**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Miketz Chanukah 5773**

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**Love of the Land**

**A Groom to the Rescue**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

 Years before they had the opportunity of praying at the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov in the Ukrainian city of Uman, the Breslover Chassidim in Eretz Yisrael would gather on Rosh Hashana at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron.

 For 62 years the Jew who led the services was a Rabbi Kalmanovitz from Yerushalayim. His grandson, Rabbi Yisrael Gellis, relates a fascinating story about how he merited such a long life.

 As a young man his grandfather and other hungry youths seized every opportunity to participate in a wedding where they could enjoy some of the food. At one particular wedding the *chatan* failed to show up. It turned out that he had discovered something about the *kallah* which he had not been aware of and felt he had been duped.

**A Cry for Pity on a Jewish Daughter!**

 The rav of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Shmuel Salant, who had been invited to serve as *mesader kiddushin*, turned to the young men surrounding him and cried:

 “Have pity on a Jewish daughter! We cannot allow a Jewish daughter to suffer such shame! I promise any one of you who agrees to marry her that he will live a long life and see great-great-grandchildren!”

 In those days when famine and disease cut short so many lives, such a blessing was not taken lightly. The young Kalmanovitz agreed to marry the abandoned *kallah* and together they built a happy, wholesome family and lived to see great-great-grandchildren.

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

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| **Grant's Greatest Regret****By Jeff Jacoby** | Jeff Jacoby |

 In the American experience, anti-Semitic decrees have been virtually unthinkable. Religious liberty is enshrined in the Constitution, and early in his presidency George Washington went out of his way to [assure the young nation's Jews](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/bigotry.html) that "the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

 During the long centuries of Jewish exile, powerful officials had often promulgated sweeping edicts depriving Jews of their rights or driving them from their homes. In America, that could never happen.

 But 150 years ago this month, it did.

**Shared a Terribly Crude Stereotype of All Jews**

 In December 1862, with the Civil War raging, the Union Army's efforts to control the movement of Southern cotton was bedeviled by illegal speculation and black marketeers. Like many of his contemporaries, Major General Ulysses S. Grant then commanding a vast geographic swath called the Department of the Tennessee shared a crude stereotype of all Jews as avaricious, corner-cutting swindlers.

 That ugly prejudice boiled over in [General Orders No. 11](http://www.geschichteinchronologie.ch/USA/EncJud_juden-in-USA-d/EncJud_USA-band15-kolonne1651-Grant-befehl-u-ruecknahme-v-Lincoln.jpg), the most infamous anti-Semitic injunction in American history: "The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from this department within 24 hours from the receipt of this order."

 The region commanded by Grant was home to several thousand Jews (including men in uniform serving under him). Fortunately, General Orders No. 11 had little direct impact on most of them. Jews were driven out of Paducah, Ky., and some towns in Mississippi and Tennessee, and there were accounts of Jewish travelers being imprisoned and roughed up. But a breakdown in military communications slowed the spread of Grant's directive, and at least some officers had qualms about enforcing it. Brigadier General Jeremiah C. Sullivan, the Union commander of Jackson, Tenn., commented tartly that "he thought he was an officer of the Army and not of a church."

 What stopped the expulsion order cold, however, was the commander-in-chief. When word of Grant's edict reached President Lincoln on January 3, 1863, he immediately countermanded it. "To condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad," the president declared. "I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners."

 End of the story? In some ways it was just the beginning.



 As historian Jonathan Sarna relates in a recent book, When General Grant Expelled the Jews, Grant's order did his military career no harm. Within a few years he was commander of all Union armies and the Confederate surrender at Appomattox made him a national hero. He was elected president in 1868, and re-elected four years later.

 Yet for the rest of his life, Grant was ashamed of having attempted to evict "Jews as a class" for offenses most of them had never committed. "What his wife, Julia, called 'that obnoxious order' continued to haunt Grant up to his death," Sarna writes. "The sense that in expelling them he had failed to live up to his own high standards of behavior, and to the Constitution that he had sworn to uphold, gnawed at him. He apologized for the order publicly and repented of it privately."

The First “Jewish Issue” in a Presidential Campaign

 Not surprisingly, Grant's order got a good deal of attention in the 1868 presidential campaign the first time a "Jewish issue" played a role in presidential politics. Grant didn't deny that General Orders No. 11 had grossly violated core American values. "I do not sustain that order," he wrote humbly. "It would never have been issued if it had not been telegraphed the moment it was penned, and without reflection."

 But it was as president that the full extent of Grant's regret became clear. He opposed a movement to make the United States an explicitly Christian state through a constitutional amendment designating Jesus as "Ruler among the nations." He named more Jews to government office than any of his predecessors including to positions, such as governor of the Washington Territory, previously considered too lofty for a Jewish nominee.

 Grant became the first American president to openly speak out against the persecution of Jews abroad. In response to anti-Jewish pogroms in Romania, he took the unprecedented step of sending a Jewish consul-general to Bucharest to "work for the benefit of the people who are laboring under severe oppression." All in all, the eight years of Grant's presidency proved to be a "golden age" in US Jewish history. When he died in 1885, he was mourned in synagogues nationwide.

 It was a remarkable saga of atonement. From scourge of the Jews to their great friend in Washington; from the general who trampled Jewish liberty to the president who made protection of their rights a priority. Only in America.

*Reprinted from the December 6, 2012 email of JewishWorldReview.com Mr. Jeff Jacoby is a columnist for the Boston Globe where the article originally appeared.*

**Whiter Than Milk**

**By Rabbi O. Alport**

 Rabbi Shalom Schwadron points out that the entire miraculous unfolding of events in the upcoming Torah portions is entirely predicated on one chance encounter. The accurate interpretation by Yosef of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker in prison set in motion a chain of events which altered the course of Jewish history.

