**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayigash 5775**

Volume 6, Issue 15 5 Teves 5775/ December 27, 2014

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

For a free subscription, please forward your request to [***keren18@juno.com***](mailto:keren18@juno.com)

**No Kidding! Your Grandmother was Jewish…**

**By Rabbi Yoseph Vigler**

I was graciously invited by one of our great councilmen to light the menorah at their event yesterday. I was inclined to decline the request because it was a hectic evening: We had a Chanukah party for our 300 "MY Extended Family" kids from single parent families, a late night kumzits with Yitzchok Fuchs at Mayan Yisroel (which by the way all turned out a success Boruch Hashem) and I had to be in Monsey for a simcha in the middle of it all. But all they requested was ten minutes to light the menorah at 4:15 P.M. So I acquiesced. After all, how can you say no to an opportunity of "pirssumei nissa" (publicizing the holiday miracle) on Chanukah!

When I arrived there was a nice crowd, primarily of local public school kids, but I could not detect anything close to a minyan that would allow for major "pirssumei nissa" and to make a bracha on the lighting.

I detected a fellow who introduced himself as Chris. I asked if he was Jewish. He said no. I said, "O.K., great seeing you here". Turns out he is the parks department representative. I don’t know why but I said "you know you look Jewish.

He says, "yeah, i have some Jewish blood. My maternal grandmother was Jewish and converted out the faith. I am Christian." I jumped at the opportunity - found a yid! I told him he is a Jew just like me and nobody can ever change that. I handed him our MitzvahShare Chanukah menorah kit to light at home, which he agreed to do. He then puts on a yarmulka and he did the lighting (without a bracha). The effort was worth it for this one Yid!

I spoke to the crowd about how the goal of Chanukah is to defeat the darkness. When you light one candle it is no longer dark. And we davka light the candles as it turns dark because that is when it matters most. Our task is to light up our inner souls and by extension illuminate the world. I was hoping Chris would get the message along with all the public school kids.

After our menorah lighting the local priest got up to light the tree. I was in the back, ready to leave, when somehow a conversation began with a photographer of the event. Guess what, this guy's mother mother was also Jewish. And I gave him a menorah too, ,though I didn’t have a chance to understand fully because he said something about his grandmother having converted to Judaism.

I was wondering if that was a halachic conversion. Worst case scenario I gave him the menorah for nothing... I couldn't chat with him because I was talking to the priest - a really nice man. He is telling me how his church has the minhag to light the menorah on the altar every year on the Sunday of Chanukah with the requisite amount of candles for that day. He uses crystal that came for Kristalnacht and he reminds the congregants how never again should we allow the slaughter that took place in the holocaust. I thought that was beautiful.

He had not heard the conversation with Chris nor with the photographer. These are three separate conversations going on. And somehow he tells me he too has Jewish blood. His grandmother converted to Christianity - in other words his mother's mother was Jewish. Nu, I embraced one more Yid into the fold.  I gave him a Chanukah menorah kit and asked him to light it at home. Make your home a Jewish place. (I got some great photos, but will not post so as to protect their privacy.)

Sitting in a warm kumzits last night for hours into the night, I couldn’t help but remark to all the chevra how fortunate we are to experience the warmth of Yiddishkeit singing niggunim around the menorah. If G-d gave us the ability to be connected to His Torah and Mitzvahs then we have a duty to light up the night

Chazal want us to light the street up until we reach the point that all the rebels, ie those who know nothing about Yiddishkeit, most likely through no fault of their own, reach a state of, a yearning for G-d. Every Jew has a neshama that thirsts for G-d no matter where circumstances led them. It is our job to light up our own lives and to illuminate the souls of all out there.

I don't know the end of the story yet. IYH they will be coming for a Shabbos meal sometime soon!

A lichtigen Chanuka and a a gutten Shabbos!

Rabbi Yoseph Vigler

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Maayan Yisroel.*

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**The “Magical” Powers**

**Of the Chanukah Lights**

A certain Rosh Yeshiva relates that in addition to his appointment as Rosh Yeshiva, he was also involved in “Peiros Ha’nosharim”, fallen fruit– children that have fallen off the correct path, in order to return them to the correct path.

