**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Chaya Sarah 5773**

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**The Inspiring Legacy of**

**Alan (Avrohom) Goldfarb**

**By Daniel Keren**

Reb Alan (Avrohom) Goldfarb was *nifter* on *Shabbos* night – Parshas Noach and the levaya was held on Sunday morning at the old Magen David Synagogue in Bensonhurst. His *petirah* shocked and saddened his many friends in both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities where Avrohom was active in learning Torah since moving to this community in 1979 following his marriage to Sara Cohen who grew up in Brooklyn’s Syrian-Jewish community

**A Talmid of Harav Avigdor Miller**

Alan was a devoted *talmid* of Harav Hagaon Avigdor Miller, *zt”l*, and not only attended all of his *shiurim* morning and evening, but more importantly adopted Rav Miller’s *hashkafa* for living a Torah-true life. In this he was aided by the encouragement of his *eizer kinegdo* – Sara.

Among those who delivered *hespedim* at the Goldfarb funeral was *Rav* Eliyahu Brog who succeeded his grandfather, *Rav* Miller as the *Mora D’Asra* of the Bais Yisroel Torah Center on Ocean Parkway near the Mirrer Yeshiva on Avenue R.

**An Incredible Commitment to**

**Learning Torah Despite Many Yissurim**

He noted to the assembled mourners that Reb Goldfarb with his incredible commitment to learning Torah despite his many *yissurim* (medical difficulties) took away the excuses that many of us might utilize by excusing ourselves from regular Torah study because of physical pains we occasionally suffer from, often much less severe than what the *nifter* experienced on a regular basis

Rabbi David Ozeri, Rav of the Yad Yosef Torah Center on Ocean Parkway near Avenue J revealed an incredible aspect of the *nifter’s* dedication to learning Torah despite his many medical issues. Prior to meeting his loyal wife Sara, Alan was not religious and had never been exposed to a religious education.

**Began Learning Alef Bet at the Age of 40**

But Sara guided him to become *frum* and encouraged him to go day after day and even night after night to learn Torah. And when Reb Goldfarb first began to tackle the *Yam Hatorah*, Rabbi Ozeri explained, he didn’t even know what an *aleph* was.

Although he was 40 years old, he didn’t let his previous decades of ignorance of Torah deter him from even trying to learn. For the first five years of his being in the Flatbush community, he established a *chavrutah* with Rabbi Shmuel Ani who taught him *aleph*, and then *bet* and then *gimmel* and then *daled*…until Alan knew the entire aleph bet.

**Made Progress in the Study of Gemara**

And after Reb Goldfarb mastered the *aleph bet*, Rabbi Ani helped instruct him in the meaning and pronunciation of the *berachot*. And from there the *nifter* went on to painstakingly learn *Mikra* (*Chumash*,) *Mishnayot* and *Gemara*. He loyally attended all of Rabbi Miller’s *Gemara* *shiurim* and slowly but surely advanced from a beginner to an advanced student of the Talmud. Before the beginning of a class, anyone not sure of where the *shiur* had left off only needed to ask Avrohom and he would glance at his *Gemara* and announce the exact line that Rav Miller or later on Rav Brog had previously stopped at.

And it wasn’t just that Reb Goldfarb committed himself to learning Torah at a late age of 40 (similar to Rabbi Akiva) and did so despite his almost constant *yissurim* of physical ailments, but as Rabbi Ozeri said in taking on a commitment to a Torah-true life, the *nifter* also cut himself off from his previous life.

**Abandoned a Life of Luxury**

You might think that perhaps he had grown up in a poor tenement apartment in a family that struggled to make ends meet and that was why he was ignorant of Torah. But the truth was that he grew up pampered in a Florida mansion with a swimming pool and full staff of butlers and chauffeurs. He had everything one could ask for in *gashmius* and he came to New York to help his older brothers run the family factory.

Reb Goldfarb’s life of material luxury and ease all ended when he made his choice to be a Torah-loyal Jew and not work on *Shabbos* or *Yomim Tovim* in the family business. But he never complained about that nor did he ever evince an argument towards Hashem for all the physical ailments he suffered, especially after he became a committed Torah Jew.

