**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeira 5774**

Volume 5, Issue 8 15 Cheshvon 5774/ October 19, 2013

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

The Secret Life of

Gershon Burd:

The Hidden Deeds of the Man We Thought We Knew.

**By** [**Sara Yoheved Rigler**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48865432.html)

We, the members of his community in the Old City of Jerusalem, thought we knew Gershon Burd. The men at the yeshiva where he worked full time and learned Torah full time thought they knew Gershon. Batya, his wife of ten years and the mother of his five children, thought she knew Gershon.



Only after Gershon drowned in the Mediterranean on his 40th birthday, October 4, did the truth, or tantalizing [glimpses of the truth](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/Learning-from-Shoshie.html), start to emerge.

On the second day of the shiva, a woman Batya knew appeared in the Burd home. As Batya recounts: “She looked at me with this look and said, ‘I’m going to tell you something you don’t know. No one in the world knows this except me and your husband.’” The woman paused, as if reluctant to divulge her secret. “For nine years, I was the front for your husband’s *tzedaka* [charity] fund.”

Batya was dumbfounded, “What *tzedaka* fund?”

The woman continued: “Your husband came to me with money every month and a list of names. I would call the people and they would come to me to pick up the money. They never knew who it came from.” The proprietor revealed to Batya that Gershon had been paying for the helium balloons.

And then there were the helium balloons. Everyone in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City knew that a certain stationery store gives a free helium balloon to every child on his or her birthday. Since most of the children here come from large, low-income families, a helium balloon is a real glee-producer. On Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, every child receives two free helium balloons. The Burd children were among those who relished this delightful prize.

Everyone assumed that the balloons were gifts from the proprietor of the store. Paying a shiva call, the proprietor revealed to Batya that Gershon had been paying for the helium balloons. At the end of every month, he would slip into the store and surreptitiously pay for that month’s balloons.

**100 Questions**

Greg Burd was born in Odessa in 1973. Three years later his parents immigrated to Chicago. Proud but non-observant Jews, they were not equipped to give their only son and two daughters a Jewish education. Greg went to public school, played on his high school football team, became a lifeguard, and got a B.A. in business from the University of Indiana.

Greg was 25 years old and working in his father’s insurance agency when his mother invited him to come with her to a Torah class at Rabbi Daniel Deutsch’s Chicago Torah Network. Greg loved the class, and made an appointment to speak to Rabbi Deutsch privately. He brought with him a list of one hundred questions.

Three months later, telling his parents, “I’m in preschool; I don’t know anything about Judaism,” Greg flew to Israel to learn Torah at Ohr Sameach Yeshiva. He returned to Chicago ten months later, but not for long. “I’m in kindergarten,” he told his parents. “I have to learn more.” He returned to Jerusalem. Every year his refrain was, “I’m in first grade. I have to learn more.” “I’m in second grade. I have to learn more.”

At the age of 30, Greg (now Gershon) married Batya Fefer, 28. She, too, came from a Russian family. Raised in Toronto, Batya was a lawyer working for Toronto’s top corporate tax firm when she decided that there had to be more to life. Her spiritual search took her to Nepal, where she climbed Mt. Annapurna, to India, where she met the Dalai Lama, and to a dozen other countries.

Back in Toronto, a friend told her about a free Birthright trip that would take her to Israel. Batya decided that that was a good way to get halfway back to India. Once in Israel, however, she started learning about Judaism at [EYAHT](http://www.eyaht.org/), Aish HaTorah’s women’s division. She became observant, and in 2003 married Gershon Burd. They settled in the Old City.

**Elaborate Ruses**

Everyone considered Gershon a nice guy. One of his study partners recalled how Gershon would purposely choose a seat in the yeshiva across from the entrance so he could smile at people as they walked in. He was affable and gentle. In ten years of marriage, Batya heard her husband raise his voice only once—when he felt that someone was trying to rip off the yeshiva. But Gershon’s nice-guy persona was a mere front for his carefully hidden true identity.

Three years ago, Gershon approached Rabbi Nissim Tagger, the head of Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah, where Gershon was both learning and working as administrator. Gershon asked Rabbi Tagger to accept as a student a young man named David, whom Gershon intuited had tremendous potential. Rabbi Tagger had seen David, with his long, curled *peyot* and hippie-ish dress. “He doesn’t fit in at all with our Yeshivah,” Rabbi Tagger refused.

“He looks like that, but it’s not who he really is,” Gershon begged.

“Will he pay tuition?” Rabbi Tagger queried.

“No,” Gershon answered simply. “He has no money.”

“I have no scholarships available,” replied Rabbi Tagger.

The next day, Gershon returned to Rabbi Tagger and said, “David’s parents decided to pay for most of his tuition, and he’ll do odd jobs to pay for the rest.”

With misgivings, Rabbi Tagger decided to give David a two-week trial period.

Only after Gershon’s death did Rabbi Tagger find out that it was Gershon who paid David’s tuition.

