**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Toldos 5771**

**Volume #2, Number #9**

**Story #675 From the Ascent Institute in Sfat**

**An Ongoing Story of**

**Courage and Sacrifice**

**By Chana Besser**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[editor's note: I received this story only a few days ago from the author, a fellow Tsfat resident. Read it as soon as possible, please]

 The hero of this story is my friend, Nechemya Regan. He is 20 years old and he is about to get married! Few children have ever been tested as Nechemya was. Imagine a religious-Jewish 11 year old suddenly thrown into a non-Jewish home, a non-Jewish public school, and surrounded with non-kosher food, foul language and liquor. This is what happened to Nechemya and his sister and brother in 2001.

 Nechemya was 2 years old when his family, candidates for conversion, first came to spend Shabbat with me, in Denver Colorado. Later, his mom, with custody of all five children, left Denver and I lost contact with them. I would only hear the rest of their story many years later when our friendship would resume in the Holy City of Tsfat.

**Converted to Judaism at the Age of Six**

 It turns out that Nechemya converted to Judaism with his mother and siblings when he was six, and his mother remarried to a wonderful Jewish man soon after that. By 1999, the children were the center of a dramatic custody battle. Nechemya’s non-Jewish father, who had originally relinquished custody, suddenly filed to reverse the custody decision. He used lots of money and influence to take the children away from their mother.

 The years of the custody battle are a story of suspense and intrigue of their own, to be told another time. As the date approached for the final appeal in court, Nechemya’s uncle went to New York for a blessing from the elderly Skuliner Rebbe. The Rebbe, famous for his middle of the night appointments for just one or two minutes each, listened intently for over thirty minutes. Then he gave a blessing saying, “The gentiles will not hurt the children.”

 Confident that they would win, they went to court. What else could his blessing mean? But the non-Jewish father won custody of the three youngest of his children! The oldest two were allowed to choose the parent they wanted to live with. Strangely, the judge ruled that the non-Jewish father and step-mother had to provide his Jewish children kosher food and utensils, Shabbat and the Jewish Holidays.

**Forced to Leave their**

**Jewish Home on Purim**

 By now, the children loved their Jewish stepfather and their growing family and Orthodox Jewish home in Chicago. The court order set the date and the hour of their police escort from their Jewish home. It fell on Purim! The family resolved to fulfill all the mitzvas of Purim with joy and to make it the best Purim ever until the police banged on the door in the middle of their Purim festive meal. The children were physically dragged away, kicking and screaming, while the local community gathered outside, helpless, to show their support.

 For three long years, Nechemya, his older sister and his younger brother lived in Byers, Colorado on their biological father’s ranch. They and their oldest brother, who was there of his own choice, were the only Jews in the entire school district, encompassing a large rural area.

**Continued to Eat Kosher**

**And Dress as Religious Jews**

 The three kids ate kosher and took kosher food to school, dressed as religious Jews, kept Shabbat and upheld the mitzvot. The boys wore their kippas and tzitzit [fringes on a sleeveless undergarment] every day, even on gym days when their classmates would ask them about their tzitzit when the boys changed for sports. Rivka was the only girl in her school to wear a long skirt and sleeves.

 Often, their phone was taken away, making it impossible for them to ask kashrut and other questions of Jewish law or to be in contact with the rest of their family. When they had access to a telephone, their contacts were very severely restricted by court order. There was not one human being in their whole town to support their Judaism.

**The Challenges of Living in**

**A Non-Jewish Environment**

 Sometimes when they were making Kiddush on Friday nights in the dining room, the Broncos game was playing in the adjoining living room where their father and stepmother and their younger children were watching TV. Their only joy came when they could be with their mother, stepfather and Jewish brothers and sisters for the Jewish holidays, and they weren't even allowed to see them every holiday.

 Some holidays they spent on the ranch, celebrating alone. Like one Yom Kippur when their father took away their food for days afterwards because he thought they were lying when the kids told him that a Jew isn’t allowed to go to school or work on Yom Kippur.

 They were surrounded by all the distractions common in a rural lifestyle that should have made it hard for them to remember that they were observant Jews -- open access to internet, movies, TV, dirt bikes, motorized all-terrain vehicles and horses.

**Oldest Sister Becomes Engaged in Israel**

 These three kids never left Torah and mitzvahs. The oldest child, a boy, chose his father’s lifestyle and was old enough for the court to give his father custody from the beginning. The next oldest, a daughter, was allowed to stay with her mother because she was a teenager. When she turned 18, she came to Israel.

The second week she arrived, she became a kallah (was engaged).

 By 2005, they were a Jewish family of ten children, four of them isolated away from Judaism, three of the four against their will. How would the family ever get permission for these three siblings to come to their sister’s wedding in Israel?

 The mother offered the biological father and his second wife a free trip to Israel if they would bring the children for their sister’s wedding. They agreed! Suddenly, in our holy city of Tsfat, three new, very, very happy teens were surrounded by Jews, hearing Hebrew on the streets, and soaking up Judaism. The boys were praying in minyans in the many shuls, and looking pretty much like everyone else in town.

