**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas yisro 5775**

Volume 6, Issue 20 11 Shevat 5775/ January 31, 2015

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

For a free subscription, please forward your request to ***keren18@juno.com***

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**The Holocaust Survivor Who Put Her Trust in the Master of the World**

**By Rabbi Fischel Schachter**

Rabbi Fischel Schachter told the story of a woman, a Holocaust survivor, who settled in America after the war and was married for twelve years without having children.

One day she was sitting in a doctor's office in Manhattan, and the doctor said to her, “Madame, please listen to me. I am saying this for your own benefit: give up. Medically speaking, there is nothing we can do for you to have children.”

The woman left the office and boarded the bus. During the ride, she contemplated her life. She recalled the horrors she experienced as a young girl in Poland, when the family had a trap door beneath the dining room table and they would go and hide under the floor when the Nazis approached.

She volunteered to be the one to close the trap door and put the carpet over it, and then hide on top of a piece of furniture. She would sit there, all curled up, and listen in terror as the Nazis searched the house, smashing furniture as they went from room to room.

Time and time again, the family was saved. But finally, the Nazis noticed a soft spot on the floor, and they discovered the trap door. This young girl watched as the Nazis dragged her family away. She was the only one who survived the war.

Once she got to America, she desperately wanted to begin a family. And now, after twelve long years, her hopes were shattered. She said to herself, “I have no reason to get off this bus”, and so she stayed on the bus, sitting there the rest of the day.

Finally, the driver informed her that he was driving the bus to the garage for the night, and she needed to disembark. She muttered, “I have nothing to live for”. The driver said to her, “Listen, lady, I've had a hard day. I don't know what your problem is, but you're not going to solve it by staying on this bus.”

She got off the bus and said, “Master of the world, You were with me all along. You saved my life countless times. You brought me here. You let me start my life over, and so it is in Your hands. I have no right to give up. The bus driver is absolutely right. You didn't save my life for me to live on the Madison Avenue bus. I won't give up! I will continue serving You no matter what, my life is in Your hands!”

A year later, this woman had a child. That child grew up, got married, and has his own children and grandchildren. Rabbi Fischel Schachter added that he heard this story first-hand from the woman herself, whom he knew quite well. She was his mother.

Rabbi Schachter concluded by saying that there are times in our lives where our hopes are shattered, and everything we've been counting on will suddenly be lost. At such moments, we can easily fall into despair and feel a sense of betrayal. But we must not give up!

We should instead say, as his mother did, “Hashem, I don't have to understand, but everything in my life is in Your hands! I will try my hardest to succeed in the difficult test You have put me in!” If we can do that and have Emunah, we open the doors to Hashem’s salvation and blessings that would never have been available to us otherwise!

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

**SHORT STORY OF THE WEEK**

**Rav Shach’s Concern for**

**The Feelings of the Printer**

It was a loud and busy day in the publishing house, with machines churning and workers running around. Suddenly, every one and all the machinery stopped, causing the owner, Reb Lipa Friedman to pick up his head from the desk and look up. He ran to the door to greet **Rav Shach,** of blessed memory who was standing at the entrance, holding the notes for another volume of “Avi Ezri” on the Rambam.

Rav Shach asked for a rate to print his papers and Reb Friedman quoted a price, fully aware (from previous encounters) that Rav Shach wouldn’t accept free printing. Rav Shach thanked the owner and left.

Around 11 P.M. that night, as Reb Friedman was getting ready for bed in his Bnei Brak home, there was a knock on the door. It was Rav Shach wearing a worried look on his face. Rav Shach told the man that he was in the middle of a personal accounting he does every night (to hold himself accountable for his actions) and observed that when he walked out of the business without offering an explanation, it seemed like he was displeased with the price and would stop using the publishing company.

In order to fulfill the verse **“One should be clean in front of Hashem and the Jewish people.”**Rav Shach came to say that he simply didn’t have money and as soon as he did, he’d return.