One particular boy had very much deteriorated and attached himself to a magician.

The boy followed him and became more and more involved with him. On one of the days of Chanukah, as the boy was on the phone with the magician, he absently looked out his window and noticed Chanukah lights in one of the neighboring houses.

At that moment the magician asked him, “Where are you standing?” The boy replied that he had not moved from his place and he is standing in the same room where he was when he began the conversation. But the magician said that this was not possible as he felt that he was losing his connection with the boy.

He demanded that the boy tell him exactly what he was seeing at that moment. Innocently, the boy told him that he was looking out his window and he was observing lights burning opposite him.

Immediately the magician yelled at him and commanded him to look at something else because the lights were causing the bond between them to break! The boy saw with his own eyes the greatness of the days of Chanukah, realized what had happened to him, and immediately broke the connection between him and the magician. He was [thus] saved from falling further away in the merit of seeing the holiness of the Chanukah lights! (Be’er HaChaim)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**My Chanukah**

**By Larry Gordon**

[](http://5tjt.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Mr-Gordon-headshot.jpg)

Rabbi Nison Gordon, z’l

It is an ongoing Chanukah dilemma, one that is dealt with annually, not necessarily at this time of year, but rather back in August or September when the summer begins to fade and we take a glimpse at the year ahead.  
Those of you following the adventures of this column over the last 15 years are probably aware that my Chanukah was unceremoniously upended in 1989 when my father [Rabbi Nison Gordon, z’l] passed away on the sixth night of the holiday.

Every small detail is still etched into my mind. There is no forgetting the life-changing trauma as it is summoned up in this space as the yahrzeit nears.  
I knew that my dad was planning on being interred in Israel, but it was always a distant, almost not relevant, issue that we would not have to deal with for a long time and that we would figure out when we had to figure it out.

As Chanukah approached that year, he experienced some kind of cardiac episode and was scheduled for bypass surgery after New Year’s Day a couple of weeks later. But on December 28, something happened, and he was gone.  
My brother Binyomin and I flew to Israel that Thursday afternoon. We arrived on an unusually warm erev Shabbos Chanukah morning for a burial in Bet Shemesh, a then-obscure location about halfway from Ben-Gurion airport to Jerusalem. We would spend Shabbos there before flying back on Saturday night. Those 36 hours in the country over that Shabbos illustrated in extreme terms what it is like to be exhilarated and downtrodden simultaneously. We were new mourners and Shabbos Chanukah in Jerusalem was indeed something else. There would be many more to come.

After shivah, we were told by Dad’s attorney that his will requested that on his yahrzeit one of his children—there are four of us—visit his kever up on that steep, now quite popular, towering mountain. We all had young families in those early years and needless to say it was difficult. That first year we all traveled to Israel for the yahrzeit and it was quite a commemoration. As time went by, I worked my schedule so that one way or another I fulfilled that request and was there at my father’s side on his yahrzeit.

There were years when I did not go specifically at that time, but one of my siblings always managed to be there. Many years have passed, but there is still an internal tug-of-war that takes place between Chanukah, the family, and our dad’s request for us to be there.

While we do not know definitively what it is about, our rabbis say that these requests are not to be taken lightly. I cannot begin to describe the conflict that was conjured up over all those years as I lit the wicks on the fourth night of Chanukah, knowing that this would be the end of the chag—for us anyway—and I would be off to Israel to observe the yahrzeit, by myself or with my wife (and a few times with the children). Many years, Chanukah became a four-day holiday and seemed a bit less than the joyous celebration it’s supposed to be because of the requirement to pull away from the family each year.

The sufganiyot they served in the airport lounge at JFK were no comfort or replacement for a good old-fashioned Shabbos Chanukah or conventional Chanukah celebration at home.

I’ve always made it my business when in Israel for the yahrzeit to daven at the amud at the Kotel early in the morning. Over the last two-and-a-half decades, there have been beautiful, sunny summer-like days and other times when the weather felt like a monsoon. One never knows what he will encounter when it comes to the weather over Chanukah in Israel. The weather is just about as predictable as everything else in that part of the world.

