**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeira 5772**

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**Story #728**

**A Unique Guest**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

Nearly fifty years ago, Yitzchak, a young married Chasidic man, who lived in the Stamford Hill section of London, drove on one of his regular business trips to the north of England. He was always careful to plan these expeditions so that he would be sure to get home in time for Shabbat, but this time fate - Divine Providence - decreed otherwise.

What happened? He set out early enough on Friday to be able to reach London with plenty of time to spare before Shabbat began, except that his car broke down on the highway and he was forced to have it towed to the nearest town, to a garage there. The repair took many hours, and even before it was finished it became clear that he would never be able to get back to London before sunset.

**Stuck in a Small Town**

**He Had Barely Heard of**

So Yitzchak found himself stuck in a small town that he had barely heard of, where he didn't know a single person. His inquiries revealed that there was a synagogue, thank G-d, and he managed to rent a hotel room within walking distance and find a bit of food in a supermarket with kosher certification.

When Queen Shabbat arrived, Yitzchak walked to the synagogue. It was quite an impressive structure considering its location in an area not known for Jewish communities. Unfortunately, it felt desolate and even now at the start of Shabbat there was hardly anyone there. With great difficulty a minyan was finally assembled, yet most of its members did not appear to Yitzchak's eye to be particularly mitzvah-observant.

One of the religious-looking older men had a thick beard. He approached Yitzchak, shook his hand enthusiastically, and then without introduction or preamble asked him in not-so-fluent English and in an almost pleading tone if he would consent to be his guest for Shabbat.

**Accepts the Invitation of the Old Man**

Yitzchak was surprised that the elderly Jew had spoken to him in English. He responded in Yiddish that he would be happy to accept the invitation. The old man's face lit up, and without another word he returned to his seat for the continuation of the prayers.

Afterwards, they left the synagogue together. His host introduced himself as Yaakov Frankenovich, adding that everyone called him Yankel.

When they reached his apartment building Yankel mentioned apologetically that they had to walk up many stairs. It became obvious to Yitzchak after one flight or so that the climb was a great strain on his companion.

**A Quite Small Apartment**

The apartment was quite small. Yitzchak perceived simultaneously that Yanked lived alone, and yet the table in the middle of the room was set for two. His host saw the wonder on his face, smiled, and remarked that he so desired to have a guest that for years (!) now he had been setting a second place in anticipation.

The meal turned out to be surprisingly enjoyable. Hours went by in Torah discussion and singing the songs of Shabbat until it was quite late at night. Yitzchak rose from the table, happy but exhausted, to return to the hotel. To his shock, Yankel pleaded with him to remain and be his guest for sleeping over also. It seemed such an urgent matter for his host that Yitzchak felt he had no choice but to accept, even though he had already paid for his hotel room.

**Promises to Tell the Whole Story**

The whole evening he had wondered why Yankel did not move in all these years to a bigger city with a larger, established Jewish community, including others that were religiously observant like him. Before they lay down to sleep, he finally asked him. Yankel promised to tell him his whole story, but not until the Third Meal, at the end of the holy day.

Throughout the night Yankel had prolonged severe coughing fits. In the morning Yitzchak tried to convince him not to walk to shul, but to stay home and rest. The old man refused to consider it.

In their long slow strolls back and forth between shul and home, the two men became friendlier and closer. Yitzchak was especially impressed with the strong faith of his elder companion and the whole-hearted innocence with which he related to and served the Al-mighty.

**Opens Up at the Third Meal**

Finally, at the Third Meal, Yankel opened up about himself, as he had promised. He was born in Russia. When he was still a child, in the early stages of the Bolshevik Revolution, his grandfather decided that Russia was no longer a safe place for them to live, and the entire family uprooted to England. They settled in this same small town, where they lived in near poverty, but happily free of fear and persecution.

As a result of their pioneering presence, other Jewish immigrant families moved to the town as well. Eventually there was a significant Jewish community, and they built a fine synagogue. His grandfather and grandmother were hospitable to an extreme, and his grandfather always managed to come up with a generous donation to give to anyone who needed it, unless the person was too embarrassed to accept such a gift, in which case he would extent it as a loan.

**Caught Up in the Spirit of “Progress”**

With the passage of time, the community became caught up in the spirit of "progress." The younger generation mostly moved away to areas distant from their parents, and of the minority that remained, their children, the third generation, moved away too.

When Yankel grew up, his grandfather was already quite old and the Jewish population greatly diminished. He tried many times to convince his grandfather to move to a different city with a larger Jewish community, but he always refused, saying that since they were the founding pillars of the community, they were obligated to stay.

**Asked Not to Abandon the Community**

Before passing away, the grandfather requested that Yankel too not abandon the community by moving away. He told him that just the fact that in his house a Jew could find a place to stay and enjoy some kosher food was in itself justification for him to remain. "Who knows?" he concluded his request; "Perhaps someday a Jewish traveler will show up, and you will be able to fulfill the blessed mitzvah of hospitality."

