**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Ekev 5772**

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**The King of Poland and**

**The Jewish Child Prodigy**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

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| Johann Kleinhard and Johann Balzer. Jonathan Eybeschütz.png |

 About 300 years ago, the chief Rabbi of Prague was the great Rabbi Yehonaton Eibeshetz. The legend has it that when he was just three years old and living with his family in Poland, he was already so famous for his precociousness that the King of Poland heard about him and, being a bit bored and even more inquisitive, decided to invent a Royal test to see if the rumors were true.

 His Majesty sent a message to little Yehonaton's father saying that he'd heard about the lad, and was interested to see if he was smart enough to find his way, unassisted, from their home, several miles away, through the confusing streets of the city, to the Royal Palace.

 Of course his father had little choice but to comply. The next day he dressed the boy in his best Shabbat clothes, blessed him, and sent him off, hoping for the best.

 It was a unique sight to see such a small child dressed nobly, striding with certain steps through the city streets, as though he had done it a hundred times before. But what was even more unique was that after several hours of walking he actually arrived at the palace!

 The guards couldn't believe their eyes and ears when the tot presented himself proudly before them, and announced in a high-pitched voice that he had come to see the king.

 Minutes later the entire king's court was marveling at the lad. The king called for silence, motioned the child to approach and asked, "Tell me my boy, how did you find your way to the palace so quickly, didn't you ever take a wrong turn or at least have any doubts which way to walk?"

 "Well, your majesty," he answered bowing deeply before the king, “There were several times that I wasn’t sure what to do so whenever I had a doubt I just asked anyone that happened to be nearby, and it seems that G-d helped."

 Everyone chuckled. The King raised his hand very slightly for silence and continued, "But, tell me, didn't it ever occur to you that maybe that person was wrong, didn’t you ever ask two people?” The king looked at the crowd, who were smiling and shaking their heads yes to one another.

 Then, when he was certain that they appreciated his question he continued. “And what if two people said opposite things; what would you have done if one said go to the right and the other to the left? What would you do then?"

 The boy paused, thought for a moment and answered, "Your Majesty, if that ever happened, in the Torah it says to follow the majority, so I would just ask a third person and follow the majority opinion."

 The King smiled and the room became filled with chattering laughter. Suddenly the King’s face became serious, the room fell silent, he moved forward in his throne, gazed piercingly at the boy and said, "Young man, you should listen to what you yourself just said! If in your Bible it says you must follow the majority, then certainly you should leave Judaism and believe as we do! You see that the Jews are vastly outnumbered!!"

 The audience smiled, laughed, even clapped their hands, at the royal wisdom. But when the noise died down, little Yehonaton waited for complete silence, cleared his throat and spoke.

 "Pardon me, your Royal Highness, I request your Majesty's forgiveness for being so unclear. When I said that I would listen to the majority, I meant when I was far from the castle and uncertain of the location. But now that I'm in the castle and I see the King seated before me, even if ALL the king's ministers tell me I'm wrong, I will certainly not listen to them.

 Similarly in Judaism; the G-d of Israel is everywhere, and no place is empty of Him. It is like being in the Palace with the King; why, even if the entire world disagrees with me I certainly have no obligation to listen to them!"

*Reprinted from last week’s email from Yeshiva Temimah Ohr in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Star Ledger Report on the Siyum Hashas at MetLife Stadium**

**By Mark Mueller and Jason Grant**



Photo by [Saed Hindash/The Star-Ledger](http://connect.nj.com/user/shindash/index.html)The Star-Ledger (photo taken on Aug. 2, 2012 at 8:15 P.M.)

 It has been described as a spiritual calling, a labor of love, a rich opportunity to connect with thousands of years of Jewish history and religion.

 It has also been called a relentless endeavor and a marathon of study. There are no vacations, no shortcuts.

 For 7½ years, day in and day out, Jews in New Jersey and around the world have studied a new double-sided page of the Talmud, the biblical commentary that, written over centuries, serves as a guide to spirituality and practical life.