**A Sister’s Special Blessing**

 But there wasn’t any money to buy airline tickets also for their Jewish stepfather, whom they called Abba, and all their younger brothers and sisters. At the Shabbat Kallah celebration in Tsfat on the Saturday before the wedding, Rivka, now 16 (the court would have honored her request to live with her mother when she turned 15, but she said that she couldn’t walk out on her two brothers and leave them behind), gave her older sister, the kallah, a blessing: I bless you to have as good a marriage as our Abba and Ema now have, she said. There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

 Her non-Jewish stepmother was there and heard, and she cried too. (Sometimes, when their father would refuse to buy the kids any kosher food, their step-mother would sneak some kosher groceries into the house for them.)

 Separated now for three years except for some Jewish holidays, the two sisters couldn't stop hugging each other. They had their arms around each other for hours, sitting at the Shabbat table or walking around the house, laughing at private jokes and singing songs from their childhood. They stayed together as if they were glued.

 Nechemya and his brother, already growing their payot longer, sang the traditional Shabbat songs with all their might, laughing a lot and talking Torah. The three kids were like fish in water. On the day of the wedding, her two brothers and sister had been living with their father for exactly thirty-six months. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people were praying for them ever since the nightmare had begun.

**Filing a Legal Affidavit**

**In a Jerusalem Police Station**

 Now with the wedding over, it was getting close to the date of their return flight to the US. It was time to test what they had been told by an attorney. The three kids walked into a Jerusalem police station to file an affidavit that they wanted to stay in Israel with their mother. The youngest was now only four months before his Bar Mitzvah.

 There's an agreement between the USA and Israel that applies to some custody arrangements. It states that Jewish children who have a Jewish parent living in Israel, and are of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age or older, will not be forced to return to their custodial parent in the US, if it is not their desire. They filed their affidavit, prayed hard and held their breaths to see if it would work.

**Biological Father Runs After His Children**

 The father came tearing into the police station, furious that they had not come back to his accommodations the night before, screaming that they had been kidnapped. At first it seemed like the police were on his side, ready to send the kids back to Byers, Colorado with him. But then he lost his temper, cursed and threatened the officers.

 The police saw enough to figure out what would be best for the three kids. The father was forced, according to the US-Israel agreement, to ask the kids in front of witnesses which parent they wanted to live with. They said they wanted to stay in Israel with their mother. The police backed the children's decision. The father and his wife flew home to America without them, only to find out in the U.S. that there wasn’t anything they could do to reverse the decision.

 This was their Jewish family’s prayer come true. The Israeli immigration representative in Chicago dropped everything to reunite the family. In perhaps the fastest aliyah ever processed, two days, their Jewish step-father and five younger siblings were on an El Al flight, tickets paid for compliments of the Government of Israel -- one-way -- for their new life in the holy land.

 By the Shabbat of Sheva Brachot (festive meals for seven days in honor of the new couple), the whole family was together in Tsfat! The blessing from the Skuliner Rebbe had come true. The children were not hurt by any non-Jews. Their suffering made them stronger in their desire to serve G-d.

**Only Hashem Knows the Reason**

**For the Children’s Suffering**

 As for why they had to suffer so much for three years, we don't know. Maybe it was for one boy in the Byers high school, who came up to Rivka one day and told her that his birth mother, who had died when he was very young, was Jewish. Perhaps he needed to see another Jew for the first time in his life. Who knows?

 The family has been living mostly in Tsfat since then. Both of Nechemya’s older sisters are wives and mothers of beautiful, growing Orthodox families. Now it is Nechemyas turn to go to the chupa [wedding canopy]. The blessed event is to take place on Wednesday, November 10, 2010 (Gimmel Kislev), beh.

 It will be a modest, happy, forest wedding. But Nechemya and his parents need to raise the money for their half of the expenses. Please share this story with people who need encouragement to hold on for their own salvation. And with people who might have money set aside for charitable causes, or other monies, to help make Nechemya’s wedding the celebration that he deserves.

 May every Jew be redeemed from their own personal sufferings, and may it happen as suddenly, and with tremendous and ongoing joy.

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For verification and recommendation: Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum in Jerusalem: (From the US/Canada: 972-2-537-0064) or [rebavraham@gmail.com](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1288537367) \*

To give maaser, yizkor pledge, tzedaka or any other form of monetary contribution for Nechemyas wedding, here are three possible methods:

1. Paypal:

www.paypal.com [<http://link.myjewishpage.com/go.asp?li=5965D6158BB9AB8D9D5DB120B2F45B3D&ui=E439C22B2FA14D648D98C7BD5B92F85F> ] then [nechemyarealy@gmail.com](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1288537367) (you dont have to have

a paypal account)

2. Checks to Israel should be made payable to and mailed to:

Nechemya Regan

Shprinztak 142/11

Tsfat, Israel

3. U.S. address for U.S. or Canadian dollar checks:

Make payable to me, if you trust me: Chana Besser, Account #0805 2491 (please e-mail me at [chanabesser@013net.net](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1288537367) when you have mailed it so that I will know it is for Nechemya and I can give him the money as soon as it arrives, or call me in Tsfas at 972-4-699-9905 or 972-54-543-2394.)

