**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeitzei 5771**

**Volume 2, Number 9**

**Continuing in Mumbai**

 Gabi and Rivky dedicated their lives to increasing light in Mumbai—and their work will certainly be continued

 The terrorists took the lives of Rabbi Gavriel (Gabi) and Rivkah (Rivky) Holtzberg, but all the guns and grenades in the world cannot put a dent in the ideals that the Holtzbergs embodied. Gabi and Rivky dedicated their lives to helping others and increasing light in Mumbai—and their work will certainly be continued. In fact, their work has not stopped.

 On the Shabbat after the attack, Chabad-Lubavitch already organized a Shabbat gathering for visiting Jewish travelers at a local hotel in Mumbai. Rabbi Dov Goldberg, a friend of the Holtzbergs who had assisted Gabi, and who was at the time the acting director of the Chabad House in Goa, led the emotional services and meals for tens of people.

 Shortly later, Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, former executive director of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Former Soviet Union, was appointed as director of the Chabad Mumbai Relief Fund, leading the global campaign to rebuild Chabad of Mumbai. His mission: to ensure the continuity of Gabi and Rivky's life service.

 Long-term plans had yet to crystallize, but less than a month after the murders, Chabad was back for Chanukah festivities. On the holiday that celebrates the triumph of light, they were there to bring light to the city of Mumbai, where terrorists had taken the lives of not only the two Chabad emissaries and their guests but hundreds of others as well.

 The evening's events began with the lighting of a restored 25-foot steel menorah outside of the destroyed Chabad House. Rabbi Nachman Holtzberg, father of Gavriel Holtzberg, lit the menorah, and an estimated 200 people gathered in front of the building.

 An hour later, more than 600 people congregated at the Gateway of India monument – the giant arch near the Taj Mahal Hotel where investigators believe the terrorists entered the city – to witness Rabbi Shimon Rosenberg, father of Rivky, light an almost identical menorah. This was also the site where the Holtzbergs had erected a menorah every year. Onlooker Shameera Galsura, 23, a member of Mumbai's local Jewish community, said that the ceremony was the perfect antidote to the fear that pervaded her city. "People here are all talking about the menorah."

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| **Rabbi Shimon Rosenberg, father of Rivka Holtzberg, lights the menorah at Mumbai’s Gateway to India.** |

 Without missing a beat, come Passover, Chabad sent rabbinical students to serve the community and tourists. On the eve of Passover, they joined the local community for a [Blessing of the Sun](http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?AID=817861) gathering, and afterwards they held an emotional Blessing of the Sun gathering at the former Chabad House. That night, they conducted a Seder.

 Chezzie Denebeim, one of the rabbinical students, writes about the Seder that "the overwhelming feedback was joy that Chabad is still functioning despite everything that has happened… The Holtzbergs were a beacon of light and warmth in a dark world, but on a more practical level, they were literally a home to Jews from all over… One local Indian Jewish doctor and his family ate with us. He was close with the Holtzbergs, and he told us that he felt orphaned since the attack. But to see Chabad continue like before, it gives him back his soul a little."

 Unfortunately, the security situation in India continues to be tenuous today. As such, though Chabad is currently running regular programs and activities in Mumbai, continuing the holy work of Gabi and Rivky, many details are still being considered. Come what may, though, Gabi and Rivky's torch will not be allowed to fall.

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Just a few of the Jewish babies born since the tragedy of Mumbai to be named in honor of the Holtzberg Kadoshim.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeitzei 5771 website of Chabad.Org

**Rabbis’ Messages**

**The Evil Inclination Can Fool One into Thinking Murder is a Misva**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

 “Then Jacob kissed Rachel and he raised his voice and wept.” (Beresheet 29:11)

 When Ya’akob met Rachel he cried. Rashi explains: “He cried because he came with empty hands. He said, ‘Eliezer, my paternal grandfather’s slave, had in his hands nose rings and bracelets, and delicacies when he went to find a wife for Isaac. But I have nothing in my hand.’ Ya’akob was empty handed because Eliphaz, the son of Esav, pursued him at the command of his father, to kill him.

 Eliphaz overtook Ya’akob, and since Eliphaz grew up under the influence of Isaac, he withdrew his hand from murdering his uncle (Ya’akob). Eliphaz said to Ya’akob, ‘What should I do about my father’s command?’ Ya’akob said to him, ‘Take that which is in my hand – and the poor man is considered like a dead person.’ (Thus, by impoverishing Ya’akob, Eliphaz would be fulfilling Esav’s command to kill him.)”

 This Rashi explains why Ya’akob was crying when he met Rachel, because he was empty handed due to his encounter with Eliphaz. Many of us are very familiar with this Rashi. However, there is an obvious question that I have asked in the back of my mind.