*Comment: Reiterating the need to worry about not hurting others with or words and actions.*

*Reprinted from last week’ email on the parsha from Reb Mendel Berlin.*

**Family Planning in Antwerp**

            The following true story occurred a few years ago in Antwerp.  Reb Chaim and his wife sat down at their table after a long hard day.

            “*Baruch Hashem*, we have been blessed so much, and I’m not complaining,” the wife announced, looking nervously at her husband.  “It’s just that we now have twelve children, *beli ayin hara*, and there is no more room in the house, and we can’t really afford any more children.  Although we’re coping, isn’t twelve enough?”

            The husband lovingly sympathized with his wife and then began to speak about the importance of relying on Hashem.  He then reassured her that He never gives anything to anyone that is impossible for them to handle.

            “Since you are healthy and our only concern is a financial one,” he suggested, “I think that we should leave everything in Hashem’s hands, for if He blesses us with another child He will surely provide us the means to support that child, as He does with all of our children. Remember we’re not just having children for our sakes, we are building Hashem’s army,” Reb Chaim said to his wife.

            The woman accepted her husband’s words and within a short period of time, she was delighted to find out that she was pregnant again.

            On the day that the baby was born, in the same hospital, an exceptionally wealthy gentile died leaving no heirs or family. Years earlier, he had declared in his will that all of his money should be given to the largest family in Antwerp since he had never married and had no family to give the money to.

           Now, there were several families in Antwerp with twelve children, but no family with thirteen children. Well, at least there *was* no family until the day that the gentile died, when there was one Jewish family who had officially become the largest family in the city, having just been blessed with heir thirteenth child! (Short Vort)

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

**Common Myths About Orthodox Judaism– Debunked!**

**By Mayim Bialik & Allison Josephs**

Karin Brooke’s[post on Kveller](http://www.kveller.com/how-i-lost-my-daughter-to-religious-fundamentalism/) about losing her daughter to religious fundamentalism struck a chord with me for a few reasons.

First, I am technically a baal teshuvah–a person who took on Jewish observance later in life. I struggled a lot in college regarding how to introduce my parents (especially my mother, who was raised Orthodox but chose not to be as an adult) to my newfound faith and observance. It was hard.

It pains me that Karin’s daughter and she did not find ways to connect positively about her daughter’s transformation. (My own parents eventually, on their own, started lighting Shabbat candles regularly and keeping Passover with more care, which has made it really lovely for my sons to see all of us observing similarly.)

Secondly, the writer says things about Orthodoxy that might be interpreted as what “all” Orthodox sects practice or believe in. Some of the things she mentions are very far outside of the mainstream Orthodox box, and I think most Orthodox people would find some of the practices she describes her daughter taking on as fringe, and not consistent with standard Orthodox practice.

The post got me thinking about the misperceptions I grew up with about Orthodoxy, many of which were because my mother was raised by Eastern European immigrants and a lot of their “old world” ways she assumed were synonymous with “Orthodoxy” but they weren’t.

For example, my grandparents were very superstitious, but that’s not Orthodoxy, per se. My grandparents also had some very, shall we say, strong feelings about how girls and women should and shouldn’t behave, and deviation from that was not welcomed.

Orthodoxy by definition doesn’t have those beliefs; they did. But my mom, since childhood, had assimilated these things into her perception of Orthodoxy in general, which made my taking on observance–as well as her sister’s decision to become even more religious when she got married–difficult for her.

Here are a few things I eventually discovered were quirks rather than norms of Orthodoxy, or simply urban legend. I thank Allison Josephs (my chavrusa [study partner] who I met through Partners in Torah), known online as “[Jew in the City](http://jewinthecity.com/)” for contributing to the truths behind these things.

Disclaimer: The answers Allison provides are simply snapshots into very complicated issues in Judaism. Her answers are by no means definitive, but she and I both work hard to try and separate misperceptions from truth about Orthodoxy, and we hope this piques your interest and challenges some of your misperceptions!