 It led to Yosef's release from jail, his appointment as second-in-command in Egypt, the fulfillment of his dreams about his family bowing down to him, his emotional reunion with his brothers and eventually his father, and the descent of the Jewish people to Egypt where they were ultimately enslaved by Pharaoh and redeemed by Moshe.
 However, the pivotal episode of Yosef interpreting their dreams wouldn't have even occurred were it not for one seemingly trivial exchange. Yosef woke up one morning and noticed that his fellow prisoners appeared aggrieved and upset. He chose to initiate a conversation which would literally change the future of all mankind, asking them quite simply, "What's wrong?" (Gen. 40:6-7)

 The Alter of Slabodka once gave a discourse on the topic of greeting others kindly and showing an interest in their welfare. He noted that if a person stood next to the synagogue door and poured a glass of milk for each person who passed by, everybody would rightfully declare him to be a person who does great acts of kindness. However, the Talmud (Ketubot 111b) derives from Genesis 49:12 that showing another person the white of one's teeth with a warm smile is an even greater act of kindness than giving him milk.

 So often, we pass somebody who looks like he could use a kind word, a warm smile, and a little extra attention, yet the evil inclination discourages us from stopping to waste our valuable time on such inconsequential matters. The next time this happens, which will likely be tomorrow, we should remember the lesson of Yosef that nothing that a person does is ever minor, and one has no idea what cosmic chain of events he could set in motion with just a few "trivial" words.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting.*

**Reflections on Jewish**

**Unity and Jerusalem**

**By David Bibi**

 Every once in a while we have the sliver of hope that there really can be unity among the Jewish people. Over the course of the last month, we’ve worked with everyone to assist people hurt by the flood. We’ve been doing projects in Long Beach for the first time in as long as I can remember and inviting, the Modern Orthodox, The Sephardim, The Yeshivaish, The Chabad, The Conservative and The Reform to join us. We’ve seen funding from the left leaning liberals to the right most conservatives. And its really been the silver lining in this dark cloud.

**Rarely Getting Along for More than a Nanosecond**

 But Jews rarely get along for more than a nanosecond. And just around the time we read about the brothers selling Joseph and the disunity that led to our slavery in Egypt, we see the same disunity raise its ugly head.

 A large liberal Synagogue on the Upper West Side sent out this note: “The vote at the U.N. yesterday is a great moment for us as citizens of the world,” said the e-mail, which was sent to all congregants. “This is an opportunity to celebrate the process that allows a nation to come forward and ask for recognition.”

 They want to celebrate what Israel and The US states is a travesty?

And it only gets worse. With the announcement that Israel wishes to build 3000 new homes between Jerusalem and Maaleh Adumim, the world turned against Israel including a very vocal and liberal Jewish voice.

**Brainwashed by the Media Barrage**

 I think people are so brainwashed by the media barrage and words such as “Palestinian Territory” and “illegal settlements” and “retaliatory behavior by Israel”. We hear again and again how horrible Netanyahu is and we begin to believe what is repeated and we join the chorus of critics. We end up agreeing with the New York Times that American Jews no longer back Israel. We fulfill CNN’s prophecy. We battle each other often ignorant of the facts.

 Nir Barkat is the mayor of Jerusalem and I found his recent comments very interesting in light of my experience with our own mayor Bloomberg a few weeks ago.

 It was right after Sandy and the streets of Far Rockaway as in much of Long Island and areas along the shore were pitch black. There was looting and the danger that comes with it especially when help was not easy to call as cell phones had no service. Knowing that Friday night presented additional problems, we met with The National Guard. They offered to send patrols to watch and protect the area. They had the vehicles. They had the soldiers. They had the communications.

**Unable to Get Permission from the Mayor’s Office**

 But what they didn’t have and what we couldn’t get was permission from the Bloomberg administration to put soldiers on the ground. The city insisted that the local police could handle it. Any mayor wants to think that he knows what’s best for his city and more times than not they do.

 Speaking in Herzliya at a conference on the subject of affordable housing, Mayor Nir Barkat told the audience: “We need to connect the E1 area to Jerusalem without any reservations at all, even with the world pressuring us not to do so. I certainly back the prime minister’s position on this. I don’t know of any city in the world whose regulator is the U.S. president.” reported Rachel Hirshfeld.

 Reacting to Israel’s new construction plans, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “Let me reiterate that this administration—like previous administrations—has been very clear with Israel that these activities set back the cause of a negotiated peace.”

**Surprised by the Overtly Negative and**

**Hostile Reaction of European Nations**

 Barkat said he was surprised by the overtly negative and hostile reaction of European countries, including Britain, France, Sweden, Denmark and Spain, summoned the Israeli ambassadors in their respective capitals to protest the plans.

 “When the world talks about a freeze in Jerusalem, I ask, a freeze on what? On the billions we invest in east Jerusalem? Should we stop construction for Arabs, Christians or Jews? Or does someone mean that when an entrepreneur approaches me, I should, heaven forbid, ask him what religion he subscribes to so he can receive a permit to build in Jerusalem? That would be horrendous and it negates even U.S. law,” he said.

 On Tuesday, government secretary Tzvi Hauser responded to the international criticism.

 “If someone thinks that Israel will avoid building in neighborhoods in its capital city due to reprimands or pressure, that person does not fully grasp Israel’s interests in the region,” he told Kol Yisrael radio. “We are not talking about a little stone in the desert. We are talking about Jerusalem."

 It’s understandable that being barraged by the media, people may not see the complete picture. It’s important that we help.