**Adopted the Sephardic Syrian Minhagim**

Although Alan was born to an Ashkenazi family, he eagerly adapted Sephardic Syrian *minhagim* after his marriage to Sara. He was very proud of his new heritage. And his sincerity won him numerous friends in both the Sephardic *shuls* he prayed and learned Torah in, as well as in the Ashkenazi *shul* of Rav Miller.

In the last few years, Reb Goldfarb undertook to study *Seder Kodshim* which he had not learned under Rav Miller. At times, it was painful for him to walk from his apartment on Ocean Parkway to his *Gemara* lectures, but when able to do so, he never let his *yissurim* stop him.

And when he couldn’t get out of the house, Avrohom would spend hour after hour pouring over an ArtScroll Gemara, patiently going over the translations and carefully analyzing the notes at the bottom of each page. In the week before his *petirah*, Reb Goldfarb called all of the rabbis he was close to in order to inform them that he had just completed learning the entire *Seder Kodshim*.

**Learning Torah was the Main Focus of His Life**

Whenever he would meet friends, he would apprise them of what he was learning because that had become the main focus of his life, with the constant encouragement of his wife Sara.

His major goal in recent years was to complete the study of *Shas*, the entire Talmud. He estimated that he was going to do so by his 80th birthday. Unfortunately, he was called up to finish his studies in the talmudical academy in *shomayim* before he could attain his lofty goal in this world. Rabbi Ozeri declared that Reb Avrohom will surely achieve his desire in Gan Eden when he would soon be reunited with his *Rebbe Muvhak* – Rav Avigdor Miller.

May Hashem comfort his widow Sara and may the *nifter* serve to intercede on behalf of *Klal Yisroel*. May his memory be a blessing to all who were privileged to know and truly be inspired by him.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of the Flatbush Jewish Journal.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Welcome Home!**

In last week’s Torah portion Vayeira , we read about the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim, welcoming guests into our homes. 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 was waiting to see if travelers would pass by, so that he could invite them into his home.

When Avrohom saw that three men were approaching, Avrohom ran towards the men in order to offer them hospitality. When the guests arrived, Avrohom was in the middle of receiving the Shechina - the Divine Presence of Hashem.

Hashem had come to visit Avrohom who was still recovering from his bris milah which had taken place three days earlier. The Torah quotes Avrohom as saying "My L-rd, If I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not away from Your servant."(Bereishis 18:3)

The Talmud explains this verse to mean that Avrohom Avinu asked the Divine Presence to wait for him, so that Avrohom could take care of the guests. Avrohom and Sorah then quickly prepared a large meal for the travelers. (Stone Chumash, p.79 citing Shabbos 127a and Shevuos 35b)

The fact that Avrohom put the needs of his guests over receiving the Divine Presence, shows the greatness of the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim.(ibid.) As the Sages tell us, "let your house be open wide" (Avos 1:5) Bartinurah explains that a Jew's house should be like Avrohom Avinu's home, which had entrances on all four sides in order to make it easy for guests to enter.

Several years ago observant Jews began to attempt to close Meah Shearim Street in Jerusalem to traffic on Shabbos. The observant Jews were offended by the blatant violation of Shabbos which disturbed the holy atmosphere of the neighborhood. In those early years, the locals set up trash bins before Shabbos which blocked the street from traffic. Needless to say, there was anger and indignation all around.

Secular elements from across Israel, formed a committee with the goal of opposing the closure of the street, a move which the secular Jews saw as "religious coercion." This committee against religious coercion used to bus into Jerusalem ruffians from kibbutzim and other places, to attack and beat up the "Ultra Orthodox."

Once such ruffian who went up to Jerusalem to beat up the Ultra Orthodox was named Kobi Levy (not his real name.) One Shabbos, Kobi was in Jerusalem with his own automobile and decided to show those Ultra Orthodox a thing or two.

He drove his car down Meah Shearim Street "like a Roman charioteer," as he described it, with pedestrians scattering in panic; pregnant women sprinting from the street, women with baby carriages bouncing across the uneven pavement. All this to show them that they cannot impose their "Shabbos" on him.

