**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayishlach 5775**

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**Why the Baal Shem Tov Began to Laugh at the Shabbos Night Seudah**

Once, while the Baal Shem Tov was sitting at the Shabbos night seudah, he suddenly started to laugh. This was a most unusual thing for him to do, and his talmidim wondered what could make their Rebbe laugh like that. After a few minutes, the Rebbe started laughing again! A short while later, the Rebbe started laughing a third time!

The next day, one of the students, Reb Zev, who was very close to the Baal Shem Tov, approached their Rebbe and ask about this unusual behavior. The Baal Shem Tov said to him, “Why don’t you and the rest of the talmidim come to me tonight after Shabbos, and I will show you what it was that made me laugh.”

That night, after Havdalah¸ the Baal Shem Tov asked the students to prepare the wagon and horses for a trip. They traveled the entire night, and at daybreak, they arrived at a large town and went to daven Shacharis. After davening, the Baal Shem Tov went over to the gabbai and asked to see Reb Shabsi, the seforim binder, and the Baal Shem Tov said to Reb Shabsi, “Please tell us what happened to you on Shabbos night.”

Reb Shabsi told them the following: “All my life I worked binding seforim, and Boruch Hashem it supported all my needs. It was my minhag that every Thursday, I would buy everything needed for Shabbos and have everything ready

for Shabbos by chatzos on Friday. After chatzos I would not do any more work except get dressed for Shabbos and go to shul, review the Parshah— Shnayim Mikra V’Echod Targum, and say Shir HaShirim until it was time for Minchah and Kabbalas Shabbos, and I would then go home and make Kiddush.

“This was my practice for many years. Lately however, since I am getting older, I don’t have the strength to work as much binding seforim, and I slowly started running out of money. I don’t always have enough now to buy everything I need for Shabbos, but I still keep my minhag to go to shul at chatzos on Erev Shabbos. This past Friday was especially difficult. I had no money left over from the week to buy anything for Shabbos. When chatzos came, I told my wife that I was going to go to shul as always, but I made her promise not to go to the neighbors to borrow anything for Shabbos—no oil for lighting candles, no food or wine or challah.

“I did this because as Chazal say, it is better to make Shabbos like a weekday, than have to borrow from people. I went to shul as usual and learned and davened, knowing that my house was dark and empty of anything for Shabbos. After Maariv, when I was walking home and getting close to my house, I noticed that there was bright light coming from the windows of my house! ‘How could this be?’ I wondered, we didn’t have money this week to buy oil or candles. I thought that my wife certainly must have broken her promise, and gone to the neighbors to borrow candles. When I went inside, I saw the table set beautifully, with fresh challos and the whole house smelled of delicious food! I got very upset, because I had told my wife to promise me that she wouldn’t borrow anything, and she didn’t keep her word!

“I decided though, that since it was Shabbos I was not going to say anything so as not to cause any arguments. I just started to happily sing Shalom Aleichem and Eishes Chayil. When my wife handed me the wine for Kiddush, however, I couldn’t control myself anymore, and I had to ask her why she broke her promise. My wife told me that she didn’t break any promises. She said that after I left for shul, she had nothing to do. There was no food to prepare and the house was clean, so she decided that instead of wasting time, she would fold some old clothes from the storage chest.

“While working, she found one of my old coats that I hadn’t worn in many years, and she noticed that the buttons were made of pure gold! She quickly cut them off and took them to the market where she sold them for a small fortune! She hurried and bought every item and delicacy that we would need for Shabbos, and rushed home to prepare everything!

“When I heard this story, I rejoiced in my heart and said Kiddush with great simchah! My wife served fish and I told her how lucky we were to have such a brachah from Hashem that He saved us from poverty! In our joy, we both got up and danced like a chosson and kallah on the day of their chuppah! After that we sat down and ate soup and meat and other delicious foods. Because of our great happiness, we started dancing again until we got tired! Then we ate all types of fruits and desserts and got up and danced a third time! We were so thankful to Hashem and by dancing we could show Him our simchah for saving us!”