 Wednesday night, in what was billed as the largest celebration of shared Jewish learning in history, some 90,000 peoplecrowded into MetLife Stadium to read portions of the Talmud’s 2,711th - and final - page.

 The celebrants, mostly Orthodox Jews from across the United States and beyond, closed out the 7½-year cycle with prayer, speeches and, when the final line was read, an explosion of jubilation that literally shook the cavernous stadium for more than 20 minutes.

 Erupting into song, they swayed arm in arm, danced in circles and formed a Conga line that snaked along the field level. Others danced and swayed in the stands.

 “This is what unites us together as Jews, the study of the Torah and the Talmud and its lessons,” said Lakewood resident Simon Weinstein, 47, who grew emotional as he explained what daily study of the Talmud has meant to him. “I learned to always have gratitude for everyone and everything. I’m much more appreciative in my life.”

 It was a graduation ceremony of sorts for the page-a-day study program, known as Daf Yomi, which has grown exponentially over the decades. In addition to the 90,000 who took part at the East Rutherford stadium Wednesday night, tens of thousands of others watched via satellite broadcasts in more than 80 cities in 15 countries.

 An estimated 100,000 Orthodox Jews filled the seats and field at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford on Wednesday night to celebrate the completion of seven and a half years of religious study. Each day, people taking part in the “Daf Yomi,” or “page a day,” program study one page of the Talmud, which collects interpretations of Jewish law that governs every aspect of life, from marriage to commerce to jurisprudence. Religious students can spend weeks studying one page of the Talmud, but the Daf Yomi program makes the daunting text surmountable for observant Jews who have otherwise busy lives. Participants around the world study the same page at the same time. (Video by Nyier Abdou/The Star-Ledger)Watch video

 The immense crowd put an equally immense strain on New Jersey’s roads, snarling traffic for hours around the stadium and on the New Jersey Turnpike, where a 6-mile delay lingered well past the scheduled 7 p.m. start. As reports grew of motorists abandoning their vehicles and walking toward MetLife, organizers pushed back the start by 30 minutes.

Security was especially tight, a safeguard against the potential for terrorism. State Police Sgt. Brian Polite, a spokesman for the agency, said roughly 600 troopers were on scene, along with members of the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the Port Authority Police Department and other agencies.

 “We cannot ignore what is going on around the world,” Polite said. “It’s not a typical football game or a concert. It’s approximately 90,000 people celebrating a religious event.”

 Inside, it was a sea of black. Attendees wore their traditional black suit jackets, black yarmulkes and wide-brimmed black hats. Family members and friends smiled and embraced one another as they entered.

 In accordance with Orthodox Jewish tradition, men and boys were separated from women, who do not take part in organized Talmud study.

 The women were seated in several upper-level sections on one side of the stadium. During prayers, large curtains on poles were drawn closed, blocking their view. The men congregated at field level and in the lower- and mid-level seats.

 Shaina Weitz, 39, a West Orange resident who came to support her uncle, called the celebration an “incredible experience.”

 Her eyes lighting up, Weitz said she was struck by one of the speakers, who pointed out the stark difference between how Hitler spoke to a crowd of thousands at a stadium in Germany during the 1936 Summer Olympics, and how there was an equal number of Jews listening to very different speakers at MetLife on Wednesday night.

 “It shows we’re still here,” she said. “It’s the exact opposite of that moment.”

 For Rabbi Daniel Oppenheimer, 57, the event brought great pride over completing the cycle, the 12th since the Daf Yomi began in the 1920s.

“It became the major item I did any day,” said Oppenheimer, who traveled to New Jersey from his home in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

 As religious Jews will often say, they do not “read” a page of the Talmud so much as “study” it, taking hours, days or sometimes more than a week to examine groups of commentaries that delve into Jewish laws and interpretations on everything from holiday celebrations, candle-lighting and agriculture to business, ethics and sexual relations between spouses.

 A page of the Talmud usually consists of the writings of different rabbis from different eras. Most yeshiva students and Daf Yomi participants study the Babylonian Talmud, also called the Gemara, which dates from about 200 to 600.