One man a local teacher had the presence of mind to memorize the number of his license plate and look him up the next day at the motor vehicle licensing bureau. That way, he eventually tracked down Kobi's telephone number. Then he called up Kobi and invited him home for Shabbos, explaining that he wanted him to see what Shabbos is and "why it means so much to us."

The driver declined, explaining that he would not want to spend the whole of Shabbos. The Meah Shearim resident pleaded with Kobi and said to him "I am inviting you to be my guest, not my prisoner. You are free to leave whenever you want. Just do me the courtesy of parking your car outside the neighborhood."

Kobi could find no honorable way of refusing an invitation which was so reasonably presented, so he agreed to go for Kiddush and the meal Shabbos evening. Kobi enjoyed himself and was intrigued at the beautiful singing, tasty food and inspiring words of Torah. When Kobi left, his host invited him to return for another Shabbos. To reinforce the invitation, the host called Kobi during the week.

Eventually, Kobi came again for Shabbos. And again. And again. Over the next year or so, he became first an occasional Shabbos guest, then a frequent Shabbos guest and finally a regular Shabbos guest. Over period of two to three years, he became a ba'al teshuvah! (From (<http://www.nishmas.org>)

We see from here the power of welcoming guests into our homes. The mitzvah of making others feel comfortable in our homes is a tremendous mitzvah. Let us all seek out guests, especially for Shabbos and Yom Tov meals. By doing so, we will all merit the great spiritual influences which Hashem imparts on those who perform this mitzvah.

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

**Learning from**

**Avraham Avinu**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Last week’s Torah section has three examples of fulfilling the very important commandment of "Hachnasat Orchim" taking in guests.

The first is Avraham (Abraham) who after sitting for hours in the sun looking for guests despite the pain of his recent circumcision, hosted three angels disguised as men.

Next is the frightening story of Lot risking his life in the name of hospitality (A trait obviously learned from his uncle Avraham, being that Lot in his own right was far from righteous, see Rashi 13;11) in the evil city of Sodom.

And finally the Torah tells us, (just before the story of the "Binding of Isaac"), that Abraham made an ‘Eshel’- a free restaurant in the desert, in order to advertise monotheism through hospitality.

So we see that hosting guests is very essential to Judaism. To understand this here is a story about hospitality.

The editor of Kfar Chabad Magazine, Rabbi Ahron Dov Haperin writes that once when traveling in the U.S.A. he ate a Shabbat meal in a Chabad House in California.

There were many guests at the table and the conversation was lively, when suddenly a strangely silent young man with very long hair and a wild look in his eyes entered the room, took a seat at the table and just stared blankly at his plate refusing to respond or react to anything around him.

He sat that way for a good half-hour, and just when everyone forgot about him, he suddenly looked up at the large picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that was hanging on the wall (as in every Chabad House), lunged from his seat, pulled it down, threw it to the ground and began screaming "Leave me alone!

The other guests subdued him and finally, when he had calmed down and drank some water, he began to talk.

He was the oldest child in a rich Jewish family from San Francisco. After graduating High School he enrolled in Berkley University and quickly became totally involved in the ‘hippy’ scene’.

Eventually, when the drugs and partying lost their charm, he made his way to India and ‘lost himself’ in one of the many spiritual cults there.

He cut off all contact with this mundane, illusionary world i.e. ‘his old self’, and it goes without saying from his parents, and had decided to devote his life to meditation and spiritual achievement.

Then, suddenly one late afternoon, after almost two years of complete silence he was overpowered with a sudden tremendous longing to see his parents. His heart ached for home.

He tried to meditate, to think of something else but to no avail. The longing plagued him constantly for days until, weeping like a madman, he left his guru traveled to the nearest town, called home and asked his amazed parents to send him a plane ticket as fast as possible.

When he arrived home totally bewildered as to why, his parents were overjoyed to see him (despite his weird zombie-like appearance) which made him open up and tell them what had transpired in the last few years.

Then, when he got to the part about his sudden nostalgia a week or so ago, his father suddenly interrupted and said "Tell me, exactly when did this happen, what day and at what time? The reason I’m asking," the father continued, "is because a strange thing happened to me last week. I went with a group of businessmen on a trip organized by Chabad to see the Lubavitch Rebbe.