 Rabbi Abraham Salem Shlita, the Rosh Yeshivah of Meor Hatorah in Jerusalem asks (in his sefer Netiv Hatorah): What was the meaning of Eliphaz’s question, “What do I do about my father’s command?” Can it be that through the act of murder one would be fulfilling the misvah of honoring one’s father? Can this be a fulfillment of the misvah of honoring one’s father that he learned from his father Esav, who was famous for his observance of that misvah?

 The answer is that this is the power of the evil inclination in man. For not only does it tell man to do evil, but he also uses the good side of the person in order to do the greatest evil. The person could be fooled into thinking that he is doing the greatest misvah and end up committing murder. Rabbi Salem concludes, “And this is what we see in our days with suicide bombers, may their name be erased.”

 We have today an entire army of Jihadists, willing to die and to kill as many innocent people as possible, the entire time thinking they are getting a misvah! How fortunate are we that we have the Torah that guides us throughout our lives to always do what’s right.

**Learning from a Rock**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

"And Ya'akob was afraid and he said, 'How awesome is this place.'" (Beresheet 28:17)

 Ya'akob Abinu was traveling to Haran when he was suddenly plunged into darkness, and he lay down to sleep. At that point, he had a phenomenal dream where Hashem revealed Himself to Ya'akob, and promised him Divine protection until he would return to his father's home. The Midrash says that he also saw the future exiles and the final redemption in this dream. And yet, when Ya'akob wakes up, his first instinct is to cry out, "This is a holy place! Had I known that, I would not have slept here!" That means that Ya'akob would have given up all of the Divine revelations and the promise that he saw in the dream, because he wouldn't want to sleep in a holy place.

 From here we see that the ends do not justify the means! If we talk in shul words of Torah during the time we are not allowed to speak, such as Kaddish, Hazarah or Sefer Torah, instead of getting a misvah, we are getting the opposite. We tend to justify our misdeeds by saying, "Hashem would want me to do this for this specific reason" and yet Ya'akob, our forefather, is teaching us that it's not worth the outcome if it means doing something wrong. Let's listen to Sefer Torah, Kaddish and Hazarah, and not talk about anything, and our Torah study will be enhanced by the fact that we are doing the right thing!

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

**A Slice of Life**

**Foe or Friend?**

**By Yehudis Kaplan**

 Greece was a dangerous place to be in last spring. Angry, violent mobs with grievances to the government destroyed property, set fires, battled the police. Bedlam reigned.

 Vacationers shunned the island; hotel reservations and plane tickets were cancelled. But for Rabbi Yoel and Ruth Kaplan and their children, the Chabad emissaries in Thessaloniki, Greece, it was just another challenge.



**Rabbi Yoel Kaplan helping a visitor to the Chabad House**

**in Thessaloniki, Greece put on tefillin**

 Like the hundreds of Chabad Houses around the world, the Chabad Center in Saloniki is open to the public 24/7.

 In the days of the rioting and even the weeks after, signs of vandalism were everywhere and tension filled the air. But the rabbi tried to resume his normal activities.

 Even such a seemingly simple task like going to the post office was fraught with danger. The post office was located in a part of the city center that was a hangout and had been hit the hardest by violence.

 Recalls Rabbi Kaplan: "I saw the typical group of young people blocking the sidewalk in the city center outside the post office in the middle of the day as they stood and chatted.

 "I noticed one of them looking at me out of the corner of his eye. I, of course, was the subject of their conversation as a Jew whose appearance proclaimed my Judaism. I'm already used to comments and laughter, and sometimes I have had to either make a detour or give up on my visit to the post office that day. But due to recent strikes at the post office, my visit was too urgent to put off. So I carried on walking."

 Soon the group's curses and anti-Semitic comments in Greek became louder, and they even translated some of their remarks into English for the rabbi's "benefit."

 "As I continued walking, I had a strange feeling. And as I stood opposite them, I smiled and said, 'Good morning to you, too,' in a pleasant voice.

 "Who spoke to you?!" was the angry reply.

 "No one, but you were talking about the Jewish people."

 "We were talking about the nation of thieves, robbers, and gluttons," they answered.

 "If you knew the truth, you wouldn't talk to me or to any Jew like that," I responded, still smiling.

 The leader of the group, a young man with spiky hair, started to lose his temper. "You'll see!" he said. "I am trained in boxing ... I think you should go away before I have to show you the power of my outstretched arm ..."

 The best thing I could do was move on, which I did but not without smiling to each member of the group first. I then went into the post office, which was still undergoing repairs after the riots. When I walked out, I could have gone another way to avoid the group, but decided to go the direct way.

 The group was still there. As I drew closer, the voices in deep debate subsided, and I said, "Have a good day!"

 "You too," was the surprisingly polite response. I was even more surprised when the leader of the group turned to me and apologized. "We thought about things, and you're right! We've probably been influenced by what we have heard."

 "'I'm happy to hear this,' I said. 'You need to treat every single person with respect, no matter what his opinions and thoughts.' And before I went on my way, I handed 'the boxer' my card and told him to be in touch if he ever wanted to talk again."

 Rabbi Kaplan thought that this was the end of the story, but it wasn't.