As Yitzchak realized that he was the guest that his new close friend had been awaiting all these years - decades even! - tears welled in his eyes. His elderly host tried to continue speaking, but another difficult coughing spell forced him to pause.

**“Please Don’t Feel Sorry for Me”**

Finally he resumed. "Please don't feel sorry for me," he said. "Really the opposite is true. You can't know how much gratitude I feel towards you that you enabled me to have the merit of fulfilling the mitzvah of bringing home a guest. Now I feel that I have fulfilled my mission from my grandfather."

On Saturday night Yitzchak left as soon as he could to get home. But he promised Yankel to return to visit. He was concerned about his welfare and anyway he wanted to bring him a nice present.

A few days later he was able to travel north again. He drove directly to Yankel's house, but to his knock on the door there was no response.

**Hurriedly Drove Over to the Synagogue**

Already worried, Yitzchak hurriedly drove over to the synagogue. He found the attendant in charge and asked him about Yankel. The man looked at him sadly and answered that the old man had passed away just that Sunday. "He came to shul, suffered a severe coughing attack, and died right here!"

Suddenly the synagogue manager's gaze focused more intently on Yitzchak, and he said, "One moment, aren't you the guest that was here this past Shabbat? I have something for you. Yankel left this package on his table, and it has your name on it."

**Hurries to Open the Package**

With great emotion, Yitzchak hurried to open the package. Inside were a few books and a letter. He began to read:

"Yitzchak, my dear friend. I feel that my end is near. Your visit brought me so much joy and pleasure- genuine Yiddishe nachas. I hope that the merit of the mitzvah of hosting you will stand for me in the World of Truth, where I will be soon. I bequeath my siddur and chumash to you, along with my heartfelt wish that you will succeed in raising your children in the path of Torah."

Yitzchak cried quietly. When he heard there was no one to say kaddish for the deceased, he promised that he himself would do it.

From that day on, Yitzchak made it a rule in his household that an extra place should always be set at the table, for any guest who might happen to appear. In addition to his own mitzvah, he wanted this practice to be an ongoing memorial for Yankel's dedication and love his entire live for the mitzvah of hospitality.

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**Connection:** Weekly Reading - hospitality

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**Karl Goodman**

**An “Ish Tov”—Good Man**

**By Tamir Goodman**

On a Sunday afternoon back in 1990, when I was eight years old, I was playing in a basketball game at a local elementary school gym in Baltimore, Maryland. It was a big game for my team, and the gym was packed with cheering fans. With two seconds left to go in the game and with my team down one point, I jumped, grabbed a rebound, and shot the ball into the hoop to score the game-winning shot.

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| --- |
| My father in his office. |
| My father in his office. |

Amidst wild cheers, I ran over towards the stands where my father was sitting, and pumped my hands in the air as if I was the greatest basketball player on earth.

**A Lesson the Son Never Forgot**

My father gave me a huge hug and kiss as only he could, and then we walked out to the parking lot. As he began driving, my father told me how proud he was of me for playing so well.

What he said next taught me a life lesson that I have never forgotten. He explained to me that my exuberant “hand pumping” reaction was inappropriate. He said, “No matter what happens, you must always stay humble and understand that your talent is from G‑d.”

**People of From All Walks of**

**Life Called Him an Ish Tov**

My father, Karl “Ish Tov” Goodman, passed away just over a month ago in his hometown of Baltimore. What has come to light after his passing is that people from all walks of life overwhelmingly referred to him as “Ish Tov,” which literally means “good man”—and not just because *ish tov* is the Hebrew translation of his last name. His drive to do good extended far beyond his personal life, where he was a devoted and loving father of nine, grandfather of thirty-four, and great-grandfather of three. In all his endeavors, he behaved in a manner that represents the essence of our mission as Jews in this world.

My father was a successful lawyer who won many high-profile cases, and his strong Jewish identity and commitment to Judaism always shaped the way he practiced law and treated others. His office was a one-stop shop for anyone and everyone who needed support, legal help, advice, or even just to hear a funny joke. You see, my father’s main priority was not racking up materialistic success, because he primarily saw himself as an emissary for G‑d in the courtroom.

**Backed Up His Beliefs with Action**

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| lWjm5814618 |
| My father dancing with the director of Chabad-Lubavitch of Maryland, Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan, at my circumcision in 1982. |

He backed up his beliefs with action. He was the first lawyer to proudly wear his *kippah* in court in Maryland, back in the early 1970s, when the practice of wearing a *kippah* in a public workplace was highly uncommon.