Three years later, David is an accomplished Torah scholar at the yeshiva. Only after Gershon’s death did Rabbi Tagger find out that David’s parents had not paid a penny. It was Gershon who paid David’s tuition. “He lied to me straight to my face,” Rabbi Tagger says, holding back his tears.

The wife of one of the students of the yeshiva had not seen her parents back in America for several years. When she received news that her mother was ill, she wanted to fly back, but she didn’t have enough money for airfare. Hearing about it, Gershon told the woman about a credit card company that was offering a fantastic deal. If she signed up for the credit card and paid just $50, she would receive enough miles to get a free round-trip ticket. Gershon even showed her the promotion on his laptop, and offered to sign her up, explaining that he too would get miles for referring her.

The woman happily gave Gershon the information to sign her up, got her ticket, and flew to America to be with her mother. She never knew that Gershon had made up the whole promotion, even devising the graphic of the ad. Gershon himself paid for her ticket.

Once Gershon decided that a struggling family in the community really needed to take their children for a fun day at “Kef-Tzuba,” an attraction with giant blow-up trampolines, castles, etc. The family lacked the funds for such an outing, so Gershon got them a free coupon. They never knew that Gershon had paid for their admission and fabricated the professional-looking coupon.

Telling this tale, Batya laughs. “Gershon was a shyster. I only know what I know because I caught him on some things.”

When Gershon became aware of couples who were experiencing marital friction, he would surreptitiously pay for therapy sessions for them, with neither the couple nor the therapist aware of who was paying.

Nine years ago, Gershon got an idea. He created “[Western Wall Prayers](http://www.westernwallprayers.org),” and put Batya in charge of it. This is a service where people all over the world can pay to have someone go to the Kotel and [pray](http://www.aish.com/sp/pr/48965861.html) for them for 40 consecutive days. Not only have hundreds of people had their prayers answered through this age-old custom, but also the money raised supports many families of Torah scholars in the Old City.

At the shiva, the Rosh Yeshiva disclosed that Gershon once came to him and asked if it was permissible according to Jewish law to give the “prayer agents” fake names to pray for. It was a low period for Western Wall Prayers, and Gershon was worried that the people supported could not afford to lose their regular checks. In order to maintain their dignity, he wanted to continue the funding from his own pocket by giving out fictitious names for which to pray.

Why did Gershon go to such lengths to hide his charitable acts? “He really believed,” explains Batya, “that if the giver gets something from his *chesed* [act of loving-kindness], it diminishes the *chesed.* So if someone knows what you did, it means you got something from it, recognition or whatever. The mitzvah is much more powerful if you get nothing … except in the Next World.”

**The Real Mystery**

The mystery, of course, is where did the money come from? The Burds were not well-to-do. They didn’t even own a car. They had no inherited wealth and Gershon’s salary as yeshiva administrator was sufficient to cover only the family’s living expenses. Sitting across from Batya at the shiva, I ask her, “Where did Gershon get the money?”

“I have no idea!” she exclaims. “I really don’t know. For years we had a crack in the sink that we couldn’t afford to repair. I have no idea where he got the money to do all this *chesed* that we’re hearing about now. No idea.”

Daniel Rostenne, Gershon’s best friend and study partner, solves this mystery. “Gershon spent next to nothing on himself,” he explains. “He bought his shoes used on EBay. Used shoes! He bought his suits used on EBay. He would brag to me, ‘Look at this suit. I got it for $10, plus $10 shipping!’ He got his laptop, a used MacBook Air that sells new for $1200, for just a few hundred dollars. He simply didn’t spend money on his personal needs.”

Gershon scrimped on his own needs, so he could be generous in satisfying the needs of others.

Gershon’s red carpet to the Next World is lined with helium balloons, fake coupons and an anonymous charity fund.

His final deal was an overnight getaway at Tel Aviv’s Sheraton Hotel for just him and Batya to celebrate his 40th birthday, paid for with credit card points. Gershon’s favorite recreation was swimming in the ocean. He went to the beach. Gershon, an expert swimmer and trained lifeguard, plunged into the waves. Minutes later, a rock or large piece of debris struck him in the back of the neck. Knocked unconscious, he was under water for 15 minutes before anyone noticed his body float up toward the beach.

A few hours before the funeral, Batya said to one of the yeshiva students: ‘There’s a plan, and what was supposed to happen, happened. Gershon is smiling now in his world. It’ll be hard for me and the children. But Gershon is shining.”

Gershon’s red carpet to [the Next World](http://www.aish.com/sp/ph/Life-after-Death-Aishcom-Ebook.html) is lined with helium balloons, fake coupons, fictional credit card promotions, an anonymous charity fund, undercover tuition payments, surreptitiously sponsored marriage counseling sessions, and how many other hidden acts of *chesed* that we will never know.

Hiddenness is a sacred value in Judaism. In fact, according to Jewish lore, the world is sustained in every generation by the merit of 36 hidden *tzaddikim*. Could a Russian-born former football player from Chicago be one of them?