 A few days later, Rabbi Kaplan was rushing to prepare for the holiday of Shavuot, which was starting that evening. In the midst of preparations, he got a phone call.

 "It's Alexandros, the young man you met near the post office. Do you remember me? I'm outside your house right now. Can I come in for a coffee?"

 The 'boxer' and his almost victim sat down for a chat. It seemed that Rabbi Kaplan's few words outside the post office, his cheerful expression, and the gentle way in which he had spoken to the group, had really had an effect on Alexandros. "I wanted to speak to you urgently afterwards," he told the rabbi.

 Alexandros related to the rabbi that his maternal grandmother was Jewish and is the only member of her family to have survived the Holocaust. Like several hundred other Jews from Saloniki, she hid in the mountains during the German invasion. Sadly her husband and only son were murdered by the Germans.

 After the war, she married a devout Christian and gave birth to Alexandros' mother. But surely, Alexandros told the rabbi, since his grandmother had left Judaism and his mother considered herself Christian, he was not Jewish!

 Rabbi Kaplan immediately set Alexandros straight. "I told Alexandros that he is, in fact, 100% Jewish. Alexandros was delighted to discover his Jewishness. He took me to visit his elderly grandmother. During this very moving visit I presented her with a mezuza for her door and Alexandros cheerfully put on tefilin for the first time in his life," relates Rabbi Kaplan.

 Although Rabbi Kaplan finishes telling the story of Alexandros here, it is surely just the beginning for this young Jewish man.

*Adapted from shmais.com and ohrtmimim.org.*

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

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

**Focus on the Good Things Hashem Gives You**

**By Sam Gindi**



Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l

“*This time I shall praise Hashem, therefore she called his name Yehudah*” (Beraishis 29:35)

 When our Mother Leah said: “This time, I shall praise G-d”, she did not merely mean the praise for giving her another son. This son, Yehudah, was to become the entire Jewish nation. Since the end of the First Sanctuary our people have been called Yehudim because their majority was the seed of Judah. The name Yehudah was a prophecy.

 What did Hashem see in Yehuda, or his family, that he deserved to become the Jewish nation?

 The word ‘Yehudah’ means “He shall praise”. The name of  Hashem is included in ‘Yehudah’. Yehuda shall praise G-d. The great function of the Jewish nation is to give thanks to Hashem constantly. “It is good to give thanks to the L-rd, to sing to Your name, O Most High” (Tehillim 92:2).

 The Yehudim are the nation whose purpose is to thank Hashem. This is a career for life and there is none better. ‘Hakarat hatob’, recognizing & acknowledging the bountiful blessings we possess and constantly receive, is the way of expressing our gratitude. By examining all of the good things we’ve been given as well as the wondrous world around us, this contemplation will bring us to a feeling of joy.

1 ”You’ve made me happy Hashem with Your handiwork, I sing at the deeds of Your hands.” It’s a wonderful and marvelous world! Look at the beautiful sky.  Isn’t it a wonderful day? We have to teach ourselves the happiness of life. Life is happy and Hashem wants us to enjoy this great gift of Olam Hazeh (This world).

 “Olam hesed yibaneh“  (Tehillim 89:3). The world is built on Kindliness.  We have a kindly Father. Instead of complaining and ignoring all the blessings He is showering on us, let’s utilize the opportunity of life to sing of the deeds of Hashem’s hands.

 With this extreme Joy & Love we will elevate ourselves to a higher level of our function as Yehudim (the ones who thank G-d), by thanking Hashem for all the gifts He bestows on us “BeSimcha”.

Adapted From “The Beginning” and

“Sing You Righteous” By R’ Miller, Zt”l.

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

**The Lesson of Shlomo’s Honest Butchers Scales**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This week we find Jacob (Yaakov) the ‘Patriarch of Judaism’ on his way to his Uncle, Lavan's house to face awesome difficulties in order to establish the Jewish people.

 Jacob was aware of the challenges before him and the Torah tells us that before he reached his destination he put rocks around his head, lay down to sleep, got a vision of G-d, and upon awakening, declared that the rock will be "the House of G-d".

  Rashi explains that Yaakov put these rocks around his head to protect him from wild animals and that the rocks united to become one rock which he called G-d’s house.

 What is going on here? Why did Yaakov surround just his head with rocks, why not his entire body? Why did the rocks unite? How can one rock be a house? And even more important; what does all this mean to us?

 I would like to explain with a story.

 December 1700. It was a cold winter in Poland and a blanket of snow covered the entire country. The city streets were bustling with rosy-cheeked people bundled up in fur coats and the countryside peasants were busy warming their homes with wood, and themselves with vodka. The holiday season was approaching, and everyone was in good spirits.

 But in the Jewish Ghetto of Krakow gloom and fear filled the air and moaned from every corner; the children were dying of smallpox. The only thing that gave them a bit of joy was being taken from them.