Another time, towards the end of a very drawn-out and high-profile trial, he realized that the sun was setting and he had not yet recited the afternoon prayers. Despite the tense atmosphere in the packed courtroom, he raised his hand and asked the judge for a ten-minute break so he could say the afternoon prayers. The judge obliged, and even gave him the keys to his personal chamber so he could pray without distractions.

**Countless Acts of Kindness**

Over the years, he used his position to do countless acts of kindness. He helped thousands of people, regardless of their race, gender, background, or affiliation, when their lives seemed hopeless, and did so many times without asking for compensation. He also worked diligently to help Chabad of Baltimore regain the rights to their cemetery after it was taken out of their possession for years, as well as to acquire the necessary zoning permit for the local Chabad House.

Another time, he found out that there was a Jew who was sentenced to prison for a white-collar crime. My father, seeing this man’s potential, took on the man’s case and managed to get his sentenced reduced to five years, with the unlikely condition that the prisoner would serve an additional three-year house arrest probation in the Goodman family home.

When he suggested such an astonishing arrangement, his only consideration was helping out a fellow Jew, while disregarding what others would say or think about having a convicted felon living under the same roof as a houseful of young children. After completing the house arrest, this prisoner increased in his Judaism, landed a job, and got his life back together—all because my father did not give up on a fellow Jew.

**Uncanny Ability to See the Crux of an Issue**

My father’s humbleness, commitment to his beliefs, and innate desire to do good earned him the respect of his colleagues, the judges who tried his cases, and his diverse client base. My father also possessed uncanny abilities to see to the crux of an issue and come up with a viable solution, as well as to say just the right comment at the right time. That is why, one day, a judge who was overwhelmed with cases chose my father out of a roomful of lawyers to be appointed as a temporary judge. She handed over a pile of case files, and within just a short time, “Ish Tov” pronounced all the cases closed and returned the files to the appreciative judge.

**The Message He Lived Each Day**

The same message he taught me years ago after the game was the same message by which he lived each day, and by which he expected me to live as I grew older. Once, when I was really tense before a big college basketball game, I called him on the phone and told him how nervous I was for the game. His response was that if I prayed that day, then I had nothing to worry about. He said, “If you are able to stand and pray in front of G‑d, then there is nothing in this world that you need to fear.” Time and time again, his unwavering faith instilled me with confidence to go out and use my own talents to try and serve my Creator.

What is truly remarkable about my father, and what made him a real *ish tov* to everyone with whom he interacted, is that no matter where he was or

what he was doing, he conducted his business with a smile on his face, a joke on the tip of his tongue and complete faith in G‑d. My father’s legacy is an inspirational reminder to focus on what is truly important in life: family, kindness, sanctifying G‑d through our unique talents, humility, judging others favorably, and of course, always being filled with joy!

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine. Dubbed the “Jewish Jordan” by Sports Illustrated,* [*Tamir Goodman*](http://www.chabad.org/1661133) *is a former NCAA and professional basketball player, IDF soldier, and today, motivational speaker, director of Coolanu Israel and founder of Sport Strings Tzitzit. Tamir lives with his wife and four children.*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Counting Teeth**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

One of the most encouraging signs of spiritual revival in our generation is the growing number of Jews regularly studying the laws of *lashon hara* and guarding their tongue against speaking gossip and slander. The laws they study were compiled by the saintly sage Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen. He is known as the “Chafetz Chaim” because that is the title of his seminal work on this important subject.

The story is told of a Torah scholar who paid a visit to this sage in his home in the Polish town of Radin. Despite his frail condition in the middle eighties of his life, the Chafetz Chaim was in a particularly good mood as he asked the visitor to come close to him and open his, the sage’s, mouth. There was an understandable hesitation to comply with this request but the sage insisted.

**Forced to Count the Sage’s Teeth**

Surprise followed surprise as the sage insisted that his teeth be counted! unable to refuse a repeated order to do so, the guest indeed counted the sage’s teeth and was amazed to find that he had all the teeth a person could ever have and that they were in prime condition

despite his advanced age.

Then came the following explanation of this phenomenon from a saintly Jew who had alerted generations to the responsibility of exercising extreme caution in regard to what they spoke:

“I guarded what came out of my mouth and G-d guarded my mouth in return.”

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**And Swing With**

**All Your Might:**

**(The Chernobyl Rebbe and Mickey Mantle)**

**By Rabbi Label Lam**

It is written, "You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might..." Make all people love Him, just like Abraham your father did. (Sifri on Devarim 6:5)

With all your might: With each and every measure that's measured out to you. (With all your experiences) (Rashi)

There's no wise person like one who's been through it. (Talmud)

How do you express love for your Creator with all of your experiences?

**Dedicated His Life to Saving Jews Held Captives**

The Chernobyl Rebbe dedicated his life to saving Jews who were being held captive. He specialized in collecting ransom money and negotiating their way out of Russian prisons.

