**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Shemos 5772**

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**Chassidic Story #737**

**Tailor to the Rescue**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh** was renowned for his punctilious observance of the mitzvot, being prepared to risk his life even for the merest detail ordained by the Sages. The Czarist regime of his day decreed that all Jews were to shave off their peyos, and some unscrupulous informer told the local authorities that Reb Hillel's earlocks were still intact. They decided to shear them off by force, but Reb Hillel covered them tightly with his hands to protect them.

**The Jewish Tailor Bribed**

**The Officers with Gifts**

The soldiers withdrew their swords and forcefully began hitting his hands and head, causing him to scream. His neighbor, a Jewish tailor who had a good relationship with the officers in charge, heard him and came running, and after promising them gifts, he convinced them to leave. Grateful for his help, Reb Hilled blessed the man, and promised him that "after a hundred and twenty years" he would be rewarded by being buried next to him.

**The 50th Gate of Impurity**

[Reb Hillel once explained that his dedication to maintaining his peyos and beard came from having seen a hand-written essay of the tzadik **Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz**, in which he wrote that adapting non-Jewish clothing styles and appearance was the 50th Gate of Impurity, which if the Jews had fallen one more level into it they would not have been able to be redeemed from Egypt.

Similarly, in the times preceding the revelation of King Mashiach there will be an endeavor to make the Jews change their clothing and appearance, and unfortunately it will succeed. Only in the merit of those individuals that will refuse to change their appearance even at the risk of their lives will all the Jews be blessed with redemption.

Reb Hillel concluded, "Anyone that would have this manuscript would of course be willing to give up his life for the sake of traditional Jewish dress and appearance."]

**Became Rabbi of Bobruisk**

Many years passed. Reb Hillel in the meantime became rabbi of Bobruisk, and every year would travel around the provinces and to the cities of Kherson and Yekatrinoslav, teaching Torah as well to the farmers of the Jewish agricultural colonies, by whom he was greatly admired. In the summer of 1864, at age 69, he suddenly fell ill while staying in Kherson - which is very far from Bobruisk and Paritsh in White Russia - and passed away there.

On the following day, amidst widespread mourning, he was brought to burial, and his disciples and admirers flocked there for many years thereafter to pray at the graveside of this tzadik.

**An Unknown Elderly Traveler Died**

Sometime later, on a bitterly cold and stormy day, an unknown elderly traveler died in the town's communal hostelry. The Chevra Kadisha [Jewish Burial Society] prepared his body and took him to be buried, intending to place him in the section for unknown people. However, due to the fierce winter snow, they unknowingly buried him near Reb Hillel.

A day or two later it was noticed that the new grave had been dug right next to the resting place of the illustrious Reb Hillel. When the facts came to light a great hubbub arose in town: was it proper that an unknown traveler whom no respectable citizen even knew, a nobody who had died in the communal poorhouse - that such a one should be buried next to the tzadik?

**Inquiring About the Dead Man**

It was too late, though, to change things: the Torah would never allow it. At least let them find out just who this individual was. His identification papers disclosed his name and that of his father, and the fact that he came from Paritsh. The communal worthies of Kherson therefore wrote to their counterparts in Paritsh, asking to be told at least whatever they knew about this man.

The answer from Paritsh identified him clearly: he was a retired tailor, who had been traveling in order to live with one of his children. They added that this same tailor had many long years earlier been promised by Reb Hillel that "after a hundred and twenty years" he would be brought to rest next to his own resting place.

And so, the decades-old promise of Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh came to fruition.

[Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Lma'an Yishme'u #78, and from Sipurei Chasidim, as translated by Uri Kaploun in A Treasury of Chassidic Tales (Artscroll).]

**One of the Ways We Merited**

**Redemption from Egypt**

Connection: Weekly Torah - One of the four ways we Jews merited the redemption from Egypt was adhering to Jewish appearance. See also the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs above [in brackets].

Biographical note: **Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh** (1795-13 Av/Shabbat Nachamu 1864) was a chassid of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Tsemach Tsedek, and as the chassidim used to say, "half a rebbe" in his own right. He served as the Rabbi of Bobruisk for many years, and authored Pelach HaRimon, a work of deep chassidic thought.

**Rabbi Pinchas** (ben R. Avraham Abba Shapiro) of Koretz (1726 - 10 Elul 1791) was considered to be one of the two most pre-eminent followers of Chassidism's founder, the Baal Shem Tov (along with his successor, the Maggid of Mezritch). His teachings appear in various collections (such as Midrash Pinchas), and are cited in the classic Bnei Yissaschar.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org,*

*a project of Ascent of Safed*

[*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)[*ascent@ascentofsafed.com*](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000nF00:001F0iDk000029s3&count=1325611907&randid=1833757664&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1833757664##)

**The Greatness of Our**

**Spiritual Leaders**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren*.” (Shemot 2:11)

When Moshe Rabenu (Moses our Teacher) was still quite young, the Torah tells us that he went out to the countryside to see firsthand the enslavement to which his brethren were subjected. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, he saw that there was no one around so he killed the Egyptian.

Rashi says that “he saw no one around” means he examined the Egyptian’s soul and determined that no righteous descendant will come from him. Later it is also revealed to us that he killed the Egyptian by uttering one of Hashem’s Holy Names and using its powers.

**Kept in the Confines of the**

**Palace Until That Day**

Moshe Rabenu was young at the time. Some commentators say he was only a teenager, and he lived in the palace of Pharaoh from the time he was weaned from his mother Yochebed. Midrash Tanhumah says that his adopted mother, Batya, kept him within the confines of the palace until that day when Moshe went out to observe the slavery.

Nevertheless, by the time he left the palace, he had already become a spiritual giant, possessing Divine vision and Divine powers to use at will. The question is obvious. How was Moshe able to achieve such a high level at such a young age, if he was always in the palace, surrounded by idolatry?

