**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayechi 5774**

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**Good Shabbos**

**Divinely Ordained**

**By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**

 The young man's name was Lazlo, or as his father called him, Ezra. His father was one of the most famous maggidim (Jewish inspirational speakers) in Budapest and traveled throughout Hungary holding drashos (inspirational speeches) in every Jewish community.

**The Non-Religious Son**

**Sat Shiva for His Father**

 One day, in the maggid's home town, the tailor died. He had been a simple but deeply religious man, yet his son Moshe, who worked alongside him, had no religious convictions at all. Nevertheless, out of respect for his father, Moshe sat shivah (the mourning period of seven days).

 During the week of shivah, Ezra's father, the maggid, went to pay a condolence call on Moshe. Little nine-year-old Ezra tagged along. When the maggid walked into the room where Moshe was sitting alone, Moshe was stunned. Everyone knew that Moshe was a rebellious lad and few in the community had much to do with him. That the esteemed maggid came and consoled him during his time of mourning, and then spent time chatting with him, was truly remarkable.

**Moshe Agrees to Recite Kaddish**

 A day later the maggid came again. Moshe sat and listened attentively as the maggid said softly, "I think, for your father's honor, it would be nice if you would come to shul to say Kaddish." To everyone's surprise, Moshe agreed.

 Throughout the months, as Moshe continued coming to shul, the maggid slowly began having a calming influence on the young man. At first they discussed Jewish concepts and attitudes and then they began to study together.

**The Year Transformed the**

**Son into a Religious Man**

 By year's end Moshe had become a religious man. With a rekindled spirit that burned enthusiastically, Moshe began performing mitzvos with a fervor that left very little tolerance for those less committed than himself. In shul it was he who would demand that others refrain from talking during the services, unlike past years, when people had silenced him constantly on the few occasions that he came to shul with his father. Eventually everyone got to know Moshe the schneider (tailor) as a man in whose presence one would dare not violate a mitzvah.

 Two years later, the German barbarians overran their Hungarian town, and the Jews were taken to forced-labor camps. Moshe the tailor was swept off the streets as were the maggid and his son Ezra.

 Together with multitudes of other frightened Jews they were crammed into the tightest quarters imaginable. With calculated cruelty, the Nazis tore children from parents — and that was the last time little Ezra, now twelve years old, ever saw his father. Ezra was placed in bunks together with other children his age, and soon began to pick up their bad habits and corrupt behavior, in the daily struggle for survival.

**Ezra’s Religious Commitment**

**Began to Weaken**

 Any religious commitment that he had before the war slowly began to ebb away as he battled to stay alive in any way he could, even if it meant cheating, lying, or stealing. Like everyone else he suffered from malnutrition and indecent living conditions, but together with a tight group of friends, managed to persist and survive.

 When the horror finally ended, the feeble remnants of the Holocaust had to be taken to rehabilitation areas where they were slowly re-acclimated to normal foods and regular living conditions. Many could not eat solid meat, and it had to be ground so that their bodies could slowly relearn the process of digesting heavy foods.

 The facility in which Ezra found himself was located high on a hill overlooking the city. The only way to get to the downtown area was to take a trolley down the long hill.

 One Friday night, Tomas, a friend from another camp, suggested to Ezra (now called Lazlo) that they go downtown to enjoy themselves. They had begun to feel like human beings once again and Tomas said it would be interesting to see nightlife in the city. Ezra was in a dilemma, for in the rehabilitation camp he had begun to think about going back to the religious practices of his father.

**Trying to Become Observant Again**

 In the labor camps it had been an insurmountable challenge for Lazlo to be observant, but now that he was back in civilization, perhaps it was time to return. He knew that the trolley was the only feasible way to town but that was an open violation of Shabbos. True he had been very lax these last years, but now that he was on his own, he was trying to become observant again.

 "Have a cigarette," Tomas said, offering one to Lazlo. In an automatic reflex Lazlo stuck out his hand to accept it. The cigarette trembled in his hand. He wondered if Tomas noticed it. He wanted to throw it away because it was Shabbos, but he could not do so, not in front of his good friend Tomas. He thought that if he inhaled his first puff, he would surely choke on it. He was going to have to make a decision: would he make the return to a religious lifestyle now, or never?

 Before he could organize his thoughts, Tomas lit a match and held it to Lazlo's cigarette. Lazlo put the cigarette in his mouth, bent forward, squinted as the flame caught on the tip, and inhaled slowly. It felt good. He was going downtown. Laughing nervously, they both got onto the trolley and began planning their night out.

**Saw Moshe the Tailor**

 The trolley rolled into the brightly lit town, while Ezra stood away from the window, hoping that no one he knew would see him. And then he saw him. It couldn't be! But it was, Moshe the schneider - tailor, walking alone!

 Ezra's stomach tightened. He recalled the first visit he and his late father, the maggid, had made to Moshe's home on a shivah call. Then he remembered Moshe reprimanding people in shul to be more respectful during prayers, and he said to himself firmly, "I will never allow the man whom my father made religious to see that his son has become a irreligious." And with that newly formed resolution, he got off the trolley at the next stop, walked all the way back up the hill to the rehabilitation camp and has remained an observant Jew to this very day. (The Maggid Speaks, p.114 Rabbi Paysach Krohn)

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

**Judging By How**

**Jewish One Looks**

**By Rabbi C.D. Green**

Dr. Asher Wade tells a very interesting story which sheds light on our question. Dr. Wade's extensive Holocaust studies have made him a key lecturer at Yad V'shem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem.

He notes that he finds it intriguing to note the reactions many people have to his mode of dress which is that of a Chasidic Jew. In his story he describes how a young woman paused as she made her way past him. She looked at him with tremendous disdain and jadedly accused him saying "it's people like YOU who caused the Holocaust to happen".

She based her statement on the premise that being different makes others hate you. That of course makes assimilation the best defense against antisemitism.