**MYTH**: Orthodox women have to shave their heads at their weddings.

**TRUTH**: Jewish law requires a married woman to cover her hair, not shave it. (In fact, the Torah, when discussing the “captive woman” in the book of Devarim seems to indicate that head-shaving makes a woman less attractive.) Nevertheless, there is a percentage of Hasidic (non-Lubavitch) women who do so.

**MYTH**: Orthodox women can’t be artists or draw pictures of any kind.

**TRUTH**: I once heard (in the name of Rav Kook–an Orthodox Israeli rabbi) that God left the world “unfinished” when creating it, and that when we make art, we are “partnering” with him in the creation of the world. Women are not excluded! There is a Torah prohibition against making a graven image. Everyone says you can’t make a statue to use for a god. There are some who say you can’t make a statue that looks like a person. There is a very minority opinion which says you can’t draw or paint a picture with a face. There are many Orthodox female artists–even some who have gained acclaim like [Elke Reva Sudin](http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/brooklyn/old-meets-new-boerum-hill-artist-article-1.1545018).  There are also [schools](http://tzoharseminary.com/) and [associations](http://www.artsandtorah.org/) which support religious Jewish women who want to make art.

**MYTH**: Orthodox women aren’t respected by their husbands and are virtual slaves.

**TRUTH**: The Talmud says that a man is supposed to love his wife as much as himself and honor her more. In the Jewish marriage contract (which is thousands of years old) a man is required to provide his wife with clothing, food, and [marital] satisfaction–a unique document historically; no other ancient contract guaranteed such rights for women. There are, of course, lousy men in the Orthodox community, just as there are lousy men in every community. There are unhappy women in the Orthodox community as there are in all communities, but most women I’ve come in contact with (in over 15 years in the Orthodox world) seem to be quite happy. There are also a huge number of [Orthodox women who work](http://jewinthecity.com/2012/12/jitcs-orthodox-jewish-all-stars/) and the variety of fields they are in is [ever-expanding.](http://jewinthecity.com/2014/12/orthodox-jewish-all-stars-2014-joyce-azria-barry-simon-more/) In fact, there are even some examples in the Hasidic world where men work [for their wives](http://forward.com/articles/190203/ultra-orthodox-women-act-on-sheryl-sandbergs-lean/)!

**MYTH**: Orthodoxy sees women as lesser in general.

**TRUTH**: According to the Torah, man and woman were created as one being to show us that men and women are two halves of one whole and that a husband and wife are different (in a yin yang sort of way) and are meant to complete one another. While it’s true that in Orthodoxy women are not obligated to time-bound commandments (meaning those designated as being performed at dawn or dusk, for example), we are told that women have merit which men do not have. The Talmud says that the Jews of Egypt were redeemed because of the righteous women and that the ultimate redemption will come about due to the righteous women.

**MYTH**: You can’t wear any nice clothes when you’re Orthodox because it might be perceived as too sexy.

**TRUTH**: Basic Jewish law requires women to cover their upper arms, upper legs, and chest (men have their own requirements in modesty to save their eyes only for their wives’ bodies and to dress modestly as well). Different communities have different ideas about how stylish clothes can or can’t be, but you’ll find (as in all communities) women who are more stylish and women who are less stylish. Interesting colors, textures, accessories, and shoes are allowed vis-a-vis basic law and are implemented [by women](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/fashion/fabologies-adi-heyman-promotes-modest-fashion.html?_r=0) like [these.](http://www.vogue.com/7696801/orthodox-judaism-fashion-laws-of-modesty/%E2%80%A8)

**MYTH**: You can’t be a dancer if you’re Orthodox. Orthodox people don’t let their kids even start dance classes because they will just have to give it up when they hit puberty.

**TRUTH**: According to Jewish law, for modesty reasons, a woman can’t dance in front of a man who is not her husband (or close blood relative). But there are all female dance troupes which only perform in front of women. There are all-women’s [zumba and dance classes](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304157204579474231170762964) and many Orthodox Jewish girls go to dance class while they are young and the issue of modesty is not relevant. As with all of these topics, different communities do different things but many things are allowed in terms of basic law or can be done within an all-female settling.