**Explanation Based on the Zohar**

Rabbi David Hofsteder explains, based on the Zohar and other sources, that Moshe Rabenu was born with a unique soul. This soul gave him greater potential for spiritual achievement than anyone who ever lived or would ever come after him. The Zohar says, “Even before Moshe was born, he existed on a very high plane. Therefore, the Shechinah remained with him from the day he was born.”

He needed this special soul to have a potential to be a person that could go up to Heaven and receive the Torah and bring it down to the Jewish people. Moshe was born with the potential to override the laws of nature and perform miracles for the sake of his people. All this was his potential. It was up to him to use it for good and not to become part of the ways of Pharaoh. If Moshe was born with such great capabilities, it is understandable that he needed no teacher to become the greatest prophet.

There is an important lesson here. While every person has free choice, Hashem sends certain very special people into this world endowed with lofty souls from birth. Certainly there is none to compare to Moshe; nevertheless, Hashem sends exalted souls to every generation. Those are the sadikim and gedolim (Torah giants) of each generation.

**We Can Never Understand the**

**Reasoning of Our Torah Giants**

On a superficial level we may think we understand their intentions and the reasons they conduct themselves as they do. The truth is, however, that many times we cannot truly comprehend the reasons and intentions behind many of their actions. Therefore, sometimes we cannot question them. Therefore, let us honor them appropriately and heed their guidance for our own benefit.

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

[**Woman’s Quest Could Mean Medal of Honor for Dad**](http://www.timesleader.com/news/Womans_quest_could_mean_Medal_of_Honor_for_dad_01-10-2012.html)

**By the Associated Press**

It was bravery at the highest level: William Shemin defied German machine gun fire to sprint across a World War I battlefield and pull wounded comrades to safety. And he did so no fewer than three times.

Then, with the platoon's senior soldiers wounded or killed, the 19-year-old American took over command of his unit and led it to safety, even after a bullet pierced his helmet and lodged behind an ear.

Yet Shemin never earned the nation's highest military citation, the Medal of Honor a result, many suspected, of the fact that he was Jewish at a time when discrimination ran rampant throughout the U.S. military.

**Tireless Efforts of His Daughter**

Now, nearly four decades after his death, Shemin may finally get that medal, thanks to the tireless efforts of his daughter, whose long quest to see her father decorated also opens the door for other overlooked Jewish veterans of the Great War.



*Elsie Shemin-Roth holds a photo father, William Shemin, taken during World War I, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2012, at her home in Labadie, Mo. Photo by Jeff Roberson of A.P.*

"A wrong has been made right here," said Shemin's daughter, 82-year-old Elsie Shemin-Roth of Labadie, Mo., a small town about 40 miles southwest of St. Louis.

Last month, President Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act, which contains a tiny provision known as the William Shemin Jewish World War I Veterans Act. It provides for a Pentagon review of Jewish soldiers and sailors who may have been overlooked for the Medal of Honor simply because of their faith.

**Review of Jews Possibly Denied**

**Medal of Honor Recognition**

Shemin's daughter was the driving force behind the measure, an effort that began a decade ago when she read news accounts of a similar law that provided for review of Jews possibly denied recognition in World War II. She was horrified there was no similar mechanism for World War I veterans.

So she began gathering military records, photos, commendations and first-hand accounts of her father's heroism. Eventually, she enlisted the help of her congressman and support from both U.S. senators from Missouri.

Retired Army Col. Erwin Burtnick of Baltimore, who is active in the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A., helped get the bill passed. He also reviewed Shemin's war record and will present the case on his behalf to the Pentagon.

"I believe based upon the criteria of World War I, the level of heroism exhibited by Sgt. Shemin will rise to the Medal of Honor," Burtnick said.

At the time, the enlistment age was 21, but Shemin lied about his age and got in at 18. A tall, strapping athlete who played semi-pro baseball at age 15 and later played college football at Syracuse, Shemin was sent off to France. On a hot day in August 1918, he and his platoon were doing battle near a river in Burgundy.

One of his superiors, Capt. Rubert Purdon, later wrote in support of a Medal of Honor: "With the most utter disregard for his own safety, (Shemin) sprang from his position in his platoon trench, dashed out across the open in full sight of the Germans, who opened and maintained a furious burst of machine gun and rifle fire."

**Led His Group Out of Harm’s Way**

Shemin didn't stop there. Casualties were heavy. Many senior platoon leaders had been killed or badly hurt, so the young sergeant led the group out of harm's way over the next three days.

Along the way, a German bullet hit him in the head, went through the steel helmet and lodged behind her father's left ear. He eventually collapsed and was hospitalized for three months. The wound left him deaf in that ear.

The heroics did not go unnoticed: Shemin was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second-highest military honor.

He eventually left the military, got a degree from Syracuse and started a greenhouse-and-nursery business in the Bronx, where he raised three children.

**Only Occassionally Reflected On Possible Anti-Semitism**

Shemin was satisfied with the medal he got, his daughter recalled, and only occasionally wondered if he was passed over for the Medal of Honor because of anti-Semitism.

"My father told me there was a lot of discrimination, but he didn't dwell on it," she said.

But once, when another soldier paid a visit, Shemin's daughter was struck by something the man told her.

"He witnessed my father's actions," said Shemin-Roth, who was then 12. "He told me, 'Your father never got the medal he deserved because he was a Jew.' I thought to myself how terrible that was."

Shemin was 78 when he died in 1973. His sense of determination clearly rubbed off on his daughter. Her first husband died when she was just 43 and a mother of five. She went to college and became a nurse.

Since then, she's done volunteer work in war-torn areas around the world. Back in Labadie, she heads a nonprofit animal-rescue group, and her property on a rural hilltop is home to dozens of rescued animals, from cats and dogs to donkeys, geese and fish.