Mail to: Marathon Investment Advisors

6565 S. Dayton Street, Suite 1200

Englewood, Colorado 80111

Phone: 1 303 708 0667

*Reprinted from this coming week’s email of the Ascent Institute in Tsfas (Safat) Israel.*

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**The Ability of Prayer to**

**Bring One Closer to Hashem**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

 “Yitzhak pleaded to Hashem opposite his wife for she was childless.” (Beresheet 25:21)

 The Sages note that the Matriarchs, Sarah, Ribkah and Rachel were barren. The commentators explain that their experiences prove that the emergence of the nation of Israel is a miracle, because each new generation was a gift of Hashem to a mother who could not have given birth naturally. One might ask; why did Hashem do this? After all, Hashem could have given them the ability to have children.

 The Gemara (Yebamot 64a) asks this question, and explains that Hashem desires the prayers of saddikim. Their pleas for mercy and attempts at self-improvement show how human beings can raise themselves to spiritual heights. The Michtav Me’Eliyahu explains that prayers are not merely a means of asking Hashem to grant us our needs. Through our prayers, we can develop a true closeness

 Rabbi Elya Roth of Jerusalem would tell his students, “Do you understand the essence of the prayers that you say before Hashem? Do you ponder the meaning of the words that you utter before Him? Have you ever experienced the closeness one should feel when he says to Hashem ‘Baruch Atah’ (‘Blessed are You’)…?”

 A student related, “Once I met R’ Elya at a minyan for Minhah in shul located in Jerusalem’s Bucharim neighborhood, quite a distance from his apartment in Battei Ungarin. I asked him, ‘Wouldn’t it be easier for you to pray close at home?’ R’ Elya replied, ‘Who comes to pray in this shul? Carpenters, painters, plumbers and storekeepers… they stop whatever they are doing in the middle of the work day, even if they stand to lose some profit and come to pray with a minyan. Such a prayer is very precious and immediately ascends above. I want my own prayers to go up together with the prayers of these precious Jews.’”

 I am so proud of our community members that have many minyanim of Minhah in Manhattan. They stop whatever they are doing, even though they are very busy, to get close to Hashem and pray. How great is their merit.

**Gaining Strength from a Life Rich in Spiritual Meaning**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

"And Esav came from the field and he was tired." (Beresheet 25:29)

 Rabbi Nissan Alpert, z"l, points out that this is the first time the Torah uses the word “ayef” - tired. When a word is introduced to us in the Torah in a certain context, we are supposed to learn from that usage and apply that same meaning all over.

 Abraham was one of the busiest men we have ever seen. He traveled from place to place, building altars, serving guests, being tested and passing those tests successfully, and we never find that he was tired. He lived for 175 years and had a full and very involved life and yet the Torah never describes him as tired.

 We know from our own experiences of great people who are very busy, involved in a million things, and we never perceive them as tired. The lesson here is that someone who is involved with a spiritual dimension to his life has the energy for many more things than someone who is just existing a mundane life. Esav was busy doing sins on the day he sold his birthright and he was not rejuvenated by anything spiritual of any meaning. Therefore, he was "tired." If we fill our lives with meaning, if we have spiritual contact in the things we do, we will have the spice and sparkle which will keep us from getting stale. Only someone who lives a life of materialism, without letting Hashem into his world, will become "tired" easily. Let us be like Abraham and have the energy for much more in our lives.

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

**2,000 feet, 69 days,**

**33 miners, 1 lesson**

**By Rabbi Yisroel Engel**

 Everything we experience in life serves as a hands-on lesson in our purpose on Earth.

 Consider this: Thirty-three miners [in the South American nation of Chile] plunge into two months of darkness 2,000 feet below the surface, disconnected from their source. After 69 days of eternity, the moment they were praying for, has arrived. Their dream became a reality. They would finally see the light of day, the joy of freedom, the hug of their loved ones, and the tears of their children.

 However, they needed to prepare for this transition before a 13 foot capsule would whisk them up and away to heaven on earth.

**Guidelines That Must Be Followed**

 Special socks, dark glasses, high calorie fluids, properly anchored straps, and an escape hatch were precautions that were set into motion. To make it out safely, they were instructed, they must follow these guidelines.

 And follow they did.

 The miners were not doctors, scientists, nor engineers. They had no inside knowledge of the capsule's mechanism.

 But they didn't need to know.

**A Connection to Light, Freedom and Life**

 What was important is realizing that this is their connection to light, to freedom and to life.

 The story of the miners is the story of our souls.

 Our souls come from a source of light. Divine light.

 And then it descends into this material world, exchanging a heaven of pristine light for an earth of confusing darkness.