Some people asked the Rebbe for advice or for more blessings but I just took the dollar, said thank you, and continued walking.

But then the Rebbe called me back. His secretary pulled me back, and the Rebbe gave me another dollar and then said; ‘This is for your oldest son’. I thought to myself ‘That was a bizarre thing for him to say, especially because I hadn’t seen you in so long, and how did he know that I even had a son?’

And now, just a few days later… here you are!! It’s really a miracle!!"

When they calculated the time of boy’s longing they realized that it began just minutes after his father received that dollar.

And that is what brought about his outburst in the Chabad House a few days later. He wanted to return to his guru in India where he felt so ‘at peace’ but try as could he couldn’t manage to break away from home, his heart just wouldn’t allow him.

"So here is the dollar back!!" He screamed as he pulled the dollar his father received from the Rebbe out of his pocket, "Take it back and tell him to leave me alone!!!"

The story is not over.

Years later Rabbi Halperin met with a Knesset (Israeli Congress) member called Professor Avner Shaki (ob’m), who told him a similar story that had occurred to him a week or so earlier.

He was in Chabad House somewhere in California for Shabbat, and in the middle of the meal three hippies entered, sat down uninvited, began eating with their hands, refused to make blessings and were generally obnoxious.

He turned to the Shaliach (Chabad House manager) to ask him to do something to get rid of them but the Shaliach comforted him and said that he shouldn’t worry. "In fact" the Shaliach added, "a few years ago I was much worse, and if you don’t believe me, ask the editor of the Kfar Chabad Magazine."

This Shilach was the young man that the Rebbe saved from India years ago.

Now he himself chose the way of Avraham Avinu.

This answers our question; what is so important about taking in guests?

The answer is that having guests is very similar to, and is very important in bringing ……. the arrival of the Moshiach (Jewish Messiah that Jews have been awaiting since they left Egypt).

Taking in guests demands a certain type of openness on the part of the host to an unexpected energy, experience and life force that the new guest brings with him.

Similarly, the Moshiach will bring something completely unexpected into the life of each and every one of us; that the world will be filled with the awareness of the Creator.

It is even accepted by Chassidim that the soul of the Baal Shem Tov came into the world because of the self-sacrifice of his father for this Commandment.

That is the idea behind the Chabad Houses found throughout the world.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe insisted that there be as many Chabad Houses as possible because taking in guests is the best preparation for, and instigator of the New Era.

May we all merit to hosting the most wonderful guest of them all, the Moshiach, who will bring all of us to realize that all of us are really only guests of HaShem.

And just as a host provides all the needs of his guest so also HaShem should provide us with ours.

It all depends on us; one more good deed, word or even thought is enough to tilt the scales and bring....**Moshiach NOW!**

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Tap on the Shoulder**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

Another baby was on the way to the Bnei Brak family already blessed with more children than their modest apartment could accommodate. When the expectant mother pointed out that there was absolutely no space for another bed, her Kollel (Torah study group) husband declared that he would ask his father for help in acquiring a larger home.

“What can you father possibly do more for us than he has already done?” challenged his wife. “You know he has no money left for such a purpose.”

“I didn’t mean my human father,” explained the righteous husband, “but rather my Father in Heaven.”

He traveled to Jerusalem and poured out his heart in prayer at the Kotel (some call it “The Weeping Wall”). Someone standing nearby saw the tears pouring from his eyes, tapped him on the shoulder and asked him what the cause of his prayerful outburst was.

At first our hero simply responded that this was a private matter between him and his Heavenly Father and continued his tearful prayers. The

curious bystander once again asked why he was praying with such fervor. Upon hearing the plight of the worshiper he immediately took him to a real estate office and wrote a check for a larger apartment.

When this overjoyed *talmid chacham* scholar told his fellow scholars in the Kollel how his prayers were so miraculously answered, they decided to go as a group to the Kotel and pray for their own needs of larger living spaces. But when the anxiously awaited tap on the shoulder came to each of them, it was merely a beggar asking for a donation!

Brokenhearted they returned to their Kollel and asked their leader why they were not favored with the miracle of their colleague.

“You went to the Kotel looking for that mysterious human benefactor,” he explained, “while your colleague went there looking for his Father!”