 Historically, study of the Talmud from start to finish was accomplished by a select few, taking decades. But Daf Yomi - initiated in 1923 by a Polish rabbi, Meir Shapiro - encourages Jews who have secular jobs to study in their own way.

 With the completion of the cycle Wednesday night, a new one began right away, with the reading of the first page.

 Typically, those who take part devote an hour or more a day to the study, making time even amid the most challenging schedules.

 Jacob Schlanger studied with a group of men at 5:30 every morning at Bnai Yeshurun synagogue, a few blocks from his home in Teaneck. Schlanger called the daily effort a challenge, but one that was well worth the effort.

 “It’s the same reason people climb Mount Everest,” he said. “Because it’s there.”

*Reprinted from the August 3, 2012 website of Matzav.com. The article originally appeared in the August 2, 2012 edition of The Star Ledger based in Newark and New Jersey’s largest circulation newspaper.*

**It Once Happened**

**A Horse is Still**

**Just a Horse**

 There was once a person who lived in the vicinity of the Baal Shem Tov. Because of his all-consuming pride, he decided to become an acetic, and in that way, attract to himself a following of as many admirers as the Baal Shem Tov had. To that end he wore only white garments, fasted interminably, and tortured his body by rolling around in the ice and snow. Imagine his disappointment when, in spite of all his attempts, he in fact attracted no following at all.

 He decided to visit the court of the Baal Shem Tov to see where it was that he had failed. What did the Baal Shem Tov have that he lacked that caused thousands to flock to him? He made his presence known to all the Chasidim and tried to gain their friendship. But they easily saw beneath his pious exterior and rebuffed all his advances.

 Before he took his leave of the Baal Shem Tov, the man managed to gain entrance to the presence of the tzadik.

 The Baal Shem Tov took the man by the shoulder and said to him, "Come outside with me for a minute. Do you see that horse over there tied to the post? His garments - white; his food - hay; his bed - straw; and in winter, he, too, rolls in the snow. But in spite of all of this, he is still a horse."

 A simple Chasid once approached the tzadik Reb Bunim of Pshischa. "It is written in our holy books that if one fasts a certain number of days, one will have a revelation of Elijah the Prophet.

 Now I have fasted many, many days - exactly what is prescribed in the texts - and still I haven't had the revelation. What have I done wrong?"

 Reb Bunim said to the Chasid, "I will explain it to you by means of a parable I heard in the name of the Baal Shem Tov:

 "It is known that when the Baal Shem Tov travelled in his coach he covered extraordinary amounts of territory in an impossibly short period of time. But, you see, he used the coach only for the sake of appearing to operate in a normal fashion. The reality was that he travelled by miraculous means - kefitzat haderech - supernaturally contracting of distance.

 “One time he was on a journey, and, as usual, he was covering enormous spaces in no time at all. The two horses who were flying before the coach began to think. Said one horse to the other, 'Look here, we are passing by all the usual rest-stops without ever stopping. When do you suppose they will feed us?'

 "The other agreed. 'You're right. All along the road, I see carriages stopped off to the side where the horses are treated to some water or oats. Only we have to continue racing on non-stop like lightning. I wonder when we will finally be able to stop?'

 "Then the first exclaimed, 'I think I've figured out the answer! Maybe we're not horses after all! Maybe we're actually human beings, and that's why we don't stop very often, for people can go longer periods without eating and drinking.'

 "'I have to congratulate you on your conclusion! I bet you're right. Let's wait and see what happens when we reach the next inn. If we come to a place where people stop to rest and eat, and we're given some supper, then we'll know.'

 little effort or exertion. They passed inns, hotels and taverns, but they did not stop. The first horse again spoke to his companion: 'Well, we haven't stopped anywhere on the way to rest or partake of a bite to eat. I suppose we aren't human beings after all. Maybe we're angels in disguise.'

