up the car before driving to work, but at the last moment decided against it, preventing a possible explosion when the car slammed into the curb and flew upside down onto the sidewalk. The impact was so strong that when we observed the accident site the next day we noticed that the curb had been pushed about four inches from its usual place.

A third child had wanted to come for the ride but was not ready on time. The daughter who was in the car had just promised her sister that she would return home to get her just before the vehicle went out of control. (The safety belts in the car’s backseat do not work well; thus we are grateful that she was not in the car at the time.)

**No Collision with Other Cars or the Gas Line**

With Hashem’s great mercy the children did not collide with the other cars at the accident scene as they went skidding down half the block and across an intersection.

There was a three-foot metal pole with the words “New Jersey gas line” only a few feet away from where the car turned over. It could have injured the children had they collided into it, not to mention the horror of smashing into a gas line.

Because of the car’s broken air conditioner, the windows had to be pulled down on that hot day. The windshield was shattered by the accident but remained mostly intact due to the specially treated glass. Who knows what would have happened to the glass in the door windows if they had been raised during the crash. Once the car stopped moving, the children, hanging upside down, were able to easily crawl out of danger through the open windows that were free of sharp, broken glass.

**Appreciating the Blessing**

**Of a Miraculous Survival**

The next day my son bentched gomel in shul. Post-accident, the children experienced minor aches and pains but overall they are ever grateful with the blessing of survival after experiencing such a difficult ordeal.

Though we can never claim to know all the calculations that are made by the One Above as He steers us through life, we believe that tzedakah saves one from death. Yes, twenty dollars! That sure is a small price to pay to help a needy family, and is definitely a great bargain to protect my beloved offspring from the claws of death.

*Reprinted from an email of the August 14, 2013 edition of The Jewish Press.*

**A Slice of Life**

**A Surprising Dish**

The Ben-Ari family of Safed, Israel, is renowned for its outstanding hospitality. Every Shabbat they host dozens of guests at their table, giving them an indelible taste of Judaism.

Last year, two weeks before Rosh Hashana, a large group of female IDF officers were spending the weekend in Safed and were invited to the Ben-Aris for a Shabbat meal. In the course of the meal, as was his custom, Rabbi Ben-Ari went around the table and asked each guest to share a thought. Some of the guests chose to use the opportunity to ask questions on Judaism, while others shared inspiring experiences and memories. One officer, though, stood up and made a surprising announcement:

**A Declaration to Become Torah-Observant**

"Because of this Shabbat, I am going to become a Torah-observant Jew."

This was not a common reaction to a first-time Shabbat experience, and her colleagues, no less than the Ben-Aris themselves, looked at her in surprise. Everyone at the table fell silent, awaiting her explanation.

"I am a vegan," she continued. "Not only do I refrain from meat and fish, I also have celiac disease, so I cannot eat any foods with gluten. Whenever I am invited out to a meal, I inform the hosts at the outset that I have these restrictions. In the army base the cook already knows to prepare special dishes for me. The truth is, my favorite food is quinoa. Whenever my friends ask me what I can eat, I tell them, 'Make quinoa. Not only is it tasty, it's easy to prepare as well.'

**Expecting Not to Find Any Quinoa**

"As I was walking towards your home, I realized that I had not made any arrangements in advance, and surely there would be no quinoa prepared for me. I was sure I'd leave the house hungry. In general, I was under the impression that religious families like to eat a lot of bread and meat.

"As I walked into the house, I turned to one of my friends and said jokingly, 'If there is quinoa in this house, that's a sign from Above that I must become religious!'

"Yet, as soon as I walked in, what did I see on the table? A big platter of quinoa! I was shocked. My friend and I looked at each other. At that moment, I felt as if I had received a message directly from G-d."

Rabbi Ben-Ari listened to her story and his own mouth dropped open in shock. He then proceeded to tell his side of the story, how the quinoa had landed on their table.

**Had Never Tasted this Dish Before**

"My wife and I are married 30 years, and never have we had quinoa on our Shabbat table, or any other time for that matter. We had simply never tasted this dish or known how to prepare it.

"During the week, I travel from kibbutz to kibbutz in the negev. I visit families and teach them about Judaism. This past week, as I was making my rounds, I spent the night in the home of my friend, Rabbi Moshe Blau, an emissary of the Rebbe in the region.

"One night, I was hungry, and since I am like a member of their family, I opened the refrigerator looking for something to eat. I saw a large bowl with some kind of grain and colorful mixed vegetables. I filled a plate and found it very tasty. The next morning, Rabbi Blau explained to me that this dish is called 'quinoa,' and it is very healthy with many natural proteins. Since it was so delicious and healthy as well, I decided to ask my wife to prepare it this week for Shabbat.

**Insisted that His Wife Prepare Quinoa for Shabbat**

"When I returned home to Safed, I mentioned to my wife about this special dish, but she had never heard of quinoa and did not know how to make it. She tried to convince me to forget about it, but I was insistent. This tasty and healthful dish must be on our Shabbat table.

"I called Rabbi Blau, who told me that the quinoa had actually been made by a neighbor of theirs. He put me in touch with her, and she very graciously introduced my wife to the secrets of quinoa preparation.

"I sent my young son, Yosef Yitzchak, to the store to buy the grain, and for the first time ever, my wife made quinoa for Shabbat."

Turning to the army officer, Rabbi Ben-Ari concluded, "See, G-d was thinking about you from the beginning of the week. He knew you'd be our guest, and that you love quinoa and it is essential for your health. He arranged matters just for you, that you would have the food you need for Shabbat.

The story left a deep impression on all the Shabbat guests. Rabbi Ben-Ari pointed out that we might think that amazing stories happen only in the Bible, but we only need to open our eyes to see G-d's intervention all around us.

In case you're wondering, the army officer did not become religious on the spot. However, from that week on she resolved to light candles every Friday in honor of Shabbat!

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. The article originally appeared in Beis Moshiach Magazine.*