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

**Hurricane Sandy:**

**The Aftermath**

**By** [**Charlie Harary**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48869347)

Sandy brought her game. Now it’s time to bring ours.

*Tuesday, October 30, 2012. 12:00 am EST*

“*Hello, 911?”*

“*Yes. How can we help?”*

“*There is water outside my house and it is rising fast. It’s already on my first step and I see water bubbling in the middle of the street. I’m not sure what’s happening but I’m scared that my house may fill up with water in the next few hours.”*

“*Sir, we are looking at your location and our emergency personnel can’t make it down your block.”*

“*But I have five little children here? What am I supposed to do?”*

“*We’re sorry sir. We can’t help you. Good luck.”*

*Click.*

There I was, staring out my bedroom window with the phone at my ear as water was rushing up my front steps. In the other room, my wife and five children were sound asleep. I stood there overwhelmed. I turned to God and asked for help. Then I ran down the stairs.

Welcome to Hurricane Sandy, one of the worst hurricanes to hit the Northeast, ever. Hundreds injured, over 50 dead. Thousands without homes. Millions without power.

As I sit here in Sandy’s aftermath, sirens screaming in the background and debris in front my house, I keep thinking of one maxim: “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” Judging by Sandy’s onslaught, there is some serious strength waiting for us. Sandy brought her game, now it’s time to bring ours.

So I decided to make few resolutions.

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**Homes in Tuckerton, New Jersey flooded by Hurricane Sandy**

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**#1: Be Happy with Normal**

I remember when I was 16 years old. I was home on Saturday night with nothing to do, moping around, feeling sorry for myself when my grandparents came over.

“What’s the matter?” my grandmother asked.

“I’m having a bad night, my plans unraveled and I have nothing to do,” I kvetched.

My grandmother, who at my age was in Auschwitz, commented, “Boy, what I would have given to have nothing to do when I was your age.”

Enough said. Checkmate. Perspective gained.

It’s amazing how when our lives are functionally normally, we focus on what we are missing. We run through our days barely paying attention to all the things we have like health, shelter, family, electricity and heat. We are too busy coming and going, buzzing and beeping, thinking and worrying about what more we can get, to slow down and see what we already have.

Then something threatens our “normal.” A loved one gets sick. We encounter tragedy. We are in danger. Almost instantly, we shift perspective. We stop focusing on more. We stop worrying about what’s next. We just want it to go back to “normal.”

My Hurricane Sandy experience began Monday evening. We had been inside the house all day. The winds were howling and the trees were shaking. The lights began to flicker, and then … black.

We lost power. They told us power outages were likely but you can never fully prepare to lose power. It was dark. Real dark. For the next few hours, we slowly felt the effects. No internet, cell phones, heat, hot water, refrigeration. We huddled together. I couldn’t help but think, pray and silently beg for power. That’s all I wanted. I didn’t even care what it was powering; just power.

Power? Who appreciates power? I have never once turned on a light and said, “Wow, power. Amazing!”

But at that moment, that’s all I wanted.

Our Sages define happiness as the ability to take pleasure in what we have, and not pain in what we don’t. Positive Psychology gurus like Tal Ben Shachar speak about the scientific relationship between happiness and gratitude. We all know this, but we never seem to integrate it into our lives.

We live in a time where most of the civilized world enjoys more luxuries than the wealthy elite just decades earlier. We have so much, and yet we just want more. We are waiting for something to make us happy. But there is nothing that can make us happy. Happiness is a choice.

Of course we should strive. Growth is part of our life. But we need to make sure we live with perspective. We have to start to take pleasure in “normal.” We have to start to enjoy life the way we have it. We shouldn’t need a Category 1 hurricane to have us cheer and hug when the lights go back on.