**Seeing the True Picture**

 After all, the brothers only see the true picture when Joseph reveals himself (in a couple of weeks) and states, I am Joseph. Had someone been around to help them get the rest of the story they might have acted differently and that would have changed the history of the world.

 Take a look at the following letter I saw submitted to the British Foreign Secretary by Mindy Weisenberg, a woman I believe is or was the director of Emunah in Britain.

 Dear Mr Hague. You have stated that if Israel tries to defend its population through a ground offensive in Gaza ‘it risks losing the sympathy of the international community.’ Let me tell you something about the sympathy of the international community Mr Hague.

**Always Plenty of Sympathy for Victims**

 My father was liberated from Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945, having lost his entire family but gaining the sympathy of the international community at the time. After 6 million Jews had been annihilated at the hands of the Nazi regime, the international community had plenty of sympathy for the Jewish people. There is always plenty of sympathy for victims.

 Israel doesn’t need the sympathy of the international community. What it needs is to defend its citizens. When as a tiny country it gained its independence in 1948 it had to absorb 800,000 Jews who were thrown out of Arab lands in the Middle East, and it did so without fuss and with dignity giving them shelter and a place of security in which their children could grow up to become productive citizens.

 When Jordan, Egypt and Syria tried to destroy Israel in 1948 and again in 1967 they took in hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs, but did they give them dignity or shelter? No they left them to rot in refugee camps in order to maintain a symbol of grievance against Israel and use them as a political tool against the Jewish state. What has arisen in those camps is a complicated situation, but it is what has led to Gaza today.

 So don’t lecture Israel on international sympathy Mr Hague.

 Not when Israel has just sent in 120 truck loads of food into Gaza to feed the Palestinian people there, because their own leadership is more interested in using its population as human shields, launching rockets against Israel from within major civilian centres.

 Don’t lecture Israel on international sympathy Mr Hague.Not when Israel targets with as much military precision as it can, only terrorists and their bases, trying its utmost to prevent civilian casualties.

**“Don’t Lecture Israel”**

 Don’t lecture Israel on international sympathy Mr Hague. Not when the Palestinian media deliberately uses images of victims of the Syrian civil war and presents them as casualties in Gaza to gain international sympathy.

 Go read your history books Mr Hague, go see that since the beginning of the twentieth century all the Arabs wanted to do was destroy Israel. Go look at the country of Israel now since the Jews have established a state there. Go read what advances in science, medicine, biotechnology, agriculture, high tech Israel has developed, and dedicated that knowledge to making the world a better place for humanity. Can you imagine any other country that after 60 years of continuously being under attack could have achieved so much.

 So Mr Hague don’t lecture Israel on international sympathy.

 Israel will do whatever it takes to defend itself from outright attack on its citizens, whether it be from Hamas, Hizbollah, Iran or any other country or terrorist group that attacks it.

 And if it loses the sympathy of the international community so be it. We don’t need the international community’s sympathy. We don’t need another 6 million victims.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**What's New**

**First Mivka Dedicated**

**In Vietnam**

 An historic first for Vietnam was the recent dedication of the country's first mikva in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). The mikva is in the Chabad House, a three-story, 3,800 square foot building on a busy street in the most populous section of the city.

 The Chabad House also contains a kosher restaurant, classrooms, synagogue, library and offices. Chabad opened in Vietnam in 2006. The Chabad House is operated by Rabbi and Mrs. Meanchem and Rachel Hartman.

 To contact them, click [www.jewishvietnam.com](http://www.jewishvietnam.com) and then click at top the icon “contact us” in order to send emails with questions you might have regarding your next visit to Ho Chi Minh City.

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

**Yehudit: The Woman**

**Who Saved the Day**

 It is not clearly known when the story which we are about to tell actually took place. The story first appeared in a very ancient book named after the heroine, Yehudit (Judith), and it was written in Hebrew. However, the original text was lost, and only a Greek translation remained, and not a very accurate one at that.

 The story was retold in different versions. According to one version, it happened during the time of the Maccabean revolt against Syrian oppression, and Yehudit was a daughter of Yochanan the high priest, father of the Hasmonean family.

 At any rate, the heroic deed of Yehudit has inspired faith and courage in the hearts of Jews throughout the ages.

 The town of Bethulia, in the land of Judea, came under siege by Holofernes, a mighty Syrian-Greek general, at the head of a huge army.

Holofernes was notorious for his cruelty in suppressing rebellions. When he captured a rebel stronghold, he showed no mercy to the men, women and children sheltered there.

 Now he was determined to crush the rebellion of the town of Bethulia, whose inhabitants refused to recognize the oppressive rule of the Syrians.

The men of the beleaguered town fought bravely and desperately to repulse the repeated assaults by the superior enemy forces. Seeing that he couldn’t take the fortified town by force, Holofernes decided to starve the inhabitants into submission. He cut off the food and water supply, and before long the town was indeed brought to the verge of surrender.

 Hungry and thirsty, and in utter despair, the townspeople gathered in the marketplace and demanded that, rather than die of hunger and thirst, they should surrender to the enemy.

 Uzziah, the commander of the defense forces, and the elders of the town tried to calm the populace without success. Finally they pleaded, “Give us five more days. If no salvation comes by the end of five days, we will surrender. Just five more days . . .”

 Reluctantly the people agreed, and slowly they dispersed. Only one person, a woman, remained in her place, as if riveted to it, and she addressed Uzziah and the elders, who had also turned to go. Her voice was clear and firm.

 “Why do you test G‑d, giving Him only five days in which to send us His help? If you truly have faith in G‑d, you must never give up your trust in Him. Besides, don’t you know that surrender to Holofernes is worse than death?!”

 So spoke Yehudit, the noble daughter of Yochanan the high priest. She was a young widow. It was several years since she had lost her beloved husband, Menashe, and she had devoted all her time to prayer and acts of charity ever since.