*To donate to the fund for Batya and her children, click here:* [www.bircas.org/donate](http://www.bircas.org/donate)

Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com

**The Grandest Piano**

**By Daniel Keebler**

“Eight times out of 10 I can do any request; that’s the thing that gets to people the most.” explains marvel pianist Pinchas Toshner, 44. Since Pinchas returned to the United Kingdom from Ohr Somayach [a yeshiva in Yerushalayim catering to Jews from non-observant backgrounds] he was stuck in dead-end piano jobs, playing for 5 pounds ($7.70) an hour, including at McDonald’s.



Pinchas Toshner

Suddenly, Pinchas was given the opportunity to perform in a massive music show with worldwide musical superstars, and for good pay. Yet the show was scheduled for the first day of Succot, when such a performance is not permitted in Judaism.

Pinchas frantically called a whole list of his rabbis in hope of finding a leniency in Jewish law that might allow him to perform. Yet no such leniency was found and Pinchas faithfully watched his gateway to success float away. “I was doing the right thing but wasn’t happy about it,” recounts Pinchas, having played piano at McDonald’s and Burger King for the past year at the time.

Seconds after Pinchas chose Jewish observance over career opportunity, an appointment with a sponsor landed in his lap. In that appointment Pinchas walked away with a check for *three* *times* the amount he would have earned for the show on Succot, plus a commitment for future help with his artistic career.

Pinchas then went to play piano for free at a shopping center which hosts a beautiful grand piano. Out of nowhere a billionaire businessman walked up to him and said, “Meet me at Hyde Park Hotel at 5 pm.” When Pinchas showed up to the luxury hotel the billionaire asked him two questions: “What kind of piano would you like?” and “How much money do you want?”

Just like that, Pinchas went from fast-food piano gigs to featured entertainment at a luxury hotel with a sponsor for his album.

“And it all started from doing the right thing at Succot,” says Pinchas.

According to Pinchas, what really makes a person happy is doing the right thing. But knowing what, when, and why it’s right requires spiritual guidance. Pinchas says he is grateful to be connected to his rabbis for such guidance, especially Rabbi [Nota] Schiller.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of ORHNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**A Slice of Life**

**Out of Gas**

**By Avrohom Nosson**

Fifteen years ago, Shmuel Hendel and his friend were in Hawaii on "Merkos Shlichus" - a project of Chabad that sends student rabbis to locations throughout the world, close and remote, to visit isolated Jews who live far from a synagogue or any organized Jewish life. Explains Shmuel, "We started with a list of names, and when we were through with those we looked up Jewish-sounding names in the phone book."

Each day they visited a few homes, talked with the people living there and spoke about holidays and other Jewish topics. People were excited to meet young Jews who were so obviously involved in Jewish life.

On one hot and hazy day, the rabbinic duo didn't manage to get into a single house. In some instances, they discovered that the people whose address they had been given were not Jewish. In other places the people were not home or the address they had was incorrect.

They were about to call it a day, feeling rather disappointed. When they got to the last address on the list and nobody was there, they planned on going back to the hotel.

"As soon as we set out," recalls Shmuel, "I saw that we were seriously low on gas. I pointed this out, but my friend didn't seem concerned. He figured that even if the needle was flickering on empty we could still drive a few more kilometers and we would definitely make it back to the hotel."

On a fairly quiet highway, with orchards on either side, the car began sounding like it was choking, and it slowly came to a stop. The cars behind them began honking and they quickly moved the car to the side of the road. The young rabbis were exhausted and low in spirits. They hadn't met a single Jew that day and now they were stuck. Who would come help them?

"We tried flagging down cars, but nobody stopped and help," continues Shmuel. "We looked odd to the locals, wearing our hats and suit jackets in the heat of summer. A long time passed and then we saw a motorcycle coming out of a path in the orchard and heading toward us. A motorcycle is easier to stop because you can look the driver in the eye. Maybe his conscience would encourage him to stop and help us.

"He stopped, parked his motorcycle and came over to us. At first we were nervous, because he was a big guy and full of tattoos with rings in every possible place. He wore sunglasses so his eyes were blocked from us, which was unnerving.

"We are stuck without gas,' said my friend.

"How do smart guys like you do something so stupid?' he asked jokingly.

"We knew he was right and didn't respond, and then he said a line that made our antennas go up.

"'I thought members of the tribe were smarter than that.' That told us he was Jewish. We asked his name.

"'Bill Aronson,' he said.

"You live at ... right?" I said, citing an address on our list.

"'Right!' he said in astonishment. 'How did you know that?'

"'We were there a quarter of an hour ago and you weren't home,' we said."

The conversation took off and then Bill told them that although he lived nearby, he had never been in that orchard before. He said he worked in real estate and a friend told him about a building in that area. That morning, after much deliberation, he had decided to check it out. He said that his wife was not Jewish. She was a Buddhist and he didn't think that if he was home that she would have invited them in.