Allison and I hope that we have debunked some misperceptions while simultaneously showing how multi-faceted the jewel of observance can be. It’s not always simple to figure out where Orthodoxy and modernity meet, but things are not like they used to be. The world of Orthodoxy is broad and colorful and there is a lot of beauty in it.

[Partners in Torah](http://www.partnersintorah.org/) is a free organization that pairs you with a study partner for whatever you are curious about in Judaism. Check it out if you want to learn more!

*Excerpted from last week’s email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Programs) Update. The article originally appeared on the website Kveller.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov and the Bar Mitzvah Celebration**

It was a chilly, windy day when the Baal Shem Tov stepped into his carriage, and as was his custom, allowed the horses to run where they would, invariably bringing their master to some small village or hamlet where the Baal Shem Tov would bring his fiery enthusiasm for G-d to his fellow Jews.

In what seemed like no time, the horses stopped in a tiny hamlet, buried in the midst of a dense forest and surrounded by tilled fields. The Jews of this place were a hard-working lot, ignorant of Torah, able to steal just a few minutes a day to devote to their prayers, most of which they didn't understand.

The Baal Shem Tov was filled with love and compassion for these Jews, and so he made these journeys to bring spiritual lights to their eyes and turn their thoughts to G-d.

There was only one villager who was a cut above, and he was a wealthy landowner, who, it turned out, was celebrating his son's Bar Mitzva just that very day. When the father of the boy heard that the famous Baal Shem Tov had arrived, he quickly harnessed his wagon and came to escort him to the grand celebration.

The Baal Shem Tov was seated at the head of the table and welcomed with great honor. But his attention riveted to the wrinkled faces and worn hands of the Jewish peasants who had also come to join the party. The Baal Shem Tov began to speak and the wondrous tales and parables of the Midrash he told held his audience spellbound. Then he began singing in his melodious voice heartfelt, soul-stirring tunes. The change which could be detected in the sad and exhausted faces of the laborers, the tears which trickled down their wrinkled cheeks, were touching to behold.

The wealthy landowner perceived the scene very differently. Why was the guest of honor devoting himself entirely to these unlettered peasants and paying no attention to me, he thought. He decided he would avenge himself on the Baal Shem Tov, and with this in mind announced, "My dear friends, I want you to know that the highlight of this celebration will be a speech which my son, the Bar Mitzva boy, will deliver in the presence of our most esteemed guest, the rabbi of a nearby town, who will be here with his party. Only before such a prominent rabbi is it fitting to deliver his discourse."

The Baal Shem Tov was not oblivious to the insult, but he did not acknowledge it. Rather, he engaged the Bar Mitzva boy in conversation about various spiritual matters.

As he spoke, his spiritual gaze wandered afield to a faraway place beyond the green fields and forests of the village.

Suddenly the Baal Shem Tov broke out into a burst of joyous laughter which seemed to engulf his entire being and spread to every man and woman in the room. Soon, not only the Baal Shem Tov was laughing, but the whole room was filled with joy and laughter - the people, the objects and even farm animals outside joined in his unbounded joy.

In the midst of all this laughter, the sound of carriage wheels grinding to a halt could be heard from the courtyard. It was the wealthy master of the feast who had just arrived with the rabbi of the nearby town, the much awaited guest of honor.

As they approached, they were astonished to hear peals of laughter from the hall. "What has happened here?" the wealthy landowner asked.

When silence was restored, the Baal Shem Tov began his explanation:

"Far away from here, in a lonely hamlet, there lives a widow and her only son. Today, he too is becoming a Bar Mitzva, and although he knows nothing about Torah and has never lived among Jews, he has a pair of tefilin left to him by his father.

"He put on the tefilin and his mother explained to him the tradition of going to the synagogue to be called up to the Torah. But, alas the poor lad had no way to fulfill this custom. He walked out to the barn and gathered all his beloved animals, which he cared for so devotedly and he formed them into a 'minyan.'