At this point the Baal Shem Tov said to everyone listening, “Every time Reb Shabsi and his wife danced at the Shabbos night seudah, the Malachei HaShareis also danced in Shamayim! This was what delighted me and made me smile and laugh three times during the seudah! The Baal Shem Tov asked Reb Shabsi, “What can I bentch you with? Would you like a brachah that you live the rest of your days not lacking anything ever again, or would you like a brachah to have a child?”

Reb Shabsi answered, “I never had any children, Rebbe. Please give me and my wife a brachah to have a child.”

The Baal Shem Tov agreed, and said that by this time next year, Reb Shabsi and his wife would have a son, and he would like to attend the bris! And so it was! The next year Reb Shabsi and his wife had a baby boy! They invited Rebbe Yisroel Baal Shem Tov to come to the bris, where they named the baby Yisroel— the name of the Rebbe who gave them the brachah. This child grew up to be a great talmid chacham, and eventually wrote the sefer called ‘Avodas Yisroel’. This child was none other than the famed Kosnitzer Maggid! (Devarim Niflaim al Shabbos Kodsheinu, p. 105)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sara email of “Torah U’Tefillah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Miser's Slippers**

**By**[**Shoshannah Brombacher**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/8749/jewish/Shoshannah-Brombacher.htm)

In a town lived a very rich miser. Every time the local rabbi came to his door to collect funds for the poor, the miser would invite the rabbi in, offer the rabbi a glass of tea and talk about his business. When the rabbi started talking about the plight of the poor people in winter, the miser would brush him off and tell him that poor people like to complain--it wasn't all as bad as the rabbi thought. In any case, he had no cash in the house at the moment, and couldn't give anything right now. Could the rabbi come back another time? The miser would then escort the rabbi to the door, go back to his warm and comfortable room and settle down in his favorite chair near the fireplace, very pleased with himself.

But the rabbi was not pleased. The poor had no money for food or for wood for their stoves and they were cold and hungry.

One evening, the rabbi knocked on the rich miser's door. It was a cold and miserable night, snow and sleet blew through the deserted streets. The miser asked the rabbi in, as usual. But the rabbi refused. "'No," he said, "I won't be long." And then he inquired after the miser's health, and after the health of his family, and asked him about his business, and spoke about affairs of the community for a long time.

The miser could not send the rabbi away, of course; he had opened the door for him himself. But he was getting quite uncomfortable. He had come to the door in his slippers and skullcap, dressed in a thin shirt and his house pants. The rabbi, wearing a warm coat with a fur lining, his biggest *shtraymel* covering his ears and heavy winter boots encasing his feet and legs, talked on and on. No, he didn't want to come in. No, really, he was on his way. The miser's toes became ice and stone.

Suddenly the miser understood. "Oh, Rabbi!" he cried. "Those poor people with no warm clothes or firewood for winter... I never knew. I never imagined it could be like this. This is miserable. It is horrible. I never knew, honestly! Something must be done!" He went into the house and returned with a purse full of gold coins. He wanted to go back to his fireplace as soon as he could. He needed hot tea.

The rabbi thanked him and took the money. He, too, was cold after that long talk, but he didn't mind. The poor people would have a good winter this year.

The miser changed his ways that night. He became a regular contributor to the rabbi's funds for the poor, for poor brides, for poor students, for Passover rmoney and for many other causes. He had learned a good lesson that night.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**A Poshute Yid**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Bloom**

Avrohom Zilberstein is a Shmittah-observant farmer. At the recent Agudah convention, he introduced himself to Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky as “a poshute Yid.” Reb Shmuel responded, “There is no such thing as a ‘poshute Yid.’ Every Yid, by definition, is very special.”

Gedolei hador have special insight. Let me share with you the story of Avrohom Zilberstein.



**Avrohom Zilberstein**

Avrohom was born in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, in 1945. His father was a Holocaust refugee from Lodz, Poland. His mother was from Odessa. Yiddish was his mama lashon. In 1948, his parents emigrated to Eretz Yisroel, where his father fought in the War of Independence.