Once the Rebbe himself was captured and put into prison. While under lock and key he prayed for his own release and begged to understand the justice of his having been imprisoned. He dedicated his life to helping others gain their release. What was the reason why he had been subject to that fate?

Having accepted the divine decree but still seeking understanding, he fell asleep exhausted with his tear-drenched siddur. That night, in a dream, a beautiful elderly woman visited him.

**Specializing in the Mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim**

She spoke to him and asked, "Why was Abraham our father told to go, (lech lecha), for your own good? What's so good about having to uproot and wander continuously?" She answered the question that she herself asked and said, "Abraham specialized in the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim, taking care of guests. Every wayfaring soul found rest for his body and food for both his body and soul in Abraham's generous tent."

However, until he was told to leave his homeland, Abraham was a well-established landed gentry. He had never experienced the full depth and anguish of being a wanderer. Now that he was cast into the role of rootless existence he would know, not just through the power of imagination, but through the school of rugged experience what it means to be without shelter and food. In this way, the mitzvah that he specialized in, his chosen career, his mission in life will have been enhanced. Not only his head and hands will be there to serve the people but also his heart as well. That is why he was told to go "for yourself"; for your own benefit.

**Understanding Who the**

**Woman Was in the Dream**

The beautiful elderly woman took leave and upon awakening, the Chernobyl Rebbe understood two things. 1) That woman was no other than Sara our mother. 2) The reason he was in jail was also for his own good. He had never been on that side of the bars and now he knows the extent of helplessness and frustration that accompanies those who are there.

Now, he could do what he had always had but with fresh enthusiasm and power of empathy. The experience of jail added color and depth to his being that could not be bought in a store or learned from a book. With this treasure, this valued resource of his experience he could deliver something unique and powerfully personal.

**Treasures Buried in Life’s**

**Difficulties and Failures**

Looking back at the trail of lives we may find, as Abraham, that there are warehouses of untapped treasures buried in boxes labeled "difficulties" and "failures." Those experiences are convertible to Divine service at any moment we choose. "If you're picked on," I needed to tell one of my children, "you know never to pick on others. You know what it feels like, now."

I remember sitting in a reception area when I noticed a picture of an old weathered face on the cover of Sports Illustrated beside me. The name beneath was "Mickey Mantle." I couldn't believe how aged he looked.

In the article he described in graphic detail his personal and public failures, due to a life of alcoholism. When his son died a drug-related death, he woke up and got help. The article concludes with a profound admission of having disappointed so many people, fans, family etc. "Now," he concluded dramatically "Mickey Mantle is gonna hit more home runs than ever."

In one moment like one wave of the bat I was moved to tears, not just because of nostalgia for the Mick, but rather for the great truth in his simple and honest words.

The way to love your Creator is the same way to reach the fences. Use the total wisdom of your experiences, be discerning and swing with all your might.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting*

**Make Yourself at HoMe!**

*“…And behold, three men were standing over him…” (18:2)*

There are some people who look like they’re giving but they’re really taking. And there are some people who look like they’re taking when they’re really giving.

Anyone who buys a $5,000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he’s also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi.

On the other hand there are people who look like they’re takers but they’re really giving. Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found

himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat.

**Just One Orthodox Family in the Town**

He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the front parlor. “Can I stay here for Shabbat?” asked the traveling salesman. “If you like,” replied the host. “The price is $200.”

“$200!” exclaimed the traveling salesman. “That’s more than a first-class hotel!”

“Suit yourself,” replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host

showed the salesman his room and the kitchen and the

other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host had left the room the salesman sat down and thought to himself. “Well, if this is going to cost me $200 I’m going to get my money’s worth.” And for the whole of the Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house’s considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower before and after Shabbat. He really made himself “at home.”

When he had showered and packed he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp $100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

“What’s this?” enquired the host.

**“The Money I Owe You”**

“That’s the money I owe you,” replied the salesman.

“You don’t owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality.”

“But you told me that Shabbat here costs $200.”

“I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home.”

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present the worst thing you can say is “You shouldn’t have done that!” Rather, take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it up and put in the middle of the

table and say “Thank you so much.”

**Mitigating the Guest’s**

**Feeling of Being a Taker**

By allowing him to contribute to the meal, you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week’s Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his *brit mila*— the most painful day. G-d made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests.

When G-d saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the *brit mila,* He sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these ‘men’ appeared

Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests. Hospitality is is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

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**It Once Happened**

**The Special Flax Merchant**

Many years ago in Poland there lived a wealthy Jewish merchant who bought flax from the nobility and then resold it abroad. At the same time, he pursued the commandment of "pidyun shevuim," ransoming prisoners. (In those days it was not unusual for Jews to languish in debtors' prisons when they failed to pay on time for leasing inns or other properties.)