**Where Did the Nazi Hatred Start?**

**He simply asked her in return, "tell me, where did the Nazi hatred start? In Eastern Europe where so many Jews were still strongly identifiable as Jews, or in Austria and Germany where the Jews were largely assimilated?"**

She stood there, taking a moment longer to think than she had the first time she spoke. She then quickly continued down the isle saying "well, you just leave me alone and I'll do the same for you," which sounds very much like: **"don't confuse me with the facts I've made up my mind!"**

***Reprinted from last week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting,***

**The Importance of Not Embarrassing Another Yid**

**By Rabbi Label Lam**

When Reb Moshe Feinstein ztl. was already an elderly man he was asked as many sages of the Talmud, “Why have you merited such a long life?” He answered, “I tried my whole life never to hurt another human being.”

The following story illustrates to what extent this principal was installed into the very psyche of his being: A group of Yeshiva students were respectfully escorting the Reb Moshe to a car that was waiting curbside. As soon as he was in and the door was slammed shut, the driver started on his way.

A few blocks away, Reb Moshe urged the driver to pull over to the side of the road and stop for a moment. Once the car halted Reb Moshe opened the car door and removed his fragile and aged hand from where it was crushed when the door was shut by one of the students.

The driver was aghast and so he asked Reb Moshe, “Why didn't the Rabbi say something back there?”

Reb Moshe replied, “If I would have reacted just then, the poor fellow that closed the door would never have forgiven himself.”

Wow! How can one ever be prepared enough for such a test!? It's certainly a principled decision and the work of a lifetime!

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

**The First Rothschild**

**By Nissan Mindel**

In the small town of Tschortkow in Galicia (Poland) there lived a learned and saintly man called Rabbi Hershelle Tschortkower.

He was busy night and day, for he never refused his help to those who needed him. Some people sought his advice; others his blessing. And then there were the poor widows, orphans, sick people, and old ones who needed money for their daily bread. He was forever collecting money for those who were unable to help themselves.

One day Rabbi Hershelle Tschortkower decided that he needed an assistant, for there was too much work for him to do alone. So he hired a shamash (secretary) to share his responsibilities. Anschel Moses Rothschild, who was then a poor young man, was happy to accept this job. The Rabbi and the shamash became dear friends.

**Decides to Get Married**

But, after a few years, Anschel Moses decided to get married. He went to live in the nearby town of Sniatyn, where his father-in-law opened a store for him. The Rabbi was happy about the marriage, but he was sad to see his shamash leave, for he had been a faithful, devoted assistant.

Several months later, on the night before Passover when a solemn search for leaven is conducted in the Jewish home, a terrible thing happened. Rabbi Hershelle Tschortkower was examining the drawers in his desk, when he discovered that his purse with five hundred guldens was missing! That was money that had been collected to help orphans, widows and others in need.

The Rabbi pulled out the entire drawer and checked the desk more carefully. Then he pulled out the rest of the drawers to search them again. He looked under the desk and behind the desk, but the purse was not to be found. The Rabbi's heart was filled with pain. It took a long time to collect all that money, and now he had no way of helping unfortunate, helpless poor people.

**Began to Feel Even More Sad**

Then he began to feel even more sad, for he suddenly realized that the only one who had known about the purse was Anschel Moses. The Rabbi had always trusted him; but who else could have taken the money? There was no other explanation.

Yet the Rabbi found it hard to believe that Anschel Moses might be a thief. Perhaps, thought the Rabbi, there was an explanation for the whole thing. Maybe Anschel Moses had borrowed the money when he went to Sniatyn to get married. Maybe he was already planning to return it? The Rabbi decided not to tell anyone about the missing money. He did not want to embarrass Anschel Moses, or let people know that he even suspected him. He decided to travel to Sniatyn to discuss the matter with Anschel Moses and give him an opportunity to clear up the matter.

Immediately after the festival, the Rabbi hired a wagon and went to visit Anschel Moses.

Anschel Moses was very pleased to have such an honored visitor. Then the Rabbi told him the reason for his visit. The Rabbi said that he was sure Anschel Moses had only meant to borrow the money, and he was sure would return it now. G-d would forgive him for his wrongdoing, and no one would ever know about it. If it had been his own money, the Rabbi said, he would not have been so concerned, but this was money collected for people who otherwise might starve or suffer hardships, G-d forbid. And he himself had little money, so the stolen money had to be found immediately.

**Growing Pale and Frightened**

As the Rabbi spoke, Anschel grew pale and frightened, and his eyes filled with tears. He went to his money-box, emptied it, and without a word gave all the money to the Rabbi. The money was counted, but it was only half of the total sum. With deep regret, Anschel Moses promised to give the rest of the money to the Rabbi as quickly as possible.

The Rabbi was both relived and saddened. Anschel had not said word in self-defense. He had offered no excuses for his conduct. The tears in his eyes were proof of his shame and guilt. That made the Rabbi sad. He was happy, however, that Anschel Moses had realized his mistake and was returning the money.

The Rabbi thanked Anschel Moses. They shook hands and embraced, and the Rabbi said that everything was forgiven and forgotten.

**Worked Harder and Saved**

**His Money to Repay the Rabbi**

During the next few months, Anschel Moses worked longer hours than ever and saved his money carefully to repay the Rabbi. The Rabbi realized that Anschel Moses was an honest and fine young man who had indeed deserved his trust and respect. Anschel Moses had made a mistake, but he was eager to make amends.

One morning, there was a loud knock on the Rabbi's door. He was surprised to see the Chief of Police standing there. The Chief asked the Rabbi to come with him to the Police Station on some important business. A horse and carriage were waiting in front of the house.

The Rabbi was very puzzled. He was afraid that there might be a serious problem. He prayed to G-d it should not be connected with any danger to the Jewish community.

The Police Chief brought the Rabbi to his office and in a very friendly way asked him if anything had been stolen from his house recently.

The Rabbi who had never spoken to anyone about the missing money was completely surprised. He told the Police Chief about the missing purse, but assured him that the one who took it had since returned the money. It was a young man who was getting married and needed the money. He really only meant to borrow it. The Police Chief asked a few more questions and he looked very bewildered by the entire story.

**The Admiration of the Police Chief**

"You Jews are a wonderful people," the Police Chief said with respect and admiration. "Never in my life have I heard of anything like this!"

Then he opened the drawer of his desk, pulled out a purse and handed it to the Rabbi. Do you recognize it?" he asked.