 Indeed, the Mishna (Avot ch. 4) tells us the soul is "forced" to descend against its will.

 It would rather stay and bathe in light and holiness. But it descends for a purpose, a higher calling.

 It will confront darkness and transform it. It will make this world a place where G-d chooses to "reside."

**G-d Engineers Our “Rescue Mission” From Above**

 G-d engineers our "rescue mission" from above and provides the spiritual cable which elevates us, connects us to the divine, and empowers us to bring light into a world of darkness, meaning into a world of chaos, and goodness into a world of evil.

 G-d told Noah to enter the capsule - the ark which would save himself and his family from the raging floods of evil and the vicissitudes of life.

 The Hebrew word for ark/capsule is "teiva," which also means "word."

 This is the deeper meaning of "Enter the teiva," says the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement.

**The Words of Prayer and Torah**

 Entering the "word" means entering the words of prayer and the words of Torah.

 Prayer and Jewish teachings are the food and garments for the soul.

 Enter the protection of Torah and mitzvot (commandments) which elevates us and indeed, the entire world, to our divine source, the surface of light.

 "A candle is a mitzva and Torah is light," King Solomon proclaims in Proverbs. Every mitzva reveals so much light in this world.

 One more mitzva can bring Moshiach today.

 And this will change the world. For good.

*Reprinted from this week’s issue of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. Rabbi Engel is co-director of Chabad-Lubavitch of Colorado and spiritual leader of Bais Menachem Synagogue in Denver.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Difference Between**

**A Mirror and a Window**

 In a small town in Poland lived a storekeeper named Abraham. Though not at all a wealthy man, when it came to giving charity and offering hospitality to wandering Jews, he was without equal.

 One day Abraham had an unexpected and distinguished visitor, his Rebbe. The Rebbe was impressed with the warm hospitality and attention Abraham showed him. But his keen eyes did not fail to note that Abraham went far beyond the call of duty in the mitzva (commandment) of hospitality to visitors and giving charity. And so, before leaving, the Rebbe blessed Abraham - that he be able to practice these mitzvot in comfort and riches.

**A Change in His Business Affairs for the Better**

 Soon after the Rebbe left, Abraham noticed a change in his business affairs; a change for the better. Every day brought him better business and more prosperity.

But, riches can be as much a test as poverty and, without even realizing, it he began to find less and less time for the mitzvot he had always treasured so.

 Abraham now lived in a beautifully furnished house, with several servants. Beggars were no longer admitted, though at the door they could still get a fairly handsome donation. People began to notice the change in their old friend.

**An Appeal to Help a Jew Imprisoned on False Charges**

 One day Abraham was informed that a very persistent Rabbi wanted to see him. Abraham greeted the man curtly, but when told that he was sent by their Rebbe, Abraham's face lit up. "Ever since the Rebbe's visit to my house my fortune has taken a good turn, and, thank G-d, I have done well, as you can see." The Rabbi asked for help in freeing a man who had been imprisoned on false charges.

 Abraham quickly took out a substantial sum of money and gave it to the visitor to take to the Rebbe. While seeing him to the door, Abraham apologized to the visitor that he was too busy to spend more time. "Remember me to the Rebbe, please," Abraham said as he shook hands with him.

 The Rebbe questioned his emissary closely about Abraham and his way of life, and it saddened him to think that Abraham had changed so. "Is it possible that my blessing could have been the indirect cause of this change?" the Rebbe wondered. He decided to pay a visit to Abraham.

 Abraham welcomed his Rebbe on his arrival with joy and respect. "Quite a change from before, Rebbe," Abraham commented as he saw the Rebbe looking all around.

**Looking Out the Window**

 "Quite a change" the Rebbe agreed, his face quite serious. He came up to the window and looked out.

 "Abraham, come here a minute," the Rebbe called. "Who is that man walking there?"

 "That is Yankel the Tailor," Abraham replied, adding "a pious Jew. Unfortunately he is very poor..."

 "And who is that woman carrying an empty basket?"

 "That's a widow going to market...poor woman, and a houseful of orphans, too."

 Abraham began to wonder why the Rebbe had become so interested in the passers-by; he was not a man of idle curiosity.

**Walking Up to a Large Mirror**

 The Rebbe turned away from the window and walked up to a large mirror. "Look into the mirror, Abraham. Whom do you see there?"

 "Why, myself, of course," Abraham replied, puzzled.

 "Tell me, Abraham. What is the difference between a window and a mirror?"

 "That is quite simple," Abraham explained. "They are both glass but a mirror has a coating of silver on it."

 "I see, I see..." the Rebbe said."When you put silver on a piece of glass, you see only yourself. Extraordinary, isn't it?"

 "Yes, indeed, but..."

**Understanding the Rebbe’s Hint and Rebuke**

 Abraham did not finish the sentence. Suddenly it dawned on him what the wise and saintly Rebbe was hinting at. Before he was "coated with silver" he could see everybody, but now that he had become rich, he could only see himself.