*Resolution #1: Every day, notice one thing in my “normal” life and be grateful for it.*

**#2: Trust the Greatness Within**

*As I stood there, staring out the window, it hit me. No one was coming. No one.*

*I always thought there would be someone to turn to in times of need. A police officer, firefighter, emergency personnel, family or friend are just a phone call away if the going got rough.*

*I was wrong.*

*I was alone, and responsible, and in need of help.*

*Standing in my room, a thought popped into my mind. A person is never alone. G-d is not in the sky watching down at the earth. He is Infinite and All-encompassing, in every bit of reality. He is not just “up there,” He is “right here,” the glue holding us together. We all have a depth of strength, wisdom and perseverance that we can draw on. He is with us, always. I prayed that I can find Him, and now.*

*An idea came to me. Grab the family and run out the back. But before I woke them, I needed to make sure we had a place to go.*

*I ran down the stairs, out the back door to the backyard. I jumped a tall fence, through a patch of trees and then to the back of a home that faced another street. I climbed the back stairs and saw a window. I banged and banged until someone answered.*

*Thankfully, they were home and welcoming. Within minutes, I went back to my house, woke my family and then, one by one, retraced our steps until everyone was in the house, safe.*

My actions were but a pittance of the courage, heroism and strength brought on during Sandy.

Throughout the storm, thousands of “regular” people tapped into an internal source they may have never previously accessed. Doctors and nurses moved hospitals wards and saved lives. Police and firefighters swam, ran and drove boats to save people from underwater homes. Neighbors, friends and total strangers literally saved people’s lives.

Why? It’s not because crisis breeds heroes. Crisis enables people to bring out the heroism they always had within them.

We are created with a soul that is Divine. Like a well, the more we draw, the more we recognize its depth. Sometimes it takes tragedy to realize how kind, caring and generous we are. Sometimes a crisis reveals the courage, bravery and strength that we never saw before.

*Resolution #2: Dare to be great. Every day, set one goal beyond my perceived limitations and go for it. Push to see how much potential I really have.*

**3. Restructure Your Life to**

**Align with your Priorities**

Famed author and speaker, Dr. Stephen Covey, ran a seminar where he invited people to place different size rocks into a bucket. After multiple failed attempts to get all the rocks in, [Covey demonstrated](http://www.aish.com/v/sp/50574352.html) how to do it. He started with the big rocks and after careful placement, all the rocks fit. He turned to the audience and surmised: “If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in."

How many times do we feel overwhelmed but unfulfilled? Busy but out of control? Sensing that life should feel different than it currently does. The reason is that, many times, our lives don’t align with our priorities. We are out of balance and we feel it.

There is nothing like a crisis to realign our actions to our priorities.

*After I secured the safety of my family, I headed back home to get some basic items. On the way back in, I surveyed the damage. My car was under water, my home was filling up. I realized that this storm may wipe out my possessions.*

*I tried to be upset but I couldn’t. I didn’t care. Not even a bit. I knew I would care tomorrow, but for tonight, there were more important things. I rushed to collect diapers, water, socks and pajamas and headed back to my family. Stuff is what it is, stuff. For tonight, it didn’t make the top of my list.*

How many times do our loved ones get rescheduled for our work? How many conversations did we miss even though we were physically there? How many family members get less attention than our hobbies?

And we wonder why we feel unfulfilled.

There is a family in my neighborhood that awoke to water gushing into their home. They climbed to their attic until they were rescued hours later. The next day, I saw the father walking with his kids. He had a gym bag of his possessions. His house was under water. I asked him how he was. He responded “Thank G-d, everything is great!” Seeing my facial response, he continued, “I’m not sure if I have a house, but I have my wife and kids. That’s all I need.”

*Lesson #3: Each day, hug each kid, tight. Pick a family member to call to say I love you.*

**#4: Giving is what makes the world go ‘round**

“The world was built on kindness” (Psalms 89:3)

*As we sat in my neighbor’s house, I couldn’t help but smile. We were practically strangers. Yet their outpouring of support was amazing. They made us feel as welcome as can be. They brought food, water and blankets. We made quite a mess and a ruckus, and they were not bothered in the slightest.*

Giving feels better than taking because giving is a Divine quality, and the more G-dly we act, the better it feels.

There is something about crisis that brings out the best in many of us. Deep down, we know we are one people. During “normal” times, it’s easy to focus on the differences. It’s easy to entrench and protect ourselves. But when our normal is threatened, we realize that we need each other. Our differences are eclipsed by are similarities. We are free to be our true selves. We are free to give.