It was now the Rabbi's turn to look bewildered. This was certainly his missing purse, but how did it come here? The door opened and a police officer brought in a handcuffed peasant woman.

"Do you recognize her?" asked the Chief of Police. The Rabbi shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I don't," he answered, still mystified by the happenings.

"Well, I suppose you are busy with your work and do not notice the cleaning woman who comes to clean your house. Anyway, it does not matter. She has confessed." And then the Chief of Police told his story.

When the woman was cleaning the house before Passover, she happened to find the purse. She took it to her house and buried it in the garden near a tree.

**Her Activities Aroused the**

**Suspicions of the Neighbors**

A few days later, she took some golden coins and went to buy new clothes. Then she decided to stop working, for now she had plenty of money. A week passed, and she took some more guldens to buy new boots and shoes. The neighbors became suspicious and reported it to the police.

It didn't take long for them to catch her. They found her digging in the garden, and when she was opening the purse, the police arrested her. There were only four coins missing. "Here you are, Rabbi," said the Chief of Police with a friendly smile.

"But you know," he said, "I just can't understand what you said. Why did that young man pay for the theft when he was not guilty? And why didn't he explain to you that he was not at fault?"

The Rabbi shook his head. This was something he could not explain.

The next day the Rabbi traveled to Sniatyn. He rushed out of the wagon, ran up to Anschel Moses, and tearfully asked his forgiveness. "Why did you not tell me that you were innocent?" asked the Rabbi in a trembling voice.

**Explained that He was**

**Touched by His Rabbi’s Plight**

Anschel Moses explained that the sadness and worry of the Rabbi had deeply touched him. He knew that if the truth were told, and he offered to help, the Rabbi would have refused to accept it, knowing that Anschel Moses was far from a rich man. So Anschel Moses and his wife gave everything they owned to the Rabbi, and for many months they saved every penny to complete the missing amount.

The Rabbi embraced Anschel Moses and blessed him to have great riches so that he might always be able to help the poor and needy of his people. "Here is the money you so kindly paid out of your pocket. Go to Frankfort, Germany, where you will have a better chance to succeed in business, as well as to do good deeds. May G-d be with you and your wife and children for generations to come."

**The Rabbi’s Blessing was Fulfilled**

The blessing of Rabbi Hershelle Tschortkower was fulfilled. Anschel Moses became a successful merchant and banker in Frankfort. His son, Mayer Anschel Rothschild, was even more successful. His five sons settled in different capitals in Europe, and they carried on their banking business in partnership and their wealth increased from generation to generation.

A grandson of Mayer Anschel, Baron Edmund de Rothschild of France, head of the House of Rothschild, earned the name of *Hanadiv Hayadua* -- "The Famous Benefactor." He helped many Jews in many different ways. He died in Paris in 1934 at the age of ninety.

So this was the secret of the Rothschilds' success -- the unselfish generosity of an ordinary man, a man who gave charity without letting anyone know of his great sacrifice.

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**Rabbi (Dr.) Twerski and**

**The Sisters of St. Francis**

**By Daniel Keren**

 Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. is no doubt familiar to many readers of the Jewish Connection who have enjoyed his many books that combine his rabbinical perspectives gained from being the scion of great Chassidic dynasties going back to the Baal Shem Tov and as a medical doctor and psychiatrist who has devoted much of his career to helping those with alcohol and narcotic addictions in regaining control of their lives.



Many readers will no doubt find the title of Rabbi Dr. Twerski’s latest book (“The Rabbi & the Nuns: The Inside Story of a Rabbi’s Therapeutic Work with the Sisters of St. Francis,” published by Mekor Press) rather intriguing. Indeed as the book jacket asks, “What happens when you take a Chassidic rabbi and make him director of psychiatry at a Catholic hospital, treating nuns who have problems adjusting to the Vatican II reforms?”

**How the Rabbi**

**Became a Doctor**

While many of the short chapters in “The Rabbi & the Nuns” indeed relate his case work with both nuns and priests, there is in the beginning of his memoirs an interesting account of how Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski came to become a medical doctor. And some of the cases he discusses in this new book were with patients who were not Catholic clergy.

During his years in medical school, he was struggling to help support a family that included at the time three young children. An intriguing account of hashgacha pratis, Divine Intervention in human affairs in general and Dr. Twerski’s life in particular occurred when the famous comedian and television star Danny Thomas met with officials of Marquette University Medical School and was told of a young rabbi who was having difficulty with his tuition. On the spot, the celebrity decided to send the young rabbi doctor a gift of $4,000 (which probably today would have the buying power of between $50,000 - $100,000.)

**Director of Psychiatry**

After completing his psychiatric internship and doing a stint at a state hospital in Pennsylvania, Rabbi Dr. Twerski he was persuaded to take the position of director of psychiatry at St. Francis Hospital, a Catholic institution in Pittsburgh, an acute psychiatric center serving the Tri-State region of Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia.

One particular story that I found both informative and instructive of Rabbi Dr. Twerski’s unique method of treating patients was how he handled the problem of a Catholic priest who was in treatment to recover from alcoholism. The priest understood he couldn’t even take one drink of alcohol, but his problem was during the mass service he led for his parishioners he had to take a sip of wine. But Dr. Twerski considered that too great a risk and he called the Bishop who confirmed what the priest had said.

**A Suggestion**

**For the Pope**

Rabbi Twerski then asked the Bishop to make a special call to the Pope (Paul VI) in Rome and explain the medical dilemma and ask if special dispensation could be made for all recovering alcoholic priests to substitute grape juice when conducting mass. The Bishop called back Dr. Twerski and informed him that the Pope had agreed to the rabbi’s Solomonic suggestion. At which point Rabbi Dr. Twerski responded that the Pope had truly done a mitzvah.

Another interesting point the author noted in several of his cases of dealing with priests (and even his relationship with the Bishop) was their great respect for his religious integrity as a Jew. Indeed although their relationship was a medical one, all of his Catholic clergy patients and colleagues automatically called him Rabbi and not Dr. Twerski. And on numerous occasions when his session was over, Rabbi Dr. Twerski would be asked by some of the priests he treated to give them a blessing.