The new law may have arrived too late to recognize many Jewish heroes from World War I. They're all gone now the last surviving American World War I veteran died last year. Even many of their children have died or are well into their 80s and 90s, Burtnick said, making it less likely that surviving relatives will have enough documentation to prove worthiness of the Medal of Honor.

**A Decision Expected by this Spring**

So far, Burtnick said, the only veteran whose case will be presented for review is William Shemin.

A decision could come by spring. If the Pentagon approves, the president would present the medal on Shemin's behalf to his daughter in a White House ceremony. Just the thought chokes her up.

"I try so hard to think of what my father would think of this," she said. "He was such a humble man. All I can see in my head is this big handsome man sitting down, tears in his eyes."

*Reprinted from the Associated Press (AP) dispatch published in many subscribing newspapers across the United States on January 10, 2012.*

**The Bagel Incident**

**By Emuna Braverman**



It’s a tradition to make a celebration called a "*siyum*" when you finish a significant portion of the Torah. Learning Torah, while not typically thought of as hard labor (no hard hat or construction boots) actually requires tremendous physical and intellectual effort (the two go hand in hand). And it demands determination and constancy. Like all of life’s true accomplishments, Torah is acquired through consistent effort, day in and day out. The consistency itself, in the face of life’s challenges is not small part of the achievement.

And so, my husband recently made a big *siyum* (a very big one!). We planned a modest celebration at our son’s high school.

Teenage boys are so easy to feed – some bagels, lox and cream cheese – and some homemade desserts. I was in charge of the food. I baked the cookies (my daughter made gingerbread cookies in the shape of Torahs – you’re never too old…), I sliced vegetables. I made platters of lox and purchased multiple containers of cream cheese.

**Order Six Dozen Bagels from a Local Bakery**

And I order 6 dozen bagels from a local bakery, to be picked up at 6:30 a.m. the morning of the event.

I was very excited for my husband. I jumped out of bed and ran to the bakery. Okay, I picked my exhausted self slowly out of bed and dragged myself to the bakery – slightly later than the appointed time. But the bagels weren’t there.

“What?!” I screamed. “We ordered these ahead of time. Everyone is waiting. My husband is making a *siyum*; we need these bagels!”

Actually, I didn’t scream. I waited somewhat patiently, exercising self-control – although my facial expression may have communicated my displeasure.

**Feel the Frustration Beginning to Seep in and Grow**

But I thought those thoughts. I could feel the frustration beginning to seep in and grow. And, yet, I wasn’t oblivious to the irony. It was a celebration of Torah learning, a study that is supposed to help us emulate the Almighty, to be more Godlike in our behavior.

To lose my temper at the bakery because I wanted bagels for the *siyum* would have missed the point entirely. I came close.

Luckily I stopped myself. Luckily I had perspective. Luckily I have some vision of who I’d like to be and that screaming banshee lurking in the dark recesses of my personality just isn’t it.

I’m very proud of my husband’s achievements. I like to think I’ve grown from it also. But it’s clearly not enough. I have a long way to go. I think I’d better do more than bask in his glory; I’d better immerse myself in some consistent Torah learning of my own.

And, in case you’re wondering, the staff at the bakery was very apologetic and delivered the bagels directly to my home 10 minutes later. Not a morsel was left…

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

**An Interview with Shabbat**

**By Moshe Parelman**

 *“Rain likely tomorrow, the high 60. Saturday should be a beautiful day with sunshine and a high of 72. Stay turned for more of the Leonard Lapine Show*

**Leonard:** My next guest is known throughout the world as the Holy Sabbath. He’s written a new book called *Shabbat: Make My Day*, and I’m very pleased that it brings Shabbat back to our show. Hello.

**Shabbat:** It’s great to be here, Leonard.

**Leonard:** Your first book was a memoir, *My Days of Rest*. This book is also about Shabbat. How is it different?

**How to Maximize Your Enjoyment of Shabbat**

**Shabbat:** My new book tells you what you can do to maximize your enjoyment of Shabbat, the meaning behind some of the more popular Shabbat customs, and I give my recipe for *gefilte* fish.

**Leonard:** Your first piece of advice is “Don’t Be Shy, Say Hi to the Shabbat Bride.” I never knew you were married. Who is it? Someone we know?

**Shabbat:** Leonard, when you’ve been married for thousands of years, as I have, you better have a great spouse—especially when you come home only on weekends. But I knew from the beginning that I was married to someone special. See, I got married late. When the world was created, I was made last. By the seventh day, all the other days had mates: Sunday with Wednesday; Monday with Thursday; and Tuesday with Friday.

**Leonard:** Is that how they came up with the alternate side parking days in New York?

**Shabbat:** It’s worth looking into. As I was saying, by the time I was created, everybody had a partner except me. G‑d could see I was dejected. So He said to me, “Don’t worry, Shabbat, I have someone very special for you.” I said, “Are you creating an eighth day?” “No,” He told me, “I’m giving you to the Jewish people.” Leonard, in the fall, I’m proud to say, we celebrated our 5,772nd wedding anniversary.

**Leonard:** *Mazel tov*. But you see each other only on the weekends?

**Shabbat:** That’s right. I’m away during the week. I’m a stress-management consultant, so I travel all the time. When we’re reunited Friday night, the Jewish people practically sing and dance—actually, they do sing and dance.

**Leonard:** Tell us about it.

**Singing a Beautiful Song Called “Lecha Dodi”**

**Shabbat:** As Friday turns into Shabbat, they conduct a special prayer service just to welcome me. Toward the end of that service they sing a beautiful song called “Lecha Dodi”—“Welcome, My Beloved.”

**Leonard:** So how does this song compel you to make your entrance?

**Shabbat:** Well, when they get to the last stanza—“Come in peace, O crown of her Husband, both with songs and gladness; among the faithful, the beloved people, come, O Bride, come, O Bride; come, Shabbat Queen”—everyone turns around and faces west, my locale, and I turn east to face them.