 " 'You know, I think you must be right! We must be angels, because angels don't need to rest or to eat. I'm so happy that you have figured that out!' And the two horses dashed on with renewed strength.

 "They continued until their master, the Baal Shem Tov, ordered them to halt. They had stopped in front of an inn where they were immediately taken to the stable and given an ample amount of hay. When the two horses saw the delicious-looking hay, they began eating as if they were starved."

 Reb Bunim concluded his parable:

 "This story refers to one who sits and fasts even if he continues his fasting for weeks on end. It may be that he will even convince himself that he is an angel. But how does that person end his fast? If, he pounces on his food like a horse, then he has remained the same horse as he had been before."

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

My 11 Months of Kaddish

How Saying Kaddish for

My Father Changed My Life

By Harlan Weisman

 My father, Herman Weisman, was a modest man, but also a man of passion, quiet courage and determination. He survived the pogroms in Russia, witnessing the murder of his father; he escaped from Russia with his mother and brothers; experienced deep poverty during the depression, worked long grueling hours while attending school; was an unassuming World War II hero; an actor, playwright and university professor. At the onset of my mother’s debilitating illness when we were all young children, he reared us alone, while caring for my mother, and pursuing a successful career.

 My father, at age 93, was physically and mentally many years younger than his age. He wrote plays diligently, winning awards for his plays and having them performed in theaters in Washington, Baltimore and Manhattan.

 On Tuesday, April 13, 2010, his life and ours suddenly changed. The woman who cooked and cleaned for my father found him confused, dazed and bruised on his head. The senior neurosurgical resident at Georgetown University Hospital painted a grim portrait of his condition (bilateral subdural hematomas or blood clots surrounding his brain) indicated that my father would live no more than a few hours. In fact, he survived for months, until September 5, the 26th of Elul, when he fell in the bathroom and died instantly.

 How could this strange Aramaic chant, which doesn’t mention death, increase the merit of my father?

 The more I learn about G-d and about what is truly real and important, the more I appreciate the sterling values my father gave to my sisters and me, and to our children. My father gave me the gifts of his kindness, his humility, his compassion, his courage, his endurance, his fortitude, his determination and tenacity to do what is right, his fierce commitment to justice, and most of all his love.

 So how could I repay my father for the gifts he bestowed to me?

 I knew little about saying Kaddish or its significance, but I read everything I could on the subject, and had many questions. How could this strange Aramaic chant, which mentions neither death nor mourning, be important in increasing the merit of one’s father? And what does this “increasing the merit” actually mean?

 With these questions, I was determined to go to shul at least once a day for the next 11 months, to say Kaddish, even though my Hebrew was poor and I could not *daven* (pray) proficiently.

 On a daily basis, I needed to find a minyan close to where I work at Johnson & Johnson headquarters in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I soon found Congregation Poile Zedek, a historic synagogue two blocks away from my office. The members were almost all Russian and Ukrainian immigrants.

 That took care of the morning, and for the afternoon Michah/Ma’ariv, I discovered the Yavneh House of Princeton. Soon I was getting to know the regulars in each of these places, and the 2-to-4 others also saying Kaddish.

 My life began to revolve around Kaddish. I had to arrange my work schedule, travel schedule, and social schedule around getting to at least one minyan per day. Gradually I was getting the hang of each of the three daily services, but no sooner would I get confident, than I would be thrown a loop by going to a shul with a different style of prayer: Askanaz, Sephard, Ha-Arizal, *Mizrach* and Temani.

 I felt a connection, a bonding, a closeness that seemed that both our souls needed.

 Given my struggles in mastering the variety of services and the time commitment, I wasn’t sure why I was determined to keep going, but it seemed important. I knew I was on a mission to increase the merit for my father – though I still wasn’t sure what that meant, or whether I believed my daily Kaddish had any effect on it. But somehow it seemed right. I was doing something special for my father, the man who had given me so much. I was thanking him and appreciating him and giving him something that I was never quite able to do when he was alive. I felt a connection, a bonding, a closeness that seemed that both our souls needed.

