**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas vayigash 5776**

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**Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages**

**A Gift from the Prayers and Tears of Your Mother**

 In the early 1950’s, a group of Yeshivah Bochrim went to visit the Tchebiner Rav in Yerushalayim, to talk with him in learning. The Tchebiner Rav discussed a Sugya with them, and then he posed a very difficult question on that topic to them. The Bochrim were stumped. They each tried to think of an answer, but no one wanted to offer a response to this Gadol BaTorah if they weren’t sure they were correct.

 Finally, a Bachur in the back of the room said he would like to try and answer the question. This Bachur was Rav Moshe Sternbuch, who today is known as one of the Gedolei Torah in Eretz Yisroel.

 When the Tchebiner Rav heard his answer, the Rav shook his head and said, “This is not your own answer.” The Bachurim were a little surprised by this statement, and the Tchebiner Rav smiled. He said, “Your answer is so good and so extraordinary, that it is not possible that at your age, you could have thought of it on your own. This answer most likely comes from your mother— from her Tefilos and her tears in crying to Hashem that her son be a Talmid Chocham!”

*Reprinted from the recent Parshas Vayishlach 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Compilation of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Tibor Rubin Is Dead at 86; Medal of Honor Was Delayed by Anti-Semitism**

**By Bruce Weber**



Tibor Rubin, pictured in 1953, spent 30 months as a prisoner of war in North Korea. Fellow prisoners later testified about his willingness to sacrifice for the good of others. (Photo Credit Greg MacGregor/The New York Times)

 “When Corporal Rubin’s battalion found itself ambushed by thousands of Chinese troops,” the president said at a White House ceremony, “the Americans’ firepower soon dwindled to a single machine gun. The weapon was in an exposed position and three soldiers had already died manning it. That was when Corporal Rubin stepped forward. He fought until his ammunition was gone. He was badly wounded, captured and sent to a P.O.W. camp.”

 The episode the president — it was George W. Bush — was describing with frank astonishment and admiration took place at Unsan, North Korea, in the fall of 1950. In a long-overdue tribute, he was speaking more than half a century later, on Sept. 23, 2005, as he prepared to present Tibor Rubin, then 76 years old, with the Medal of Honor.

 There was much more to Mr. Bush’s encomium that day, but even he did not tell the whole story of the remarkable courage and forbearance of a Hungarian-born American hero, a man who joined the United States Army to thank the nation and the troops that rescued him from the concentration camp where he had been imprisoned as a teenager, and for whom recognition was delayed for decades because he happened to be Jewish.



**President George W. Bush bestowing the Medal of Honor on Corporal Rubin on Sept. 23, 2005. As a corporal during the Korean War, he was repeatedly assigned the most dangerous missions. (Photo Credit Mark Wilson/Getty Images)**

 Corporal Rubin, who was known familiarly as Ted, had lived quietly in Southern California since the end of the Korean War, mostly working in a liquor store owned by his brother Emery. He was 86 when he died on Saturday at his home in Garden Grove, Calif., a nephew, Robert Huntly, said.

 The narrative of Corporal Rubin’s life is Hollywood-worthy. He was born on June 18, 1929, in Paszto, a Hungarian shtetl with a reported 120 Jewish families, to Ferenc and Rosa Rubin; his father, who had served in the Hungarian Army during World War I and spent several years as a prisoner of war in Russia, worked in a shoe store.

 According to “Single Handed,” a 2015 book about Corporal Rubin by [Daniel M. Cohen](http://www.danielmcohenauthor.com/), in the days before the Nazi occupation of Hungary in March 1944, his parents sent him with a band of adult escorts in an attempt to reach Switzerland, but they were captured.

 Young Tibor, then 14, was sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, where, on his arrival, a commandant told him and his six comrades that none would get out alive. He barely survived the 14 months before the camp was liberated by American soldiers on May 5, 1945.