 It was the beginning of an epidemic. The doctors were helpless to stop it and the various home remedies did nothing. Every day the town was visited with more heartbreaking tragedies. The only one they could rely on, as usual, was their Father in Heaven, and He didn't seem to be helping much either.

 The Rabbi of the community had declared a day of fasting and prayer, then another, then three days of prayer and self-examination. But nothing seemed to work. A week of supplication was announced, but before it began, the thirty elders of the community decided they had to make a "Shaalas Chalom" (a request from a dream).

  It was a drastic move, but they had no other choice. They purified themselves, fasted, said Psalms non-stop, immersed in a Mikva, and then prayed to G-d according to ancient Kabbalistic formulas, that He send them some sort of sign that night in their sleep.

  Early the next morning they met in the Shul (synagogue) and the results were frightening; The previous night they all had identical dreams!

 An old man in a white robe appeared and said: "SHLOMO THE BUTCHER MUST PRAY BEFORE THE CONGREGATION!!".

 It was clear what they had to do.

 The thirty of them solemnly walked to Shlomo's home and knocked on the door. When his wife opened, she almost fainted at the sight of them.

 "Ye..yes?" She stammered, pushing her loose hair under the kerchief on her head.

 "We want to speak to your husband. Is he home?" said one of them as pleasantly as possible. "May we come in?" asked another.

 She told them to wait and in a few moments Shlomo himself came to the door, shook everyone's hands and invited them in. He ran around for a few minutes looking for chairs and when he found a few and everyone was seated one of them began;

  "Shlomo, we made a Dream request yesterday. We asked G-d to tell us what to do about the epidemic and last night we all had the same dream. We dreamed that you have to lead the prayers today."

 Shlomo was dumbfounded. If it weren't such a serious matter he would think it was a joke.

 "I...should lead the prayers?” stammered Shlomo “ Why I....I can't even read properly. I can't…. I mean, what good will it possibly do?"

 The elders looked at poor Shlomo, then at each other and then took turns trying to convince him. "Listen Shlomo, just come and do what you can. You don't have to really lead, just pray in front of everyone. Maybe there will be a miracle, maybe you will begin to read. We don’t understand it either but…. just come and give it a try. Everyone is in the Shul (synagogue) waiting. Just come and say a few words. Anything is better than what we have now."

 So Shlomo, with no other choice, left his house and accompanied them. But no sooner had they entered the crowded Synagogue that Shlomo suddenly broke away, ran back outside and by the time they realized what happened and ran outside after him he was nowhere to be seen.

  What could they do? He disappeared. They didn't even know where to look. They had no choice other than to wait.

 About half an hour later the door opened and in came Shlomo pushing a wheelbarrow covered with a cloth.

  All eyes were on him as he went up to the podium, pulled off the cloth, and lifted an old set of scales out of the barrow. He brought his butchers scales into the Shul!

 They were heavy but he lifted them over his head and although his face was red and contorted with the effort, it was obvious that he was crying.

  "Here" he yelled out to the ceiling. "Here, G-d! Take them! Take the scales! That must be why you want me to lead the prayers, right? So take the scales and heal the children! Just heal the children. Okay?!!"

  He was crying pretty loudly by then and so was most of the congregation. A few men rushed over to help him put the scales on a table on the podium and the congregation began praying.

  The next day all the children got better.

 You can imagine the joy and festivities that followed. They even made a nice glass case for the scales and left the whole thing there permanently for all to see.

 But after a few days when the excitement died down, the elders had to admit that they couldn't figure it out. What was so special about Shomo’s scales? After all, there were tens of shops in the Ghetto that had scales and all of them were owned by G-d fearing Jews. What could be so special about THESE scales?

 The answer was soon in coming. When they went around checking all the other scales, they discovered that every one of them without exception was a bit off, certainly never enough to constitute bad business, but inaccurate nevertheless.

  It seems that Shlomo would check his scales twice every day, "That’s what G-d wants" he explained, "I just check and don't ask questions", while the others checked only occasionally.

 The legend has it that these scales remained proudly displayed in that Shul for over two hundred years until the Germans destroyed everything in WWII.

  That answers our questions.

 Yaakov was founding the Jewish people. He knew that the essence of Judaism is Avoda; sanctifying the world through devotion to HaShem in even the most mundane matters and despite all obstacles.

  But he also knew that crooked Lavan was a seasoned charlatan and master of worldly affairs that would try his best to make him compromise his goals.

 Therefore he surrounded his head with rocks; he protected his thoughts and ideals with unquestioning service of G-d (like Shlomo the butcher in our story), and that was sufficient protection to enable him to unify all that he would do (all the rocks became one) to the Creator of the Universe.

 But that isn't all. His real goal was to pave the way for the Jews in generations to come to reveal G-d down here, first of all on Mount Sinai, then in both Holy Temples, and finally in its most complete form, with the arrival of Moshiach.