**Clarity and Connection**

 At the same time, I would feel doubts. *Is this real? Where’s the evidence? This is foolish!* But why reject something that feels so real, that inwardly I knew was meaningful and more real than the daily grind of the material world, where we seek comfort and gratification, but seldom achieve lasting pleasure?

 Saying that Kaddish, day after day, I experienced the kind of pleasure that comes with the gift that God gave the Jewish people thousands of years ago, to be a holy people; the gift, privilege and responsibility to be a light onto nations; the gift of Torah, the guidebook that shows us how the spiritual illuminates the material – the gift that makes sense out of the apparent nonsense of daily life.

 Between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, on a business trip to Washington, DC, I went to Kesher Israel in Georgetown. The congregation and rabbi warmly welcomed me. It was an interesting crowd: students and faculty from Georgetown University, businessmen on their way to work, retired older men sharing the latest news of the neighborhood, politicians including Senator Joseph Lieberman, and sitting near me, a man with long gray hair wearing cowboy boots. I later learned this unorthodox-looking, orthodox man was Leon Wieseltier, author of the book *Kaddish*, a wonderful history of the mourner’s Kaddish and a personal meditation about the Kaddish experience, which I had just begun reading.

 One of the earliest sources associating Kaddish with mourners is a story about Rabbi Akiva, who saved the soul of an evil man condemned to purgatory. This man had left behind a pregnant wife who gave birth to a son. When the son grew up, Rabbi Akiva took him to the synagogue to join in the recitation of Kaddish. Later the departed soul appeared to Rabbi Akiva and thanked him for saving him from the depths of punishment by teaching his son to say Kaddish.

 The great Kabbalist the Arizal maintains that saying Kaddish helps to raise the departed soul from one spiritual level to even loftier levels of holiness.

 This is not blind faith, but an innate knowledge that our sense of personal purpose, often elusive and hidden, can be revealed. When I acknowledged the importance of what I was doing, I gained an immense clarity and connection – even if I could not explain it to anyone, except my new friends, my fellow *daveners*, who needed no explanation. They were there for the same, deeply-understood reason – the same reason that our people have been doing the same thing through the centuries.

 The peace and knowledge about what really matters went from ephemeral glimpses to a serene constancy in my life.

 The peace, the knowledge, the understanding, the certainty about what really matters, went from ephemeral glimpses to a serene constancy in my life – whether I was at Chabad in Redondo Beach, CA; Young Israel in St Louis; Beth Tikvah in Naples, Florida – which didn’t have a daily minyan, but created one for me during the three days I was attending a meeting at a nearby hotel; and the small Sefardic synagogue in the Neve Tzedek area of Tel Aviv. And surely my favorite of the over two dozen places around the globe I attended during my 11 months of saying Kaddish was the Kotel, the Western Wall, where at any hour of the day I could find many different minyanim to say Kaddish.

**The Final Kaddish**

 Then all of a sudden, it was over.

 On my last day of saying Kaddish, the 26th of Tammuz, I said Kaddish during Maariv at *Yavneh* house in Princeton, Shacharit at *Poile Zadek* in New Brunswick, and Minchah at the *Garment Center Synagogue* in Manhattan, a few blocks away from where I was to give a keynote speech at a dinner event. There I was standing in the synagogue about to say the last Kaddish during my 11 months of mourning.

 Aleynu, at the end of the service, was almost over. I remained standing. It was time.

 *Yisgadal v’yiskadash Sh’mei rabba…*

 I began to tremble*.*

 *B’allma dee v’rah chir’usei, v’yamlich malchusei…*

 I wasn’t sure I could make it through. My legs were weak. I felt like I was going to cry uncontrollably.

 *May G-d’s great name be praised to all eternity.*

 I stumbled through the next few verses of Aramaic:

 *Hallowed, and honored, extolled and exalted, adored and acclaimed be the Name of the blessed Holy One… May G-d grant abundant peace and life, to us and to all Israel. And let us say, Amein*

 I took three steps back on my trembling legs. Trying to keep my balance, I bowed left, *Oseh Shalom bim’ro’Mav.*

 Bowed right, *hu ya’aseh shalom, aleinu*.