 In a 2013 documentary film, “Finnigan’s War,” about veterans of the Korean War, Corporal Rubin recalled, “I promised the good L-rd that if I get out of here alive, I’d become a G.I. Joe, to give back something.”

 Corporal Rubin came to the United States in 1948 but was prevented from enlisting until his English improved enough to meet Army standards, which he managed by 1950. He worked for a time as a butcher before he entered the service. The Korean War was in its early stages, but because he was not a citizen, he was not required to fight.

 “My commander told me that I didn’t have to go to war,” he said. “So I told him: ‘Well, what about the others? I cannot leave my fellow brothers.’ ”

 Chillingly, Corporal Rubin had an enemy on his own side. Numerous reports detail affidavits submitted by his fellow soldiers who described their sergeant as a virulent anti-Semite who repeatedly assigned him the most dangerous missions, including one in which he single-handedly held off a wave of North Korean soldiers for 24 hours, securing for his own troops a safe route of retreat.

 The affidavits also suggested that though Corporal Rubin was recommended more than once for the Medal of Honor, the same sergeant, Artice V. Watson, deliberately ignored the orders from his own superiors to prepare the appropriate paperwork.

 In 2002, after Congress passed the Leonard Kravitz Jewish War Veterans Act — named for a Jewish soldier killed in an act of heroism in 1951 and subsequently denied the Medal of Honor — President Bush ordered a review of the records of 137 Jewish veterans. Corporal Rubin’s case was deemed among the most egregious. At the time, The Jewish Journal, a Southern California newspaper, published a statement from a notarized affidavit about Corporal Rubin and Sergeant Watson.

 “I really believe, in my heart, that First Sgt. Watson would have jeopardized his own safety rather than assist in any way whatsoever in the awarding of the medal to a person of Jewish descent,” Cpl. Harold Speakman wrote.

 When Corporal Rubin was awarded the medal, an Army spokeswoman told [The Los Angeles Times](http://www.latimes.com/) that notarized documents showed that “Rubin’s first sergeant did the circular trash can on these” — that is, the recommendations — “and did not process them.”

 “Rubin is a true American hero and deserves this honor,” she said.

 (Leonard Kravitz, the uncle of the musician Lenny Kravitz, did not receive his posthumous Medal of Honor until it was awarded by President Obama in 2014.)

 Corporal Rubin spent [30 months as a prisoner of war](http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1953/04/22/110064532.html?pageNumber=3) in North Korea, where testimony from his fellow prisoners detailed his willingness to sacrifice for the good of others. He had been steeled for captivity and privation, he said, by his experience in Mauthausen. And he declined the offer of his Communist captors to return him to Hungary, then under the influence of the Soviet Union. Instead, he made a habit of sneaking out of the camp at night and foraging for food, stealing from enemy supplies, and bringing back what he could to help nourish his comrades.

 “He shared the food evenly among the G.I.’s,” Sgt. Leo A. Cormier Jr., a fellow prisoner, wrote in a statement, according to The Jewish Journal. “He also took care of us, nursed us, carried us to the latrine.” He added, “Helping his fellow men was the most important thing to him.”

 Corporal Rubin’s father died in the Buchenwald concentration camp; his mother and a younger sister died at Auschwitz. He is survived by his wife, Yvonne; a sister, Edith Rittri; a daughter, Rosalyn; and a son, Frank. In addition to his Medal of Honor, he was the recipient of two Purple Hearts.

 “I have a mom who was very religious,” Corporal Rubin said in the documentary. “And she always teach us: ‘There is one G-d, and we are all brothers and sisters. You have to take care of your brothers, and save them.’ To her, to save somebody’s life is the greatest honor. And I did that.”

*Reprinted from the December 9, 2015 edition of The New York Times.*

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**Complete Trust in Hashem For the $60,000 to Pay for**

**A Daughter’s Apartment**

 Rabbi Scheinbaum relates a story about a Kollel fellow in Yerushalayim, a scholar, who lived his life with amazing Bitachon, trust in Hashem. He was able to live in near-abject poverty as if he did not have a care in the world because of his trust in Hashem, and somehow, his family survived the daily financial pressures. The man never worried, and all he would say is, “Hashem Ya'azor, Hashem will help.”