“Then he announced in a loud voice, 'Today I am a Bar Mitzva!' The animals responded to his words with a cacophony of 'moos,' 'neighs,' and 'clucks.' When the heavenly hosts beheld this strange but touching Bar Mitzva celebration, they laughed so heartily that their laughter echoed through the universe until it reached the Holy Throne of G-d where it provoked great Divine Joy.

"And so,” concluded the Baal Shem Tov, “it is now a propitious time to hear the discourse of the Bar Mitzva boy, for now, the Gates of Heaven are open."

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5775 edition of “L’Chaim,” a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Why I Slept on the Living Room Floor for 5 Weeks**

**By [Elana Mizrahi](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/10574/jewish/Elana-Mizrahi.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Browse%20more%20articles%20by%20Elana%20Mizrahi)**

I think at last, a week later, I’ve caught up on my sleep. Five weeks was a long time to sleep on the floor of my living room, which also happens to be my kitchen and the central room of our home.

What happened? My 88-year-old father-in-law (may he live long and be well) came to visit us, and my husband and I gave him our room. To have him—a man with poor eyesight, poor hearing, and who doesn’t always walk so well—stay some place on his own was out of the question.

It was obvious that he would stay with us. To me and my husband it was also obvious where he would sleep. We have two bedrooms, one for the kids and one for us. Yes, it was obvious to us that he would sleep in our room. What surprised me was that many people I told about this visit didn’t understand why my father in-law couldn’t stay in my kids’ room while they slept on the floor.

The other day I went with my kids and a close friend of mine and her kids to a community center near our home. Downstairs, there were big trampolines for the kids to jump on, and upstairs is the neighborhood library. I told my daughter, who is about six and a half years old, to take our friend down to the trampolines with all the little kids while I returned books and picked out new ones. After I finished, I went down to the trampolines and walked up to my friend who was sitting nearby.

She turned to me and asked, “What’s your secret?”

“What do you mean?”

 “You have such considerate kids! As soon as we entered the activities room, Frida Tamar (my daughter) went over and got me a chair to sit on. How do you teach them to do things like that?!!”

To me, the answer was obvious. My daughter got her the chair because there is no doubt that I would have done the same thing. How do I teach them to be considerate? Certainly not by telling them. I teach them consideration by being considerate. I teach them to do acts of *chesed* (loving kindness) by doing acts of *chesed*myself.

In the book of Samuel, the prophet relates how David was running away from King Saul, who wanted to kill him. David arrived near the home of a very wealthy man named Nabal, whom David had helped in the past. Nabal was a greedy man who, as the prophet describes him, was “difficult and an evildoer.” David sent his attendants to ask Nabal for food and he refused. When David’s attendants reported Nabal’s refusal to David, David was infuriated and wanted to destroy Nabal for his insolence.

Upon hearing about what happened, Nabal’s wife, Abigail, “hurried and took two hundred breads, two containers of wine, five cooked sheep, five *se’ahs* (a measurement) of toasted grain, a hundred raisin-clusters, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and she put them on donkeys.”1 In other words, she took a *lot*of food, and *she*took it; she didn’t order anyone else to do it. This wealthy woman who had five personal maidservants and many attendants put the food on the donkeys herself, saddled her donkey and rode to David. “When Abigail saw David she hurried and dismounted from the donkey, and fell on her face before David, and prostrated herself to the ground.”2

You know what happened then? David calmed down. Abigail saved not only her entire household, but she also saved David from becoming too angry. In his words:

Blessed be you, who has restrained me this day from coming to bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand. Truly as the L‑rd G‑d of Israel lives, Who has prevented me from harming you, had you not hurried and come to meet me, by morning’s light there would not have remained to Nabal as much as a dog . . . Go in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your advice, and have shown you grace.3

Ten days later Nabal was struck with an illness and died. When David heard about his death, he sent for Abigail and married her. Abigail thus become one of the queens of Israel and is counted by our Sages as one of the seven prophetesses of Israel.4

What made Abigail a queen? It wasn’t her wealth or beauty (though they were so great that the prophet describes both of them); it was her wisdom and her act of *chesed* (kindness). It was her act of gathering the food and bringing it to David herself.