**Leonard:** And then you finally enter the synagogue?

**Shabbat:** Well, I don’t exactly walk in off the street. I’m more of a presence. When I’m there, I’m there. You notice the room is different. You don’t see me. But you feel me there. The women, FYI, receive me earlier, when they light Shabbat candles.

**Why Eating is an Important Part of Shabbat**

**Leonard:** Your next suggestion is “Have Another Piece of Baked Chicken: Your Extra Soul Must Be Starving.” Why is eating such an important part of Shabbat?

**Shabbat:** Leonard, delighting in Shabbat is a mitzvah. On Shabbat pleasure is enhanced—the spiritual *and* the physical. The praying’s better, the Torah learning is better—and the sleeping is literally more peaceful, and the food tastes more delicious.

**Leonard:** That’s quite a claim. Does Shabbat come with a warranty?

**Shabbat:** Just the testimony of the millions of Jews who have made Shabbat the last 3,300 years.

**Leonard:** That sounds better than the guarantee I got on my last Toyota. You were saying that the food tastes better on Shabbat. How can that be? You’re not going around the world hiring the best chefs, are you?

**Shabbat:** Everybody’s soul undergoes a transformation and elevation on Shabbat. Kabbalah describes this change as being granted an extra soul. Commentators on the Talmud speak of a person’s soul gaining a heightened sensitivity to the peace and joy of Shabbat, and an increased capacity to eat and drink.

**Leonard:** But what does that have to do with how the *kugel* tastes?

**Shabbat:** When your soul’s been opened to a more acute sense of pleasure, you appreciate more the goodness inside of everything, including your mother’s *kugel*.

**Kosher Wines from Around the**

**World for the Sophisticated Palate**

**Leonard:** What are some other foods that we associate with Shabbat?

**Shabbat:** Well, the first thing anyone tastes Friday night at the Shabbat meal is, of course, wine, which we use to sanctify the day when we make *kiddush*. Today you could keep a large wine cellar stocked with all the different kosher wines on the market. Besides a wide range of sweet wines, vintners from France to Chile and from California to Australia make kosher wines for the sophisticated palate.

**Leonard:** Which wines do you recommend?

**Shabbat:** I don’t make endorsements, Leonard. I was once on a show like this one, and I praised a certain brand of recliner chair. Man, I never heard the end of it. After that I decided—no endorsements.

**Leonard:** I’m starting to see why everybody’s so anxious to greet you Friday night. You bring all the goodies.

**It’s a Two-Way Street**

**Shabbat:** True, but it’s a two-way street. I don’t become inspired to give my bounty until the Jewish people make me feel at home.

**Leonard:** That’s sweet. Okay, we have time for one caller . . . Go ahead, caller, you’re on the air.

**Caller:** I lost an orange windbreaker at the 23rd Street Shul last Shabbat. Has anybody found it?

**Shabbat:** My Lost and Found people should be able to help you with that.

**Leonard:** Caller, stay on the line and the screener will give you the number. Shabbat, I want to thank you again for being my guest. It’s always fascinating to talk with you. And I must say, for a guy who’s been around for so long, you don’t look a minute over seven days old.

**Shabbat:** I really appreciate that, Leonard. Thank you for having me on.

**Leonard:** Shabbat will be giving a reading from his new book tonight at 7:30 at the Barnes and Noble at 82nd and Broadway. Please arrive on time, because a large crowd is expected. Well, that’s our show for today. Join me tomorrow, when my guest will be a very old pair of *tefillin*, who will talk about his experiences traveling with the Baal Shem Tov.

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

**The Lesson of the Mishkan**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

As we begin the book of Shemot, Exodus, we can see right away why this is called the Book of Redemption, for it talks about the exile into Egypt, the bondage and servitude under the Egyptians, and the ultimate redemption thereof. Why, however, are the portions dealing with the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, placed in the book of Shemot? What do they have to do with the Redemption?

The Ramban tells us that the redemption was not complete until the Jews came back to the level of the forefathers, and that was when we had the Mishkan (the Tabernacle) with the Divine Presence in it. This was a replica of the homes of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, who also had the Divine Presence completely among them and which was manifested by the Clouds of Glory on their tent, the Eternal Lamp shining inside and the dough constantly fresh, just like in the Mishkan.

**A Truly Remarkable Statement**

This is truly a remarkable statement. The Mishkan was only a replica of the tents of our forefathers. How foolish are those who speak against our ancestors as if they were from our generation, ascribing to them our own faults and frailties, when in reality they were like angels on this earth.

We have no concept of the holiness and greatness of these individuals and anyone who thinks they can understand them with our own limited vision is really revealing flaws in his own character, rather than in those he may be speaking about. As the Gemara sums it up, if the earlier generations are like angels in our eyes, then we are compared to human beings, but if we think they are humans, we are only like donkeys, and not even like the donkey of Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair!

Let us take this lesson of Ramban to heart and realize how awesome and elevated are our ancestors so that we may learn even the slightest amount from them.

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

**The Issue of Gambling:**

**Is it Permitted?**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

The Gemara in Eruvin, Daf 82 discusses the issue of whether a gambler is qualified to render testimony according to Halacha. Halacha disqualifies thieves from serving as witnesses, and so the question becomes whether or not earning money through gambling constitutes thievery.The Gemara cites a dispute on this matter between Rabbi Yehuda and the Chachamim.

Rabbi Yehuda is of the opinion that "Asmachta Kanya," meaning, since both parties gamble with the understanding that they might lose their money, and they accept the terms of the game, the winner legally acquires the money from the loser. Gambling would thus not involve theft, and gamblers would be qualified to testify.