My father left us with an assortment of interesting challenges. Chief amongst those was leading the services on the day of his yahrzeit, which, regardless of which day of the week it falls out on, is no simple davening. This is true when the yahrzeit falls on Shabbos, which means that it is also Rosh Chodesh.  
My dad used to struggle to get me up in the morning to get to yeshiva on time for the daily minyan. But then in 11th grade, I took a driver’s-education course and discovered that I was capable of being outside in front of the yeshiva on Coney Island Avenue, wide-eyed at 6:00 a.m., ready to get behind the wheel. I think that is when we both discovered that I could wake up and get out early; the only apparent requirement was that I really want to do it.

I think of this yahrzeit davening as a communication from the other side about an old youthful struggle to make it out on time in the morning. On Shabbos Chanukah, when we daven for the amud and say Kaddish, everything printed in the Siddur has to be said. This means everything above the various lines and below, in the parentheses and in the brackets. It includes Hallel and Mussaf, reading from the Torah every day during the week, and on Shabbos Chanukah/Rosh Chodesh utilizing and reading from three Torah scrolls.

It’s a quarter-century later and I really cannot get over the irony of all this. Talk about last laughs. So let me tell you a little bit about my dad. He came to the U.S. from Russia as a 16-year-old in 1934. His father arrived here in 1932 to set up a new life for his family with my grandmother and her four children. My father was the oldest.

My father developed an interest in writing and journalism early on. He was a prodigious keeper of notes and was said to have transcribed by hand the shiurim of his rebbe in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, Rav Shlomo Heyman. At the age of 18 years, he convinced a Polish-Jewish newspaper (back in Poland) to carry his stories about life in the New World—that is, life for an immigrant in New York.

Before the age of the Internet and instant communication, in order to penetrate the journalistic market and make an impression, you had to be consistent and credible at your craft. I know he was those things and more because today, 25 years later, I still meet people who recount for me the circumstances of their meeting my dad, Rabbi Nison Gordon, z’l, or what he said or wrote about them or their work in his weekly newspaper columns.

In his prime, he worked at Yiddish newspapers like the Day Morning Journal (which was formed from two daily Yiddish papers—the Day and the Morning Journal—that merged). And then after they closed in the early 1970s, he went to work for the Algemeiner Journal, headed up by his longtime colleague Gershon Jacobson, of blessed memory.

The morning he passed away was surreal. I don’t know how, but I quietly and methodically drove up Ocean Avenue from my home on East 27th Street near Avenue P. It was about 4 a.m. and it was snowing lightly. There were people I observed on some of the street corners when I stopped for the lights. I could not understand what they were doing out there at that hour.

Cell phones were just breaking into the market and, for a change, the car radio was off and all was silent. I thought then and I recall now that what I was actually doing was driving toward a new reality, a point that after I arrived at my parents’ home in Crown Heights, things would never be the same.

And they are not the same anymore. Things in life vary as a matter of routine. I think we survive by believing that things essentially are the same.

Interestingly, the one constant in my life these days is Chanukah and my father’s yahrzeit.

No matter what I think, say, or do, there it is, coming around in my direction again. But this year I am making a small change. I am sending a friend who lives in Israel as my shaliach to represent all of us at my father’s kever on the yahrzeit. My wife and I will leave for Eretz Yisrael a few days after Chanukah.  
While I was writing these lines, I texted my friend on WhatsApp to confirm that he would be going to represent us on Monday, the sixth day of Chanukah. He wrote back in Hebrew that he will be there at the kever in Bet Shemesh to say Tehillim on Monday.

I thought long and hard about this change before effecting it. I just thought my father would concur that it is best for us to be home with the children and grandchildren and have a conventional Shabbos Chanukah and a Chanukah party on Sunday without suitcases and running to the airport to catch a flight to Israel.  
As the holiday is here, I cannot help but churn this idea in my head over and over. But then I can almost hear my father render his decision on my quiet and isolated thought process on this matter. And the words that I imagine him saying after listening to my position and looking at me contemplatively are, “You did right; you did good. I will see you later. A freilechen Chanukah.”