One day the merchant was on his way to the estate of one of the Polish landowners, when he fell asleep at the reins of his carriage. As he dozed, the horses wandered off the path. When the merchant awakened he found himself on an unknown road . In front of him was a carriage driver fixing a broken wheel. Inside the carriage, a Polish gentleman sat looking angry and impatient. The merchant asked the nobleman if he could be of any assistance.

**Request to Be Driven to an Inn**

"Yes, you certainly can," he replied. "I would be most grateful if you would drive me to the inn just 15 minutes ride from here. I could use a bit of whiskey, and I will be happy to treat you to some also in return for the favor."

"I will be happy to take you to the inn," the merchant replied. On the way they spoke amiably, and the nobleman discovered that the merchant dealt in flax, which was one of his primary crops. "What a happy coincidence," he said, and they agreed to meet again to conduct some business.

**Overhearing the Landlord’s Harsh**

**Words to the Jewish Innkeeper**

When they arrived at the inn the Jewish innkeeper rushed to offer the Pole, who was his landlord, hospitality. The merchant went into the other room to say his afternoon prayers. He couldn't help but overhear snippets of conversation. "Moshke, you had better pay up the rent, now!" the landlord barked. The Jew responded meekly about the terrible snows which had kept customers away.

The merchant finished praying, and was about to leave, but the innkeeper begged him to partake of some refreshments. "No, I'd better be on my way," the merchant replied. "But tell me, are you having problems with the landlord?"

"He's drunk now. I hope when he sobers up he'll extend me credit a bit longer." The two Jews bade each other farewell, and the merchant departed.

When the flax harvest arrived, the Jewish merchant remembered the Polish landlord. He went to the estate, and the Pole was glad to make a deal with him. They settled on a price and drew up a contract. The conversation was friendly, and the merchant mentioned Moshke. "How is our friend, the innkeeper?"

**Tells of Putting the Moshke into Prison**

"Oh, I put him in prison. Imagine, after all the chances I gave him, he still didn't pay me! Now, it's his wife's problem to come up with the money!"

"What! I can't believe you actually imprisoned the poor fellow! How much does he owe you?" asked the merchant.

The landlord mentioned a figure, exactly the sum agreed upon for the deposit. The merchant placed the money in the Pole's hand, and said, "There is the money he owes you. Now, set him free!"

"Fine. Now give me the money for the deposit and we'll conclude our deal."

"I'm sorry, Sir. I have no more money with me."

**Amazed by the Jew’s Selfless**

**Act to Help An Utter Stranger**

"I have never seen such a thing!" exclaimed the Pole. "You have just given all your money to an utter stranger, and in the bargain, you have lost out on a wonderful deal that could have made you a tidy profit!"

"What you say is true, Sir, except for one thing. That Jew is not a stranger to me. He is my brother, and it is my duty to redeem him."

The Pole was stunned. "You are a fine fellow. I will sign the contract without a deposit. I will also write a letter of recommendation to my brother-in-law, also a flax merchant. He will be anxious to do business with you."

The Jewish innkeeper was returned to his joyful family, and the gratitude they felt toward the merchant was inexpressible. But how on earth would they ever be able to repay him for his kindness? "I wouldn't sell my mitzva (commandment) for any amount of money!" the merchant declared, and they parted in happiness and with a deep feeling of brotherhood.

The merchant proceeded to the other landlord with the letter of recommendation. Just as the first Pole promised, his relative was happy to sell his flax to the Jew. They were about to conclude the deal when the merchant heard a child crying in Yiddish, "Daddy, Mommy, I want to go home!"

"Why is a Jewish child here, away from his parents?"

"I had to take him so his parents would pay what they owe me!"

The merchant suddenly rose from his seat. "I can't do business with a man who would take a child as hostage!"

**Agrees to Return the Jewish Child**

The Pole was anxious not to lose the sale. "I'll have the child returned, just let's finish our business." Just as his brother-in-law had done, this man also concluded the deal without a deposit, and the merchant made a very nice profit on the sale of the flax. In addition, he accrued yet another precious mitzva to his account when the child was returned to his grieving parents.

The Jewish merchant was rewarded in this world as well as the next. But he was blessed with yet another great reward, the birth of two sons who lit up the world with their holiness, the illustrious tzadikim, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and Reb Zusia of Anipoli.

Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

**A Slice of Life**

**"Angels" on the Freeway**

**By Steve Hyatt**

As I sat in the doctor's office full of anxiety, I heard the word no one wants to hear from their orthopedist when he looks at your x-ray: "Whoa!"

And so began my journey into the world of hip replacement. Until that moment hip replacement surgery was for "old" people, injured professional football players, or someone severely injured in a car accident. But it most certainly didn't apply to me, a young 57-year-old!