 Yehudit was blessed with extraordinary charm, grace and beauty, but she was particularly respected and admired for her devoutness, modesty and lovingkindness.

 Yehudit’s words made a deep impression on Uzziah and the elders.

“You are quite right, daughter,” they admitted, “but what can we do? Only a downpour of rain that would fill our empty cisterns could save our people, but it is not the rainy season. We are all suffering the pangs of hunger and thirst. Pray for us, Yehudit, and maybe G‑d will accept your prayers . . .”

 “We must all continue to pray, and never despair of G‑d’s help,” Yehudit said. “But I have also thought of a plan. I ask your permission to leave town together with my maid. I want to go to Holofernes . . .”

 Uzziah and the elders were shocked and dismayed. “Do you know what you are saying, Yehudit? Would you sacrifice your life and honor on the slim chance that you might soften Holofernes’s heart? We cannot allow you to make such a sacrifice for us.”

 But Yehudit persisted. “It has happened before that G‑d sent His salvation through a woman. Yael, the wife of Heber, was her name, as you well know. It was into her hands that G‑d delivered the cruel Sisera . . .”

 Uzziah and the elders attempted to discourage Yehudit from such a dangerous mission, but she insisted that she be allowed to try. Finally, they agreed.

 Yehudit passed through the gates of Bethulia, dressed in her best clothes, which she had not worn since her husband passed away. A delicate veil all but hid her beautiful face. She was accompanied by her faithful maid, who carried on her head a basket filled with rolls, cheese and several bottles of old wine.

 The sun had already begun to hide behind the green mountains when Yehudit and her maid wound their way toward the enemy’s camp, their lips whispering a prayer to G‑d. Presently they were stopped by sentries, who demanded to know who they were and who sent them.

 “We have an important message for your commander, the brave Holofernes,” Yehudit said. “Take us to him at once.”

 “Who are you, and why are you here?” Holofernes asked, his eyes feasting on his unexpected, charming visitor.

 “I am but a plain widow from Bethulia. Yehudit is my name. I came to tell you how to capture the town, in the hope that you will deal mercifully with its inhabitants . . .”

 Yehudit then told Holofernes that life in the beleaguered town had become unbearable for her, and that she had bribed the watchmen to let her and her maid out. She went on to say that she had heard of Holofernes’s bravery and mighty deeds in battle, and wished to make his acquaintance. Finally she told Holofernes what he already knew, that the situation in the besieged town was desperate, that the inhabitants have very little food and water left. Yet, she said, their faith in G‑d remained strong, and so long as they had faith, they would not surrender.

 On the other hand, she added, before long, every scrap of kosher food would be gone, and in desperation they would begin to eat the flesh of unclean animals, and then G‑d’s anger would be turned against them, and the town would fall . . .

 “But how will I know when the defenders of the citadel will begin to eat unkosher food, as you say, so that I can then storm the walls and capture the city?” the commander of the besieging army asked.

 “I had thought of that,” Yehudit answered confidently. “I have arranged with the watchmen at the city’s gates that I would come to the gate every evening to exchange information: I will tell them what’s doing here, and they will tell me what’s doing there.”

 Holofernes was completely captivated by the charming young Jewish widow who had so unexpectedly entered his life and was now offering him the key to the city. “If you are telling me the truth, and will indeed help me capture the city, you will be my wife!” Holofernes promised. Then he gave orders that Yehudit and her maid were to have complete freedom to walk through the camp, and anyone attempting to molest them in any way would be put to death immediately. A comfortable tent was prepared for the two women, next to his.

 The two women, veiled and wrapped in their shawls, could now be seen walking leisurely through the armed camp at any time during the day and evening. Fearful of the commander’s strict orders, everyone gave them a wide berth. Soon, they attracted little if any attention. Yehudit could now walk up to the city’s gates after dark, where she was met by a watchman.

 “Tell Uzziah that, thank G‑d, everything is shaping up according to plan. With G‑d’s help, we shall prevail over our enemy. Keep your trust strong in G‑d; do not lose hope for a moment!”

 Having delivered this message for the commander of the defense force of the city, Yehudit departed as quietly as she had appeared.

 The following evening she came again to the city’s gate and repeated the same message, adding that she had won Holofernes’s complete confidence.

 In the meantime, Holofernes, having nothing special to do, spent most of his time drinking, with and without his aides. When he was not completely drunk, he would send for Yehudit. She always came to his tent in the company of her maid. On the third day, he was already getting impatient.

“Well, gracious Yehudit, what intelligence do you bring me today? My men are getting impatient and demoralized doing nothing; they cannot wait to capture the city and have their fun . . .”

 “I have very good news, general. There is not a scrap of kosher food left in the city now. In a day or two, famine will drive them to eat their cats and dogs and mules. Then G‑d will deliver them into your hands!”

 “Wonderful, wonderful! This surely calls for a celebration. Tonight we’ll have a party, just you and I. I shall expect you as my honored guest.”

 “Thank you, sir,” Yehudit said.

 That evening, when Yehudit entered Holofernes’s tent, the table was laden with various delicacies. The general was delighted to welcome her, and bade her partake of the feast. But Yehudit told him she had brought her own food and wine that she had prepared especially for that occasion.

 “My goat cheese is famous in all of Bethulia,” Yehudit said. “I’m sure you’ll like it, General.”

 He did. And he also liked the strong, undiluted wine she had brought. She fed him the cheese, chunk after chunk, and he washed it down with wine. Before long he was sprawled on the ground, dead drunk.

 Yehudit propped a pillow under his head and rolled him over on his face. Then she uttered a silent prayer.