 Then the entire world will see the manifestation of what we Jews have been saying twice daily for over three thousand years "Listen Israel (referring also to Jacob our forefather whose name was also Israel) G-d is our G-d, G-d is ONE"

 Namely that all this time G-d has only been ‘our’ G-d but in the future with the arrival of Moshiach the entire world will see and feel the goodness, nearness and unconditional love of the Creator of the Universe.  (See Rashi on Deut.6:4).

 What it means to us is of utmost importance: It all depends on us! Today, more than ever before, we need unquestioning and uncompromising faith that brings to action; just one more deed, word, or even thought, will fulfill Yaakov's dream, save the entire world and bring...**Moshiach NOW!!**

*Reprinted from this week’s email of TorahOhr Tmimim on the parsha.*

**Story #676**

**Out and Back**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 When Rabbi Yaakov-Chaim Sofer, author of the Kaf HaChaim, was preparing to publish the first volume of his work, he had no idea how to pay for the cost of printing. He had not so much as a penny in his pocket at the time. His friends advised him to travel abroad in order to raise money.

 This was a very hard thing for Rabbi Yaakov Chaim to do. He was always begging G-d not to ever force him to leave the Holy Land. But in the end, having no choice, he did go -- praying that he would not have to stay away for long. He set out from Jerusalem to take a train to Alexandria, Egypt [a 300 mile ride after he reached the station in Yafo ed.].

 When he stepped off the train onto the platform, he ran into one of the wealthiest philanthropists of his time, a man by the name of Yosef Somocha.

Mr. Somocha asked, “To what do we owe the honor of this visit?”

 Rabbi Yaakov Chaim explained his purpose in coming. The rich man immediately took 200 lira out of his pocket -- the cost of printing the first volume. That same day, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim boarded a train for the return trip home. It was the same train that had brought him to Alexandria.

 His friends back in Jerusalem were surprised to see him back so soon. When Rabbi Yaakov Chaim explained the amazing thing that had happened, they protested, “If you were so successful in raising the money, you should have stayed a few days and raised the amount you'll need for future volumes!”

 “No!” Rabbi Yaakov Chaim declared. “I will not remain in a foreign country one minute longer than urgent necessity forces me to stay.”

 Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Stories My Grandfather Told Me (Mesorah) by Zev Greenwald

 Connection: Weekly Reading regarding “Leaving the Land.”

 Biographic note:Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer, (1870 - 9 Sivan 1939) better known as the Kaf Hachaim (the name of the monumental halachic work which he authored), was born in Baghdad. In the beginning of the 20th century he emigrated to the Land of Israel, and settled inJerusalem.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed* [www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1289526912)

**The Golden Column**

**Rabbeinu Yisshak Al Baliah, zs"l**

 In the generations of our Rabbis, the Rif - Rabbeinu Yisshak Alfasi -and Rabbeinu Yisshak ben Giat zs"l, also shone in Spain the light of Rabbeinu Yisshak, the son of Rabbi Baruch, to the family of Al Baliah, a descendant of the exiles of Jeruslem who were in Spain.

 According to the tradition, the ruler of Spain asked the evil Titus to send him a boatload full of the captives of Jerusalem so that they would improve the economy of the state. Amongst them was the forefather of the family of Al Baliah who settled in the city of Marda.

 With the destruction of the city, the family was uprooted to Cordoba. In the year 4795 (1035), Rabbi Yisshak was born, and from his childhood his blessed abilities were recognized. His Rabbi was Rabbeinu Progros, who moved from France to Spain.

 When it became known to Rabbeinu Shemuel Hanagid the abilities of Rabbi Yisshak, he gave him sefarim and supported him, so that he would be able to set aside his time to learning Torah with peace of mind.

 When he was thirty-four years old, Rabbeinu Yisshak was crowned as the prince of Spanish Jewry, which he led on the pathways of justice. His

wisdom was known by the king of Spain, Al Muhamad, who appointed him

his personal advisor. This was a lofty position which he used for the good and the profit of the Jews, as a whole and as individuals.

 Rabbeinu Yisshak Al Baliah wrote many books, of which only fragments remain in our hands: a monograph about the laws of ssissit (which was published in "Temim Deim, chapter 254) and a comment on the words of his friend, the Rif, which is brought down in the "Maor Hagadol" on the tractate of Shabbat.

 "Mahberet Ha'ibur" which is brought down in the "Yesod Olam" and many poems which are brought down in early works. Later, a war broke out between the king of Spain and the king of Morocco, Yusuf Ibn Tshipin. The king of Spain was conquered and exiled to Morocco and Rabbeinu Yissshak fell from his high position.

 But his stature amongst his brothers and his true greatness remained

as they had been. He went to live in Grenada, and died in the year 4854, at the age of 59, with a good name. His son, Rabbeinu Baruch, learned in the yeshivah of his friend, the Rif, who treated him like a son, and raised him to fill his father's position.