If you've never had a hip problem, count your blessings. Something as simple as putting on a sock produces waves of excruciating pain. It also impacts your ability to sleep, walk to the mailbox, chase your grandson around a soccer field, sit comfortably for long hours in an airplane and walk to and from shul (synagogue) on Shabbat.

Over the years I've chronicled the myriad people I've met and the adventures I've experienced while walking two or three miles to shul. That walk was always an opportunity to shut down the business side of my brain and marvel at the wonders of nature around me. It was a unique opportunity to recharge my spiritual batteries and for the first time all week to totally, unconditionally relax!

**Feeling a Discomfort in the Left Leg**

Since arriving at my new home in McLean, Virginia, I had discomfort in my left leg every time I climbed stairs or walked more than a mile. Within months I was constantly in pain. That pain eventually brought me to the doctor whose astonishment at the severity of my condition was the aforementioned "Whoa!" He informed me that I needed a complete hip replacement. I went home and discussed it with my wife. We decided to wait and see if the pain would subside.

The pain in my leg sometimes prevented me from walking the 5.2 miles round-trip to and from shul every Saturday so my attendance became sporadic. As weeks turned into months I realized how much I missed shul, how much I missed my "relax" time, and how much my soul missed my spiritual recharge time.

**A Decision to Try and Walk**

**To Shul for Rosh Hashana**

The day before Rosh Hashana I convinced myself that despite the pain I was going to walk to shul both days. When I woke up the morning of the first day I was in pain but I set out anyway. The first mile is straight up hill and it was horrible. When I crested the hill I had to stop and literally catch my breath from the pain. Within a few moments the pain subsided and I started again.

After a few hundred yards I was faced with another problem, a huge construction project. The bridge I had to cross was under repair and there was no longer a sidewalk. There was a pathway but in the past it had me walking within inches of passing cars and trucks. Faced with having to do that again with a bad leg I almost gave up. But a little voice in my head encouraged me to go on.

As I made way across the bridge on the narrow pathway, my leg actually started to feel better. Before I knew it I had cleared the construction "battle zone." About an hour later I arrived at shul.

My leg tightened up during services. When services were over I hobbled out of the building and started walking. After a few hundred yards I felt better and for the rest of the walk I felt pretty good. When I arrived at the bridge I was once again concerned about having to dodge the traffic. Before I took my first step I noticed what appeared to be four men floating across the bridge.

**They Seemed to be Angels**

Being that it was Rosh Hashana I immediately thought "Four angels are leading me across the bridge!" Upon closer inspection they weren't angels, but were four construction workers walking across a narrow "sidewalk" that I had never seen before. The workers had placed concrete barriers against the side of the bridge to protect themselves as they worked on various pieces of the structure. However, from the road, the barrier created an optical illusion and the narrow walkway was impossible to see.

I had walked across this bridge at least 10 times and had never seen the protected walkway. I recalled something my dad has said to me a thousand times: "Steve sometimes you look but you do not see." Never had that statement made more sense. I immediately walked over to the first barrier and sure enough there was a pathway. Before you could say "More potato kugel please!" I was skipping along, protected from the ten-wheelers and mini-vans. A few minutes later I was safely ensconced in my home.

**Couldn’t Help but**

**Wonder at His Good Fortune**

As I sat in my favorite chair I couldn't help but wonder at my good fortune. On the Shabbat mornings when my leg was not too painful I had traveled across that bridge dodging the big rigs along the way. This time because my leg slowed me down I came to the bridge at the exact moment four construction "angels" were walking to their job site.

Five minutes earlier or later and I'd have missed them and never discovered the hidden walkway. Now I had a safe and quick way across the bridge until the two year project was completed. Coincidence.... I think not!

Many years earlier my mentor Rabbi Chuni Vogel and I were sitting in his sukka when it started to rain. I wanted to go inside. The rabbi picked up a slice of water-logged challa and said, "Shloma Yakov, no one ever said a mitzva has to be easy. For 3311 years your ancestors have been performing the mitzva of 'dwelling' in a sukka. Take your mind off the rain and concentrate on the joy of fulfilling G-d's mitzva and honoring the memory of your ancestors who lived in dwellings like these for 40 years." He waited a moment for his words to sink in and then added, "But, if the rain really bothers you, feel free to go inside." I chose to remain in the sukka and it was one of the best nights of my life.

His words, "No one ever said a mitzva has to be easy" has been my motto for the last 15 years. Every time I am afraid to try something new or do something old, I think of those words. As I walked across the bridge with a painful hip his words once again inspired me.

I get my new hip in December. After that the only thing my doctor will say is, "Whoa, nice drive down the middle of the golf course Steve!"