**Considered Gambling a Type of Theft**

The Chachamim, by contrast, hold that "Asmachta Lo Kanya" earning money in this fashion, where the wagers are placed in the hope of winning and the loser surrenders his money halfheartedly, does not constitute a legal acquisition. Therefore, earning money through gambling is considered theft and disqualifies the gambler from testimony.

Tosefot (Medieval French-German Talmudic commentators) follow Rabbi Yehuda's position, that gambling does not constitute theft. Nevertheless, Tosefot would agree that full-time gambling, as one's primary occupation, is forbidden. The Rambam, on the other hand, appears to hold a different view.

Although he seems to accept Rabbi Yehuda's opinion, he views gambling as theft Mi'de'rabbanan by force of rabbinic enactment. While Torah law would consider earning money through gambling a legal means of acquisition, the Rabbis legislated that it should be treated as theft. According to the Rambam, then, gambling is proscribed by force of rabbinic enactment.

In truth, even Tosefot's position would not necessarily sanction gambling. The Rivash (Rabbi Yitzchak Ben Sheshet, Spain - North Africa, 1326-1407) writes in one of his response that even if gambling is not strictly forbidden, it is nevertheless a "Davar Mechu'ar" a loathsome activity.

**A Bet Din Should Not**

**Annul Such a Vow**

He therefore rules that if a person uttered a vow to abstain from gambling, the Bet Din (rabbinical court) should not annul the vow for him. (Normally, Bet Din is empowered in many situations to annul an individual's vow so that he would no longer be bound by it, a process called "Hatarat Nedarim.")

Given the impropriety of gambling, even if it is not forbidden according to the strict letter of the law, Bet Din should keep the vow in place, rather than having it annulled. And although the Shach (commentary on the Shulchan Aruch by Rabbi Shabtai Hakohen, 1623-1663, Europe) disputes the Rivash on this particular point, all would agree that gambling is not an appropriate activity for a Jew.

**A Jew Should Spend His Free Time**

**In More Meaningful Activities**

Thus, according to the Rambam gambling is forbidden according to Halacha, and according to others, Halacha outright forbids only full-time gambling, but nevertheless frowns upon even occasional gambling. It should be noted in conclusion that a Jew is to spend his free time involved in meaningful activities such as Torah study, Mitzvah performance, acts of Chessed (kindness), and so on, such that there should be no time for wasteful activities such as gambling.

*Reprinted from an email last week of dailyhalacha.com of the Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series as explained by Rabbi Eli J. Mansour, Rav of K’hal Bet Yaakob in Flatbush.*

**Chabad Rabbi Donates Kidney, 'Act of Caring'**

**By Hana Levi Julian**

There were no microphones being shoved in 29-year-old Rabbi Avi Richler's face and no cameras snapping as he was being wheeled into the operating room. Neither did the husband and father of three, who is also the co-director of Chabad of Gloucester County, New Jersey, ask whether the Jewish recipient of the kidney he was about to donate was hareidi-religious like himself.

Recent headlines about the goings-on in Israel between fringe elements of the hareidi-religious and secular populations had, if anything, simply reinforced the rabbi's conviction that the world needs a little more "Ahavas Yisroel" -- love for one's fellow Jew -- and to "show we really mean it when we say we care about all Jews."

**Read About Another Father of Three**

Richler had read about the man, also a father of three (who prefers to remain anonymous) in an online appeal by the [Ahavas Chesed Medical Emergency Hotline](http://trailer.web-view.net/Links/0X29176AA3874B6C60AAFE0ED5B74FBAADE8B2941CEDDF724ADA3C70DA74EDBDA671A8BCA6889D96440D983A51873C7143BE61E32780EE83545CFDE0090C8A982F.htm), based in Brooklyn, NY. The recipient, it later turned out, lives on a secular moshav in Israel.To the two men who are still recuperating from their respective surgeries, there is simply a sense of quiet satisfaction that one Jew saved the life of another who was suffering from end-stage renal disease.

**Wife Was Unsurprised by Husband’s Decision**

Richler is not the first Chabad rabbi to donate a kidney in recent years. "Our attitude is every Jew is our brother," he explained in an interview with Lubavitch.com. "That sense of brotherhood is not limited to helping another Jew put on tefillin or kosher his home."The rabbi's wife, Chabad of Gloucester co-director Mina Richler was unsurprised when he first approached her with his decision to donate his kidney.

"Some people are blessed financially and they give charity. Some donate their time. We've been blessed with good health," and a kidney to give to another, she said.

Both the recipient and the donor are reportedly doing well.

*Reprinted from the Aruzt Sheva (Israel National News) email of January 12, 2012.*

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**The Purpose of Dreams**

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| **QUESTION:** |

What purpose do dreams serve today?

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| --- |
| **ANSWER:** |

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| --- |
| Are_Your_Dreams_Big_Enough_300x300 |

Dreams are very useful today. Dreams can tell you where you're holding in this world. Let's say, if tonight you'll dream that you're sitting in a bathtub full of golden coins, and you're wading with your hands through the coins. Aah! And then you wake up and you are terribly disappointed, it's a let down.

**What Do You Dream Of?**

So ask yourself, did I dream about sitting in a bathtub full of Gemoras? Would I dream of finishing a Perek? Or even ten Blatt? Why don't I have good dreams? Did I dream of Mitzvahs? Why don't you dream of putting on Tefilin?

The answer is, although you put on Tefilin everyday, conscientiously, but it could be that it's so superficial without any thought, without any feeling, that it really doesn't enter you subconscious mind. And you dream only about the things that you really want, not the things you talk about with your mouth. So dreams can tell you more or less where you are holding in this world.