 Bowed forward, *v’a’ kol yisroel, v’imru Amain.*

 Three final steps forward. It was over.

 I didn’t anticipate the sudden sense of loss, of emptiness, of deep sadness.

 I sat down for a few moments, and then davened Ma’ariv. It was a blur. I don’t remember saying the Shema or Amidah.

 Before I knew it, everyone was standing for Aleynu.

 After Aleynu, the mourners remained standing for Kaddish. But for the first time in 11 months, I sat down, silent. Numb.

 I spoke to the rabbi afterwards. He said what I felt was normal. The sadness will gradually dull over the next week or so, and life will go on.

 My mission was over. It has not only been part of my life, it’s been my life. My mission, my deep, soulful connection to my father was gone. He’s gone. Nothing filled the hole that was growing inside me.

 I walked slowly to the hotel in a daze. *How can I possibly talk to anyone? How can I banter small talk during the cocktail hour before my speech.*

 I walked into the room. The organizers greeted me. Something surprising happened. A switch had flipped. The energy was restored. I was on again – talking, connecting, flowing. My father was back inside of me. It felt good to be in front of the audience. The tension was gone. I was relaxed, the words came out easily.

 In the car ride home, I prayed. I thanked G-d. And I thanked my father.

 The sadness was pushed away by the knowledge that my father was *not* gone.

 Next day, I went to shul, even though I didn’t have the obligation to say Kaddish anymore. But I needed the warmth and the continuity. And the minyan needed me, the tenth man. I’m repaying all those who took care of me for those 11 months. I’m helping those who continue their period of saying Kaddish, and I watch the new ones joining us, some just as unsure of what they’re doing as I was 11 months ago, as they stumble through their first Kaddish.

 I go because it feels good to join the generations of Jews before me who were blessed with the same traditions. I go because it makes the light inside me shine more brightly.

 In the weeks following my last Kaddish, the hole inside of me opened and closed in unpredictable cycles. The sadness continued, coming and going, but gradually became less intense. And the hole gradually filled and stopped opening, just like the rabbi said.

 The sadness was pushed away by the knowledge that my father was *not* gone. He is with me today, with me every day. His values, his kindness, compassion, courage, endurance, fortitude, determination and tenacity to do what’s right, his commitment to justice and fairness, but most of all his love, is with me today, tomorrow and always. And I am passing these gifts onto my children, as they will to theirs, through the generations.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**The One and Only**

 One of the most heart-wrenching jobs that a Rabbi does is visiting the sick in the hospital. Rabbi Emanuel Feldman of Atlanta, Georgia often visited ill people in local hospitals to encourage them and to pray for their recovery. Rabbi Feldman tells of one particularly memorable experience visiting a woman who was very ill.

 Mrs. Mary Lichtman was suffering from the horible disease in many parts of her body. The disease had spread to her lungs and her throat. Rabbi Feldman happened to visit the woman the day before the woman’s larynx would be removed in surgery. This was Mary Lichtman’s last day on earth with the power of speech. Without the larynx, speaking would be impossible for Mrs. Lichtman.

**Unable to Holder in Her Emotions**

 When Rabbi Feldman entered the hospital room, Mrs. Lichtman was surrounded by close family members who had gathered to show their love and support. Mrs. Lichtman appeared to be in good spirits. Soon, the family members withdrew and left Rabbi Feldman to speak with the ailing woman. Mrs. Lichtman became very upset; she could no longer hold in her emotions.

 Rabbi Feldman tried to assure her, but to no avail. Rabbi Feldman then suggested that Mrs. Lichtman might feel a little better if she prayed to Hashem. Mrs. Lichtman said that she did not know any prayers. It was her last day with speech on this earth and she did not know any prayers.