*Reprinted last week’s edition (December 19, 2014) of the 5 Towns Jewish Times.*

**A Fixer of Souls and Watches-**

**A Miracle Within a Miracle After**

**The Libertion from Auschwitz**

**By Tzvi Yaakovson**

During the month of Cheshvan, Rav Shmuel Reich z”l passed away in Kiryat Sanz. He was 90 years old at the time of his passing, although based on the story of his life and his vast accomplishments he could have been mistaken for being 200 years old. Like many others, I went to his home in Netanya to offer my condolences to his twelve sons.

His sons have all carried on his legacy, and he was proud of them all. One is a dayan in Antwerp, another is a rov in a shul in Tzefas, and a third was known for being the gabbai of the Rebbe of Sanz-Klausenberg, the Shefa Chaim. The main purpose of my visit was to see his son Moishe.

The twelve sons sat in a row along the wall, receiving the thousands of visitors. They spoke about their father, whose miraculous escape from the jaws of the Nazis could have been the plot of a bestseller. They spoke about the chilling meeting between their father and his own father, Rav Yechezkel Reich, and the Shefa Chaim at the train station in Munich.

At that encounter, the Rebbe captured the heart of the elder Reich, who became a devoted Sanzer chossid along with his sons, Shmuel and Ephraim. The family’s attachment to the chassidus has continued to this day. The sons also heard stories from some of their visitors that they had never been told before. People revealed that the apartments in which they lived had been provided to them at extremely low prices by Rav Shmuel Reich, the main builder of Sanz, in its neighborhoods in Netanya and Yerushalayim.

Rav Yechezkel Reich had two sons, Shmuel, who just passed away at the age of 90, and his brother, Ephraim, who was a year and three months older and who now lives in Brooklyn. The two brothers were born in Dembitz, Galicia, and made their way to America as young boys after the war. They suffered unspeakable torment during the war. Among other things, they spent eight months in a bunker where it was impossible even to stand upright. But they also experienced unmistakable miracles, as Hashem’s Providence saved them from certain death time after time.

Ephraim, the uncle of the sons who are currently mourning their father, got married in America after the war to a girl named Jenia Greenberg, daughter of Ephraim and Shprintze Greenberg, who were themselves Holocaust survivors. Ephraim and Sphrintze are no longer among the living. As I sat with the other visitors, facing the sons of Rav Shmuel Reich, Moishe Reich began to speak about his uncle, Ephraim. To be more precise, he spoke about his uncle’s father-in-law, the father of his Aunt Jenia, Ephraim Greenberg.

• • • • •

Ephraim Greenberg arrived in Auschwitz with his wife, Sphrintze, and their two children, a son and a daughter. They were a chassidishe family, members of the Belzer chassidus, who had been deported along with everyone else in the death trains to the extermination camps. The young family was in complete shock. Who would have believed that such evil could exist in the world? Who would have believed what lurked behind the sign that announced, “Arbeit Macht Frei”?

The small family was a group of only four souls, out of six million. Ephraim, who was carrying some valuables and a sum of money, gave everything he had in order to save the lives of his wife and two children. The bribe worked, and after some difficult experiences, the three managed to reach the city of Pest, Hungary. Pest was part of the Hungarian capital city of Budapest, the birthplace of many great chassidishe courts and, of course, the Pressburg dynasty. Ephraim himself remained in Auschwitz, preparing - mainly through prayer = to face a battle for his very life.

On the death march, he was certain that he could see his own death approaching. He thought about his wife and two children, who were awaiting him. Ultimately, he survived the march by a miracle, another one of the chain of miracles that he himself could not even believe had happened to him. When the gates finally opened, he found himself, a young father and husband - emaciated, brokenhearted, and suffering from tuberculosis - in a tuberculosis hospital in Sweden.