Back to my father-in-law and the five weeks of sleeping, or not sleeping, in my living room. It was an honor to host my father-in-law. It was a privilege to have him in our home, and, yes, it was a *chesed*. However, it wouldn’t have been a *chesed* to host him at the expense of my kids. When we have guests for Shabbat, I always ask my children before I have the guests sleep in their room. They know that they can say no, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But you know what? They always say yes. Why? First, because we make it fun by turning it into a slumber party, but most importantly, because children learn kindness from their environment. By seeing it.

**Was it hard, hosting my father-in-law?**

So you ask me, was it hard, hosting my father-in-law? Honestly, yes. It was. For many reasons. Being responsible for the physical and emotional needs of another human being is always hard. Having someone stay in your home and take over your space is always hard.

But was it worth it? Was it beautiful? Was it an honor and a privilege? Was it a wonderful opportunity to really teach my children the mitzvahs of honoring your parents and doing *chesed*? YES! Yes, yes and yes. This is the answer to my friend who asks me, “How do you have such considerate kids?”

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

**What’s a Father For?**

**By Slovie Jungreis Wolf**

It has been 19 years, and yet the day arrives and it still feels raw. Though seasons come and go, and one has the privilege of walking children to the chupah and joyously embracing the next generation, when the yahrtzeit licht is lit, we are still that child who yearns. Bais Shevat arrives and I am once again the little girl who is waiting for my Abba at the door, wanting to see his face and hear his voice one more time. This past week was no different.

Darkness falls. I watch the glow of the flame and memories fill my mind. My father always filled my world with light and laughter. We did not have much “stuff” growing up, but somehow we never felt lacking. We never took exotic vacations or had the latest gadgets or toys. My parents provided us with much more to carry us through our days.

We had endless love and a faith that anchored us. In a world today, where mothers and fathers often feel stressed and families spend more time on their phones communicating with others than with each other, there is one particular memory that stands out from my yesterday. My father imprinted within me his definition of family and “what’s a father for.”

It had been a long and hot summer. My husband had undergone delicate surgery for a dislocated shoulder and was warned to watch the movements of his arm. He was wearing a sling and was in a lot of pain. I was expecting and approaching my due date, feeling the scorching heat of a blazing summer day.

I took my children outside to play and my five-year-old daughter fell off the swing. Her hand lay limply at her side. She was howling in pain.

I ran to the pediatrician, hoping that he would tell me that she was simply bruised or suffered a sprain. He shared the news that her hand seems to be broken and that I would have to see an orthopedist. My child would require an adult to accompany her to the x-ray room, lift her up and sooth her. I also had an active toddler who needed someone to watch over him in the office as my daughter was being examined and casted. I needed help.

My husband was completely incapacitated and in his own bandaged arm. My mother was lecturing. I knew that my father had left that morning to visit with my sister and her children in the Catskills. He was spending a week in their summer bungalow.

I was mulling over my situation as I entered my home and the phone rang. I picked up the receiver and heard my father’s voice.

“Sheyfelah, how are you?”

I could not speak. I just started to cry.

“What happened? What is it?”

I sobbed a bit more and then relayed the story to my father. I described my husband immobile in his sling and in pain, my daughter wailing and needing x-rays, my seven-year-old getting off the day camp bus shortly, and my two-year-old doing what two-year-olds love to do. The orthopedist’s office was an hour away. I didn’t know how I would manage. I felt overwhelmed.

“Don’t worry, sheyfelah. I am coming to help you.”

“Abba, what do you mean?” I asked. “You just arrived to the country this morning. You spent three hours on a bus getting there. You’re staying for a week. How will you help me?”

“I’m going to take the next bus home. Don’t worry. I didn’t even unpack yet, so it’s fine.”