“Rabbis & the Nuns” by Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. is available in Jewish (and maybe some Catholic) bookstores. Or you can call the distributor at (718) 232-0856 or click www.mekorpress.com

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of the Jewish Connection.*

**A Slice of Life**

**The Power of a**

**Chanuka Stamp**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Hecht**



 It was Chanuka 2007, my first year as an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in my home town of Forest Hills, New York. As I stood in line in the local post office waiting to buy some stamps, I noticed a woman at the counter was quite upset after learning that there were no more Christmas stamps. "What do you have then?" she asked, "We have first class and Chanuka ones," the clerk replied. "I don't want Chanuka stamps!" she responded. Immediately, the man in front of me shouted out "I'll take the Chanuka stamps, give me a whole bunch of them!"

 Matt was a proud Jew! In public he did not care to proclaim his Judaism and his Jewish pride. And so I introduced myself, "My name is Mordechai from Chabad, nice to meet you." He replied emphatically, "I put on Tefilin every Friday with those guys on 108th Street and I put a few dollars in the pushkie" - referring to the charity box - "all the time."

 Matt had had some downs in his life; through a difficult divorce and loss of his business. But my impression of Matt was that he was optimistic for the future. We would talk from time to time about life, business, the neighborhood and more. Matt often joined us for Friday night dinners in our Chabad Home and he enjoyed them very much.

 One day Matt called and said, "The most frightening thing in my life happened to me." He told me that his next door neighbor, an elderly lady who he would check on quite often, was very ill. The other day she told Matt that she was not feeling well and he immediately called an ambulance. Before the ambulance arrived, she passed away right next to him in his hands. He said, "Rabbi, it was so scary. I feel so bad for her, and I don't know what to do, and I didn't know who to call, so I called you."

**Encouraging Matt to Put Mezuzas Up in His House**

 Wow! After a few minutes of conversation I said, "Matt, I was always taught that the Mezuza serves as a protection not just for the home but for the well being of the people in it. Perhaps you might consider getting Mezuzas in your home to serve as protection and a little peace of mind."

 "Rabbi," he began, "I know there are Mezuzas on our door but they are probably not kosher. Go ahead and get me two new Mezuzas - one for my door and one for the main door." When Matt came over the next day I explained to him how to put up the Mezuzas, and he gladly listened, leaving our Chabad Home on a mission.

 A few weeks later Matt called. "Rabbi, you're not going to believe it. For years my mom was practically deaf in one ear and she suddenly started to get her hearing back! The doctors were astonished; they said that they had no medical explanation for it. Rabbi, I have no doubt that my mom got her hearing back because of the Mezuza. Thank you so much for what you've done."

**Getting Another Mezuza for His Mom’s Bedroom**

 "Not me, G-d!" I said. "But I am so glad that you told me this."

 A little later Matt called back. "My mom asked if you could get her a Mezuza for her bedroom."

 From Chanuka stamps to Tefilin and charity, to Mezuzas and honoring his mother, Matt was a true and concerned Jew who not only believed, but also practiced what he believed. He was a man with a big heart and an open mind.

 A few weeks later, which happened to be almost a year after Matt and I first met, he called. "Rabbi, we need to talk." After asking what the matter was, all he could say was that we had to talk. When I told him I would come over, he said not to bother. A couple of days later, his sister called, "Matt is in a coma." Over the next few weeks, we visited Matt to pray at his bedside and performed acts of kindness in his merit. After being hospitalized for only a few weeks, Matt passed away from pneumonia. My wife and I were shocked; we had only just started to get to know Matt. It was clear G-d had other plans for him.

**Everyone at the Funeral was Impressed by Matt’s Story**

 At the funeral, it seemed as though the entire Italian mob was present. I soon learned that these guys were Matt's friends. I shared with them the story you have just read, and everyone was very moved. People were shocked to hear a side of Matt they had never known, including his mother and sister.

 After the funeral, I started to get calls from family members wishing to make donations in Matt's memory, and I had an epiphany. Matt's story was all about good deeds, but the Mezuza was at the epicenter of it all. I suggested to a family member that we make a fund for Matt - A Mezuza fund - and that perhaps the family could put together $1,800 to create it in his memory.

 The relative explained that such an amount would be a stretch, but she would get her family on board in contributing. Over the next few days, a few checks came in totaling $500. That was very nice, but it was not the $1,800 I had "epiphanied."

**A Generous Check from Matt’s Sister**

 Two weeks later, our doorbell rang. When I got to the door no one was there, but I saw an envelope in the mailbox. At first I noticed the address was wrong, and it had been reposted three times. Being that it was a Sunday, I knew the mailman hadn't dropped it off. I opened the envelope and was shocked and elated to find an $1,800 check made out to Chabad of the Gardens, Forest Hills from Matt's sister.

 I picked up the phone to tell her how glad I was that we would be able to perpetuate Matt's memory in such a special way. When I began to thank her for the money for the fund, she asked, "Which fund?" I said, "The Matt Colwes Mezuza Fund that we spoke about!" Confused, she replied that she did not know what I was talking about. I told her that I had discussed the fund with her cousin. She explained that she had not heard about the fund: "I just knew that Matt was enthusiastic about you and Chabad and I wanted to contribute and say 'thank you.' "

 The previous night, my wife and I had had a serious conversation about the general direction of our work. I had pitched the idea of the Matt Colwes Mezuza Fund explaining how the Mezuza is not only such an easy mitzva, it is also such a great way to meet people and one of the Mitzva Campaigns of the Rebbe, so why not start there? And now we had the resources to establish the Fund and it had arrived at just the right moment!

 The Matt Colwes Mezuza Fund is now the Matt Colwes Mezuza and Tefilin Fund and is stronger than ever. The fund has provided hundreds of Mezuzas and Tefilin to dozens of people in our neighborhood and to others throughout the New York area.

 All of this because of the Chanuka Stamp - a piece of paper worth less that 40 cents at the time and less than a square inch in diameter!

This article was reprinted from the recent Parshas Miketz 5774 edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. This article is dedicated to Moshe Duvid Ben Devorah (Matt) obm.

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**To Catch a Thief**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

 It is very easy to catch a thief when one has clues and evidence. It is a far different matter, however, when one must attempt to find the guilty party through his own wits alone. It is then that we must have a truly wise man- one as wise as, say Shlomo HaMelech.