**A Frightful Dream is a Very Healthy Thing**

Sometimes a dream is a fright, and it's a **very** healthy thing to put a fright into a person. Hashem is frightening a man! And it means, get busy young man or old man, get busy and shake a leg because Chas Veshalom, it might happen! Start accomplishing something in this world, because if you're wasting your life, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu might say, Chalila, why do you need this life? And therefore, a frightening dream also has a purpose.  
 Rarely, to chosen souls, very rarely, a dream comes to give him a hint of something he should do. Sometimes when you're puzzling about a piece of Gemora and you go to bed with the puzzle unsolved, sometimes it happens, rarely, that the solution lights up in your mind during the dream. When you wake up, aah, why didn't I think of that? Sometimes a problem in dealing with people. Now it could be that the subconscious mind is working while your conscious mind is not. The conscious mind is obstructing the subconscious mind from working properly. The conscious mind uses artificial approaches, the subconscious mind uses the natural direct approaches, and sometimes the subconscious mind is showing you the resolution.

**Sometimes** it could be Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sending a message. But don't rely too much on that because not everybody is worthy of such a great revelation.

*This email is transcribed from questions that were posed to Harav Miller by the audience at the Thursday night lectures. To listen to the audio of this Q & A please dial: 201-676-3210*

**Wrongly Religious?**

**From: Allen**

***Dear Rabbi****, Is it acceptable that a Jewish man or woman become religiously observant because of their desire to marry someone they know that is already observant? Is there any problem with the possibility that they might not be sincere?*

**Dear Allen**,

Since the person is Jewish, he or she is obligated to be observant in any case. Of course, the more sincere a person’s motivations are the better. But even if he or she is only interested or practicing in order to gain or maintain a relationship with one who is already observant, this is tolerable.

This is not so different from the fact that many observant people are committed for any number of reasons, which, in addition to the altruistic ones, might include social acceptance, recognition, honor, livelihood, etc. While these motives are certainly not ideal, realistically they exist, and if in the end of the day they contribute to a person’s observance, they have value as such.

In fact, the Sages taught that even if a person realizes his motivations are not ideal, he should not desist from observance. Rather, through lower-level intentions one will eventually grow toward the ideal. In a case you describe where the motive is for another person, the observant person, if interested, should try his or her best to guide the other toward genuine belief and observance.

This is probably the more problematic issue with the question you raise. Because even if the interested person eventually retracts from observance, G-d will not be “harmed”, and the person can always come back to G-d even if it takes an entire lifetime. But if he or she retracts after committing to another person, particularly in marriage, that can have devastating ramifications. So it’s really the observant person who has to be most careful.

**The Famous Rabbi Akiva**

The famous Rabbi Akiva was initially an illiterate hired hand of a wealthy estate owner whose daughter Rachel saw that Akiva had what it takes to become a great Torah scholar.

She proposed to him saying, “If I marry you, will you study Torah?” Apparently, he was not so sure of himself, or sure of the sincerity of his motives, because the Midrash teaches us that Rachel took him on a walk with the intention of inspiring him.

When they arrived at the base of a waterfall, she asked him, “What do you see?” He replied, “Water pouring onto the rocks beneath the fall.”

**Take a Closer Look**

“Look closer”, said she. “I see the rushing water has bored a hole through the rock.” Rachel then said these piercing words: “Take heed. If something as soft as water can bore a hole through something as hard as rock, surely something as strong as Torah can bore a hole through something as soft as your heart of flesh.”

Akiva was inspired. They were married. After 24 years of extreme sacrifice and dedication on the parts of both Rachel and Akiva, he became a rabbi to 24,000 students. And it was through Rabbi Akiva that much of the Torah was preserved through the destruction of the Temple to the generations that followed.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet (ohr.edu)*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Surprise of the Wig**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

When the rabbis in Eretz Yisrael issued their ruling that wigs with hair from India were forbidden for use by married women because they were made from material offered as sacrifices for idol worship, the immediate reaction of countless women was to remove their wigs until the source of their hair could be verified and receive rabbinical sanction.

One such woman, a teacher in the fourth grade of a school in the State Religious (*Mamlachti Dati*) stream, appeared before her students one day wearing a snood in place of her customary wig. In response to the curious nquiries of her pupils she explained that the prohibition had een issued by the rabbis and proceeded to elaborate on the mportance of obeying such rabbinical rulings.

**The Pupil Suddenly Removed Her Own Wig**

Upon hearing this, one pupil suddenly removed the wig she was wearing, exposing the baldness of her head, which had hitherto been unknown to her classmates.

All the praises heaped by the rabbis upon the married women who bravely obeyed their directive pale beside the courage of this youngster to whom we all have to tip our hats.

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**What's In a Name?**

Who was Rabbi Akiva? Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, who lived from about 40 C.E. to 125 C.E., was a descendant of righteous converts. Unlearned until the age of 40, he was encouraged by his wife Rachel, to study Torah in the Academy at Yavneh. Eventually considered one of our greatest rabbis, he 22,000 students, mainly at his academy in Bnei Brak. He was an outstanding interpreter of Written Torah, and arranged the entire Oral Torah according to subjects, forming a basis for the Mishna. He was martyred by the Romans for teaching Torah in disregard of their ban.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**The Way It Was in Nam**

Anyone wishing to see proof of the existence of Hashem, need only lookat the Jewish people. We are a nation that by all estimates, should havebeen destroyed long ago. We are small among the nations. However, after years of persecutions, banishments, burnings, gassings, torturing and exterminations, Am Yisroel is alive and well.

We read about the indestructibility of the Jewish nation in our Torahportion this week Shemos. The Torah tells us about how Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) saw a prophetic vision in the form of a burning bush. The verse tells us"…behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed." (Shemos 3:2)

**The Burning Bush Symbolizes Yisroel**

The Midrash tells us that the bush symbolizes Yisroel. Although the nations may try to destroy us, we are not consumed… we will never be consumed.(Midrash Rabbah, Shemos [Margolios] 2,14) We are the eternal nation.