 When it was time to marry off his oldest daughter, she required an apartment, as had become the accepted norm that when a girl becomes engaged, her parents pay for the apartment. The father of the Kallah agreed to pay for the apartment, and a small apartment that would suffice for the couple’s needs was selected. It cost only $60,000.

 The Kallah’s mother said to her husband in utter disbelief, “Where will we get $60,000 from? We hardly have enough money for our own simple, daily expenses!” Her husband assured her that she need not worry, as Hashem will provide the necessary money in time for the wedding, and he returned to his Torah study.

 We must understand that the husband was neither a fool nor a simpleton, but rather, he had a profound sense of Bitachon. He reasoned, ‘If Hashem could provide their daily bread, He could likewise provide $60,000! It was all based upon their merit.’

 As the wedding date was looming closer, there was still not a penny extra to cover their expenses. The wife was getting more nervous, while her husband was as serene as ever, as he delved into his learning.

 His wife, realizing that her husband had no plans to actively go out and try to come up with the money, decided to speak with Rebbetzin Elyashiv, whose husband, the Posek Ha’dor, had a tremendous influence on her husband.

 When Rav Elyashiv heard about the situation, he asked for the husband to come see him. He advised the husband that he should make some form of Hishtadlus, effort, to get the funds, and he should not sit back and wait for a miracle.

 The husband listened without question, and went to one of his good friends who was the executive director of a large girls’ school and solicited his assistance. Perhaps he could tell him the name of one of his donors. The director said he had many donors, but the husband said he only wanted one name.

 The director told him that due to the large sum that he needed, he should take a few names, but the husband refused. He randomly chose one name, took the contact information, and said “Hashem Ya’azor”.

 The director noticed that he took the name of one of his American donors, but he didn’t have the chance to tell him that his annual donation was fifteen dollars.

 The Kallah's father immediately sent off a letter explaining his present need, and returned to the Kollel. His wife and daughter were beside themselves with worry that they would have to call off the wedding.

 Three days before the wedding, an envelope arrived from America. Words cannot describe their shock, joy and utter disbelief to discover a check for $60,000 in the envelope!

 The husband was not fazed because he knew Hashem would save them. He immediately wrote a warm letter of gratitude for the donation, and returned to his learning.

 Meanwhile, his friend, the executive director of the school, was beyond shocked. If this is what the American donor was sending to an unknown Kollel fellow, he would surely send him much more! He decided to fly to New York to personally visit with the American benefactor.

 Upon arriving at his home, he was surprised to see that the man lived with his wife and young daughter in a small, simple apartment. The director told him why he was there, and the man explained with a story.

 “For many years, my wife and I davened for a child, and finally we were blessed with a little girl. At the age of four years old, we enrolled her in nursery school. Everything seemed to be going so well in our lives until, one day, we received a dreaded phone call that our child was hit by a car, R”L.

 “The situation was critical. As she was taken into surgery, we began to daven fervently for her. All the tears that we shed to have this child were renewed, as we entreated Hashem to please let her live! I then made a vow that half of the money that we had placed in a savings account for her dowry would be given to tzedakah, in the hope for a complete recovery.

 “Hours elapsed, and finally an exhausted, but smiling, surgeon came out to greet us to inform us that Baruch Hashem the surgery had been successful! That very day, I went to the bank and withdrew half of my account. It amounted to $60,000. I declared that the first needy person to approach me would receive the money.

 “That night, we came home to find a letter in our mailbox from a Kollel fellow in Eretz Yisroel. He was marrying off his daughter and had no money to pay for her apartment. I felt it was Hashem’s way of providing the dowry for one girl with the dowry of another. Thus, he was the one to whom I sent the entire check!”