After a few days, he realized that the country where he had found himself had opened its doors to the survivors of the camps, especially those who were ill and alone. With strength that he did not possess, he tried to recover enough to somehow make his way to Hungary, but he was too weak and sick. In desperation, he made several attempts to get word to his wife that he was alive and still hospitalized in Sweden. Ultimately, one of the messages - which he sent with a goodhearted soldier - found its way to his wife. Mrs. Greenberg made her way to Sweden along with her two children, one of whom was Jenia, the future wife of Ephraim Reich.

We listened raptly as Moishe shared the story of the life of Ephraim Reich, his uncle, a story that he found it fitting, for some reason, to tell us as he sat shivah for his father. And Moishe is a master storyteller. He knows exactly when to add details and how to hold his listeners’ attention. In general, he is blessed with both a phenomenal memory and the ability to pay attention to the tiniest, most seemingly insignificant details. He fascinates everyone who hears him speak.

• • • • •

Some time passed and the Greenberg family was finally reunited, after last being tearfully separated on the accursed soil of Auschwitz. With the help of various organizations, the young wife finally landed in Sweden. Mere words would fail to describe their encounter on the friendly soil of that Scandinavian country, with its cold climate and its warm attitude toward the survivors of the furnaces. Once again, there were tears - the total opposite of the tears that had accompanied their separation.

Ephraim recovered from the emotional reunion and made a decision. He would not wait to recover completely from his illness. Instead, he immediately began to gather up the shattered fragments of his life and reestablish his family. The first step was to find a place to live, which they discovered in a suburb by the name of Strengis. The second step, of course, was to find a means of earning a livelihood. Since he had some prior knowledge of watches, he opened a watch repair store.

Today, this may sound bizarre. After all, who fixes watches in this day and age? Seventy years ago, though, every watch was a rare and valuable object, and whenever a watch broke, it was brought to an expert watchmaker. A person who knew how to fix watches could rest easy, knowing that his parnassah was guaranteed. It quickly became apparent that Ephraim was particularly adept at the job. Before long, his reputation had spread throughout the town and the surrounding locales. Customers swarmed to his store and his business flourished.

Ephraim and his wife, like other survivors, had lived through the horrors of Auschwitz. Now that they had been blessed with a bit of tranquility and a comfortable livelihood, they gave of their own assets to other survivors who had likewise come to Sweden. Every Thursday, Mrs. Greenberg would bake challos and cakes and prepare a steaming hot soup, and on Fridays, when the store closed early, Ephraim and Shprintze would load their wagon with baskets and pots filled with food and make their way to Lidinga. There, they would bring some respite to the young Jewish girls, also survivors of the war, who had found refuge there.

Yocheved Matles, daughter of Ephraim and Jenia Reich and granddaughter of Ephraim and Shprintze Greenberg, lives in Ashdod today. This week, I listened in on a telephone call between Moishe Reich and Yocheved Matles, who is his first cousin. She filled in a few biographical details that we were missing. Among other things, she related that her mother told her that she remembered, as a child, joining her own parents on their trips from Strengis to Lidinga.

• • • • •

I need no one to tell me about Lidinga. I am already quite familiar with it.

Lidinga is a small town near Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden. In the summer of 1945, Sweden was flooded with thousands of refugees who had been freed from the camps, among them a number of young girls. These survivors did not trust anyone. They were certain that murderers awaited them around every corner. They knew that they were alone in the world. Their fathers had been burned, their mothers shot, their siblings burned. Why should they even bother living?

These girls were literally gathered in from the streets. There were various Christian organizations that gathered them in and sought to restore the humanity that had been stolen from them in the camps. There were also Zionist organizations, associated with the Reform movement, that gathered groups of girls and arranged camps for them, with the goal of having them travel to the State of Israel, which was then in the process of being founded.

There were also some compassionate non-Jews - mainly childless ones - who adopted some of these girls as their own daughters. Some of the people of the church sought to gather in Jewish children, especially girls, and convert them to Christianity. Today, there are elderly women in Sweden who were born into chassidishe families in Hungary and Romania, but do not know that they are Jewish.