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

The Ultra-Orthodox Punching Bag

**By Dr. Haim Shine**

Last week, former Mossad (Israel’s spy agency) chief Efraim Halevy [expressed harsh sentiments](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=1723) against the ultra-Orthodox. According to Halevy, the radicalization of the ultra-Orthodox community is a greater threat to Israel than Iran. His statements continue a painful and disturbing trend of hatred leveled at the ultra-Orthodox from left-wing liberal circles.

There is a tendency to blame the ultra-Orthodox for every ill, ache and pain in Israeli society. Over just two decades, the ultra-Orthodox have become the punching bag for a violent and decadent society, which mercilessly beats anyone who dresses differently or adopts an unfamiliar lifestyle. Yet the ultra-Orthodox are much worse off than other minorities in Israel.

Arabs in Israel have a wall to protect them, both in the Supreme Court and among the Israeli Left, in the face of any effort to infringe on their rights. Israelis are willing to lay on barbed wire to protect a few Palestinian olive trees.

For every other sub-culture in Israeli society there is some protection for freedom of expression, ideological pluralism and individual rights. Only the ultra-Orthodox have no one to care for them. Their honor is trampled in the streets, evil slander is often voiced and sludge is hurled at them in unthinkable ways.

Israeli society contains a violent and dangerous element that arouses discord and hatred in order to consolidate a majority based on false unity. Secular versus religious, veteran Israelis versus new immigrants, Ashkenazi versus Sephardi, urbanites versus those who live outside of central Israel, Jews versus Arabs and the list goes on.

**The Dangerous Israeli Tribal Flame**

The Israeli tribal flame is heating up, burning hotter as it focuses on the weak and different. When we hate others, we love ourselves and our kind more. From time to time, the object of our hatred is replaced, but the hatred itself remains. Israeli society increasingly and systematically delegitimizes the ultra-Orthodox. We have a plethora of stigmas and anti-Semitic stereotypes that would not shame the German propaganda machine and that we hurl at the ultra-Orthodox public without batting an eye.

Hatred for the ultra-Orthodox has garnered such admiration that Israeli students traveling to Poland have said that they feel closer to Muslims in Europe than to the ultra-Orthodox in Jerusalem. Timely propaganda has caused them to forget that just a few generations ago, their forefathers looked and behaved exactly as the ultra-Orthodox in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak do today.

**The Need to Avoid Collective Denigration**

It is true that among the ultra-Orthodox, as with any other society, there are people whose behavioral norms deserve condemnation, people whose actions stain the entirety of ultra-Orthodox society. But collective denigration, without basis, is directed specifically toward the ultra-Orthodox. There is simply no foundation for collective blame, only malice and wickedness. The Jewish people have suffered, for thousands of years, from the contagion of epithets; they need to be extremely sensitive to applying such names to their own people as they might any other person who is different.

It is important to remember that beyond our differences, we are still one people. We are a small nation which cannot allow itself to be filled with alienation and hatred. One who instills hatred in a child should not be surprised when one day that child hates him. The hatred bubbles up, and it does not know how to differentiate between the just and the evil, between good and bad.

The ultra-Orthodox population is the Jewish people's insurance certificate. Israelis are not everywhere, yet in every sub-culture to which he or she is connected, he or she can be sure that their sons and their son's sons will continue to affiliate as Jews. From the Himalayas to San Francisco, by way of Israel and Europe, you can find many Israelis who have abandoned their Jewish heritage.

**Assimilation in the U.S. is Frightening**

The percentage of assimilation in the U.S. is frightening. Judaism en masse is experiencing the quiet kiss of death. Those who feel Judaism is important must honor and appreciate the ultra-Orthodox; they must protect and safeguard them just as one does with a life insurance card. The ultra-Orthodox public is the insurance policy for the continuing existence of the Jewish people. Even when the premium goes up, one does not forego life insurance.

These days, in the face of constant existential threats from the north, south and east, it is important to remember that we are brothers. Additional obstacles await us, but only if we are united will be able to deal with the difficulties ahead.

*Reprinted from the November 7, 2011 Newsletter of Israel Hayom newspaper.*

**Poland Hosts Largest Gathering**

**Of Rabbis Since World War II**

**By The Associated Press**

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WARSAW - Dozens of rabbis from across Europe have gathered in Warsaw for the largest meeting of Jewish religious leaders in Poland since the community was virtually wiped out during World War II.

This year's Conference of European Rabbis will focus on a range of issues affecting European and global Jewry, including attempts in Europe to ban shechita, the kosher slaughter of animals. The Dutch parliament passed such a bill earlier this year, though it must still be approved by the Senate.

The rabbis will also discuss the problem of validating the Jewish identity of people who have not practiced Judaism in two or three generations. This has become an issue in countries like Poland, where many people with Jewish ancestry were so traumatized by the Holocaust and postwar anti-Semitism that they lived secular or Christian lives for decades and are only now embracing a Jewish life again.