 Along a lonely country road came three people, merchants who had just completed profitable business transactions. It was a Friday afternoon, and as the hours dragged by, the travelers saw that the sun was about to set and they would not possibly be able to reach town before Shabbos.

“I see that we shall have to camp here for tonight,” said one. “I suggest that since we are forbidden to carry money, we bury it all in one spot and leave it there until after Shabbos.”

 “That is a good idea,” agreed the other two.

 And so, the three merchants took all their valuables, and buried them together in one spot.

 That night, however, one of the merchants waited until his comrades had fallen asleep and getting up stealthily, tiptoed to the place where the money was buried. Despite the fact that it was Shabbos, and despite the fact that it’s forbidden to steal, the thief dug up the money and then walking into the forest, hid it away where no one else would find it.

 On Motzei Shabbos, the three merchants went to the place where the money was originally buried. Imagine their horror (that is, except for the thief) when they saw that the money was gone, obviously stolen by one of them.

**A Dispute Over Who Stole the Money**

 Immediately, all three began to shout and yell at each other: “You are the thief!”

 “No, you are!”

 “No, you stole the money!”

 After five minutes of accusation and name calling, one of the trio paused and said:

 “We are never going to get anywhere this way. It is obviously impossible for us to find out which of us is the real thief. This is something that only a very great and very wise man can do. Let us therefore go to the court of that wisest of all men, Shlomo HaMelech.

 Reaching the palace, the three had to wait their turn while hundreds of Jews with problems and lawsuits winded their way through the courtroom seeking justice and help. Finally the three reached the King’s throne.

“State your case,” ordered Shlomo HaMelech.

**A Most Difficult Question for Their King**

 “Oh great king,” began the merchant, “we have a most difficult problem that we are unable to solve. We have therefore come to you, in the hope that you in your great G-d given wisdom will be able to catch a thief.”

 The merchants then proceeded to tell the king how they had hidden their money because of the approach of Shabbos; how during the night, one of them must have awakened and transferred the money to some hidden spot. Now they were at a loss to know how to find the thief, since there were no witnesses or indeed any evidence which might point to one person’s guilt.

 Shlomo HaMelech sat in silence listening to the entire story. When the merchants had concluded, he sat without speaking.

 Suddenly he announced, “Judgment is in the morning! Return tomorrow and I shall catch your thief.”

 The following morning, court opened early, and the three merchants stood once again before the king.

 The night before, Shlomo HaMelech had wracked his brain in an effort to find some way to discover the thief. He realized that without clues, his only path was to work through the personality and character of the thief and to trap him by his own words.

**The King Asks for Their Advice**

 “Before I tell you who the thief is,” he began, “I would like your advice. I have heard that you are all wise and learned men, and so I will need your aid in a very perplexing problem that has arisen. Here is the story.”

 The merchants were flattered that the wisest of all men should turn to them for advice, and they listened eagerly as the king expounded the problem.

 “It appears,” began Shlomo HaMelech, “that there is a young boy who was a neighbor of a young girl his own age. They were very good friends, and became very attached to each other.

 “One day, the boy said to the girl:

 “‘Let us agree that if the day ever comes that one of us will desire to marry some other person that it shall not be done without the consent of the other one.’

 “The young girl agreed and faithfully gave her word to be bound by the agreement.

**The Girl Never Forgot Her Vow**

 “The years passed and the two drifted apart. The girl, however, never forgot her vow; and on the day that she became engaged, she told her prospective groom.

 “‘I want you to know that I swore many years ago to a boy I knew that I would seek his consent for any marriage that I would enter. I must, therefore, before entering into our marriage, seek this consent from him.’

 “‘I understand,’ replied her fiancée, ‘go seek out this person.’

 “After many days they arrived at the home of the boy and there the girl began to plead with her old friend to release her:

 “‘Take all my wealth if you wish,’ she cried, ‘but allow me to marry the one of my choice.’

 “The boy looked at her and replied:

 “‘Because you have faithfully observed our oath, I absolve you of it. Go and marry the one you love. And as for the money, I desire nothing from you.’

 “Happily, the couple left the home of the boy and set out for home.

 “As they were traveling, however, they were suddenly set upon by a band of robbers led by an old man. They were quickly overpowered and brought before the aged chieftain. He was struck by the beauty of the girl and declared his intentions of keeping her for his wife.

 “‘Wait,’ cried the girl. ‘Before you do this thing, listen to my story.’

 “And she began to tell the old bandit the entire story of her oath, her love for her fiancée and the absolution granted her by the boy.

**A Challenge to the Old Bandit**

 “‘Now,’ she said, ‘consider carefully. Here was a young man in the prime of his life who had some claim on me and yet knew it would be wrong to hold me against my will. How much more so should this hold true for you who are an old man and a bandit.’

 “Upon hearing the words of the maiden, the bandit lifted his eyes to heaven and declared:

 “‘Behold, it is true that I am old and I walk daily along the edge of my grave, and how can I do such a terrible thing?’

 “Turning to the couple then, he ordered that his bandits release them, wishing them farewell.”

 Shlomo HaMelech ended his narrative and turned to the merchants:

 “You have heard the story of the incident that occurred. The king in whose domain this occurred now wishes to know the following:

 Which of the parties involved is to be the most highly praised?”

**The Opinions of the Merchants**

 The merchants thought for a few moments, and then one spoke up:

 “Surely the maiden is to be the most praised for having clung so steadfastly to her vow.”

 “I disagree,” stated the second. “In my opinion, it is the betrothed who agreed to go along with her vow.”

 “It is the bandit that I feel is the most praiseworthy,” answered the third, “for he had all the beautiful money, and nevertheless, returned it.”

 When Shlomo HaMelech heard this, he leaped to his feet and pointing an accusing finger at the third merchant, declared:

 “You are the thief! You are the only one who was so impressed by the money. Confess now!”

 The merchant began to tremble and in a broken voice cried out: “Yes, yes, I am the thief.”

 The people in the court were deeply impressed by this exhibition and “they saw that the wisdom of G-d was in his midst to do justice.”