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Gavriel and the Question**

**Of “Zeh Fair?”**

 In this week’s parsha Vayeitzeh we read about how, on the way to Charan, Yakov Avinu stopped to rest for the night. As he slept, Yakov dreamt that he saw a ladder. The famous dream of the ladder contains some of the most inspirational spiritual lessons of the entire Torah.

 The verse tells us that Yakov “dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set on the earth and its top reached towards the heavens...” (Bereishis 28:12) The Sages teach us that the ladder symbolizes the position of a Jew in this world.

 Although we stand on the ground like the base of the ladder, we strive to reach up to the heavens, like the top of the ladder in the dream. As the verse states, "A ladder was set on the earth and its top reached towards the heavens..."

 The following emotional story illustrates how one Jew climbed very high in life and in death. For the first two decades of his life, Gavriel Kadel (not his real name) lived as a secular Israeli. Born and raised in the Holy Land, Gavriel knew next to nothing about his religious heritage. And then Gavriel joined the growing throng of Israeli baalei teshuva.

 Fired by a deep sense of commitment to Torah and mitzvos, Gavriel joined a yeshiva and dedicated himself fully to the service of Hashem. Just one year after his return to Torah observance, Gavriel had already made tremendous strides in his learning and yiras shomayim - fear of heaven.

 But then Hasgacha Pratis (divine intervention)  intervened. Gavriel contracted a life threatening illness, and he grew weaker as the days passed. Friends prayed for his recovery, but Hashem had other plans…

 Only a short time later, Gavriel passed away. His fellow students, his Rabbeim (Rabbis), all those who had come to know and admire the enthusiastic young man were devastated by the news.

 But even as they tried to come to terms with their grief, the Rabbeim in the yeshiva were faced with a troubling problem. They knew that they ought to visit Gavriel’s parents to console them for their loss. Yet they also knew that his parents had been angry when their son had become religious. Would the parents even want to see or speak to the Rabbeim?

 Torn by the conflict, the Rabbeim finally decided to consult with a gadol. They went to speak to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, the son and successor of the Steipler Gaon.

 After listening carefully to the Rabbeim, Reb Chaim said, "Tell them that in truth, their son should have passed away the year before. But because he became religious, Hashem granted him another year of life to fulfill Torah and mitzvos."

 The Rabbeim left Reb Chaim with feeling that they were in a sticky situation. No doubt Reb Chaim knew what he was talking about. Yet how could they go to irreligious parents and offer this as a condolence? What did such people know of the power of such a respected Torah leader? Surely they would mock the words of Reb Chaim! No, Gavriel’s Rabbeim decided, they would simply have to come up with some other way of consoling the parents.

 The meeting with the parents proceeded much as the Gavriel’s Rabbeim had feared. "You religious Jews!" the parents said bitterly. "What did our son gain by becoming religious? Nothing! He lost everything, including his life!"

 With anger and accusations being hurled at them from all sides, Gavriel’s Rabbeim slowly realized that none of their carefully prepared remarks were helping. Perhaps, they thought, they should simply say what Reb Chaim had suggested. "We spoke to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky about your son," one of the Rabbeim began cautiously. "He told us that, far from costing your son his life, his newfound interest in religion actually saved his life." The parents remained silent for a moment.

 Emboldened, the Rabbi continued. "In fact, Reb Chaim said that your son was actually supposed to die the year before and that it was only because he became religious that he was granted another year of life." There was a sudden gasp from his mother.

 "It is true!" she yelled hysterically. "Every word the Rabbi said is true!" "You are right," the father said, tears streaming down his cheeks. "We blamed you for the death of my son, but the rabbi is right. Becoming religious did save his life."

 The Rabbeim simply could not understand it. What had brought about this change in attitude? What was there about the message of Reb Chaim that had finally gotten through to the parents of the young man?
        After she calmed down, the mother explained: “Last year, my son began thinking about keeping Shabbos, though he was not really religious yet. Exactly one year ago, on one Shabbos morning, his old group of friends drove up to the house and tried to convince him to go along for some fun.

 “Gavriel thought about it, but he decided against joining them. They drove away, laughing and mocking Gavriel for his beliefs. Later that day, the same group of friends were involved in a car accident and all of them were killed. If Gavriel had gone along with them, he would also have been killed. It was his newfound interest in religion and keeping Shabbos that saved his life.

 “I was not willing to admit it then, but deep down I suppose I really knew that religion was helping Gavriel, not harming him. When you told me the words of the Rabbi, I realized that you were right. Thank you. You have consoled us for our loss,” said the mother. And when Gavriel’s Rabbeim left the house, they went with a new understanding of the faith and trust we must have in the guidance of our Torah leaders.(Visions of Greatness, R.Y.Weiss)

 We do not know how high our spiritual ladders will take us. However, it is our obligation as conscientious Jews to always try to climb in life. Spiritual life is eternal, while our physical existence is fleeting. As the verse tell us “…because you are dust and to the dust you shall return.” (Bereishis 3:19)

 In the end, the dust returns to its source in the ground and the soul returns to its source above. We do not know how many days have been allotted to us. Thus, we must make the smart investment in our spiritual selves.