 Abraham felt a deep sense of shame. "I've failed my test, haven't I Rebbe? Is there any way I can make it up?" he asked tearfully.

 "You must return to your good old way of giving charity generously and graciously, and inviting guests humbly into your home - all in accordance with your ability."

 Later Abraham went over to his mirror with a sharp knife. He scraped off the silver in one of the corners. In this way he would always be reminded not to see only himself.

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

**As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**The Cries of Yaakov and Esav**

“*And Isaac trembled a very great trembling*” (27:33)

“*And he (Esav) cried out a great and exceedingly bitter outcry*” (27:34)

 Here we have the case where two men were subject to the most awesome alarm. When Yitzchak Abenu realized that he had been in error for so many years, “And Isaac trembled a very great trembling”.

 He was a Prophet and surely he knew both of his sons well. And yet he was tricked for many years and almost gave the blessings to the wrong son. Isaac suddenly understood that he had committed an error of such magnitude that would have altered the entire history of the great nation which was expected to rise up to become the people of Hashem.

 Chazal tell us that he saw Gehenom open up before him and he trembled exceedingly. The Midrash tells us that Isaac was even greater that Abraham in wisdom, since he possessed his father’s wisdom and also had progressed on his own. And yet, still he was fooled by Esav.

 The same applies to Esav as well, since they both “cried out with a most exceeding outcry”. Since by Isaac this meant that he was completely fooled, then by Esav it also means that he was completely fooled. Esav thought he was honestly entitled to the blessings. If he had realized that he was inferior to Jacob his brother, then even though he might have been disappointed when Jacob received the Blessings, he wouldn’t have made such an outcry. But his cry proves that he really thought he deserved the Blessings.

 Thus both Isaac and his son Esav cried; one for the many years of error and his almost fatal mistake, and the other for not getting what he thought he deserved. In Slabodka Yeshiva we were constantly taught: *A person must always examine his motivations*.

 A person always gives himself the benefit of the doubt and rarely acknowledges his faults. Even when he suspects certain flaws in his character, he never has any idea how serious they are. He can only improve if someone else points them out to him, for example your father, mother, spouse, boss, Rabbi or teacher etc. A person must be a listener, “And Jacob listened to his father and mother” (28:7). Jacob who sat in the tent was the one who knew his own faults. He listened and obeyed his great parents.

 Even when you do listen you have to listen and hear things many times. It takes 40 years before you fully understand its meaning. “The ear that hears the admonition of life will always abide in the midst of the wise” (Mishle 15:31).

*Adapted from the “Shabbat Morning Talks” of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l.*

Reprintef from this week’s email of “As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l”

**The Freeman Files**

**What's Wrong with**

**Mixed Services?**

**By Tzvi Freeman**

 **Question:** You insist that men and women have to be separated when it comes to prayer and meditation. But I've attended services where men and women engage in serious meditation and prayer together. I saw women acting as rabbis and cantors and wearing talit and tefillin and being called to Torah”and I saw the joy and passion they had in doing so. Why should it be denied to them? Don't you agree that feminine spirituality needs to be honored in the liturgy, not just in the kitchen and the nursery?

 **Response:** Much of what you write resonates with me. Women's spirituality is a burning issue today with which the Orthodox Jewish world must come to terms. Not enough is being done for today's woman. Where we part, however, is in the suggestion that mixed services are the solution.

 Let's back up a little. The common assumption is that spirituality and sensuality are mutually exclusive. Who says? Yes, there is the perfect tzadik who transcends these matters entirely. But I'm talking about the rest of us, for whom the two seem to go hand in hand: The greater the sensitivity to spiritual matters, the more attuned we are to sensual matters as well.[1]

 And that sensuality is not something we are meant to kill. After all, it lies at the core of human spirituality even of the Divinity of the entire cosmos.[2] The first human being, the Torah tells us, was created male and female and that is what the Torah calls the Divine Image. The Divine Presence” the Shechina rests in the union of man and woman as one when that union is sanctified by marriage, by keeping the times of separation, and by the hearts and mental focus of two that become one.[3] That place is called the Holy of Holies, where "no person shall be" when the Shechina is present.[4]

 If so, it would seem to me that when a normal man watches a woman carrying a Sefer Torah, listens to her voice chanting its words, feels her presence as a member of his group spiritual experience -- and is not sensually affected by that experience, then something in that male is either dead or in denial.

 In our community (Thornhill, Ontario), several groups of women have begun "Tehillim Groups" which involve much more than reciting psalms. Women sing, pray together, share teachings and come away in an elevated state. As one woman told me, "No one who has come has not seen miracles in her life."

 Along with the many Rosh Chodesh groups that are sprouting up, I see these as proliferating and evolving into a uniquely feminine form of group worship and spirituality. Let us men remain men and women be the ultimate of being women. And what we share will be in private, and in holiness.[5]

Footnotes:

1. See Sukkot 52a: The greater one is, the greater his yetzer. 2. See The Kabbala of Men & Women. 3. See Sota 17a. 4. See Leviticus 16:17, Holy Epistle attributed to Nachmanides, and Unidolatry. 5. See Women in the Synagogue.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Freeman Files.*

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**How Can Childless Couples Be Thankful to Hashem?**

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| **QUESTION:** |

 How can someone who is constantly sad because they have no children, be thankful to Hashem?