Reprinted from the October 5, 2013 edition of The Jewish Press.

**From Mountain Mama**

**To Yiddishe Mama**

**The True Story of an Appalachian Family**

**Of 12 Who Converted to Judaism.**

**By** [**Penina Neiman**](http://www.aish.com/authors/234253611.html)

Sheryl Youngs was born into a devout family of Sabbath-observing Christians, adherents of the Church of G-d 7th Day. Her father, Brother Victor Youngs, was the pastor of their church, a charismatic leader who conducted many baptismal ceremonies over the years. He had but one little congregant who stubbornly refused to be baptized; his daughter Sheryl.

**

*The Youngs Family: Left to right, back row: me, my mother and my father*

At the age of 16 she finally succumbed to familial pressure and allowed herself to be baptized. When asked to sign the baptismal certificate that stated a lifelong pledge to serve as a “flowering vine of their [Savior](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/93663419.html),” she refused. She did not want to sell herself out to a religion that she was less than 100% sure was the truth.

**A Questioning Teen**

Sheryl was a questioning teen, intuitively searching for knowledge of her Creator.

“When I was 14,I attended a youth camp with a group from [our church](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48932037.html). One night, everyone sat around a campfire, singing and praying. Somehow, the very beauty of the service did not satisfy me; if anything, it only intensified the relentless yearning within me. I wanted something more.

“I walked up a wooded hill and peered up at the heavens spread out above the towering pine trees. The flickering stars felt so close; I felt deeply connected to G-d. Deep within, a new thought welled up. G-d, Creator of the magnificent heavens above me, was surely great enough to hear my prayers. I said to myself, ‘If the G-d of the universe is so powerful as to make these heavens, then I know that He can listen to my prayer. I need no mediator! From now on, I am only going to pray to G-d Himself!’”1

Sheryl was a voracious reader, passionately devouring book after book in her quest for knowledge of G-d and her purpose in the world. It was the following words of Tolstoy that got her thinking, “’These are the great questions of life that everyone has to answer; is there a G-d? Is there life after death? Is there reward and punishment? What’s the purpose of life?’

**Fueling a Desire for More Knowledge**

These questions fueled my desire for more knowledge. The more I read, the more I realized that there was much more to know. I began to keep a list of books that I was determined to track down and read. My father once joked that I reminded him of an alcoholic pining for a drink, and there was truth to his words. I read like a man possessed, devouring book after book in my search for answers.”

Although she had many questions, Sheryl was afraid to express her concerns. She began to search for answers within the context of different branches of Christianity, but in every church she encountered new practices and beliefs that went against her perception of G-d.

Her genteel anti-Semitism and mistrust of Jews kept her from taking a serious look at Judaism. Upon entering college she resolved to study all the religions of the world. The society she’d come from had given her a genteel anti-Semitism and a mistrust of Jews, which kept her from taking a serious look at Judaism. She resolved instead to study the Koran, but was unable to understand it.

She decided to continue her education at the Midwest Bible College in Missouri, which proved to be a turning point in her life. It was at Bible College that Sheryl met John Massey, a Bible scholar and the man she would marry.

“As a teenager, I had struggled with doubts and fears about religion, but the… reaction that Christianity exerted upon questioners who thought out of the box kept me from ever verbalizing my troubling thoughts. For years I turned them over and over in my mind as I continued my lonely search for answers. Ironically, it was at missionary college that I came upon the first few holes in my belief system. There, I learned that the New Testament had evolved out of a collection of letters that mere men decided to write – men who had not even claimed to have received prophecy.

**Struck by the Words of Her Teacher**

“And it was in missionary college, at the age of 19, that I finally found someone I could talk to… One summer night, [my friend and teacher] Jewell and I stood together under the oak trees in front of her home. We were talking about the Bible, and Jewell told me that she was troubled by our religion’s practice of extracting just a few commandments from the Old Testament while ignoring all the rest. Her words struck a chord. I had grappled with this question for years. This was the first time I had ever heard anyone verbalize it.”

It was also Jewell who first suggested that Sheryl date John Massey. Before long the two were engaged and had decided to establish their home in Georgia near John’s parents.

**Moving to Appalachia**

It was there that Sheryl received the shock of her life. Although she had realized that her in-laws lived a simpler life than what she had been accustomed to back in Southern California, she hadn’t realized the full extent of the difference until after her wedding.

She had envisioned living in a pleasant farmhouse with a white picket fence. Instead, home was a little room at the back of her in-laws’ house deep in the Appalachian Mountains. This was the 1970’s, and Sheryl now had to get used to a home with no indoor plumbing, a place where a soothing hot shower was an impossible luxury and outhouses were the norm.

Back in school John presented the perfect picture of a modern man. He cut a smart image in his suit and drove a nice car. Sheryl had every reason to believe that he was used to the same middle class standards that she was. Having grown up in the ’60’s, Sheryl had a bit of an anti-materialistic mentality, and was not all that alarmed by the thought of “roughing it.”

Yet the beginning of her married life was challenged by the great cultural differences she now confronted at every turn. The new slow-paced life style she was introduced to as they began their family amongst the mountain folk was light years away from anything Sheryl had ever imagined.

Sheryl had been trained since childhood not to complain, and had learned that it was best not to feel at all. Her parents believed that children were inherently evil and were firm believers in corporal punishment. Her father’s disciplinary measures would likely be considered quite harsh by today’s standard. She had also been taught that it was her duty to submit to the will of her husband. So although she was bewildered by her new circumstances, she never thought to challenge her husband.

Sheryl worked hard to fit in and accept her new life. In time she learned how to haul water up from the well, build a fire, make Granny’s butter milk biscuits, and butcher the freshly killed deer that her sons brought home for dinner.

**A homeschooling pioneer**

Walker County, Georgia, where John and Sheryl raised their family, was known for its impoverished and unsuccessful public school system. Sheryl never met anyone in those parts with a college education; the vast majority of adults had never even finished grade school and 40% of the county was illiterate. Sheryl was determined to homeschool her children, a decision she had made in response to her own exposure to the loose moral values in the U.S. public school system.

Despite the fact that homeschooling was illegal in Georgia and the truant officers and social service workers even threatened to take their children away, Sheryl held on to her vision. She had always been idealistic, and once she became a mother she channeled her passion into educating her children.