 By doing mitzvahs such as keeping Shabbos, we climb the rungs of the spiritual ladder. This idea is hinted to in the dream of Yakov. As the verse tells us "A ladder was set on the earth and its top reached towards the heavens..."

 The challenge of a Jew is therefore to elevate his earthy being to become more like Hashem in heaven. The ladder must stay on the ground in order to climb on it, yet the purpose of the ladder is to climb higher. So too, although we must take care of our earthy needs such as eating and sleeping, etc., our primary goal is to reach the heavens.

 In conclusion, whenever we see a ladder we should stop to reflect on our position in life.(Reb Zelig Pliskin) Are we climbing higher towards our spiritual source in Heaven above? Are we using our materialism to grow closer to Hashem? If we can stay focused on climbing the spiritual ladder, we will all live happier lives.

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

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

**Defining What is Meant by**

**Thrills, Fun and Excitement**

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| **QUESTION:** |

 Define what is meant by thrills, fun, and excitement?  |
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| **ANSWER:** |

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| view_from_the_top_of_the_top_thrill_dragster1 |

It’s the desire of a person for a change in his situation. Now when a person is sick and he doesn't have enough to eat, so then when he gets well, that's his biggest thrill.  Or when a person who is hungry gets money enough to buy a good meal, that's a big thrill. But suppose a person is well and he has enough money for all of his meals, so then he wants something else. So *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* says, you're a man who likes thrills? I'll give you a thrill; I'll put you on the operating table, that's a thrill. Now sometimes they give you ether and you don't know what's taking place, of course afterwards you find out the thrill.  Sometimes even during the operation the ether wears out and the surgeon is still cutting, still cutting. And you start telling him; he says a few more minutes, I'm almost finished, almost finished, but it hurts, you have a thrill. Anybody looking for thrills, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will supply thrills.    Here's a fellow going skiing for thrills, now he could stay home. It's a big thrill to sit home and to have plenty to eat and to be healthy. No, but he goes out and is looking for a broken leg, that's a big thrill. Thrills mean, you want a change in your status. So if you're suffering, the best thrill is to get well, to get what you need. But if you're happy and healthy, and enough to eat and you're looking for thrills, it means *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is going to give you plenty of thrills; don't ask for it.    ‘Thrills’ means what’s unexpected. So here’s a man who lives in a fine house in New York. He has all comforts; he has, of course, hot and cold running water, he has a bathroom in the house, he has central heating in the house, many have air conditioning in the house, he has a refrigerator, he has electric lights, what not!  So now he is sold by a travel agency on the glories of going, let’s say to Honolulu. So he goes to Honolulu and there he goes out let’s say slumming and he takes a drink that they sell there, some kind of drink there, and the drink is water that comes from a well that's not sterilized by the city. He gets dysentery or he gets typhoid fever, and he comes down with an illness, a parasite in his blood that lasts for months and months, sometimes he gets yellow jaundice… true stories I'm telling you. All these are the thrills he was waiting for.     In case he comes back and he’s still well, so he invents thrills to tell his people back home the good times he didn't have over there. Ah, what good times I had over there. The big mosquitoes, the big bed bugs they have over there - nothing like that you’ll see in America, and for that he paid a lot of money to make the trip. So thrills mean to look for things that are out of the usual, but it doesn't mean happiness.    To us, to sensible people the greatest thrill is that you have happiness in life; happiness means that nothing wrong is happening to you. *Good Shabbos To All*  |
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*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l” that is based on a transcription of Rav Miller’s answer to a question posed by a member of the audience attending his classic Thursday night hashkafa lectures from the early 1970s until his petirah in 2001.*

**Rapper Finds Order in Orthodox Judaism in Israel**

**By Dina Kraft**

 JERUSALEM — The tall man in the velvet fedora and knee-length black jacket with ritual fringes peeking out takes long, swift strides toward the Western Wall. It’s late in the day, and he does not want to miss afternoon prayers at Judaism’s holiest site.

 “We have to get there before the sun goes down,” he says, his stare fixed behind a pair of Ray-Ban sunglasses, the first clue that this is no ordinary Jerusalem man of G-d. It’s the rapper Shyne, the [Sean Combs](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/sean_combs/index.html?inline=nyt-per) protégé who served almost nine years in New York prisons for opening fire in a nightclub in 1999 during an evening out with Mr. Combs.

 “My entire life screams that I have a Jewish neshama,” he said, using the Hebrew word for soul.

 Living as Moses Levi, an Orthodox Jew in Jerusalem (he legally changed his name from Jamaal Barrow), he shuttles between sessions of Talmud study with some of the most religiously stringent rabbis in the city and preparations for a musical comeback.