 “Answer me, O L‑rd, as You answered Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, when you delivered the wicked general Sisera into her hands. Strengthen me this once, that I may bring Your deliverance to my people whom this cruel man vowed to destroy, and let the nations know that You have not forsaken us . . .”

 Now Yehudit unsheathed Holofernes’s heavy sword, and taking aim at his neck, she brought the sword down on it with all her might.

 For a moment she sat down to compose herself. Then she wrapped up the general’s head in rags, concealed it under her shawl, and calmly walked out and into her own tent.

 “Come quickly,” she said to her maid, “but let’s not arouse suspicion.”

 The two veiled women walked leisurely, as usual, until they reached the gates of the city. “Take me to Uzziah at once,” she said to the sentry.

 Uzziah could not believe his eyes as he stared at the gruesome prize Yehudit had brought him.

 “There is no time to lose,” she told the commander. “Prepare your men for a surprise attack at dawn. The enemy’s camp is not prepared for it. When they run to their commander’s tent, they will find his headless body, and they will flee for their lives . . .”

 This is precisely what happened.

 The enemy fled in confusion and terror, leaving much booty behind. It was a wonderful victory, and it was the G‑d-fearing and brave daughter of Yochanan the high priest, the father of the Hasmonean family, that saved the city of Bethulia and all its inhabitants.

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad.org*

Radio Prank Gone Wrong

Kate Middleton's Nurse and the Unpredictable Consequences of One’s Actions.

**By** [**Yvette Alt Miller**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=84110707)

 By now you’ve probably heard: Two radio hosts in Australia – pretending to be Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles – phoned the London hospital where Kate Middleton [the wife of Prince William] was recovering from hyperemesis gravidarum (“serious morning sickness”).

 Jacintha Saldanha, a 46-year-old nurse, was manning the hospital switchboard and connected them to a second gullible nurse who provided details of Kate's condition.

 As recordings of the prank call rocketed around the Internet, she surely felt like a laughing stock and a failure – “traumatized” according to hospital sources.

 Three days later, Jacintha committed suicide.

 In the days since there's been a torrent of criticism directed at the DJs, Mel Greig and Michael Christian. Their radio station issued an abject apology and suspended the pair indefinitely.

 The opprobrium seems logical, but would we still be indignant if somehow Nurse Saldanha had not killed herself? What would we be saying if Mrs. Saldanha was still utterly miserable, embarrassed and depressed, but had stopped short of that dramatic suicidal step?

 If Mrs. Saldanha had never had her second, fatal, brush with fame, it's fair to say that most of the world would still be laughing over the improbable joke: a pair of goofy Australians, with terrible English accents, tricking a gullible nurse into divulging medical details on the air. After the hoax, one of the radio hosts said: "This is by far the best prank I've ever been involved in… it's definitely a career highlight."

 From [reality shows](http://www.aish.com/ci/w/48966656.html) to morning radio, laughing at someone else’s expense is a common guilty pleasure.

 Rhys Holleran, CEO of the radio station, defended the whole thing as a joke which never intended such an outcome. ”I think prank calls as a craft in radio have been going for decades... No one could have reasonably foreseen what ended up being an incredibly tragic day.”

 Holleran also emphasized that the station had done nothing illegal.

 But that’s surely not the point. Whether TV shows with hidden cameras or any comedy aimed at embarrassing others, the media has frequently overstepped its bounds. In its pursuit of sensationalism and big headlines, the media pushes the ethical envelope – and in some instances pushes way too far.

 Our decisions in life have to be based on more than just what’s technically legal or on “what we can get away with.”

**Time to Stop**

 The Torah has a lot say about this type of humor. Specifically, we are instructed not to startle people. We're not to [embarrass them](http://www.aish.com/h/hh/yom-kippur/stories/Other_Peoples_Tears.html). We're not to [speak negatively](http://www.aish.com/f/p/48936067.html) of others, even as part of a joke. We're not to laugh at others' expense. We're not to shame them.

 The Jewish people are known for their great sense of humor, but our Sages long ago realized that the temptation to make fun of others in search of a joke – while may be funny at the time – ultimately cheapens and degrades us.

 Humor reveals whether a person is refined or coarse.

 The Talmud teaches that humor is one of the essential ways we can know another person's nature. It's a window into their truest essence. It reveals whether a person is refined or coarse, and how sensitive they are to the needs and feelings of others.

 Here are four steps to start working on ourselves today.

 What do you find funny? Spend some time thinking about the jokes you tell and laugh at. What do they say about you? Do you routinely find yourself laughing at others' expense?

 Drop the sarcasm. It's destructive and tears people – including the speaker – down.

 Avoid humor that alienates. It's easy to feel that celebrities or people on TV contests (remember “The Gong Show”?) are asking to be made fun of, but this prevents us from viewing others as real people, with real needs and feelings.

 You never know. The Talmud (Sotah 58b) compares one who humiliates another person to one who sheds their blood. People react differently to circumstances and they may not see the funny side of a prank. Sometimes people laugh along at jokes at their own expense, but humor can do lasting damage in the guise of fun.

 Further: Despair is not a Jewish concept. Situations often look hopeless, we see no way out – but circumstances can change. As bad as things might be, redemption may be right around the corner. And it often is.

 In the Kate Middleton case, there was a confluence of factors: a breakdown in hospital security, a vulnerable nurse, and a media more concerned with cheap “entertainment” than the adverse affect their actions may have on others. The result was a moral failing and, ultimately, disaster.

Those of us striving to be sensitive and caring should foreswear once and for all indulging in any form of toxic humor.