*Reprinted from the recent Parshas Vayishlach 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Compilation of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Development of a Jewish Exile Community in Babylonia**

 The era of the First Holy Temple was replete with both the greatest wonders and the greatest temptations. Although miracles were daily occurrences, the people succumbed to the temptation of idol worship which prevailed among the nations of the world at that time. Destruction came upon the Jewish nation slowly, and though the prophets begged the people to return from their sinful practices, it was to no avail.

 In the year 3228 (533 b.c.e.), Menashe, the evil son of the righteous King Hezzikaya, rose to the throne of Judea. Through his insidious influence idol worship spread through the land. The next half century saw the great struggle between the arch-rivals Babylonia and Egypt encroach into the Jewish kingdom, as Judea became a vassal king of King Nebuchadnezar.

 The year 434 b.c.e. saw the first wave of exiles, the elite of Jerusalem, leave for Babylonia. These men included the greatest leaders and scholars of the time: Mordechai, Daniel and Ezekiel, men who would be instrumental in bringing about great miracles in the future. Only the poor were left in the land, and the future clearly pointed to the exiled community which was to grow and flourish in Babylonia.

 Eight years later, the end came as the forces of the Babylonian commander besieged Jerusalem and battered its defenses. The Holy Temple, the king's palace, as well as the rest of the city was burned and laid waste. The remaining leaders were executed and the people forced into exile under torturous conditions.

 Although the destruction had been bloody and crushing, the Jewish exiles in Babylonia gradually rebuilt their lives and communities. The Babylonian rulers permitted the Jews considerable independence to reconstruct Jewish life in the new environment. The adjustment was made easier by the fact that the earlier exiles were now well established.

 The exiles thought that their stay in Babylon would be a short one. They waited and longed for the day on which they would return to the Holy Land. However, it was decreed differently: The prophet Jeremiah told them that it was decreed in Heaven that they must remain in Babylon. "Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat their fruit...Increase there...Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to G-d for her, because through her peace, you will have peace."

 And so, the exiled Jews settled down in Babylon. But how could they retain their Jewishness in a foreign land, bereft of the Holy Temple and its Divine service, and surrounded as they were by idol worshippers? The guidance of the Sages of the time set the pattern for Jewish life for all coming generations by establishing the foundations of Torah study, assuring the continuation of the Jewish people both in and out of exile.

 One of the early exiled Jews mentioned above was Daniel. Together with three companions, the 15 year-old Daniel was amongst those chosen to attend the king in the royal palace. True to their upbringing, Daniel and his friends resisted the temptations of the royal lifestyle. Refusing to partake of non-kosher food, they were given beans and water, but in spite of this meager diet, they remained robust. The wisdom of the Jewish youths attracted attention, and Daniel and his companions were appointed to high positions in the royal court. Nebuchadnezzar had reached the pinnacle of his power, but he began to worry about the future.

 One of the most remarkable episodes in the life of Daniel occurred when the king had a terrifying dream. When he awoke, the king was unable to remember the dream that had so frightened him. His terror and anxiety mounted, and he summoned his advisors, and ordered them to reveal to him both the dream and its meaning. But even under the threat of death, they couldn't explain a dream which the king himself couldn't recall.

 Then, the king called upon Daniel. In response to his prayers, G-d enabled Daniel to describe and interpret the dream. His explanation was as follows: The king saw in his dream a towering statue whose head was made of gold. The golden head represented Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the known world at the time.

 The chest and arms were silver, which symbolized Persia and Media, weaker kingdoms, which would, nevertheless, replace Babylon. The thighs of the statue were copper, representing Greece, the third and weaker empire in the chain. Its legs were of iron, this symbolic of the cruel rule of Rome, the fourth empire. The statue's toes were partly iron and partly earthenware.