"My friend went off with Bill to get gas. Bill had been on his way to pick up his children from the preschool. On the way to the gas station Bill met his wife and she agreed to pick them up instead. So Bill came back with a jerry can of gas and we had time to talk. He said that the only one in his family connected to Judaism was his mother. So when he visited a monastery the year before, he had himself videotaped shouting 'Shema Yisrael' and sent it to his mother to make her happy.

"We asked him if he had ever put on tefillin. He had no idea what we were talking about. When we asked him to put on tefillin before sunset, he wasn't willing to do it until we spoke some more about the significance of his being Jewish. Then he rolled up his sleeve. This was all new to him. He was very moved and cried.

“We spent a long time standing there and talking. Suddenly, all our feelings of having wasted the entire day disappeared and were replaced with the joy of having been able to reach out to another Jew. If Bill had been at home, we might not have been successful. If our gas tank had been full, we wouldn't have met him. If he hadn't decided that day to check out the property, we would not have met." Concludes Shmuel, "G-d arranged it all and it took place just as it was meant to be."

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

**Thoughts that Count**

*And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed to the ground* (Gen. 18:2)

The great Sage Shammai said: "Greet every man with a pleasant countenance." Should a person give his friend every gift in the world, yet greet him with a scowl, it is considered as if he gave him nothing. But if he greets him with a smile, it is considered as if he gave the other person everything, even if he is empty-handed. *(Avot D'Rabbi Natan)*

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

**Barney Dreyfus: The Jewish**

**Father of the World Series**

**By** [**Irwin Cohen**](http://www.jewishpress.com/author/irwincohen/)



Barney Dreyfus

The World Series was born 110 years ago. So were the New York Yankees, as New York inherited the remnants of the old Baltimore Orioles, a charter member of the new American League that was formed in 1901. A year later the team was headed to last place and bankruptcy. Manager John McGraw jumped to the National League New York Giants to assume the same position and brought some Orioles players with him.

What was left of the Baltimore Orioles became part of the new New York club, named the Highlanders. The name was chosen after a famous British army regiment and the lofty location of the new New York ballpark.

Hilltop Park, a wooden stadium that could accommodate 15,000, was rushed to completion in upper Manhattan along Broadway from 165th to 168th streets.

Many Jewish boys living in New York with Yiddish-speaking and reading parents spent most their free time in good weather playing baseball.

A popular feature of Abraham Cahan's Yiddish language Jewish Daily Forward was Cahan's "Bintel Brief" advice column. An immigrant from Russia, who couldn't understand his son's fascination with the popular American game, sent the following letter:

“It makes sense to play dominoes or chess. But what is the point of a crazy game like baseball? The children get crippled. Here in educated America adults play baseball. They run after a leather ball like children. I want my boy to grow up to be a mensh, not a wild American runner. But he cries his head off.”

The letter and Cahan's reply appeared in the August 3, 1903, edition. Cahan's answer was for all fathers with the same problem: "Let your boys play baseball and play it well," Cahan advised, “as long as it does not interfere with their education or get them in bad company. Chess is good, but baseball develops the arms, legs, and eyesight. It is played in the fresh air. Let us not raise the children that they grow up foreigners in their own birthplace."

A Jewish foreigner, Bernard Dreyfuss, developed a love for baseball and would eventually develop the World Series.

Bernard was born and educated in Germany. He apprenticed as a bank clerk before arriving in America in 1882 at age 17. A smallish fellow with a thick German accent, Barney as he became known, made his way to Paducah, Kentucky, to help out at a distillery owned by relatives.

Working his way up from scrubbing barrels to assistant bookkeeper, a bout with illness led a doctor to advise Dreyfuss to get more exercise by playing baseball.

Dreyfuss followed the doctor's orders, enjoyed playing, and decided to invest in the game by operating a semipro team. In 1888, the 23-year-old Dreyfuss became a naturalized citizen and the distillery relocated to Louisville.

Dreyfuss met Florence Wolf in Louisville and the pair hit it off as both were Jewish and loved baseball. They married in 1894, and five years later they were the major owners of the Louisville club, which was a member of the National League at the time.

When the 12-team National League decided to contract to eight teams, the Louisville club was targeted for extinction. A deal was engineered to allow Dreyfuss to purchase a half interest in the Pittsburgh Pirates and take fourteen of his Louisville players with him. By the time the American League was born in 1901, Dreyfuss was the major owner of the Pirates.

The Pirates topped the National League in 1901 and 1902; however, when the season ended there was no series of games between the best team in each league to determine which one was baseball's best.

The Pirates were on their way to topping the National League again in 1903 and the Boston club was on its way to clinching first place in the American League. Dreyfuss wrote his Boston counterpart, trumpeting the merits of a series of games between the two leagues' best teams.

"The time has come for the National League and American League to organize a World Series," Dreyfuss wrote. "It is my belief that if our clubs played a series on a best-out-of-nine basis we would create great interest in baseball, in our leagues, and in our players. I also believe it would be a financial success."