The Jewish Nation has ridden the storm of many generations of persecution.  Unfortunately, some Jews have fallen away, by intermarrying and assimilating. However, no matter how far a Jew may stray, he still retains his membership in the eternal nation. The following amazing true story describes one Jew's return.

**Vietnam Was a Dangerous Place**

Vietnam in the late 1960’s was a dangerous place. Especially for a Robert Silverman, a Jew from Bayside, New York. As Robert lay in the jungle on that hot and humid night in Vietnam, many thoughts raced through his mind.  The real question just now was, should he do netilas yadayim or not? There was a stream about 800 feet away; he could get water there.

Then again, the enemy, the Vietcong weren't far away either. Crawling even that far could cost him his life. As Robert weighed the options, he began to wonder how he had ended up in such a bizarre situation. Until shortly before being drafted into the army, Robert had heard neither of Vietnam nor of netilas yadayim.

As he looked up into the Southeast Asian sky, he thought back to Bayside and his childhood. He had attended public school, and three times a week went for "Hebrew instruction" at the local Conservative Hebrew School. The main purpose was simply to learn enough Hebrew to read his “half-Torah” which he eventually learned from a tape recorder. Graduation from Hebrew School and his Bar Mitzvah marked the end of his involvement with Judaism.

**His Father Says Kaddish Daily**

He never set foot in a shul again until his grandfather passed away. Then his father, by no means a religious man, suddenly started going to minyan every day. When Robert questioned his father about his sudden resurgence of interest in religion, his father replied, "I'm saying Kaddish for my father. His soul won't get rest unless I say Kaddish every day for him.” Robert figured that his father would abandon this ritual after a week or two. To his astonishment he was mistaken. His father took the responsibility quite seriously and made sure to go to shul every day. A few times Robert accompanied his father. Overall, Robert was impressed that his father took on such consistency for 11 months.

**Robert is Hit with a Terrible Misfortune**

In the fall of 1965 Robert left for college in Oneonta, New York. The summer following his graduation, Robert was hit with misfortune: his father's sudden heart attack. Robert rushed from his job to the hospital. Looking down at his father who lay in bed, Robert knew the condition was serious. He took a seat at his father's right. "Dad. I'm here. Can you hear me?"

Mustering the little strength left in his body Mr. Silverman responded in barely audible tones, "Bobby, Thank G-d you're here. I..." The strain of talking seemed too much for him. Yet like so many times before, he persevered: "I want you to make one promise to me. You're my only son. Say Kaddish for me if I don't make it this time.”

**He Could Not Refuse His Father’s Request**

Through his tears, Robert said he hoped the occasion wouldn't arise for many years to come. But he knew he could not refuse the request, and finally choked out, "I promise.” His father seemed suddenly at peace, and closed his eyes in easy sleep.

Unfortunately his Kaddish duty took effect only a few days later. Robert felt the loss, and also remembered the promise he had made. Just as his father had, following the shiv'ah he went to synagogue to say Kaddish. He found that the only shul in his neighborhood which had daily services was the local Orthodox shul, Ahavas Torah.

Rabbi Jacobs, the rav of the shul, immediately took a liking to the young man who struggled so hard with his Kaddish, and seemed so intent on keeping his father's last wishes. During Shacharis the young man seemed lost, only catching himself when it came time for Kaddish. He even needed signals from Rabbi Jacobs to know when to start, and thankfully, the Rabbi willingly gave them.

**The Draft Notice Arrives**

Little by little, with Rabbi Jacob’s encouragement, Robert became more active in the shul. He first attended a few of the Rabbi's classes, then began accepting Shabbos invitations. Had there been a baal-teshuvah yeshiva at the time, Robert would have been a prime candidate. This was ten years too soon, however, and America was busy waging war in Vietnam. Soon after, Robert received his draft notice.

Shortly following his eleven months of Kaddish, Robert knocked on Rabbi Jacobs' door. "Rabbi, I just came to say goodbye. It looks like the [military] will be shipping me to South Carolina soon for basic training. It's going to be real hard for me to keep any of the 613 mitzvahs. So tell me, Rabbi - pick one for me. Which one of the mitzvahs should I keep no matter what?"

**How to Answer Such a Question?**

The Rabbi thought for a while. Who could answer such a question? Too difficult an assignment would end in failure. Shabbos? Kashrus? Tefillin? Robert clearly wasn't ready to tackle these. Suddenly the Rabbi's face lit up. "Robert, I have just the right one. Make sure you do netilas yadayim every time you eat bread, even if you don't say the blessings over the food, even if you don't bench, and even if the bread is not kosher.”

“Netilas yadayim?" said Robert with trepidation. “Yes. It's a mitzvah that won't put undue pressure on you, since nobody will think twice about your washing your hands before eating. Keep that one mitzvah as well as you can, and remember, any mitzvah will protect you even in the direst circumstances. Best of luck to you, and write me when you get the chance.”

During basic training, and even when he was shipped out to the base in Vietnam, Robert had little difficulty in performing this mitzvah. Nobody noticed anything strange about his desire to wash his hands before eating bread. But finally about six months after being stationed in the jungles of Southeast Asia, the first real difficulty developed.

One night, the platoon was sent for a late-night raid on the fringes of the enemy lines. It wasn't long before the shooting began, and it soon developed into a full-scale battle. A few of his comrades had dropped and the remainder of the unit was trapped behind enemy lines.

**Remember “Netilas Yadayim”**

After a few hours' lapse in the fighting, some of the soldiers recalled their hunger: in fact, they hadn't eaten for the major part of the day. They began to take out their combat rations of oranges, sardines, and bread. Robert was about to join a few of his colleagues when he remembered… “netilas yadayim!”

He quickly and quietly broke from the camp, to his destination, a small stream he had seen about 800 feet away. It didn't matter that this excursion was insanely dangerous; no argument could convince Robert to abandon it. He had promised the Rabbi, and it was in memory of his father, too. That was that.