**Incorporating Many Life Lessons**

**In Her Children’s Curriculum**

 “My lessons included a lot more than the standard curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic… I also made sure to incorporate many life lessons into our classroom discussions. In this way I was able to instill in my children the attitudes and values that their father and I had cultivated over the years. I also read to them from the [Old Testament](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48922267.html)…

My personal favorite was dubbed ‘successful men,’ which I developed into a tool to get my sons to think beyond society’s desire for instant gratification. I wanted them to have a chance at a brighter future, to grow to become men of vision who would build a life for themselves beyond the squalor that mired our society of hillbillies.”

Except for a few brief years when they lived near an Indian reservation in Oklahoma, or near her widowed mother in Joplin, Missouri, Sheryl spent most of next 23 years living in the Appalachian Mountains. Materially the family encountered nothing but unremitting poverty, and Sheryl struggled mightily to keep her family warm and fed. But for all their deprivation, the Massey’s were blessed with a beautiful family consisting of ten healthy and well adjusted children.

**Breaking away from the Church**

Spiritually they had taken their own unique journey. Early on in their marriage John’s in-depth bible study led him to reject Christianity, a realization that left a very devout Sheryl devastated. Although she had been beset by doubts for nearly her entire life, her parents had managed to instill in her the belief that accepting their savior would guarantee eternal salvation. She was too frightened to even contemplate giving up Christianity. It was a risk she wouldn’t dream of taking.

For seven years the couple was at odds over their personal views of religion. Sheryl tried everything to bring her husband back to their roots. Finally, after all those years, she was worn down. There was nothing left to try. Broken hearted, she prayed to G-d to bring her husband back to their roots, and as an afterthought added, “And if he is correct, help me to see the truth.”

The next time she opened a bible she felt as if a light had turned on and her lifelong struggle with her questions on Christianity all came to the fore. Sheryl began to see the validity behind John’s beliefs and decided to go along with her husband.

**Trying to Make Sense of the Contradictions**

One of the hardest parts of belonging to this religion was the suffocating feeling that there was nothing else to learn.

 “I had fought with myself for decades as I tried to make sense of the [contradictions between my religion](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/My-Journey-from-Chinese-to-Jewish.html) and my own relationship with the Creator. One of the hardest parts of belonging to this religion was the suffocating feeling that there was nothing else to learn. As a thinking individual, I had formed my own impressions of the world. I looked up to the heavens and saw an endless sky spread out above me.

 The dark expanse of the evening sky, studded with multitudes of stars, shining pinpricks of light coalescing into giant galaxies, all bore proof of the vastness of the universe and beyond. In contrast to the mind-boggling endlessness of the world, I found the complexity inherent in the DNA of the microscopic cells in even my littlest toe to be just as great proof of an Intelligence so endless and so infinite that I was awed.

“After witnessing firsthand the greatness of the physical world, I had been left wondering how the spiritual world could possibly be so simplistic and narrow. If the physical world is infused with a sense of infinity, why would the spiritual world be so limited, comprising just a few beliefs and practices? Shouldn’t religion be at least as intricate as the physical world?”

John and Sheryl believed in One G-d Who had created the world and had given mankind the Old Testament. They continued to rest on the Sabbath. They no longer went to church, alienating their community and their family. They were on their own.

They might have stayed on that mountain, observing their own idea of religion until this day, if Sheryl hadn’t come to realize that her growing children needed some sort of community if they were to find fitting mates and establish families of their own.

**Searching for God’s People**

It was John who first suggested they look into Judaism, since he recognized that Jews also rested on the Sabbath and studied the Old Testament. Their first foray into Judaism brought them to a Conservative Congregation in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Sheryl was impressed by the rabbi, a polished Harvard graduate, and was deeply inspired by the Kiddush ceremony. They attended services there for some time, before becoming disenchanted with some of the congregant’s manner of dress and deciding to move on.

Their next step was a Reform temple in Rome, Georgia but nothing about the temple or the service spoke to the Masseys. Then John met Rabbi Michael Katz, an Orthodox rabbi in Chattanooga. The Massey boys remember their father’s ecstatic declaration upon meeting Rabbi Katz. “For the first time in my life, I met a man who could answer my questions!” In keeping with the Torah’s directive to turn away prospective converts Rabbi Katz suggested that they attend a Unitarian Universalist congregation. However the loose moral standards accepted in that congregation discouraged the Masssey’s from taking an interest in that congregation.

For the next year they put their search on hold and spent their time on the mountain following their own religious beliefs. Then John went back to Rabbi Katz and tried again. This time the rabbi tried to discourage him by telling him that services were conducted in Hebrew, a language he wouldn’t be able to understand. John would not be deterred, and so Rabbi Katz invited him and his oldest sons down to the synagogue. In time the Massey family was invited for Shabbos.

Sheryl and her children were taken by the beauty of the Jewish Shabbos. As Sabbath observers the concept was familiar, but she felt it was empty compared to what the Jews had. She loved the way Rabbi Katz interacted with her children, and was thrilled that Rebbetzin Toby Katz was able to answer some of the questions that troubled her. It was Sheryl who first decided that she would like to convert. After some time John began to look into the [Noahide](http://www.aish.com/atr/Seven_Laws_of_Noah.html) movement.

**The Oldest Son Makes**

**His Own Spiritual Decision**

The Massey boys were growing up, and the oldest son, Joey, decided to move ahead in his spiritual quest without waiting for his parent’s decision on the matter. He bought himself a pickup truck and began driving out to Atlanta on a daily basis to learn Torah. Joey accepted the Torah as the ultimate truth and realized that all that was required of him was the observance of the Seven Noahide Laws. Joey loved hunting, the woods, the mountain folk, and the entire culture he was raised in.

The city felt cold and foreign in comparison. He struggled with the choice that confronted him; to convert and become a Jew or remain a faithful Son of Noah? His greatest fear was that his family would not follow him to Judaism, yet Joey decided to become a Jew. He felt that through Judaism and observing its 613 mitzvot he would forge a close relationship to G-d. Joey moved to Atlanta and converted, his brother Nate came soon after, as did the rest of the family.