Agreement was reached, and the first game of the first World Series took place on Thursday, October 1 in Boston. An overflow crowd of 16,242 packed Boston's Huntington Avenue Grounds. But Dreyfuss didn't see his Pirates win 7-3, because the game was on Yom Kippur.

Dreyfuss watched the second game with two guests, the rabbi from Boston's oldest congregation and the rabbi from Dryfuss's Pittsburgh congregation. The rabbis saw Boston shut out the Pirates 3-0 to even the Series.

Pittsburgh lost that first World Series, five games to three. But for Barney and his beloved Florence, the disappointment would be followed by success and other firsts.

*Reprinted from the October 9, 2013 edition of The Jewish Press.*

**Who's Who**

**Benyamin**

Benyamin (Benjamin) was the [second] son of our Matriarch Rachel and Jacob. He was the only one of the 12 sons of Jacob born in the Land of Israel. He was named by Rachel BenOni ("son of my affliction") because she realized that his birth was so difficult that she would die in childbirth.

The first king of the Jewish people, Saul, was descended from Benyamin as was the great Mordechai. The area of the Holy Temple knows as the Kodesh Hakedoshim (Holy of Holies) was in the portion of land belonging to the tribe of Benyamin. (Reprinted from this week’s issue of L’Chaim.)

**The Golden Column**

**The Author of the**

**“Admat Kodesh”**

Rabbi Nisim Chayim Moshe Mizrachi Z”L, who served as the “Rishon Letzion” two hundred sixty-five years ago, was elevated and holy, and a tremendous genius in both hidden and reveled Torah. No less great were his kindness, modesty and his noble traits.

**Saw a Woman Struggling with a Tray of Dough**

Once is the heat of the afternoon, in the middle of the summer, he was walking in the street. .Across from him he saw a woman, carrying a tray of dough, ready for baking. In those days they did not bake in the homes. The baker’s assistant would arrive to help in the carrying of the dough, and they were baked in the bakery for a few pennies and sent to the owner’s home.

The Rabbi saw this poor woman carrying the heavy tray and was shocked: “Where is the baker’s assistant! Isn’t this his job, his work!”

“I called him,’ sighed the woman,’ and he did not want to come. I am a widow and I have no one to send. And the dough would have started to spoil soon…”

**Commands in the Name of the Holy Torah**

“Give me the tray,” requested the Rabbi. The widow hesitated, and the Rabbi said: “I command you, in the name of the holy Torah!”

She gave the tray to his holy hands, and he carried it to the bakery. When the baker saw him, words could not escape his mouth! He cried “Our Rabbi, what are you doing? Why didn’t you call my helper, it would be an honor for him to carry your dough!”

“I am surprised,” responded the Rabbi. “If your helper isn’t careful enough in the commandment of sensitivity to a widow, which is an express commandment in the Torah, why would he hurry to my house? This is not my tray. It is the tray of the widow he refused to help…”

*Reprinted from the Parshat Noah 5774 edition of the Aram Soba Newsletter.*

**A Dying Old Russian Woman’s Request for**

**A “Jewish” Priest**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Rabbi Kaminetski in Dnepropetrovsk Russia was a very busy man. Besides having to direct the activities of his Chabad House; give Torah classes, visit homes, encourage Judaism, overcome opposition, collect money, run his schools and help as many Jews as possible both spiritually and physically he also had to worry about his personal life; educating his children etc.

So it wasn't surprising that he had little patience for foolish requests.

For instance, once he was approached by a young gentile girl with a big cross dangling around her neck who asked him to give her dying grandmother a visit.

The girl explained that the old lady was over ninety years old, didn't have a penny to her name, felt she was about to die and wanted a Jewish priest to perform the last rites and, oh yes, she lived over two hours drive away!

When the Rabbi asked why she didn't just get a normal priest she answered that the old lady hated them all because of something some priest did or said to her some fifty years ago. Since then she hated all priests and never went to Church. But now she's dying and needs someone, so she said that she wanted a Rabbi. She added that her grandmother was also bit senile which also could explain her strange request.

The Rabbi had no problem refusing: two hours drive both ways for a demented gentile lady was definitely not his line of work.

But suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps the old lady was really Jewish. There were many such cases in Russia. He began asking the girl questions. Perhaps she had seen her grandmother light candles on Friday or separate milk and meat - something... anything Jewish? Maybe she once mentioned something about Judaism?

But it was a dead end. There was nothing. It was clear as day; there were some three hundred million gentiles in Russia and this old lady her daughter and granddaughter were among them.

Rabbi Kaminetski apologized, explained that he was sorry but he didn’t know any Church rites, this was definitely NOT for him and bade her farewell and that was the end of it. The girl left.

But a week later she returned. And this time she refused to leave.

She began speaking quietly but gradually raised her tone to weeping and moaning. She had traveled two long hours and would never leave until he fulfilled her precious grandmother's last request. He had to have mercy. Only he could do it. The lady was dying!!