**Suddenly the Sound of Gunfire**

He slipped, silent and alone, towards the stream. Crawling on the ground like a snake slithering through the forest, Robert quickly reached his destination. He poured water over his hands, delighted that even in this combat situation he was able to keep his mitzvah. It was just after he finished pouring the cup of water over his other hand when he heard the gunfire.

There was the rapid-fire of machine guns, piercing the stillness of the jungle in a long barrage of thunderous noise. For what seemed like hours, Robert remained hidden in the grass, long after the last sounds of the bullets had faded. Mustering up his strength, he slowly slithered back to his unit to find not one of them alive. (The Monsey-Kiryas Sefer Express, R.Z. Roth. p.124 names have been changed)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone*

**What's In a Name**

Who was Rabbi Akiva? Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, who lived from about 40 C.E. to 125 C.E., was a descendant of righteous converts. Unlearned until the age of 40, he was encouraged by his wife Rachel, to study Torah in the Academy at Yavneh. Eventually considered one of our greatest rabbis, he 22,000 students, mainly at his academy in Bnei Brak. He was an outstanding interpreter of Written Torah, and arranged the entire Oral Torah according to subjects, forming a basis for the Mishna. He was martyred by the Romans for teaching Torah in disregard of their ban.

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Tragedy of a Young Man Wanting to Shmad Himself**

In a village near Liozna lived a widow with her son and two daughters. The children helped their mother manage the family inn. By and by, the eldest daughter married a young man, Velvel, who was very learned in Torah, but also very conceited.

One of the frequent callers at the inn was the parish priest. He spent many hours in religious debate with Velvel. The young scholar always won, which only served to feed his haughtiness. Even when the priest brought along two of his colleagues to verbally spar with him, Velvel held his own.

**Persuaded to Go to Vitebsk**

After one of their debates, the priest mentioned that the bishop of Vitebsk wanted to meet the young scholar. Velvel was persuaded to go to Vitebsk.

The honor accorded Velvel in the Vitebsk was beyond his wildest dreams. He met with the bishop and out-argued him point by point. One of the senior clerics convinced Velvel to remain for a few days in Vitebsk and help other members of the clergy sharpen their debating skills. Velvel never dreamed that he could be shown so much honor. The innumerable compliments fed his ego even further.

Velvel returned to the inn, with no one the wiser of how he had spent the past few days. Some weeks later, a group of prominent Torah scholars stopped at the inn. They became involved in a learned discussion and the over-confident Velvel gave his opinions, though never once asked. An elderly scholar smiled at Velvel and said, "A young man should learn to listen to what his elders have to say, and to regard Torah scholars with respect."

Velvel took great offense at these words. He thought, "Who are these men who are not showing me due honor? I have even bettered the bishop in religious debate!"

Several weeks later, Velvel disappeared. His family received a letter from him saying that he was living in Vitebsk where honors were being heaped upon him by the bishop of the city. The bishop had assured him that he would become a great dignitary if he would join them.

**Family is Thrown into a Turmoil**

The family was thrown into turmoil. They set out immediately to Rabbi Shneur Zalman (founder of Chabad Chasidism) in Liozna. They burst into the synagogue and cried out, "Rebbe, help us! Velvel wants to apostatize!"

The Rebbe simply said, "I cannot help you. But I will tell you a story that took place while I was in Mezritch.

"In the winter of 1769, a young man was overcome with the desire to be baptized. He went to the local priest who began arranging everything. The young man's father ran to my Rebbe, the Maggid of Mezritch and cried: 'Rebbe, rescue my son from baptism!'

**The Maggid’s Torah Discourse**

"The Maggid listened to the story that the broken-hearted father told and then, after a few minutes, began to expound on the verse, 'If a person should sin and commit a trespass against G-d'" And then, Reb Shneur Zalman repeated the discourse as he had heard it from the Maggid.

Then, Rabbi Shneur Zalman continued to recount the incident: "When the Maggid was finished, he told ten of his Chasidim to stay awake all night, reciting Psalms until dawn. I was one of the ten. At noon, the young man wandered into our synagogue. No one asked him what had happened. He stayed with us for a few days, spoke privately with the Rebbe, then went home." Reb Shneur Zalman completed the story and went back into his study.

The Rebbe's Chasidim immediately chose a quorum of ten men and spent the whole night awake, saying Psalms. The widow and her daughter returned home and soon after that a young man appeared in the synagogue. He sat down with the others, and with tears, recited Psalms. The Chasidim knew who the young man was, but no one breathed a word.

The young man spent the entire week in Liozna, and the following week, after speaking privately with the Rebbe, he returned home. A few weeks later, he and his family moved to another town. He remained close with Rabbi Shneur Zalman and became one of his worthy Chasidim.

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

**Coming Closer to Hashem**

**By Savta Kops**

If a person does all that is within his power, trying his best

The Al-mighty stands at his side, guides and does the rest.

He will be blessed with success if he continues on his way

Not allowing the Yetzer Hora to succeed and lure him away.

The first step in greatness is the trait of learning anew

It can mean every blessing in the world as a frum Jew.

It teaches you lessons of faith, reward and punishment

Redemption and prophesy of our Borei Olam that’s sent.

Hashem is the Creator of the universe and controls actions

Trusting in Him is tranquility while performing transactions.

When we need assistance, we always remember to pray

But never forget to be thankful for the achievement today.

All treasures from wherever they may come are gifts.

From Hashem, His messengers to give us our lifts.

Believe and understand we are always at His compassion

Trusting that our lives will be lived in an essential fashion.

A person must always be ablaze with the fire of Torah learning

Always standing guard, fueling the fire against evil turning.

We do not have our Holy Temple to bring sacrifices today

But our prayers bring us closer to Hashem, so genuinely pray.

*Reprinted from a recent issue of the Jewish Connection.*