I took a breath. “Are you sure, Abba?”

I was astonished. I knew how my father had waited for this week. My parents never took a vacation. Being the rov of a shul was a never-ending role that kept my father “on” both day and night. The phone was constantly ringing with all types of needs. Hours were spent preparing for drashos and shiurim, counseling families, visiting the sick, and teaching Hebrew school to kids who could not sit still after a full day in class. It all took its toll.

This was to be my father’s big getaway, a week in my sister’s bungalow. His greatest pleasure was spending time with his children and grandchildren. My father would take early morning walks on the country roads while wheeling a stroller, and spend the day discovering the beauty of Hashem’s world while sharing the wonder with the children surrounding him. He would share his stories and laughter. We never heard a sharp word or saw a sour mood. I learned later from my sister that my father had arrived drenched in sweat after a long and hot bus ride, but he made no mention of this to me.

To me, my father simply insisted that he was turning around and coming home. I was overwhelmed by his incredible kindness. I decided to ask one more time.

“Abba, are you sure?”

I heard my father’s wonderful laugh over the phone. And then he said something that I will never forget. In fact, I can hear his voice as I write these lines.

“Slovelah, of course I’m sure. What’s a father for?”

My father came home. He lifted my spirits. He soothed my daughter’s tears. He carried my toddler on his shoulders. He took my seven-year-old on to his lap and told him a favorite story. And he did it all with an incredible smile.

As we grapple with a topsy-turvy world, let us at least hold on to this one unshakable truth: Fathers exist in the lives of their children in a role that goes way beyond the daily grind of paying bills and taking care of daily needs. Of course mothers nurture and give life and love. But fathers are here too, to lead, teach, guide, and provide spiritual and emotional nourishment to both sons and daughters.

Fathers can be the moral compass steering children throughout their life journey. And then, when we grow up and may feel overwhelmed at times or wonder if we have the koach to go on, we can hear our father’s voice or see his image - “deyukno shel aviv” - and know that we have been given footsteps to follow. We can look back at the small kindnesses, the little talks when we seemed troubled, and the reassuring arm around our shoulders that let us know that we are loved and never stand alone.

After all, what’s a father for?

L’zeicher nishmas Rav Meshulem Haleivy ben Rav Asher Anschil.

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

**Kaddish for My Mother**

**My Mother Almost Left This**

**World Without My Love.**

**By**[**Beth Firestone**](http://www.aish.com/authors/289411441.html)

“But behind all your stories is your mother's story, for hers is where yours begins." Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*

Nobody knows this as well as Sarah Weintraub, who lost her mother last year. Since a Jewish woman does not count as part of a *minyan* according to Jewish law, orthodox women will ask a male relative, friend or rabbi to say the mourner’s Kaddish for the 11-month period. For most, this is enough. Not so for Sarah, who took it upon herself to show up at her synagogue every morning for 11 months so she could say “Amen” to her mother’s Kaddish.

When the year was up, Sarah addressed the congregation after Shabbat services, thanking the men’s side for providing her with an “amazing Kaddish experience.”

She explained that each morning, as she prayed on the woman’s side, she experienced a healing and strengthening of the bond between not only herself and her mother, but between her grandmother and great grandmother. “It was like I was having coffee with my mother every single morning.”

I was in shul that Shabbos morning, listening to Sarah speak. Though I’d known her for years, I knew little about Sarah’s relationship with her mother, Millie, and I’d certainly never known anyone who had done what she had done – show up to say “Amen” to her mother’s Kaddish for 11 months, never missing a day. I knew there was a mother-daughter story worth hearing and telling.

**First Time Around**

Sarah’s story is one of regret, rife with painful mistakes and missed opportunities, but it is ultimately a story of love and personal redemption. To understand, we must go back in time. Forty years ago, long before she’d set foot on the spiritual path that would lead to her becoming an observant Jew, Sarah became a twenty four year old divorced single mother. Needing to support her small family, she found a job in a posh Beverly Hills designer clothing store.