The Rabbi tried to make excuses but she just screamed louder. He tried to reason with her but she wouldn't let him finish a sentence. He even offered to personally calling the local Church and introducing her to a real Priest but she wouldn't hear of it. Her grandmother made her a bit crazy as well.

The Rabbi was stuck. He couldn’t ignore or get rid of her. There were only two choices; call the police and get her kicked off his property or give in.

But suddenly it dawned on him that the police wouldn't understand why he, a man of 'the cloth' wouldn't give last rites to this heart-broken girl's grandmother. And even if they did understand and did evict her, she would certainly come back - perhaps every day… all day!

He gave in. After all, she was a human being! But why did she have to live so far away?! Who knows, maybe the old lady had been an anti-Semite and wanted to repent on her deathbed. In any case there was no way out.

They drove silently and two hours later they arrived at a large run down hut in a typical Russian village.

On the porch was sitting a very old woman in an old torn stuffed chair. She was no more than skin and bones with a blanket covering most of her and looked out of contact with the world. But when she saw the bearded Rabbi her eyes lit up and filled with tears. She began silently weeping.

The Rabbi walked up the few stairs and as he approached she looked deeply into his eyes and began speaking....in Yiddish!

"My whole life I have been waiting for this moment," she said in a wavering voice.

**"I am a Jew!"**

She hesitated, took out a handkerchief and wept aloud.

"When I was nine, my parents were killed in a pogrom, and I was put in a Church orphanage. One nun there once told me that I must never tell anyone I am Jewish because all Jews get killed. Now I am ninety-six, that's right, ninety-six years old, and my entire life I have been keeping this secret, even from my children."

The Rabbi was surprised but a thought flashed through his mind; It could be that she had once worked in a Jewish home and learned Yiddish. Now she's senile; she's crazy and thinks she's Jewish.

"I know what you are thinking," She interrupted his thoughts, "You're thinking that maybe I'm not Jewish, right? Well you should know that I remember how my mother would light the candles and make a Brocha (blessing) before Shabbos; Boruch Ataw etc." (and she repeated the blessing). "And my father would put on T’filin and a Tallis and daven in Shul in the weekdays. And she repeated some more details."

She paused for a few minutes, dried her eyes again and continued.

"My whole life I have been repeating these things because I was afraid that I would forget them. See, I remembered! But I didn't tell my daughter because I didn't know how to explain it.

"Now I want you to tell her and my granddaughter that they are Jewish too, so that they will remember. Will you do that Rabbi? And teach them what it means to be Jewish. Then I will be happy."

This is what Abraham got when he made the 'covenant' with G-d; an eternal Jewish identity. And he is called the 'Father' of Judaism because he passed this covenant; this feeling, down to all Jews for all time.

The old woman in our story felt only the smallest spark of it and it was enough to keep a flame burning in her all her life that she wanted to pass on to her daughter and daughter's daughter; despite the fact that she had only bad Jewish experiences and had been separated from Jews almost 90 years.

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

**Who's Who**

**Rachel**

Rachel was one of the four matriarchs of the Jewish people. She was the second wife of Jacob, but the most beloved. She gave birth to Joseph and died nine years later when giving birth to her second child, Benjamin. She passed away on 11 Cheshvan [this past Monday] and is buried outside of Bethlehem, in Kever Rachel (Rachel's Tomb). Kever Rachel has been a place of prayer for Jews for over 35 centuries. The Midrash states that Rachel is the only one able to extract a promise from G-d that the Jewish people will return to the Holy Land after they are exiled. (Reprinted from last week’s issue of “L’Chaim”)

**An Unbelievable Display of**

**Ahavas Yisroel on Shabbos**

**By Rabbi Avraham Tovalsky**

Rebbi Hillel Lichtenstein, Z’tl, known as R’ Hillel Kilemayar, was once up late Leil Shabbos studying Parshas HaShavuah. He heard a noise near the window and stunningly found that a *ganav* had entered his home and had silver candlesticks and other items in his hand and was about to exit. R’ Hillel said to him—“how could you do this -- you can’t carry on Shabbos, and the candlesticks are Muktzah?! In any event, the Torah prohibits you from stealing…and what about the *agmas nefesh* you will cause to the Rebbetzin on Shabbos itself?! If you are hungry and need to eat, come and I will give you delicious Shabbos food.”

The *ganav* laughed and slipped out the window. A little while later, the Rav heard a commotion outside. A policeman had caught the thief and was taking him to the police station. The Rav approached the policeman and told him not to take the thief away -- as all the articles were formerly his and he had given them as a present to the thief.

The policeman did not listen to the entreaties of the Rav, and took him to the police station--with the Rav accompanying them. At the police station, the Rav prevailed - and the *ganav* was released! The sinner then fell upon the Rav -- asking him for forgiveness. The Rav invited him to his house for the remainder of Shabbos, where he became a new man - -and a true Ba’al Teshuvah!