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

**How the Lights of Hanukah**

**Can Trump the Doctors**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

“*There was only enough to light one day; a miracle happened and it lit eight days*.” (Talmud Babli Shabbat 21:)

 One may ask, why is the miracle of the Hanukah oil so great? The Gemara tells us a story of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa . On a Friday afternoon, there was no olive oil and all they had was vinegar. The Rabbi declared , “The One who tells oil to light can tell vinegar to light!” Miraculously the vinegar lit for the entire Shabbat. Why don’t we celebrate that miracle?

 Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner zt”l answers that Rabbi Hanina be Dosa was a great saddik. All of his actions were with so much self-sacrifice that he lived a life above and beyond nature. Hashem always acts measure for measure with man. Since the Rabbi lived above nature in his relationship with Hashem, so did Hashem relate to him in a miraculous way, and the vinegar lit. The most amazing part of the miracle of Hanukah was that this was a miracle for all the Jews of that time. Therefore they must have all been on the spiritual level to merit such a miracle.

 One Hanukah, Rabbi Abraham Twersky visited an elderly friend, Lazer, who was quite ill in the hospital. Lazer was depressed, having received a poor prognosis from his doctors. Although the hospital forbade lighting any fire, Rabbi Twersky pleaded that Lazer be allowed to light the Hanukah candles. He assured the nurse that Lazer’s wife would remain with the candles as long as they burned. The hospital agreed, and Lazer was overjoyed.

 “Listen,” Lazer said, “the oil in the Bet Hamikdash could only burn naturally for one day, yet it burned for eight days. The doctors say I have only one year to live – but that’s according to nature. Hashem can turn one year into eight, or even more!”

 The doctors could not understand how Lazer actually survived another ten years without any treatments. The powerful radiance of the Hanukah candles were able to help him where the radiation therapy could not. Apparently, Lazer’s belief in Hashem was so great that he merited this great miracle. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

 The Midrash tells us that Pharaoh saw signs of kingship on Yosef, and when he interpreted the dreams correctly and suggested that Pharaoh appoint someone to lead the country Yosef was the obvious choice. What did Pharaoh see on Yosef that showed kingship?

 A king is someone who is concerned about his people. To rule others doesn’t only mean control and power, it means caring and doing for others. When Yosef was in jail and saw the butler and baker depressed because they had dreamt disturbing dreams, Yosef asked them what was bothering them and whether he could help. Even though Yosef was in trouble himself, he cared about their plight and did something about it. Later on when Yosef was appointed viceroy, he was in charge of feeding everyone during the famine. The Midrash says that Yosef would not eat until everyone else was fed first. This trait was evident on Yosef when he stood before Pharaoh, and that’s why he chose him as viceroy!

 We all have areas that we are in charge of, our families, or committees, or businesses. If we want to exhibit signs of leadership, it is how we can take care of those we are responsible for. The more we are concerned and devoted to others, the more we show signs of leadership!

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

**A Slice of Life**

**A CHANUKA MIRACLE:**

**Lighting the Menora in the**

**Buenaventura Mall**

**By Rabbi Yitzchok Sapochkinsky**

 He was still clutching the receiver of the telephone, his hands trembling, when I walked into the Chabad House in Westlake.

 "She was so nasty," the yeshiva student told me. "She said that if we go ahead with the menora lighting she'd burn a cross next to it!"

 "What did you tell her?" I questioned the young man, who was experiencing anti-semitism for the first time.

 "I said, 'Be my guest.' " But from the look on his face I could tell that he was quite shaken up.

 Agoura, the site of the menora in question, is the epitome of suburbia. With a 35% Jewish population, it was understandable why local shopkeepers and malls had posted "Happy Chanuka" signs alongside other holiday greetings. Yet, the woman was blaming Chabad for that, too. "Ever since you came along," she had yelled, "there's Jewish stuff all over the place."

 She threatened to organize a boycott of the stores that hosted "Chanuka at the Agoura Mall" and burn a 50-foot cross. We had to come up with the perfect solution, and Chanuka was less than two weeks away.

 That evening our minds were on other things, though. I was working together with some of the students from the Lubavitch yeshiva in Los Angeles who were helping us out on a special project. We were busy through the night constructing floats to lead a procession of cars welcoming a new Torah scroll to our Chabad House. At 4 a.m. we finally finished and the subject of Chanuka came up and with it a repeat of the phone conversation.

 "I know what," said one of the yeshiva students. "Doesn't the Rebbe encourage us to always add to our activities, especially in the face of adversity? Instead of lighting the menora only at the Agoura Mall, let's find another city and bring the message of Chanuka there, too."

 His simple yet sincere words made an impact on all of us. Choosing the city was easy. Two of the students present had scouted out the entire area the previous summer when they had gone to small Jewish communities throughout the San Fernando Valley organizing Jewish classes and activities for children and adults.

 "Ventura," they declared in unison, "Lots of Jews there but not much happening Jewishly."

 We trusted their judgement and the only remaining question was where in Ventura.

 "That mall," one of the students, Asher, recalled. "If I could only remember its name. It's the biggest mall in Ventura." Time was of the essence and I wasn't about to let this sudden burst of enthusiasm slip away.

I dialed 4-1-1. "Hello, operator. I need the number for the mall in Ventura."

 "Name of business," came the familiar reply.

 "I don't know, operator. But it's the biggest mall there," I added hopefully.

 "Hm, the Buenaventura Plaza?" she asked.

 I said the name out loud and the boys nodded in agreement. "That's it," I told her excitedly.

 "Please hold for the number."

 "Wait, operator," I said, realizing that a phone number wouldn't do me much good at 5 a.m. "Do you by any chance know how to get there?"

 I'm not sure if all operators are especially nice at that time of the day, or if G-d was simply on my side, but she knew the exact location and gave us directions. I hopped into my car for the 30-minute trip to Ventura. Arriving on the scene, I found a one-storey indoor mall decorated from head to toe with green and red. "Ah," I swelled, "the perfect place for a menora!"