 Rabbi Feldman suggested that the two say the Shma together. Rabbi Feldman led Mrs. Lichtman saying slowly, word for word “Shma, Yisroel, Ad-noi El-heynu, Ad-noi Echad!” The first Hebrew words that she ever spoke were also the last Hebrew words she ever spoke.(p.213-5 Tales out of Shul, R’Emanuel Feldman)

**Perhaps The Most Important**

**Words in the Entire Torah**

 The only Hebrew words Mrs. Lichtman spoke are perhaps the most important words in the entire Torah. We read the Shma in last week’s portion Va’Eschanan, as the verse says “Hear O’ Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the one and only.”(Devarim 6:4)

 The Shma is the most important verse in the Torah because it defines the Jewish Nation. We are a nation which believes that Hashem is the Master of the Universe. Rambam explains this principle of Jewish faith in the following way: “I believe in perfect faith that Hashem is One. There is no unity that is in any way like His, He alone is our G-d -- He was, He is, and He will be.” (Maimonides’ Principles, Aryeh Kaplan Anthology I, p.30)

 Before World War II, the mayor of Kosznitz was an assimilated Jew who had even married a non-Jew. His name was Joseph Gonchor. Mayor Gonchor was not particularly friendly to the local Jewish population. When the dreaded war finally reached Kosznitz, the Germans rounded up all the Jews, including Gonchor. On the day after Rosh HaShana 5704 (1943) the Germans burned down the Kosznitzer Shul.

**A Large Fire was Prepared**

 Mayor Gonchor was taken in for interrogation. Soon, all the Jews were forced to gather in the town square. A car drove up and the Germans led the mayor out into the square. A large fire was prepared.

 The Germans then brought out a sefer Torah.

 As the local Jews gathered around, the Germans told the Jewish mayor: “Throw this sefer Torah into the fire or we will throw you into the fire.” The assimilated Jewish mayor hesitated. His non-Jewish wife pleaded with him to give into the Germans and throw the sefer Torah into the fire. The mayor thought for a moment and then said out loud for all to hear: “My grandparents and great-grandparents sacrificed their lives to uphold this Torah, and should I now throw it into the fire?” The Germans then took the Jewish mayor and wrapped the sefer Torah around his body and then set the flame to the sefer Torah. As the flames grew higher, the heretofore assimilated Jewish mayor cried out “Shma Yisroel, Ad-noi El-heinu, Ad-noi Echad.”

 The deceased mayor's non-Jewish wife later produced a letter which her husband Mr. Gonchor had written shortly before his demise. "I left my religion because of my need to make a living and to advance my profession. But as much as I tried to forget my origins, I could not. My *girsa deyankusa* the Torah that I learned as a child, remained with me and followed me, not willing to leave me alone Regrettably, I did not live my life as a Jew. But I beg you the Al-mighty, to let the Torah that I learned as a child protect me so that at least I will die as a Jew."

**Recognizing Hashem’s Unity and**

**Mastery Over the Whole World**

 Every Jew eventually comes to recognize Hashem’s unity and His mastery over the whole world. Hashem is One and He is the only One. He rules the world. He was, He is, and He always will be. He has no beginning and no end. He is not limited by time or space or corporality.

 It is a mitzvah from the Torah to read the Shma twice a day, once at night and once in the morning. Jews also have the custom to read the Shma before going to sleep at night. The mitzvah of reading the Shma two times a day, includes all three paragraphs of the Shma as found in every prayer book. The Great Code of Jewish Law tells us that one should read the Shma intending to fulfill the mitzvah of announcing Hashem’s oneness. (Shulchan Aruch, 61:1) The Shma should be read with fear and trembling. (Ibid)

**Testifying to Hashem’s Power**

 When one looks at the first sentence of the Shma in a Torah scroll, one notices that two letters are larger than the others. The final letters “ayin” of the first word Shma and “dalet” of the last word Echad, are in large print. The Hebrew letters “ayin” and “dalet” spell the Hebrew word “Eyd,” which means ‘witness.’ By reading the Shma, a Jew is testifying to Hashem’s mastery over the world.