His parents, who had lost all their relatives in the war, had given up on Torah and mitzvos. The only Jewish topic they spoke about was the Holocaust. Avrohom left home at the age of 13 and literally lived on the streets. Eventually, he joined the army and fought in the Six Day War.

Avrohom vividly recollects hearing, on his radio, Mordechai Gur, commander of the 55th paratrooper brigade, announce, “Har Habayit beyodeinu - The Temple Mount is in our hands!” When Avrohom heard those words, he went to the area of the Kosel. He was looking for it and couldn’t find it. There was no plaza in front of the Kosel as there is today. There were houses all the way to the Kosel and only a narrow path in front of it.

Avrohom asked someone where the Kosel was and was told that he was standing in front of it. He looked up as far as his eyes could see and imagined that the Kosel rose to the heavens. At that point, something came over him. Avrohom felt as if the Shechinah was coming over him. Then and there, he decided that he wanted to actually live like a Jew and not just be a Jew in name alone. Avrohom decided at that moment that from then on, he would keep Shabbos and kashrus.

Avrohom was blessed with a wonderful Yerushalmi wife and together they began building a home based on Shabbos and kashrus. He decided that he wanted to help build Eretz Yisroel. Avrohom became a farmer in the settlements and was influential in building four communities on the West Bank, the latest being Vered Yericho in the shadow of Arab-settled Yericho.

There was one particular Shabbos, however, that made a major difference in Avrohom’s life. He had put his onions out to dry before so they could be ready to take to market. Almost out of nowhere, a cloudburst erupted and there was a major rainstorm. All his neighbors ran to cover their onions with plastic. Avrohom looked at his wife and they said to each other, “We have decided to keep Shabbos. Whatever happens to the onions will happen.”

On Sunday morning, Avrohom went out to the field and witnessed his neighbors crying hysterically. The temperature had risen. It was over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. All the onions lying under the plastic had become rotten in the moisture that was trapped beneath the sheathing. His onions had dried in the extreme heat and were saved. At that point, Avrohom and his wife decided that they would go full steam ahead and keep all the mitzvos hateluyos ba’aretz, including Shmittah.

After they reached that decision, Avrohom was diagnosed with lung and liver cancer. The doctors gave him three months to live. It was before a Shmittah year and Avrohom said that he wanted to at least keep his first Shmittah. With the help of Hakadosh Boruch Hu, he will now be keeping his fifth Shmittah.

It didn’t go smoothly, though. Each Shmittah, Avrohom has had a life-threatening crisis that Hashem has helped him through. One Shmittah, he caught a deadly virus and the doctors had gathered his family together. They didn’t expect him to live out the day. He did.

Another Shmittah, Avrohom had an accident with his tractor that left him inches from death. Avrohom recovered to see yet another Shmittah.

During Shmittah years, Avrohom works as a mashgiach for a kashrus agency to make sure that the Arab produce that is purchased is not really produce that was grown by Jews and then “laundered” into Arab hands. Avrohom actually caught an Arab who was dealing in millions of dollars of produce doing just that. When the Arab realized that he was caught, he tried to hand Avrohom an envelope filled with cash. Avrohom refused it and reported it to his kashrus agency and to the other kashrus agencies, so that they wouldn’t fall into the same trap. Avrohom got into his car and started driving away. The Arab had put nails on the road and Avrohom got four flat tires and the car rolled into a ditch.

Avrohom walked away with minor injuries. He was standing on the side of the road, looking at his car and smiling, when someone asked him how he can be so inconsiderate.

“The dead driver is lying in the ditch and you stand here and smile?” he was asked.

“Excuse me,” was his response. “I am the ‘dead driver.’”

Last Shmittah, Avrohom was in such a difficult situation that he didn’t know where he would get bread for his family. The grant that he had received from Keren Hashviis was so helpful and he was able to get back on his feet. He is now supporting his children, who are learning in kollel in Mir, Chevron and Slabodka.