**Jewish Population is Growing in Poland**

Over the last 30 years, the Jewish population in Poland has grown from just a few thousand to over 20,000, the conference said.

Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich called the three-day gathering of about 150 rabbis "a real testament to the revival of Jewish life in Poland."

The meeting began Monday, when several of the representatives met with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski. On Wednesday, the rabbis are to meet with Polish righteous gentiles - Christians who risked their lives to save Jews during the war.

Poland was home to Europe's largest Jewish community before the war, numbering nearly 3.5 million. Most were murdered in the Holocaust.

The Conference of European Rabbis takes place every two years.

*Reprinted from the November 2, 2011 edition of Haaretz newspaper in Israel.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Be My Guest!**

In this week’s parsha Vayeira, we read about the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. The Torah tells us that Avrohom Avinu "was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day."(Bereishis 18:1) Rashi explains that Avrohom Avinu was waiting to see if travelers would pass by, so that he could invite them into his home. When Avrohom Avinu saw that three men were approaching, Avrohom Avinu ran towards the men in order to offer them hospitality.

The Shlah comments that we are all guests in Hashem's world.  Because if Hashem were to "pull the plug", so to speak, we the world would no longer exist. So, the Shlah writes, by fulfilling the mitzvah of welcoming guests into our homes, we are fulfilling the mitzvah of "going in Hashem's ways."

**Searching for Travelers**

**Passing by His Village**

Reb Eliezer, the father of the Baal Shem Tov, was so hospitable that he used to send people out to bring in travelers who were passing by his village. After the guests had eaten, Reb Eliezer would give them gifts, and provisions for their further travels. The Heavenly Court took due note of his exemplary conduct, and it was decided to put Reb Eliezer to the test.

The accusing angel spoke up first: "I am willing to go down and test him.” But Eliyahu the Prophet said: "No, perhaps it would be better if I were to go," His suggestion was accepted, and the prophet appeared at the door of Reb Eliezer on Shabbos afternoon in the guise of a poor drifter, with a staff in his hand and a knapsack on his back, in flagrant breach of the holiness of Shabbos. (Carrying in the streets is generally forbidden on Shabbos.) Reb Eliezer simply opened up his door wide and said “Gut Shabbos,” and warmly welcomed the man inside.

**Calm in the Face of Incredible Chutzpah**

Reb Eliezer remained calm in the face of the chutzpah of his guest in desecrating the Sabbath before his very eyes. Reb Eliezer let no harsh word pass his lips that might put the poor man to shame. On the contrary, Reb Eliezer hastened to serve the man the Seudah Shlishis, and in the evening, when Shabbos had passed, prepared for the poor man Melaveh Malkah.   
         The next morning Reb Eliezer gave the man a liberal donation for his further upkeep, still without breathing a word about the shameful conduct of violating the holy Shabbos.

At this moment, the prophet revealed himself to Reb Eliezer, and said: "Know that I am the Prophet Eliyahu, and I have come to test you. And because you withstood your test, and did not shame the one who came to your door, you have been found worthy of having a son who will light up the eyes of all Yisroel."

**Parents of the Baal Shem Tov**

And in due course the blessing was fulfilled, and to this patient host and his dutiful wife was born the Baal Shem Tov. (A Treasury of Chassidic Tales, p.62, R.S.Y. Zevin, U.Kaploun, trans.) We see from this story the greatness of the mitzvah of welcoming guests into our homes.

In order for us to be able to perform the mitzvah of welcoming guests properly, we will now briefly detail the basic guidelines of this most important mitzvah. Most guests have traveled and are usually hungry and thirsty.

This is hinted to in the verse which tells us that Avrohom Avinu ran to meet his guests. Ratz – (Ran) – is spelled Reysh - Tzadi, which are the first letters of the words ra-ev - hungry and tzameh - thirsty. Therefore, a good host will offer his guest something to eat and drink immediately after their arrival. As the verse states in Tehillim "...and You give them their food in its proper time;" (145:15)

**The Importance of Serving Guests Quickly**

Also, the verses tell us that “Avrohom hurried to the tent to Sorah and said ‘Hurry! Three seahs of meal, fine flour! Knead and make cakes.’ Then Avrohom ran to the cattle…” (18:6-7) Thus we see how important it is to serve guests quickly.

Similarly, a host should avoid keeping a guest hostage by delaying the recitation of Bircas Hamazon – Grace after meals. This is hinted to in the verse, as Avrohom Avinu tells his guests: “I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on…”(18:5) The Belzer Rav explains this verse to mean that Avrohom Avinu saw that his guests were in a hurry; so Avrohom Avinu did his best not to delay them.(As heard from Rav A.D.M. Bayer)

By following the basic guidelines and by learning from the examples of Avrohom Avinu and Sorah Emainu, we should have the merit to warmly welcome guests into our homes for many years to come.

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