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| --- |
| **ANSWER:** |

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| --- |
| couple |

And the answer is, the Chovas Halvavos says if you are one of the privileged ones who has no children, you should thank Hashem always. You should be grateful that He absolved you from the obligation of children.

 Now pay attention. What do we need children for? Are we little girls that need baby dolls? Something to play with? It’s irrational, and it’s selfish; that's what children are for?

 Children are given to us by Hashem as a responsibility; however it’s our job not to dodge it. Certainly you have to marry young and have as many as you can, because that's Hakadosh Baruch Hu's command, Pru U'rvu. You must do that. And as they come, and the obligations come upon you, you're getting crazy from one child, so go crazy from ten. It's the same thing. There's a big mistake, women think if they won’t have more, they won’t go crazy. I've seen women who claim they're crazy from one baby. So you might as well go crazy over a lot.

 But suppose Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't give, and it's silly for a person to waste his life in sadness. On the contrary, breathe a sigh of relief like the Chovas Halvavos says, and be grateful, now you can go ahead and do the great things in life. How many women have time to read the Kuzri, or to read the Chovas Halvavos, in translation, you can read it too. A woman can become great now that she has no children. She's not of that bent of mind? She can become great in Gemilus Chasodim, there are careers in helping other people, a lot of things to do that mothers of families cannot do.

 Now mothers of families, Tovo Aleihem Brocho, blessed should they be, with all their chores, certainly Hakadosh Baruch Hu will reward them. But the Chovas Halvavos says, you should thank Hashem when you have no children because he has exonerated you from those obligations, and now you can do a lot of things that people with children can not do. And don't waste your life mourning, because it shows that you don't understand the purpose of life.

 The purpose of life is to serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu. How do you serve Him? In whatever manner He requires of you. So if He deposits children on your doorstep, so that's required of you. If He doesn't, He requires other things, and there’s so many requirements in life that there is never any spare time.

 Never do you have any leisure time to take off from Avodas Hashem. And people should always be busy in serving Hashem in one way or another, to utilize the life's purpose, whether it’s by raising children or by raising somebody else's children or by raising money for people who have children or by raising your mind to the heights of Daiuh Binah V'haskel.

 *Good Shabbos to all.*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l, which is based on a transcription of an answer from a question posed to Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l from members of the audience to his classic Thursday night hashkafa lectures delivered at his Flatbush shul form the early 1970’s until his petirah in 2001.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**On Parole**

 In this week's parsha Toldos, we read about the blessings which Yitzchok blessed his son Yaakov.  These blessings apply, of course, not only to Yaakov but also to the Jewish people for eternity.  One of the blessings is "Cursed is everyone who curses you, and blessed is everyone that blesses you."  (Bereishis 27:29)

 As more details on the story of an Arab ex-convict on his way to converting to Judaism are revealed, the more astonishing it becomes.  The following true story which is currently on-going, will inspire us all to see the great lengths non-Jews are going through to join the blessed nation.

 Yaniv Ben-David, an Arab from the territories and Haifa whose official name until recently was Busmon Abu-Ras, found Judaism and Hashem while serving a 12-year term in prison. The full miraculous story has come out in three interviews, including one with Arutz-7’s Hizky Ezra and another on Radio Kol Chai with the head of the Civil Administration, Brig.-Gen. Yoav Mordechai, known as "Poli."

 Yaniv’s speech is liberally sprinkled with “May Hashem’s Name be blessed” and the like, as if he had grown up all his life in a traditional Sephardic neighborhood. But in actuality, his story is very different. Without getting into details, he explains that he became involved in criminal activity of which today he is very ashamed, but that once in jail, no one in his family ever visited him. “My crime was not related to terrorism, Heaven forbid, chas veshalom,” he says, “but I don’t want to discuss it.”



**Others Noticed Something Special**

**About the Arab Prisoner**

 “Some of the Jews in prison with me,” he relates, “began talking to me, and said things like, ‘There’s something special about you, something that doesn’t seem to belong to that world that you came from... You seem to have a spark of Jewishness... Specifically, one very special guy began teaching me about Judaism, and little by little, I began to enter the world of holiness and Torah and the Chosen Nation, etc., may Hashem’s Name be blessed...”

 At the same time, however, that he was undergoing changes in his religious outlook and identity, the prison authorities were preparing him for another change: Early release from jail, back into the areas of the so-called "Palestinian Authority" – where he knew there were many who would seek to kill him for his connections with Jews and Israelis.