If you are getting the impression that this is a special Jew, then let me tell you that when his wife was offered a ticket to come to America to join her husband at the Agudah Convention, she asked that we take the money that we would have spent on her trip and give it to kollel yungeleit in Kiryat Sofer.

I considered it a special zechus to spend the three days of the Agudah Convention with this “poshute Yid.”

*Reprinted from the November 26, 2014 edition of the Yated N’eman*

**Story#887**

**Coming Back to Earth**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

During the Third Meal of Shabbat, towards the close of the holy day, the chasidim of **Rabbi Yitzchak-Aizik of Zhiditchov** would sit in an awed silence as the *tzadik* sang soul stirring melodies and expounded deep mystical words of Torah. A profound yearning for improvement and increased spirituality would engulf them, once to such an extent that the morning following such a Shabbat, none of the visiting businessman who had participated wanted to leave. In the state in which the Rebbe left them, it did not make sense to them that they should now be returning to their mundane affairs.

Not knowing this, the *tzadik* asked his sons why no one has left yet. They went to investigate, and were told, "Only yesterday our Rebbe has made all the things of this world so unworthy in our eyes, that we are ashamed to face him with our problems about our animals and our businesses."

Hearing this, the *tzadik* smiled and related that a similar occurrence had once happened with the *tzadik* Rabbi Menachem-Mendel of Riminov, and he had told his chasidim, "Shabbos is one thing; weekdays are something different. Let the businessmen return to their homes and engage honestly in their commerce." Reb Yitzchad Aizik then quoted the words of Psalms (115:16), "The heavens belong to G-d, but the earth He has given to man [to labor]."

Hearing this message from their Rebbe, each chasid folded up his talit, packed his bags, and returned home to his daily affairs.

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from L'maan Yishma'u #71.

Biographical notes: **Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Zhidachov** (1804 - 30 Adar A, 1872) was descendent of the Tosfos Yomtov and the nephew and successor of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch of Zhidachov. He was a major scholar as well as a Chasidic rebbe, who authored commentaries on Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah. His thousands of followers included some of the leading scholars and rabbis of the generation. His four sons were all considered tsadikim, including the first rebbe of the Komarna dynasty.

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov** [of blessed memory: ?-19 Iyar 5575 (? - 1815 C.E.)],.was an important Rebbe in the third generation of chasidism. He was a main disciple of the Rebbe Elimelech, and many rebbes of the succeeding generation studied with him. His teachings are collected in Menachem Zion and other works.

Connection: Weekly Reading--*"Yaakov halach l'darko"* (32:2), a hint to involvement in the world.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) *ascent@ascentofsafed.com*

**A Slice of Life**

**Those Mysterious Squiggles**

**By Miriam Karp**

**Excerpted from “Painting Zaidy’s Dream”**



One day, the Chabad Rebbetzin at the University of Michigan, Esther Goldstein, asked if I'd like to learn to read Hebrew. Me?

Sounded intimidating. Sounded interesting. Dad had tried to teach me a few times over the years. We learned the first two letters, alef and bet. But we never got further with those mysterious squiggles.

Here were letters again. But now they were more relevant to my life. Why not, I figured, might as well try. It seemed to be one of those things people did when they were seriously thinking of getting serious about their Judaism.

So Esther gathered a group around her table one Tuesday afternoon. We worked haltingly, embarrassed in our fumbling efforts, but she encouraged and we persisted. A new world slowly began to open up, of sounds, images, and nuanced rich meaning that I never would have experienced the same way in English.

Those letters, those letters...

Little squiggles, swirls and crowns, ascending up, dipping below.

What about them was so powerful, so evocative; that grabbed hold of me and wouldn't let go? Those letters, dots, and dashes seemed almost atomic, packed full of compressed and unleashed power.

Neshama letters, soul letters, souls in forms, souls on paper or parchment.