 This represented the two kingdoms which would follow Rome: the Holy Roman Empire and the Moslem rule and the many smaller kingdom's which would result from their fragmentation. As the dream continued, a small stone rolled toward the figure and smashed it. Then, the small stone grew into a huge mountain. This small stone represented the King Moshiach, who would overthrow these kingdoms and rule in the end.

 The king accepted Daniel's interpretation and raised him to even higher rank. A succeeding king, Belshazzar was to have another, even more astonishing need for Daniel's interpretive powers when Hebrew words mysteriously appeared on the wall of his palace during a drinking orgy. He interpreted those words correctly, as well, predicting the demise of his kingdom, which occurred that same night.

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

**A Slice of Life**

**The Power of an Essay**

**By Esther Sternberg**

 Nearly four decades ago, the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe told me to publish a book of essays written by girls about the mitzva (commandment) of lighting Shabbat candles. The Rebbe told me to make a contest to get the girls to write, and to offer prizes to the winners.

 Two years later, we again publicized a contest and offered prizes to the girls who wrote the winning essays. The contest generated a lot of excitement, we selected the winners, and I thought I was finished as I had had no intention of publishing another book.

 Then one day, my husband said, "We just got a call from the Rebbe's office. The Rebbe wants to know, where is the second book? ...it must be distributed before Rosh Hashana!"

 It was just a little over a month until Rosh Hashana. How would we put out a book in less than five weeks? I reviewed the compositions from our last essay contest, and saw that we didn't have enough interesting material to fill a whole book.

 I called a friend who was in charge working at Camp Emunah, a girls' overnight camp in the Catskill Mountains run by Lubavitch. At the time there were many new immigrants from Russia and Iran attending Camp Emunah. I explained the Rebbe's request to my friend, Yehudis Metzger. I asked if she could get the girls to write compositions about lighting Shabbat candles.

 A little while later, I received a number of essays, including one from a 12-year old girl named Laura. She had just come from Russia and wrote that in camp she had learned to keep Shabbat for the first time. She concluded, "I hope that when I come home I will continue to keep Shabbat just like I did in camp."

 We put together the book and it was printed in time for Rosh Hashana. We printed Laura's essay in Russian and also translated it into English. That was the end of the story. Or so we thought.

 Thirty years later, a woman from Philadelphia called me. "My name is Yanna. This past Shabbat, I was at the Chabad House and I noticed a book called A Candle of My Own. I looked through it and saw an essay by a girl named Laura, who wrote about how much she loved Shabbat and how she hopes to continue keeping Shabbat when she gets home.

 "I happen to know Laura. Her husband and daughter have been coming around to the Chabad House and I think Laura is ready as well. I believe that if I show her a copy of the book with her own essay in it, it could change her life."

 I had only two books left, and I was reluctant to part with one of them. But if it could possibly change someone's life…

 I agreed to give a copy to Yanna. For three weeks I didn't hear from her and thought maybe it had gone to waste. Then I received a call.

 "Mrs. Sternberg, this is Laura Fisher. I used to be Laura Brovender. I was in Camp Emunah and I wrote that essay. This past Shabbat I was invited to a Shabbaton. There was a large crowd, and there was an easel set up with a cloth covering. I thought maybe it was a painting that would be unveiled during the Shabbaton.

 "Suddenly someone got up and said, 'Laura, we have a surprise for you!'

 "They took off the cover and on the easel was the book of essays, opened to my composition. I read it and started to cry. It brought me back to my childhood, when I loved Shabbat and wanted to keep it so badly. But my parents made fun of me and wouldn't let me keep Jewish observance. I still remember all the blessings I learned in camp."

 Then her husband got up and showed a prayer book that his wife had received that summer from her counselor in Camp Emunah. The counselor had written a blessing to Laura. First the ink is strong, then the pen is running out of ink and the letters look faded. Then apparently the counselor got a new pen and the letters are strong again.

 Laura's husband pointed out that this blessing from the counselor is the story of Laura's life. The experience in Camp Emunah was like the bold first ink, and left a strong impression on Laura. Then the letters faded, but now they are coming to life again and Laura is newly inspired to take on more Jewish observances.