*Reprinted from the October 11, 2013 email of the Hakhel Email Community Awareness Bulletin. The excerpt is from Sefer Ketzais Hashemesh Bigvuraso by Rabbi Avraham Tovalsky.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**A Chance to Do a**

**Favor to Another Yid**

Some twenty years ago in New York, a certain Mr. Fogel (fictitious name) - a middle-aged Chassid - was listening to a Torah tape of the Lubavitcher Rebbe while driving home late one evening from work. He had heard this one particular one tens of times but for some reason he liked it. But suddenly one sentence really struck him. It was as though the Rebbe was speaking to him directly: "As is known, the Baal Shem Tov said that a soul can come into this world for seventy, eighty years just to do a favor for someone, especially a fellow Jew."

**Lost in Thought**

Suddenly Mr. Fogel became lost in thought. 'Could it be that I could live my entire life and never fulfill my purpose! Could such a thing really happen? After all who knows the secret ways of G-d if not the Baal Shem Tov?' He became serious. His eyes even began to fill with tears and he began to pray. 'Please, Hashem, guide me to do what I'm supposed to do, I don't want to miss my purpose!' Deep in thought he began to imagine the hundreds (today there are thousands) of Chassidim all over the world going 'out of their ways' to wake up Jews spiritually. Nothing is more important. nothing!

When he came out of his reverie he realized that he was in a strange place and it took him a few seconds to figure out what happened. He had passed his turn-off, gotten off the expressway several stops too late and now was in a different district of Brooklyn. He was looking for a place to make a U-turn when something caught his eye. To his right, at the side of the road was an older man standing before the open hood of a stalled car.

**The Street Was Unusually Empty**

The street was unusually empty so Mr. Fogel slowed down, opened his right side window and had a better look. The fellow looked up at him and signaled. It didn't look suspicious so he pulled over and asked what was wrong.

"Ahh! What rotten luck! I can't figure it out." The fellow yelled out. "The thing just died on me! Now I'm really stuck!! A tow truck stopped about ten minutes ago but they wanted six hundred dollars to tow me home! Six hundred! And I only live fifteen minutes away!" Mr. Fogel pulled his car even closer and the fellow continued. "And I'm stalled in a no parking zone. Look at this! Even if I caught a taxi. If I leave the car here they'll tow it away."

**“Just Don’t Worry. G-d Will Help”**

Fogel pointed to a spot about fifty yards ahead and said. "Just don't worry. G-d will help. Here, look over there! About a hundred feet away is a place you can park. See! I'll push you. Get in your car and I'll push you. Then you can take a taxi home."

"Thanks!" he yelled back as he walked to open the door to his car. "But I've been waiting here for a long time and not one taxi has passed. look!The road is deserted. But I guess you're right. Worrying doesn't help."

Mr. Fogel was totally convinced that this fellow was telling the truth. So after pushing him to the parking place and the fellow locked his car up, he offered to take him home. After all it was only a fifteen minute ride. The old fellow couldn't stop thanking him. He got into Fogel's car and kept talking.

**“Thanks a Million!”**

"Wow! Thanks a million! I really appreciate this!! Now all we have to do, my wife and I that is, is order a cab." He looked at his watch, "Whew! It's really late! I hope we don't miss our plane. We're flying to Florida to visit our daughter and the plane is leaving in an hour."

"Listen" said Mr. Fogel "It's no problem. You know what. I'll take you to the airport, after all it's only a half hour drive and my wife won't worry. Just don't ask questions. As soon as we get to your house get your wife and suitcases and let's go! You have no time to waste."

The old fellow tried weakly to protest but realized that this Chassid was right, so in no time he and his wife were in the car and before they knew it were at the airport. "I can't thank you enough" said the old man as he pulled his suitcase from the trunk.

"Listen, you got to let me pay you! Here, do me a favor. Take a hundred dollars." He pulled a bill from his wallet. "Nu! It's the least I can do. Just take it! But Fogel would have no part of it.

"Sorry, my friend! First of all thank G-d I don't need the money. Second, it was a favor so I don't want the money. And third it was no big deal; the whole thing took less than an hour and I enjoyed it, so I don't even deserve the money." But the old man insisted, even took another hundred out and kept pushing it at Fogel saying "Just take it. Nu! Don't argue. Just take it."

Until finally Mr. Fogel said. "Excuse me but you're Jewish, right?" the fellow shook his head yes. "So, listen, if you really want to repay me then, you know what? Put on Tefillin. Do you put on Tefillin? Do it every morning for a month."

**“I’m Not Doing Mitzvos”**

The man shook his head no. In fact it was exactly what he did not want to hear. Tefillin?! No way!! I'm not doing no mitzvos! No MITVOS! Not me!"

"Alright, so then don't put on Tefillin." Fogel replied. "You were the one that wanted to pay. As far as I'm concerned you don't owe me anything but if you want to pay, this is what I want. Nu? What do you say? Just buy yourself a pair of Tefillin and put them on when you can. Okay?"