**Divine Providence in the Personage**

**Of General Yoav Mordechai**

 Here’s where Providence stepped in. Gen. Mordechai relates: “I was driving shortly before midnight on Route 443 to Modiin where I live, when I saw a strange sight at the checkpoint, and I stopped; apparently, everything is truly from Heaven. I saw this young man, Yaniv, crying and sobbing at the checkpoint, and he told me an amazing story – of how he had come close to Judaism while in prison, and how all his requests and pleas to be recognized as a former prisoner whose life would be endangered in the PA were turned down, including from the Supreme Court.

 “I had trouble believing this, but I saw him quoting Biblical verses and all... Meanwhile, he was stuck at the checkpoint; the soldiers wouldn't let him cross, and he refused to enter the PA. I did some quick checking with the social worker in the prison and with the prison rabbi, and they said very complimentary things about him, such as that he had been released for good behavior, and how sincere he was... I had no immediate solution for him, but I was able to have him brought to a nearby IDF base for a couple of days, and then, after some not-simple struggles with the Shabak and other bodies, we were able to find a place for him...”

 Yaniv is now studying and living at a yeshiva in Jerusalem, whose name and location he will not disclose.

 Both Gen. Mordechai and Yaniv do not cease to express their amazement at the Divine providence of the story. Yaniv said, “Poli is truly an agent of Hashem, blessed be His Name, sent specifically to save me. He is a true tzaddik [righteous person]...” Asked what he would have done had Poli not happened by at that time, he said, “I would have waited there all night, and put on my tefillin in the morning...”

**Afraid that the Arabs Would Steal His Tefillin**

 “I was standing there at the checkpoint, I saw two Arabs coming close to me – I was afraid not only for my life, but even more that maybe they would take my tefillin! For them to take my holiness, the holiness of Hashem, I couldn’t take it!.. But I said, If Hashem wants me to put on tefillin next to these Arabs, I’ll do it! I stood and screamed out, Shma Yisrael, Hear O Israel, Hashem is our Hashem, Hashem is One!”

 “...And then Hashem sent Poli to save me. I had already been rejected by all the courts, and I went to the synagogue and said, ‘Hashem, thank You for all you have given me – the good and the bad. If this is Your will, that I return and have to die for the Sanctification of Your Name, then I’ll do it... But Hashem sent the general Poli; Hashem never abandons anyone who doesn’t abandon Him, Blessed be His Name forever.”

**Nearing the End of His**

**Formal Conversion Process**

 Yaniv, who is towards the end of his formal conversion process, says he does not know exactly when he will become an official Jew. "Meanwhile, I'm enjoying learning Talmud, praying, etc... When I pray the Amidah, it is not from this world; I see lights..." He acted as the gabbai (sexton) of the prison synagogue. “Gathering people for the prayers, setting up the prayer books – this is where I feel my holiness, this is my blood, this is my life, nothing else, may Hashem’s Name be blessed.”

 He related, as well, that he was forced to withstand many difficult situations in prison: “Hashem sent me many tests, but I believe that, with His help, may He be blessed, I was able to stand up to them.” On the day of his release, the deputy commander of the prison, a Bedouin, wanted to cut off his peyos - sidelocks – customarily grown long by religious Jews.

 “I told him, without fear: You can kill me, you can do anything you want – but no one will ever touch my payos, my holiness. I didn’t care about anything; it was unthinkable that I would lose my holiness, my payos... How could it be that someone wanted to take my holiness!”

**Ready to Die to Sanctify Hashem’s Name**

 Yaniv related that when he first began to observe Jewish customs in jail, “there were some goyim there [Arabs] who mocked me, and even threatened me. I couldn’t understand those people, that nation: I find something for my soul, why should they care? ... But I was not afraid. I felt that I would rather die to sanctify Hashem's name, than not be observant.”

 He said that he hopes to continue studying in Yeshiva, and in the future, to possibly give lectures about Judaism and Torah: “The Jewish people – for some reason, I just don’t know why - many of these holy people don’t observe Hashem’s will. I hope I can help them to truly return to Hashem, and bring the Messiah – who is here, by the way; as soon as everyone observes two Shabboses he will be revealed...

 “This is a very difficult generation, a very, very hard generation, Hashem knows, there are very strong temptations. But the place in which stands someone who returns to Hashem, even a righteous person cannot stand...

**Hashem Never Abandons Anyone**

 "I want to tell all of Israel: Just like a convert loves Hashem with all his heart – I do His will with all my heart, He performed great kindnesses for me, and I serve Him with all my essence, with perfect faith and with serenity, even though I went through many tests – so too Hashem loves Israel... Hashem took care of me. Hashem never abandons anyone; we just have to try to perform His will; give Him an opening the size of a needle [as the Sages say – ed.] and He will open entire worlds for us..."

 If a non-Jew can express these opinions and aspirations, how much more so Jews!  We can be inspired by this story to be the best Jews possible and to merit the blessing "Cursed is everyone who curses you, and blessed is everyone that blesses you."

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Open the Door!**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 Terrible pains which had bothered him for years came to a climax on Pesach eve for Rabbi Shmuel Chaim Klein. As the traditional Seder began, it was almost impossible for him to move.