There were two people who fought against all these “benefactors” and tried to save as many Jewish girls as possible from being lost to the Jewish people. These two men were Rav Binyomin Zev Yaakovson zt”l and Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt”l. The former was a member of the Vaad Hatzalah and Keren HaTorah, who had served as rov of Copenhagen, Denmark, before the Holocaust. In 5705, before the Nazi invasion of Denmark, Rav Yaakovson and his community crossed the sea into Sweden, hoping to wait out the storm there.

Rav Wolbe, meanwhile, was a young bochur who had come at the request of an Orthodox Jew living in Sweden who wished for his children to have a proper Torah education. Rav Wolbe, who was then dealing with a complicated issue pertaining to his citizenship, traveled to Sweden for a short visit. It later became clear that both of these men were emissaries of Divine Hashgachah sent to save hundreds of Jewish girls. The two of them together founded Lidinga.

Rav Binyomin Zev Yaakovson, my grandfather, would travel back and forth between the various refugee camps in Sweden, locating girls from religious homes and bringing them to Lidinga. He also located girls who had been taken into private homes, and he brought them back with him as well. He did not have to invest much effort. As soon as these girls saw a Jewish man with a beard and a yarmulka, they began to believe that it was worthwhile, after all, to live that way and to remain Jewish.

Both he and Rav Wolbe showered the girls with compassion and love. Of course, they also taught them much of the basic Jewish knowledge they were lacking. They were assisted in this endeavor by Rebbetzin Baila Yaakovson, my grandmother; Mrs. Nina Igel, whose husband was the official director of the camp (since he was a Swedish resident and held academic degrees); and another counselor named Rivka Grodzensky, herself a Holocaust survivor as well, though she was slightly older than the girls. Her father had been the mashgiach of Slabodka. She later went on to become Rebbetzin Wolbe.

Lidinga itself was thus a miracle. Lidinga was home to 85 orphaned girls whose worlds had gone dark. It was a type of phenomenon that occurs only once every thousand years, if at all.

Lidinga, in a word, was my grandfather.

And it was also my mother, who was one of the girls of Lidinga. Having lost her own sisters and brothers, with the exception of one sister (I am named after her younger brother, Herschel), my mother arrived in Sweden without the slightest interest in life. All she desired was to die and to join her parents in the World to Come.

But my mother and her younger sister were part of Lidinga. And all the girls of Lidinga - all of whom my grandfather brought to the chupah - were my “aunts.”

• • • • •

One day, a distinguished-looking woman entered Ephraim Greenberg’s watch repair shop. With visible emotion, she withdrew a large watch from her purse. “Mr. Greenberg,” she said in an authoritative tone, “can you fix this watch for me?”

“I will try to answer you after I examine it,” he replied.

“Can you examine it now and give me an answer?” she asked.

“The examination also takes time, at least two hours. If you would like, you can go attend to your affairs and come back in two hours. I hope to be able to answer you by then.”

The customer was silent for a moment. “Look,” she finally said, “I don’t want to leave the watch unattended.”

“I understand. You can sit in a chair here and wait.” The woman hesitated, then decided to trust the watchmaker.

“But how much will it cost?” she asked.

“It’s difficult for me to answer that without examining it first.”

The two agreed that he would examine the watch for free. If the damage was not irreversible, he would then name a price and she would decide whether she was willing to pay for it. The discussions were all theoretical, though, for it was possible that the antique, expensive watch might not be reparable.

Two hours later, the woman returned to the store. “Can it be fixed?” she asked.

“I have fixed it already,” he replied.

She nearly fainted. This was unexpected. “How much will it cost?”

He named a price so low that she had to steady herself once again. “Look,” she said, “I am not a wealthy woman, but I am a dentist. I am prepared to take care of your teeth for free. I won’t even require you to pay for the materials I use.”

Ephraim smiled, displaying his willingness to accept the gesture - because he had no teeth. Auschwitz had left him not only with a scarred soul, but with a scarred body as well. One of his legs was only partially functioning, and there were no teeth left in his mouth. That incident sparked a bizarre friendship between the Jewish, Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor and the Christian dentist.