The day after the storm, I walked up the street. People were outside their homes offering help to each other. We were sharing sub pumps and wet-vacs. One woman, whose house was spared, drove by and brought us groceries. Someone else dropped off a pie of pizza. At night, a friend stopped by with heaters. Families moved in with others. Our phones are buzzing with well-wishers.

*Resolution #4: The next time I have an opportunity to give, I will just give.*

*Tuesday, October 30, 2012. 9:00 am EST*

*I walked outside my home to survey the damage. The streets were still filled with water. Coast guard boats were evacuating people from their homes. Sirens were blaring down the streets.*

“*What happens now, Daddy?” my son asked.*

“*There is only one place to go from here,” I answered.*

“*Where?”*

“*Forward.”*

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

**A Slice of Life**

**Jerusalem's Milky Way**

**By Barbara Sofer**

Imagine keeping a strict no milk, no wheat diet while breast-feeding your eighth child, not because he or she is allergic, but because you are supplying milk for a stranger's baby. Or imagine expressing milk for someone else's child when your own was stillborn.

These are everyday stories of unheralded heroism in what may be the world's most unusual project, called simply Mother's Milk Bank and run out of one of Jerusalem's most religious neighborhoods. The recipients don't have to be religious or even Jewish, just babies in need.

There are a very small number of babies for whom no synthetic substitute can replace mother's milk; it can't be bought, and the epoch of wet-nurses has long passed. A decade ago, if the baby's mother was unable to breast-fed, the baby was doomed.

Enter Bracha Mann, 53, an ebullient, devout, attractive mother of 13 whose family has been in Jerusalem for 10 generations. Nine years ago Mann, who lives in the Mekor Barukh neighborhood, had never heard of a milk bank; a high school graduate, she had no formal knowledge of medicine or nutrition. One of her daughters had begged her to come along on a difficult get-well visit: her neighbor had just given birth to her third child, but the first two had died soon after birth.

Mann worried about what she would say to the woman. Perhaps the new baby was equally doomed. Should she offer congratulations or sympathy? "All I could think of was to ask her if there was anything I could do to help her," she recalls.

The woman began to weep uncontrollably. Between sobs Mann understood that she attributed her babies' deaths to her inability to breast-feed them. If only she could get mother's milk, she knew this baby would live.

"I had no idea if she was fantasizing or speaking from medical knowledge," Mann says. "But she was so distressed that I heard myself promising that she would have milk by the end of the day.

"Outside, my daughter said she was shocked by my rash promise. After all, I wasn't nursing. But I was determined that even if I had to go down the streets of Mea Shearim with a shofar and a megaphone, I'd have milk by that evening."

Mann began knocking on doors in the most strictly Orthodox neighborhoods, asking if there was a nursing mother in the house. Some people were shocked at the request, but others were willing to contribute or directed her to a friend who'd just had a baby. Drop by drop Mann collected donations. By evening she'd filled her first flask, enough for two feedings. With relief that she'd fulfilled her promise she delivered it to the grateful mother.

"Whether the milk was responsible or whether its effect was psychological, I'll never know." Mann says. "I don't really care. What's important to me is that the baby thrived."

A few weeks later a doctor phoned and wondered if he could get breast milk from her; he'd heard a rumor that she was running a private milk bank. Mann learned there were indeed babies who would die without the milk.

"I'd stumbled onto an unanswered need," she says. "But I knew I couldn't go house to house. We needed to get organized."

Mann had some practical experience in administration, overseeing a food collection project in memory of a friend who had died. So when she realized the need for organization, she remembered her earlier project. "I still had my old lists from the food collection," she recalls. "I wondered if the same women would help out. That way we could collect milk all over the city."

Harvesting mother's milk turned out to be complicated. Mann consulted doctors and realized she needed pumps, sterile containers, freezers, ice chests and drivers. Many of the world's milk banks, she learned, had closed down because of the problem of passing along infections like AIDS and hepatitis B.

But Mann came up with a solution: although she'd give milk to any baby who needed it, she would collect it only from women who were Sabbath observant, went to the mikva (ritual bath), and covered their hair. The instance of sexually transmitted or drug-related diseases was so low among these women that testing the milk wasn't necessary. Eligible donors would mostly be mothers with four, eight, even 12 children. Still, there were many eager volunteers.