The old fellow looked at Fogel with foggy eyes for a second, shook his head reluctantly and said ."All right. I'll do it!" Then he half-heartedly shook Fogel's hand, looked at his watch and ran to get a luggage cart.

As soon as her husband was far enough away, his wife approached Fogel with tears in her eyes, dabbed them with a small kerchief and said. "Thank you! G-d just sent you!"

**Her Eyes Were Red from Crying**

She spoke in a low voice, keeping an eye on her husband to make sure he was involved with the cart but, although she tried to hide it, she was obviously very emotional, her eyes were red from crying.

"You don't know what you just did. It was a miracle! We are holocaust survivors. We met after the war, got married, moved here to New York and agreed that we wouldn't do anything Jewish. Nothing. We were mad at G-d, you know."

She started crying again. "But as we got older I began to yearn for the things from my mother's house.. you know, like lighting candles before Shabbos. But each time I mentioned it my husband said 'NO MITZVOS!! Our children got married, we are alone in the house but he still says 'No Mitzvos'!!'

"So, yesterday I felt so bad that .. I did something I haven't done since the war.. I prayed. "I begged G-d to send some miracle to change my husband's mind. And now you came . You are a miracle!! "I'm sure that this Shabbos we will have Candles."

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone*.

**Weekly Chasidic Story #829**

**Missing a Penny**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000wCk0:001IKJL100001nM6&count=1381088519&randid=1971839611&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1971839611)

An unlearned Jew once traveled to the *tzadik* Rabbi Mordechai of Chernobyl for Shabbat. When he went to get a blessing before departing, R. Mordechai queried him about his daily routine. The Jew related how he rises early to buy merchandise from the farmers, and when he finishes he returns home to *daven Shacharit* (pray the Morning Payer). The Rebbe condemned going to work before praying, but the Jew excused himself saying that if he prays first, he will be unable to be on time to buy the merchandise.

R. Mordechai then told him the following story:

A young Torah scholar, who was supported by his father-in-law in order to enable him to devote his day to Torah-study, was forced to find additional means of support when his family grew. He left home for three years and earned money as a *melamed* (teacher-tutor), saving every coin he received, exchanging large amounts of lesser coins for single gold ones. When he had collected enough to start a business, he decided to return home.

On Friday midday he reached a small village near his city, but then he realized that he did not have enough time to reach home before Shabbat. He decided to stay at a local hostel.

He became concerned for the safety of his money. He was afraid to leave it in his luggage lest someone steal it, and he did not know if he can trust the owner with it. Nevertheless, feeling that he had no other choice, he gave it to his host to hold for him.

Throughout the entire Shabbat, the young man was unable to relax properly; he was too worried about his money. Immediately after *Havdala* at the beginning of Saturday night, he requested it back. Upon receiving his wallet, he counted all the gold coins and was happy to find that nothing was missing. Still, he then continued to shake the coins and look through them.

"What are you looking for?" the owner asked, "Is something missing?"

The guest told him that he wanted to make sure that his one copper coin is there as well....

Reb Mordechai concluded,"Look at this man's silliness. After seeing that all his golden coins were returned to him, he still suspects his host of perhaps having stolen one copper coin. And you are doing the same!

Every night, you entrust G-d Al-mighty with your soul, and when you wake up in the morning, he returns the gold you have given him. How is it that you do not trust that he will still give you your living if you do not pursue it until after praying?"

**Source:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Lma'an Yishme'u #70

**Biographical note:** Rabbi Mordechai ("Mottel") of Chernobyl [of blessed memory: 5530 - 20 Iyar 5697 (1770 – May 1837 C.E.)], successor to his father, Rabbi Nachum, was the son-in-law of Rabbi Aharon the Great of Karlin and subsequently of Rabbi David Seirkes, an important disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. His eight sons all became major Chasidic leaders. One of them Yaakov Yisrael Twerski of Cherkassy, the first Hornsteipel Rebbe, married Devora Leah, one of the six daughters of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (match arranged by the two grandfather-Rebbes), in order to maximize the possibilities for fulfillment of the prediction, "the Moshiach will be born of the elder disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch or the youngest."

Connection: Weekly Reading—Gen. 13:8-13 (income vs. faith)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

[www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:ascent@ascentofsafed.com)

**Thoughts that Count**

And offer him there for a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2)

Master of the Universe!" cried Abraham before G-d. "When you commanded me to offer up my son as a burnt offering, I could have said, 'But yesterday You promised that my seed would be perpetuated through Isaac!' However, I conquered my own inclination to carry out Your will. In return, may it be Your will that should the descendents of Isaac ever be in trouble, with no one to defend them, You Yourself will come to their defense." *(Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit)*

The trial of the binding of Isaac is ascribed to Abraham's merit, even though he was not the intended sacrifice. For the agony of a father who leads his child to slaughter is much greater than the child's own suffering. (Taharat Hakodesh) [Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim.”