 Just as the family reached that part of the Seder where the door is opened and a special prayer is said, they noticed that Rabbi Klein was making an effort to stand up despite his pain. As they rushed towards him they heard him ask that they summon a young man who was a guest.

 It turned out that this pain-racked host recalled that opening the door at that point in the Seder is mentioned in sources as a merit for finding a marriage partner. Since the young guest had encountered difficulty in this area, his host made the supreme effort of giving him this opportunity to open the door – to his future as well.

*Reprinted from this week’s “The Human Side of the Story” as published on the Ohr Somayach International’s website: Ohr.edu*

**Frum Star, Theater**

**Dark on The Sabbath:**

**David Yudell Stars in New**

**“Jekyll and Hyde” Show**

**By Ted Merwin**

 There may be no business like it, but it’s a business all the same. In the old days, it was simply impossible for Jews to star on Broadway but be excused from performing on the Sabbath. Today, in the wake of Dudu Fisher’s Sabbath exemption from playing the lead role in “Les Miz,” producers are more willing to accommodate observant Jewish performers.

 In the new Long Island revival of “Jekyll and Hyde,” opening next week at SUNY Old Westbury’s Maguire Theater, star David Yudell will not appear on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. The twist is that Yudell will have no understudy for these performances; the theater will simply be dark.

 Yudell, who grew up in a nominally Conservative Jewish family in upstate Poughkeepsie, became observant after marrying a Sephardic Jewish woman from Afghanistan. He has starred Off Broadway in “Godiva Was a Lady” and has appeared in numerous regional and dinner theater productions.



**David Yudell stars in new “Jekyll and Hyde” show.**

 “I feel proud because I turn around assimilation in my family,” Yudell said. “My great-grandmother came over from Russia and was an observant Jew, but each generation lost a degree of religious observance. Now, I now go to shul every week, my kids attend yeshiva and my eldest just graduated from Stern College.

 “I feel fortunate that the producers believed in my talent enough to accommodate my religious obligations.”

 “Jekyll and Hyde,” which ran on Broadway from 1997 to 2001, is the inaugural production of a new professional theater season at the state university campus, which lost its music department to state budget cuts more than a decade ago. The revival is not only using large portions of the original Broadway set but is doing a Broadway-level advertising blitz on billboards, commuter trains, and radio.

 The production will take place in accordance with the college schedule, running in November and then taking a hiatus for December and January before reopening for the month of February ([www.ovationtix.com](http://www.ovationtix.com), [866] 811-4111).

 Jeffrey Gurock, a leading scholar of Orthodox Jews in America, called Yudell’s situation “extraordinary but not unprecedented.” Beyond Fisher, he mentioned Cantor Yussele Rosenblatt, who famously turned down an offer to star in Halevy’s “La Juive” at the Chicago Opera, despite a clause in his contract that would have excused him from performing on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

 While closing the theater on the Sabbath might seem to be bad for business, Gurock told The Jewish Week, it may attract more Orthodox Jews during the week, who want to show support for the star. Casting Yudell is, he said, “a major step in the accommodation of Orthodox Jews in America.”

*Reprinted this week’s email of the AJOP (Association for Jewish Outreach Programs Newsletter. The article was originally published in the October 26th edition of The New York Jewish Week.*

**Forward-50” includes CEO of MASBIA Soup Kitchen Network’s Alexander Rapaport**

 Brooklyn, NY - Executive Director of the Masbia soup kitchen network, Alexander Rapaport was chosen to be one of the "Forward 50," an annual list of Jews who have had a significant impact on the Jewish story each year.

 Rapaport opened his first soup kitchen in 2005 to feed hungry Jews who were often times too proud to ask for help. This year, as the community continued to feel the effects of the Great Recession, Rapaport opened three new soup kitchens in Flatbush and Williamsburg in Brooklyn, and in Rego Park in Queens. Altogether, Masbia, Hebrew for “satiate,” now feeds 500 people a night.

 "I am very honored to be the only Hassidic Jew chosen to be part of this year's Forward 50," said Rapaport, acknowledging that he stands out from the rest of his largely secular cohort. Masbia's expansion over the last year would not have been possible without the help of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, and a few generous donors such as Henry and Susie Orenstein, Larry Robbins, and Mordechai Mandelbaum, Rapaport said.

 "Bubbe Rapaport in Montreal, recently widowed and a Holocaust survivor is going to be very proud of me," Rapaport said. "She struggled all her life to raise a family from the ashes, and this will be real milestone for her." Feeding the hungry has a long history in Rapaport's family. His mother's mother [Bubby Brauner OB”M] was beaten time and again for stealing food from the SS delivery trucks to give to her fellow Jews.

 Rapaport recalls her telling him how she would walk through the dead trying to find a living person to feed stolen beets. "It continues to be a challenge every day to keep Masbia's doors open. I hope this moment of recognition will help bring awareness to the plight of so many hungry people."

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the AOJP Newletter. Originally printed in the website Vos Iz Neias*