Their four oldest sons converted to Judaism and flew off to Jerusalem to learn in a yeshivah.

In the space of just a few years Sheryl and John’s four oldest sons converted to Judaism and flew off to Jerusalem to learn in a yeshivah. The fifth one followed on their heels. At that same time the Massey’s faith was tested once again. After giving birth to ten healthy children, Sheryl bore her 11th child, a little girl whose medical condition was incompatible with life, and who died at the age of one month.

The family was devastated, and Sheryl was overcome with grief. In the wake of this crisis the Massey’s marriage fell apart and John and Sheryl divorced.

**Finding peace in the Land of Israel**

Two years later Sheryl converted along with her younger children and took the name Tzirel Rus. She moved the rest of her family to Israel were the family was finally reunited. (Their father would follow them and convert a few years later.) It was there that she finally found peace after years of searching and suffering.

“I stood at the world’s holiest site, the Western Wall, the remnant of the glorious Temple that once graced the earth. …I had been praying all my life, turning my heart to the Creator of the heavens and stars and begging Him to help me on my life’s journey. I promised to serve Him, but didn’t know how. Empty and alone, I was ignorant of the truth, clawing at the earth as I slowly, laboriously climbed the rugged terrain of the expedition that had been my life.

**An Intense Feeling of Thanksgiving**

“…Now my soul raced to find my place among all the women who seemed to roil with prayer and connection to G-d. I restrained myself and walked towards the plaza, filled with an intense thanksgiving that I was at last able to connect with my G-d amidst a crowd of other yearning souls.”

It was in Israel that Tzirel Rus’s dream at last came true, as she sat at her Shabbos table surrounded by her ten Jewish children, serenaded by the melodious singing of her children and their friends. She rented an apartment in a small developing town in the Judean Hills. Her innovative and pioneering spirit urged her to roll up her sleeves and get to work in building up the local English speaking community. She arranged Torah classes and brought in speakers, and before long became a well known and much loved member of her community.

An excerpt from a letter written to her Jewish friends back in the U.S. expresses these sentiments.

**A Sense of Destiny**

“I feel that all of my life’s experiences have been to bring me to this moment. G-d had always put me in situations where I had no one to follow, compelling me to blaze my own path. Here in this growing town, I feel a sense of destiny. With G-d’s help I will get to pioneer and blaze new trails, only this time I am building on holy soil amidst a holy nation. This time everything will be forever.”

After seven years of single motherhood, Tzirel Rus married the man of her dreams. A Hassidic Jew, Avrum had grown up in New York, and like her had known the pain of a failed marriage, as well as a lifelong incapacitating illness.

 “Our backgrounds couldn’t have been more different. Avrum had grown up in Crown Heights, and had gone to *cheder* with the Boyaner Rebbe. And me? Southern California and the Appalachian Mountains are a long way from Crown Heights…

“With all that, Avrum and I found much in common. There is something about painful life experiences – no matter what their source – that draws together fellow survivors. Our past histories, in which we had both engaged in backbreaking labor, removing metaphorical stones and battling the parched and hardened earth, had resulted in dark, loamy soil from which our shared future would sprout. The vagaries of our lives forced both of us to rise above ur physical limitations and develop a more spiritual perspective on life. This strength became the cornerstone of our relationship, the basis for the deep understanding that developed between us. We became true partners in every way. More, we were each other’s biggest fans.”

**Meriting to Build a Warm**

**and Peaceful Home**

With her marriage to Avrum, Tzirel Rus finally moved beyond her difficult childhood and merited to build a warm and peaceful home where her children and grandchildren feel so loved and welcome.

Tzirel Rus’s unusual journey and charismatic personality have made her a magnet for many searching Jews. Her message to them? “I have looked into the four corners of the world, searching for the recipe of life, and after all my efforts I can honestly tell you that I found it by the Jews.”

*Reprinted from this week’s email from the website of Aish.com You can read the story of the father, mother, and their ten children who all converted to Judaism in the newly-published book,* [*The Mountain Family*](http://www.artscroll.com/linker/aish/link/Books/mfamh.html)*, by Tzirel Rus Berger and Penina Neiman (Mesorah Publications).*

**Rav Moshe Dovid Walli**

 **Rav Moshe Dovid Walli** (Vally; Vali) (1697 - 1777). The foremost talmid of Ramchal in Padua, Italy, he practiced as a physician in Padova. When the Ramchal was forced to leave Italy, Rav Moshe Dovid was appointed head of his academy in Padova.

 Also known as the Rama”d Vali, he wrote a commentary on commentary on Chumash (Ohr Olam on Breishis; Bris Olam on Shemos; Avodas Hakodesh on Vayikra; Shivtei Kah on Bamidbar; Mishna Lamelech on Devarim), Na”Ch, Likkutim. His yahrtzeit was yesterday, the 7th day of Teves.

*Reprinted from the December 10, 2013 website of Matzav.com*

**Milkman Who Showed**

**A Lot of Bottle**

**By** [**Marcus Dysch**](http://www.thejc.com/users/marcus-dysch)

 A milkman who helped to save the life of a Jewish pensioner who collapsed in a hedge has received an award.



George Debesay with Barnet Mayor Melvin Cohen

and Shomrim's Gavriel Ost

 George Debesay was on his delivery round in north-west London last winter when he spotted an object in the darkness. Stopping his float to investigate, he found an unconscious elderly man.

 Mr Debesay immediately rang volunteers from the Shomrim community security group for assistance. Doctors said his actions had saved the pensioner’s life.

 The Eritrea-born milkman, who works for the kosher Charedi Dairies company, regularly assists Shomrim by looking out for suspicious activity while on his early-morning rounds.

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 He was presented with the organisation’s first Exemplary Citizen Award at its Chanucah party in Golders Green on Tuesday evening. Charedi Dairies director Eli Stern said: “George is a helping hand for the Shomrim, a good neighbourhood watch man.”

 Around 50 people attended the celebration, including police chaplain Rabbi Alan Plancey and Barnet’s deputy borough commander, Superintendent Mark Strugnell.

*Reprinted from the December 9, 2013 website of the Jewish Chronicle Online (London, U.K.)*