 Back home, the sun was beginning to rise as we put the finishing touches to a flyer and the public relations material. Asher reminded us that in our excitement, we had forgotten to ask the mall management for permission.

 "Right," I agreed. "It wouldn't sit too well with them if they read about it in the papers before we asked them," I chuckled.

 Chanuka at the Agoura Mall went ahead as planned. No disturbances as had been threatened. But it was the seventh night of Chanuka that stands out as one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Close to 300 people jammed into a small area between Thom McAn Shoes and The Pretzel Factory in the Buenaventura Mall. An employee from Radio Shack came out and offered to lend us a PA system.

 An old man in a wheel chair was crying while clutching his grandson's hand tightly. "Not in Ventura. I never would have believed it," he sobbed.

 "This is really a miracle."

 Another women joined in, "This must have taken you months to organize."

 Six months later, Rabbi Yaacov and Sarah Latowicz were officially welcomed as the Chabad emissaries to the new Chabad House of Ventura. Today, some five years later, Ventura boasts a Hebrew School, minyan, classes, day camp, and a full array of Jewish programs and activities.

 And all because an irate woman threatened to extinguish the light of the Chanuka menora!

*Rabbi Sapochkinsky and his wife, Brocha are the Chabad emissaries in Westlake Village, California.*

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**When Christmas and Hanukkah Crashed**

**By** [**Sara Debbie Gutfreund**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48867522)

 For the first time in my life, I was the only Jew in the group.

 My winter break when I was 15 was a turning point in my life, although I had no idea it was coming. My dad took me and my brother to a ski resort in Canada where we enrolled in a week long ski school to improve our jumps and form.

 The teenagers in our group were from all over the world, and most of them were far better skiers than we were. But we kept up with the grueling exercises, skiing down mogul lined slopes with one ski and preparing for the final race scheduled for the last day of ski school.

 Most of the kids were friendly, but for the first time in my life, I was the only Jewish girl in the whole group. My life had been pretty sheltered. I went to a Jewish day school in New York, lived in a mostly Jewish neighborhood and went to Jewish summer camps. I wasn't used to being the odd one out.

 It was also one of those years when Christmas and Hanukkah coincided, so while everyone was discussing their Christmas plans, my brother and I pretended not to hear as we adjusted our boot settings. And we avoided eye contact with the instructor who asked us whether we were coming to the party that night. I thought about the little silver menorah in the living room of our chalet, and about [the blessings](http://www.aish.com/h/c/ht/48969531.html) that we would say that night.

 I was surprised by the beauty of the Christmas tree.

 That afternoon in the ski lodge I warmed my hands next to the fire and stared at the enormous pine tree decorated with hundreds of lights and shiny gold ornaments. I had never really looked closely at a [Christmas tree](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/79487927.html) before, and I was surprised by how beautiful it was. The lights were simply mesmerizing, and when one of the girls who I had been skiing with that day sat down next to me and asked if I was coming to the party that night, I began to reconsider.

 I didn't have to drink or eat anything. I could light the menorah with my family and then hang out with my ski class for a while. It seemed like it would be anti-social not to go, and there wasn't anything technically wrong with going to the party, was there?

 Lighting the menorah that night with my father and brother, I looked out the window into the snowy night and saw the [tiny, flickering candles](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48907857.html) reflected back at me. Suddenly they seemed so small, like sparks of light that kept eluding my grasp. I listened to the familiar, ancient words of the blessings and saw them fall like soft snowflakes through my hands. When I asked my father if he minded if I went to the Christmas party, he seemed surprised but then just nodded and told me to be back by eleven. We ate the potato latkes silently, and then my brother surprised me by announcing that he was coming too.

 The hall was full of wreaths and blinking lights and songs that I knew by heart from the radio. I sat with a group of girls from my ski class, and we joked about the upcoming race the next day. I wasn't the worst skier in the group but I was close. We all knew Ethan would win anyway. Blond and blue eyed, he was here from Switzerland, and it looked like he had been skiing since he could walk.

 Suddenly he was standing in front of our group with his brother. They were wearing matching green sweaters and cracking up over something. Then Ethan asked us if we wanted to hear the joke. "What did the Jew say to the..."

 Is this guy really telling an anti-Semitic joke to my face?

 The room began to spin. *Is this guy really telling an anti-Semitic joke to my face? How could he?* Until then, I had felt fine at the party. Not exactly like I belonged, but almost. But now I felt my whole face go red, and I interrupted him loudly, "I'm Jewish."

 Everything went quiet. I could hear the wind whipping through the snow outside the lodge window as everyone stared at me.

 "You're Jewish? But you don't look Jewish," Ethan mumbled.

 "What is that supposed to mean?"

 I had always thought that anti-Semitism was a thing of the past, irrelevant to my cushioned, New York bubble where being Jewish was a badge of pride. I stormed out of the party and walked back in a blur of snowflakes that fell so hard I could hardly see. But then I saw them. The lights of the menorah in the window. They were [tiny and flickering](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/Chanukah_Eyes.html) in the winter darkness, but they warmed my confused heart as I pulled the door shut behind me.

 I sat in the soft shadows on the living room and looked at my face in the mirror. What did Ethan know anyway? Staring back at me was a Jew. So what if I had blond hair and green eyes? What did it mean to look like a Jew anyway? I didn't know, but suddenly I knew what it felt like to be a Jew. I wanted to stand up for who I was and where I came from. I wanted everyone to see the little, silver menorah in our window. I wanted to be part of the strength and endurance climbing through these flames before me.