 Everyone at the Shabbaton was very moved, and Laura called to thank me for my foresight in putting together that book. I told her, "Don't thank me, thank the Rebbe."

 She said, "Do you see the vision of the Rebbe? He knew that years later I would need inspiration and I would see this book again one day when I was ready for it. Now I'm ready."

 Laura and Yanna came to visit me together with their daughters, and I told them many stories about the Shabbat Candle Lighting Campaign initiated by the Rebbe in 1975 and about the Rebbe. I was also invited to Philadelphia to speak to the Russian Jewish community there. I formed a close relationship with Yanna and Laura.

 One Shabbat I was hosting Yanna and Laura in my home in Crown Heights. We were discussing the story and I said, "It would be so interesting to find out the name of the counselor who taught Laura."

 Laura said, "I don't even know how I ended up in Camp Emunah that summer. I had just come from Russia in May, and by June I was already in camp. My counselor made me feel so at home."

 All we knew about the counselor was that her name was Yona, because that was how she signed her letter in Laura's prayer book. Once again I called my friend Yehudis Metzger and she told me that Yona was a friend of her daughter Tova. I called Tova (Meizlish), now an emissary of the Rebbe in Mexico, and she told me that Yona Hershkowitz was a wonderful Russian woman. She had tragically passed away in a car accident, leaving behind four young children.

 Yona had been only 16 years old that summer when she was Laura's counselor, yet she had the depth and maturity to give her all to the girls in her charge and to impact their lives significantly.

 Hearing about Yona's passing, Laura committed herself to be more careful in her observance of mitzvot in Yona's honor.

 Every act ignites a spark. Maybe for the spark to burst into a flame will take a week, or a few weeks, or even a few years or decades. But every mitzva is a candle that will lead to another spark and flame.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Mrs. Sternberg’s story was originally published in The N'Shei Chabad Newsletter.*

**Thoughts that Count on Joseph HaTzadik**

“*You shall tell my father of all my honor in Egypt.*” (Gen. 45:13)

 "Tell my father not to worry," Joseph requested of his brothers. "All the honor and respect heaped upon me by the Egyptians has not had a negative effect. It has not made me lose the humility necessary to worship G-d properly."

*(Gedolei HaChasidut)*

“*And he saw all the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him*.” (Gen. 45:27)

 Rashi comments that with these wagons Joseph alluded to the very last subject in Torah he had learned with his father Jacob before being sold into slavery, that of the egla arufa (beheaded heifer). When Jacob saw the wagons (agalot - the same root word as egla), he realized that his son was sending the message that he had not forgotten all that he had learned with his father so many years ago. We see from this that seemingly insignificant actions of the righteous are fraught with meaning and serve as lessons and examples for those who take heed. *(Maayana Shel Torah)*

“*Here is seed for you; and you shall sow the land*.” (Gen. 47:23)

 The righteous Joseph, the spiritual leader of every generation, gives each of us the encouragement and strength we need to worship G-d. But we must not rely solely on that which we receive from the tzadik; we must also sow the seeds we are given. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

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

**Knowing the Difference Between**

**The Two Telephones in Life**

 Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memoryh had just received wonderful news that his dear colleague and friend, Rav Moshe Feinstein, had come home from the hospital. Reb Yaakov wanted to call the venerable sage and personally extend his good wishes.

 Reb Yaakov, who never had an attendant make calls for him, went to the telephone and dialed. The line was busy. A few minutes later, he tried again. The line was still busy.

 "Perhaps," thought Reb Yaakov, "many people are calling to wish him well.”

 One of his grandchildren who was present during the frustrating scenario asked Reb Yaakov a simple question. "I don't understand," he asked. "Aren't there times that it is imperative that you speak to Reb Moshe? After all, you sit together on the “The Council of Torah Sages”. What would happen if there were a matter of national significance that required immediate attention? Shouldn't Reb Moshe get a second telephone line?"