**Ricki Rosen for The New York Times**

**The rapper Shyne at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. “My entire life screams that I have a Jewish neshama,” he said, using the Hebrew word for soul.**

 His transition from troubled adolescent in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, shot at the age of 15, to celebrity gangster rapper turned prisoner turned frequenter of yeshivas, is the latest chapter in a bizarre journey that began with his birth in Belize 32 years ago. He is the son of a lawyer who is now that country’s prime minister and a mother who brought him to the United States and cleaned houses for a living.

 “The science of Judaism” as Mr. Levi refers to it, has become his system for living, a lifeline that connects him to G-d and becoming a better human being. He sees no conflict fusing the hip-hop world with the life of a Torah-observant Jew.

 Mr. Levi speaks in the style of the urban streets but combines his slang with Yiddish-accented Hebrew words and references to the “Chumash” (the bound version of the Torah, pronounced khoo-MASH) and “Halacha” (Jewish law, pronounced ha-la-KHAH).

 As in: “There’s nothing in the Chumash that says I can’t drive a Lamborghini,” and “nothing in the Halacha about driving the cars I like, about the lifestyle I live.” As a teenager he started reading the Bible, relating to the stories of King David and Moses that he had first heard from his grandmother. At 13 (bar mitzvah age, he notes) he began to identify himself as “an Israelite,” a sensibility reinforced after finding out his great-grandmother was Ethiopian; he likes to wonder aloud whether she might have been Jewish.

 He was already praying daily and engaged in his own study of Judaism at the time of his arrest but only became a practicing Jew, celebrating the holidays, keeping kosher and observing the Sabbath under the tutelage of prison rabbis. In Israel, he said, he had undergone a type of pro forma conversion known as “giyur lechumra” (pronounced ghee-YUR le-kchoom-RAH).

 On the December night in 1999 that Mr. Levi walked into a Times Square nightclub, he was a 19-year-old enjoying the fruits of his first record deal and the hip-hop high life. The details of what happened inside remain muddled, but after an argument broke out between Mr. Combs, then known as Puff Daddy, and a group in the club, shots were fired, and three people were hurt.

 Mr. Combs was charged with gun possession but later cleared in a highly publicized trial. Mr. Levi was sentenced to 10 years in prison for assault, gun possession and reckless endangerment. The police said he fired into the crowd. He maintains he shot in the air to break up the dispute. He would not say whether he took a fall for his former mentor.

 “That’s the past, I got so much going on,” he said. “We move on.”

 What Mr. Levi has moved on to since being released from prison last year is a life in which he is often up at daybreak, wrapping his arms with the leather straps of tefillin, the ritual boxes containing Torah verses worn by observant Jews for morning prayers. Throughout the day he studies with various strictly Orthodox rabbis.

 “What are the laws?” he said, explaining his decision to adhere to the Orthodox level of observance. “I want to know the laws. I don’t want to know the leniencies. I never look for the leniencies because of all of the terrible things I’ve done in my life, all of the mistakes I’ve made.”

 On the sprawling stone plaza of the Western Wall, crowded with tourists and worshipers, he clutches a worn prayer book whose leather cover was torn off by prison officials for security reasons.

 Here he encounters a group of young Ethiopians singing in Hebrew and Amharic about Jerusalem. For a moment he links arms with them, and together they spin, dancing in concentric circles at dizzying speed.

 With him is his local sidekick, a burly and bearded 30-year-old named Eli Goldsmith who used to run nightclubs in London (his uncle is a prominent music promoter) before he too became religious.

 Later, with Mr. Goldsmith in the rental car he uses to get around, [Mr. Levi](http://rapfix.mtv.com/2010/10/11/shyne-journal-releasing-old-shyne/) sampled tracks from two new albums, [“Messiah”](http://newsroom.mtv.com/2010/04/12/shyne-starts-his-comeback-with-new-song-messiah-listen-here/) and “Gangland,” that are to be released in a joint venture with Def Jam Records. The deal suggests the clout he holds despite not having released an album since 2004. He put the volume on high as he drove through the traffic-clogged roads of an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood.

 In songs like “Am I a Sinner?” he casts his spiritual quest as an escape from prison life and pain, with lyrics like, “Look in your soul and you will find vision that you can’t see through the eye.”

 Three more albums are scheduled to follow. Touring in the United States remains uncertain; he was deported after his prison release as a felon who does not have citizenship, a ruling he is appealing.

 Arriving at a small hummus restaurant, he recited the blessing for bread over a piece of warm pita. With him were two rabbis. Jeffrey Seidel, one of the rabbis, said he been moved by the depth of Mr. Levi’s intellectual curiosity and dedication to Judaism.

 Their current focus of study together: Sabbath laws. For Mr. Levi they help explain his attraction to Judaism.

 “What I do get is boundaries,” he said. “Definition and form. And that is what Shabbat is. You can’t just do whatever you want to do. You have to set limits for yourself.

 “All these rules, rules, rules,” he said with his hand on an open page of the Talmud. “But you know what you have if you don’t have rules? You end up with a bunch of pills in your stomach. When you don’t know when to say when and no one tells you no, you go off the deep.”

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