**The Showdown**

 The next morning we all stood in a very uncomfortable silence at the top of the mountain. The race course was marked by red and black flags that dotted the slope below us. I was still so angry. I skied faster than I ever had before and to my utter surprise, I had beaten every member of the class except for Ethan. But he was a far better skier than I was, and I knew there was no way that I could win.

 We stood braced at the top of the course, avoiding each other’s eyes, preparing for the showdown. The starting signal rang out. Ethan raced right past me, but then something miraculous happened. For the first time that week, Ethan fell. He was fine, but by the time he had regained his balance, I was by the finish line.

 He skied up to me and finally looked me in the eyes. "You know it was just a joke. Congrats on the race."

 Ethan offered his hand, but I shook my head. I took off my skis and walked towards the lodge. Through the window the enormous tree still twinkled, but I was immune to its light. I was different. I had my own light. I didn’t realize it before, but it was a miraculous torch that I was holding. And I was meant to carry it and run a different race.

 I turned around and headed home.

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**Story #785**

**Chanukah Shopping**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000n2W0:001GlpGb00001K2O&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1355243882&randid=1461895590&content=central##)

 It was Chanukah and I [Mrs. Nechama Berenshtein] was at the mall. I was in a hurry, though not to do last minute shopping. I had brought a group of young women students with me from Crown Heights, Brooklyn, to a shopping mall in New Jersey so that we could give out Chanukah menora kits. As Lubavitcher Chasidim we were shopping for opportunities to encourage our fellow Jews to kindle the candles for the Festival of Lights. The drive out to New Jersey had taken longer than I had anticipated and we needed to head back just 45 minutes after we arrived. I had to return to Brooklyn to give a lecture. I was preoccupied with pacing the entrance of the mall to make sure that the girls would regroup on time.

 As I looked up from my watch for the umpteenth time, I noticed a circle of seats in the center of the food court of the mall. There were a number of women of all ages sitting on the seats, chatting, laughing, eating their food or drinks. "This is going to be very easy," I told myself, as I sized up the situation, noting that many of the girls and women looked Jewish.

 There was one young man sitting by himself in the circle of seats, but he was obviously not Jewish. It wasn't even his purple and green hair or the earrings that pierced his ears and other body parts. He just had a decidedly non-Jewish look. Keeping in mind that the Lubavitcher Rebbe always encouraged women to approach women (and men to approach men), I was relieved that I would not seem ill-mannered if I didn't attempt to hand the young man a Chanukah kit.

 I went amongst the women and girls, asking them if they were Jewish and if they would like Chanukah menora kits. The Jewish women responded positively and eagerly took the kits. Some of them even asked if I had Shabbat candle lighting brochures with me, as well.

 I spoke with the last of the women and turned to leave. I looked at my watch again and noted that I was at the end of the allotted 45 minutes. I quickly began walking toward the mall entrance to meet my students.

 I hadn't walked more than a few steps when I heard someone say, "Nechama, go back."

 Now, to be honest, I'm not the kind of person who hears voices. But then it came again, "Nechama, go back."

 "Leave me alone," I protested. But it wouldn't.

 "Nechama, go back and ask him if he's Jewish."

 What can it hurt? I asked myself. So I turned around and started walking toward the young man, who was in the midst of munching on some kind of McDonalds concoction and drinking a huge soda. An order of fries, liberally sprinkled with ketchup, was perched on his knee.

 "Excuse me, are you Jewish?" I asked him.

 The next thing I knew, I was covered in soda, ketchup and mustard. The young man had been so shocked by my question that he had dropped everything. After apologizing profusely, he asked, "Please tell me, why did you ask me if I'm Jewish?"

 To this day, I don't know how or why these words popped into my mind, but I said quite confidently, "You look Jewish!"

 And then I heard a sob erupt from what could only have been the depths of his heart. The young man began to cry, but stopped and said, "Say that again, please."

 "You look Jewish," I said once more. A new torrent of tears was unleashed. But once again, he stopped himself and asked, "Please, say that again." And I did a third time.

 After calming himself down, the young man told me the following:

 "My mother was Jewish but my father was not. Though my mother didn't really care about religion -- they celebrated all of the non-Jewish holidays at home -- she was adamant that I go to a Jewish school.

 "Everyday in school, the other children used to mock me. It wasn't because we didn't celebrate the Jewish holidays at home; they didn't know that. It was because I was a carbon copy of my father. I look exactly like him. The kids in school used to say, 'Why are you here? You don't look Jewish. Why are you wearing tzitzit and a kipah, you don't look Jewish.'

 “And it's true. I don't look Jewish at all. Day after day the children mocked me. I would return home each day in tears. My father begged my mother to let me leave the school. 'Look how miserable he is,' he would say to my mother. After a few years of mockery and torture, my mother agreed with my father and let me leave the Jewish day school and go to public school.

 "To this day, I remember the mockery," the young man said, wincing in pain. "Today, I was sitting here and I was watching you go over to all of the women and girls, asking them if they are Jewish. 'G-d,' I said, 'I'm not guilty that I'm not doing anything Jewish. Look, this girl will go over to everyone else, but she won't come over to me, to ask me if I am Jewish. I don't look like a Jew!'

 “As you neared the end of the circle, I looked up to G-d and said, 'I will even prove that I am righteous. If this girl will come over and ask me if I am Jewish, then I will give You another chance.' When you left, I said, 'Aha. You see, G-d!'

 "And then, you turned around and walked back toward me. Well, now I guess I have to give G-d another chance." I gave the young man a Chanukah menora kit, and the phone number of his local Chabad-Lubavitch Center and we parted.

 I do not know if he ever contacted the Chabad Center. But I do know that the tiny flame in each one of us, even if it is untended or G-d forbid, it is mocked, burns eternally within every Jew.

Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from lchaimweekly.org (#949), with permission.

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