Marveling as its treasures shyly revealed themselves, like a sweet young bride would to her beloved, I struggled to court those letters, learn their shapes. Esther's young son whipped through the letters and vowels, then zoomed off reading with an easy laugh as I sat in the dust trying to put a sound together. That was humbling.

Some days my eyes and lips skipped smoothly through the verses, while on others, they were like lead. I felt learning disabled, disjointed, my tongue and mouth not quite making the right shape, my eyes seeing those jumping dots not quite right.

But I pushed and dragged through, sound by sound. Something compelling and magnetic beckoned. Loshon Hakodesh - the holy tongue. Those letters... those sounds.

You kind of know what they mean, way before you can explicitly translate them. The black shapes whisper to your eyes, the sounds whisper to your ears; they tickle your soul. There's a gleaning and absorbing, even if you don't know what many of the words mean.

These Hebrew jewels slowly became part of my vocabulary. How, when did I start spouting these terms? When I had to go back to English - just fell flat. I heard the emptiness, the hard edge and sterility of the English word that came the closest but was still so off the mark.

Bracha - blessing. Chessed - kindness. Rachmanut... pity. The English was a sad approximation. I was hungry to uncover more of these jewels.

What must it be like to pick up a prayer book, Psalms, a holy Jewish book written in Hebrew, and read them with fluency?

As I sat at Esther's table slowly spitting out vowel-and-letter syllables, going over and over to commit those little shapes to memory, time slowed.

I built up, one halting sentence after another. Read one blessing. Then one fine day, I got to the point where I could try reading the whole first paragraph of bentching, the lengthy blessing after eating bread.

After most foods I had learned to say a short after-blessing thanking G-d for the sustenance. But bread was a special food, the staff of life. It required more. A lot more. There was a multi-paged liturgy, full of meaning.

After a few weeks I'd learned alef, bet, gimmel, daled - all 22 letters - the twelve vowels, and worked up to stringing together one, two, even three syllable words. I decided to be bold, and to plow through reading the whole first paragraph of the bentching.



I was alone at the Arboretum on a balmy summer day, sitting by a stream, my bike resting on a rock. I took my brand-new prayer book out of my backpack, and carefully pronounced (and tried not to butcher) one precious sound after another. Some ten minutes later, I finished, savoring the feeling of accomplishment and connection.

Several weeks later I decided to attempt the whole prayer. I was sitting at the Shabbat table after lunch. The Goldstein children had flown through the Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals), and ran off to play.

Shabbat afternoon after the meal was a golden, relaxed time; sweetness redolent in the air. Folks pushed back from the abundant food and conversation and wandered off for a chat or nap.

For what felt like an interminable time I sat alone at that table reading the Birkat Hamazon. I stumbled and mumbled and finally finished some 30 minutes later. A friend smiled and commented, "Before you know it, you'll be whizzing through it"

That day came to pass soon enough, when I could casually whip off the words with the best of them.

But that struggle wasn't all pain. The hidden depth of those letters was whispering to me the whole time, singing and encouraging. Like practicing piano, sitting there was a labor, yet the joy of the sounds good company and pleasure along the way. And these sounds were building a path into that hidden world, one letter, one syllable, one word at a time.

Painting Zaidy's Dream was the winner of 2013 American Jewish Press Association Simon Rockower Award: First Place for Excellence in Writing About Women.

*Reprinted from the recent Parshas Toldos edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization of Brooklyn, NY.*

Tales of the Gaonim

**The Greatest Charity of All**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

There was a drought in *Eretz Yisrael* and the people prayed to G-d for rain, but none came. The sages fasted and still no rain. But that night they had a dream, a *malach* stood in front of them and said, “Your prayers will not be answered by G-d, but the prayers of the mule driver, who resides at the outskirts of your city, his prayers will be heard.”

That morning, the sages checked with each other and they found that they all had the same dream. “It must be true if we all had the same dream,” they said. “Let us visit the mule driver and see what wonderful attributes he may have.”

That day, the sages visited the mule driver and after greeting him, they asked him what his occupation was.