 Reb Yaakov smiled. "Of course Reb Moshe has a special private line. And I, in fact, have the telephone number. But that line is to be used solely for matters relating to Klal Yisroel. I now wish to extend my good wishes to Reb Moshe on a personal level. And I can't use his special line for that. So I will dial and wait until his published number becomes available."

 Comment: Pharaoh understood that as ruler of an entire kingdom, his “Divine inspiration” was not intended as a message regarding seven daughters or new military conquests. His dreams rang of messages for his entire nation.

 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky (who tells the above story about his grandfather) explains that the attitude of a leader is to understand that there are two telephones in his life, a personal and a public line. We too need to be mindful of the nature of our messages. Some of what we say needs to be said behind closed doors, privately. And sometimes, there is benefit in “going public” to stress a point, like with lighting of our Menoras!

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Torah’s Sweet Weekly.*

**The Koren Pirkei Avot**

**Reviewed by Daniel Keren**

(“The Koren Pirkei Avot – the Neuwirth Edition” with commentary by Rabbi Marc Angel and translation by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, 175 pages, 2015, Koren Publishers - Jerusalem)

(“The Jewish Fact Finder: A Book full of Important Torah Facts and Handy Jewish Information – Third Revised Edition” by Yaffa Ganz, 120 pages, 2015, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem – New York)



 Koren Publishers in Jerusalem have just come out with the Neuwirth Edition of “The Koren Pirkei Avot” and it is interesting to note that my review copy came after Rosh Hashanah. Most people think that the season to read and study Pirkei Avos is from Pesach until Rosh Hashanah. But being that this is one of the most popular and respected books on Jewish ethics, it makes sense that it should be studied year-round.

 This new volume is based on a translation by the well-known former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks who is himself a prolific writer of Jewish books, many of which have been published by Koren Publishers.

 However the heart of any Torah book is the commentary and this Neuwirth Edition of the Koren Pirkei Avot is based on the commentary of Rabbi Marc D. Angel who is rabbi emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel (the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York), one of the most historic and still Orthodox shuls in America.

 He was born in Seattle, Washington in 1945 to Sephardic parents from Turkey and Rhoades (a part of Greece) who spoke Ladino in his home, which would indicate that his ancestors immigrated to that part of Europe after the Spanish Expulsion in 1492.

 Most of his collegiate and rabbinical education was undertaken at Yeshiva University in Manhattan where he was awarded semicha and a B.A., M.S., Ph.D and Th.D. He also received an M.A. in English literature from the City College of New York. A past president of the Rabbinical Council of America, he served on the editorial board of the RCA’s Tradition magazine.

 However in 2007 Rabbi Angel established the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals to foster supposedly “an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.” That same year he joined Rabbi Avi Weiss, one of the proponents of “Open Orthodoxy” in establishing the International Rabbinic Fellowship, an association of modern Orthodox rabbis.

 In reading Rabbi Angel’s commentary of the “Koren Pirkei Avoth,” I haven’t come across any controversial Open Orthodox philosophy. His commentary is easy-to-read and quite informative on both the rabbinical personalities who gems of ethical behavior make up this classic Jewish work and also the concepts themselves that have come down to guide Jewish thinking and behavior over the millennium of time since Pirkei Avos was originally composed.

 On Pirkei Avot (3:14), Rabbi Angel writes:

 “*’Sleeping late in the morning*:’ It is easy to fall into bad habits. Sleeping late is a sign of laziness. Drinking wine at midday is a sign of hedonism. Spending too much time chattering with children or socializing with ignorant people is a sign of intellectual laxity.

 “*’These drive a person from the world’*: This should be understood as an idiomatic expression of disapproval for slothful, hedonistic, and lax behavior, i.e., these actions drive one away from the proper way of life, the ideal world."

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of The Jewish Connection*