• • • • •

Once, as he sat in the dentist’s chair, Ephraim’s dentist told him that she had taken two Jewish girls into her home. She spoke proudly, expecting him to express admiration for her nobility. But Ephraim leapt from his seat. “What did you say?”

“I said that I took in two Jewish girls I found in the street.”

“They’re Jewish? Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. They were in Auschwitz.”

Ephraim rose to his full height, his entire body trembling. “What are they doing in your home?”

“What do you mean?” she responded. “I intend to raise them.” The dentist went on to relate that she lived alone. She had neither a husband nor children, but she was relatively well-off. She had taken the two girls into her home in order to give them a happy life.

“This is my response to Hitler’s atrocities,” she said with satisfaction. She could not understand why the watchmaker was not expressing his admiration for her noble deed. “I have already begun the legal adoption process,” she added. She also related that she planned on marrying off the elder of the two to her sister’s son. “She will have a happy life with him and forget all that she has suffered. Next week, he will come to meet her.”

“Did you know,” Ephraim exclaimed, raising his voice, “that you are doing exactly what Hitler did?”

The dentist was stunned. “How can you talk to me like that? Is this what your Torah teaches you?”

“Those girls are Jewish!” he exclaimed. “How can you marry them off to a Christian?”

“What difference does it make?” she demanded. “The main thing is for him to be a human being.”

“You’re wrong! You are doing something that is burning the souls of these girls’ parents. You are doing what Hitler did. He wanted to destroy the Jewish nation, and that is exactly what you are doing. Their children will live as Christians!”

The dentist suddenly burst into uncontrollable weeping, as did Ephraim. It was a terrible scene for both of them.

Ephraim was the first to recover. “Can I meet the girls?” he asked.

“Of course.”

The two girls, one 17 years old and the other 15, shuddered when they saw Ephraim. Since the Holocaust, they had not seen another Jew.

“Modeh ani lefanecha,” Ephraim began to chant with chassidishe pronunciation.

The girls burst into heartrending tears and exclaimed, “Melech chai vekayom!”

The two girls sat for a long time with “Uncle Ephraim,” as he spoke to them about what was going on in the world, and especially about Lidnga. “When you get to Lidinga,” he told them, “you will see another 84 girls like yourselves. That is the place for you.” He promised the girls and the dentist that he would arrange for them to be taken into the camp as soon as possible.

Ephraim did not wait for his weekly visit to the camp every Friday. Instead, he hurried to the small hut where Rav Binyomin Zev Yaakovson lived, and he proceeded to inform him of the events of the day. Rav Yaakovson looked at him with tired eyes. “Don’t you know that if I allow another two girls into the institution, it might be closed down altogether?” he asked. He knew that the Swedish government had limited the number of students that the camp could accept.

Ephraim spoke tersely in response: “No choice!”

“Okay,” said Rav Yaakovson. “Bring them as quickly as possible.” Nevertheless, he added, the girls were not to be considered students in the camp. They were to be his guests, living with him and his wife. This would be an answer to the Swedish inspectors when they came to monitor the goings-on at the camp.

The older girl, like the other girls of Lidinga, moved to Eretz Yisroel two years later and built a true Torah home. Rav Yaakovson married her off, just as he did with all her “sisters” from Lidinga. That girl became the mother of nine children, all of whom she viewed as a vengeance of sorts against the Nazi devil. Until her passing this past Erev Shavuos, she never fully freed herself from Auschwitz.

• • • • •

When Moishe finished speaking, the audience sat quietly, still enthralled by his words.  “Nu,” he said, taking a deep breath, “what do you say? Isn’t it an astonishing story?”

Everyone was silent.

Then he turned to me and asked, “Tzvika, what do you say?”

I dried my tears and laughed. “Moishe, do you really think I don’t know? I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to ruin the story. I grew up with the stories of ‘Uncle Ephraim.’ Every time my mother visited America, her visit began and ended at the home of ‘Uncle Ephraim’ and his wife, ‘Aunt Sphrintze.’”

Because, of course, the older of those two girls was my mother…

*Reprinted from last week’s email of the Yated N’eman.*