Requests for milk began to multiply. When Mann came up with the idea of visiting a postnatal convalescent home, so many volunteers were recruited that a commercial machine was installed.

Some babies are so allergic that donors had to stick to special diets: no soy, wheat, chocolate or milk. Yet women volunteered to take on the additional inconvenience. "You hear these women joking that they can't keep a weight-loss diet, but if they're motivated by saving a life, that's easy," she says. "One young woman expressed milk for months after her own baby was lost at birth. She told me that she found relief in giving another baby a chance at life."

Mann, who keeps an album of photographs from grateful parents stacked next to albums of her own children and grandchildren, waves away the notion of being too busy to do chesed, acts of kindness. "You always have time for what you want," she says. "If a woman really wants to work out or have her hair done she finds time, right? You need to make time for doing good deeds, too.

"Women have been made to feel embarrassed today if they indulge their impulse to give. But I say, never underestimate the surge of joy giving can bring."

Barbara Sofer is the author of the novel The Thirteenth Hour, (Signet), and the family guide book Kids Love Israel, Israel Loves Kids. (Karben)

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**Story #780**

**The Red-head, the**

**Beer and the Amen**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=ABC&msgNum=0000eg00:001GaZzJ00002ACU&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1352333931&randid=512210269&content=central)

**From Rabbi Label Lam**

IT WAS SHABBOS IN THE 1980s and my closest and oldest friend had come to Monsey from Boston to be introduced to a young lady at the table of a neighbor. In the meantime, our house was crowded with twelve or more girls that had come to celebrate the marriage of a friend. All the young ladies politely chattered through the meal and I was left alone to mumble some Shabbos songs and words of Torah.

In an inspired moment, my wife brought out a few cold bottles of beer between the fish and the soup. I was singing ever so quietly and hurriedly words to the Shabbos song, Mah Yedidos, Permissible thoughts and to marry off the daughters. No sooner had the words ulashadaich es habanos(to marry off the daughters) escaped my mouth than a petite red-headed girl held up a bottle of beer and shouted with exuberance, “AMEN!”

I stopped mid-song, looked up, and mentally snapped a picture of the young woman who was actually paying attention to what I was singing. The girls went home, and I was left waiting for my friend to return home.

When he entered the door he looked woefully disappointed. “Each date that isn’t the one brings you one step closer to the one!” I declared trying to console him. I knew I said the wrong thing. I felt bad. He had driven so far only to be disappointed.

TWO MONTHS LATER, between Purim and Pesach I awoke on a Sunday morning with an idea percolating in my mind. I promptly shared it with my wife, “What about my friend for that little red-headed girl?”

My wife countered with a skeptical tone, “I don’t see it! He’s so mellow and she’s a real live wire.”

I retorted, “Well look at us!” It gave her cause to pause and so she recommended that I speak to the one person who knew both of them. So I called up this lady that had made many matches and when she heard what I had in mind

She got excited and said, “That’s a great idea!”

I warned her, “That’s my idea! Don’t touch it!”

So I phoned Boston right away. I caught my friend just as he was coming back to his apartment from a meeting with the Bostoner Rebbe (Grand Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak Horowitz of blessed memory) who had advised him to try again, even with a recent proposal that didn’t seem to have much promise, unless somebody tells you they’ve got someone very special.

When he picked up the phone I told him right away, “I have someone very special!” His ears perked up. It was the same words the Rebbe had just uttered to him.

THREE MONTHS LATER, there we all were at the chupa (wedding canopy) at the Marina Del Rey between the Whitestone and Throgsneck Bridges while planes overhead streaked the sky.

FOR YEARS AFTERWARD, whenever we would go to Boston to visit them, my friend, would introduce me as the match-maker and all the guys would strike poses before me as if I had a warehouse back in New York. I was embarrassed because although I had tried before and since I have never been successful except this one time. It took me years to figure out who was the real human matchmaker. It was none other than the red-headed girl with the beer and her spontaneous- “AMEN!”

Source: Excerpted and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from //torah.org (5770/vayera)

Connection: Weekly Reading -- Matchmaking

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