 For poor Mrs. Lichtman and Mr. Gonchor, the Jewish mayor of Kosznitz, it took the angel of death to awaken within them belief in Hashem’s oneness. Hopefully, we will never have to be in the position of those poor souls. Let us not wait for our last breath to say Shma with conviction. Rather, let us recite the Shma everyday and cry out our perfect faith in Hashem, the One and Only G-d. Good Shabbos Everyone.

**Story #767**

**One Mezuzah -- Two Souls**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000wMW0:001G8%5e1A00003bZV&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1344451534&randid=896253837&content=central##)

 When Perla Cohen took her first steps towards becoming closer to Judaism, she was a student of economy at the University of Lyon. She joined one of the classes that the original local representative of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Lyon, Rabbi Shmuel Gurewich, held on the campus once a week for several other girl students.

 Since her family lived out of town, she was frequently invited to stay for Shabbat in the house of the Gurewich family and over a period of time she developed a strong and close relationship with Mrs. Gurewich.

 On the other hand, she was in no hurry to make a firm commitment to the path of Torah and Mitzvot, despite the numerous study sessions in which she participated. A long period of time would pass between her deciding to keep one mitzvah and taking another upon herself.

 Finally the time came for affixing a mezuzah on the door of her home. Responding to the explicit request of Mrs. Gurewich, she agreed to affix a mezuzah at the entrance to her studio apartment. However, after a few weeks Perla Cohen decided to take it down. Some girlfriends had visited her and warned that a Jewish student living alone in a French town, announcing to everybody by means of a mezuzah on her doorpost that she is Jewish, is taking a big risk in these days.

 These frightening warnings had their effect on her and one day she took away the "security risk" from the entrance to her apartment.

 About two weeks later she found a note from the post office on her front door. The note stated that a package had arrived for her, but since she was not at home, the package had been delivered to the neighbor upstairs on the fifth floor.

 She went upstairs and the neighbor, a man in his seventies, said that he had just been passing by in the staircase. When he saw that the postman did not find her at home, he agreed to take the parcel for her. He handed her the package, and when she thanked him and she was about to leave, he suddenly said 'Shalom' to her.

 She asked him in a surprised tone: "Are you Jewish?"

 "Yes", answered the neighbor, "and I'd like to ask you something: why did you take down the mezuzah on your front door two weeks ago?"

 When she started to stutter and tried to explain to him the 'security risk', he said that he wanted to tell her something.

 "I am a Jewish man who lost my entire family in the holocaust -- my wife and my children. Since then I have been running away from my Jewish religion as much as possible. No Yom Kippur, no kosher food and no observance of any commandment. I looked for a place to live, situated as far away as possible from Jews in order not to see their faces.

 About a month ago the elevator was out of order, and on that day I had to climb the staircase by foot. When I came to the first floor, I suddenly saw a door with a mezuzah fixed to the doorpost.

 The last time I saw a mezuzah was 30 years ago, and the sight suddenly took me back to the past. Memories began to flood my mind. I stood there for half an hour, touching the mezuzah and unable to control my tears.

 Since then I have stopped using the elevator. Every day I descend and ascend the staircase to my apartment by foot so that I may stand in front of the mezuzah for a while, caress it and delve into my thoughts. I felt so strongly that this is the only thing that connects me to Judaism, to my past.

 Therefore, I was so shocked and disappointed when two weeks later I no longer found my mezuzah and my Judaism to which I have so longed to return, with a full heart.

 That day, two Jewish souls joined the Chassidic community in Rabbi Gurewich's house in Lyon. The first was Perla Cohen, who later established a magnificent Chassidic home together with her husband, another young returnee to traditional Judaism (they are now happy grandparents - ed.).

 The second was Mr. Avraham Londert, a Jewish man aged 70, who began a new life in the merit of the mitzvah of mezuzah.

 Source: From "Chassidic Gems," as heard from Rabbi Gurewich by the compiler, Tuvia Litzman.

 Connection: Weekly reading - the mitzvah of mezuzah: Deut. 11:20(+21).

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