“I rent my mule to serve as a beast of burden to pull a plow and do other menial work on the field,” the man replied.

“We do not see your mule. Where is it?” they asked him.

“I have sold it,” he replied.

The rabbis were amazed at his answer. Why would such a man sell his mule, his only visible means of support? And even if he did, why should it be considered so great in the eyes of G-d that if he were to pray, G-d would immediately hearken to his pleas.

**The Explanation**

“Tell us, what wonderful thing did you do?” they asked him.

“I do nothing worthwhile,” he modestly replied and refused to discuss any of his deeds. For the man was a very modest and humble person. But the rabbis persisted until he agreed to tell them the good deed he had performed.

“As you know, I rent my mule to people,” he began his story. “The money derived through this rental enables me to support my family. One day, a woman came to me to rent my mule. She gave me the few coins I normally charge for its hire.

“But as she turned away, leading the animal behind her, I heard her sob. I walked over to her and asked why she was crying.

“She turned to me, and in bitter tears said, ‘Woe is to me, my husband is sitting in jail for an unpaid debt and I don’t have the funds to redeem him. I thought that I would hire your mule to plough and plant the ground behind my house and when the wheat grows I would sell it and with these funds redeem my husband.’

“‘And what will you do if the wheat does not grow soon, or if it be a drought and none will grow at all?’ I asked her.

“‘If the ground fails to produce I will then go to the jail keeper and offer my body to him to release my husband,’ she replied.

“I was surprised at her answer. ‘You would commit such a terrible sin?’ I asked her in surprise.

“She then began to sob uncontrollably. ‘My husband is in jail and my children are starving and I am at my wits end. I’ll do anything.’ She began to cry bitter tears.”

**Sells His Mule**

With a sigh, the mule keeper continued his story. “When I heard of the terrible deed this woman was going to commit, I took pity on her. I invited the woman into my home. ‘Stay here until I return from the market place,’ I said to her. ‘I will secure for you the money to redeem your husband.’

“I then took the mule with me to the market place and I sold it to the highest bidder. Although this was a great sacrifice for me to lose my means of support, I never hesitated. I took this money and returned home and gave it to the poor woman, saying to her, ‘Here is enough money to free your husband from jail and may G-d bless you that you may never again know any trouble.’

“The woman fell at my feet, kissing my shoes, and crying in appreciation, and she then departed, happier than she had ever been in her life. That is my story, O masters.”

**Merits G-d’s Mercy**

“How do you support yourself now,” they asked him.

“It is not easy,” he replied. “But I hire myself out as a laborer to work on other people’s fields. I work long hours to make up for the money I would have earned through my mule.”

When the sages heard this they were awed by the story told by this simple man. “You are worthy that G-d should always listen to your prayers and we are worthy to have had the honor to know you. May the merit of your wonderful deed protect all Israel from famine.”

**Pleading To the Father**

Once, when there was a drought in Israel, the sages wanted Hanan, the son of Choni’s daughter to pray on their behalf. They knew him to be a saint, but he was so modest and meek that he would hide when they approached him for help. He reasoned that by relying upon him to pray, they would neglect to repent or pray themselves. He, therefore, refused to help them.

When Hanan refused to pray, the people became worried. The drought was fast giving way to a famine and still he would not help them. When the rabbis saw this terrible predicament, they went to the schools and addressed the children. “We want to tell you, dear children, that we may soon die of thirst and hunger, unless we receive rain. There is only one person who can help us, and that is Hanan. Therefore, go to him and ask him for rain.”

The little children, hearing these instructions, went to Hanan and began pulling at the tails of his robe, saying, “O father, father, please give us rain.”

Touched by the pleas of the little children, Hanan prayed to the Holy One, blessed be His Name, “Master of the Universe, please cause rain to fall for the sake of these little children who do not know the difference between the Father who is able to give rain and the father who is unable to give rain.”

G-d listened to Hanan’s prayer and rain descended in abundance upon the earth and all the people enjoyed themselves and blessed G-d.

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