Outgoing, beautiful and ambitious, Sarah established a trusting clientele of returning customers from the upper echelons of Beverly Hills and Hollywood. Sarah’s entire life changed when she was introduced to super star, [Diana Ross](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48901087.html), and subsequently offered the coveted position of ‘fashion coordinator’ for Ms. Ross on the upcoming blockbuster film, *Mahogony*. When her celebrity gig ended, Sarah ventured into a career as a licensing agent for the famous American costume designer, Bob Mackie.

In time, this led to Sarah becoming the head of Marketing and Advertising for a large apparel company. “I was living in a rarified world of access and glamour that most people never enter. I was having an amazing time and was too busy to care about anyone else. Sadly I left my family behind, my father, my mother, and my older daughter, Jennifer… everyone. “

Herein begins Sarah’s mother-daughter saga. She explains, “In my twenties my mother went through a very painful divorce. At the time I took my father’s side.” It would take many years and much newfound wisdom for Sarah to understand how difficult that had been for her mother. Sarah is full of regrets. “My mother was a strong woman, but she was sad and lonely. The thing she wanted most in the world was to have a close relationship with me, but I couldn’t see that yet.“

**Next Time Around**

At 40 years old, Sarah ‘coincidentally’ befriended a young Jewish fashion stylist working on a commercial shoot for Sarah’s apparel company. This woman had to leave the set early on Friday afternoon because “the Jewish Sabbath was coming.” Sarah was incredulous. Nobody left the shoot early. And yet, she found herself wondering. First she’d find out what all this ‘Sabbath business’ was about, then she’d fire this audacious young thing. Destiny had something else in mind.

This woman had such an endearing demeanor as she explained the idea of – “taking off twenty four hours every week from the rat race – lighting Shabbat candles, eating a beautiful dinner by candlelight” – that Sarah was compelled to take a closer look at her Jewish faith. Looking back Sarah could see that her “Soul was thirsty.”

Over the next ten years, Sarah slowly became an observant Jew. She also remarried and had two more daughters, embracing motherhood once again, but this time wholeheartedly. Though she still worked outside the home, her role as wife, mother and builder of a Jewish home became the focal point of Sarah’s life.

Sarah’s relationship with her mother began to slowly shift. “My mother loved to come to our home for Shabbos. the Jewish holidays and every birthday party. She’d visit over Chanukah and make us latkes. My mother was an amazing cook and she was always trying to get me into the kitchen with her. But I was still busy with my career. I was always running out the door.” Sarah is reflective, remembering her mother telling her to “slow down, Susie. “

“Unfortunately I never stood next to her in the kitchen. We never cooked together. What a lost opportunity.”

**Time to Come Home**

“Think for a minute, darling: in fairy tales it's always the children who have the fine adventures. The mothers have to stay at home and wait for the children to fly in the window." – Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveller's Wife*

It would take Sarah a few more years to fly back into that window. Her mother was still waiting, but she was running on borrowed time. Millie was now 80 years old, and suffering from the onset of dementia.

Sarah set a new stage for her relationship with her mother. She determined to make herself available to her mother both physically and emotionally. She became her mother’s primary caretaker. As the disease progressed, Sarah moved her mother to an Assisted Living facility. It was on her daily visits there that she had a second epiphany.

For the first time in her life she was able to “see who my mother really was.” She saw it in the way her mother earned the love and respect of both the staff and other residents. Sarah became a celebrity by proxy. “You’re Millie’s daughter?” they’d say whenever Sarah came, then they’d sing Millie’s praises. Millie in turn, would sing her daughter’s praises in front of everyone.

“My mother was always my biggest fan. Now it was my turn. I began to openly thank my mother for everything she’d given me. She finally felt loved, heard and understood by me.”

Sarah marveled at the woman she’d never really “seen.” Even though her mother was fading from dementia “she lit up the place with her light. She had so much goodness and warmth. All she wanted from life was to love and be loved.”

Sarah soon had to move her mother for further care, this time to The Jewish Home. Even here Millie brought joy to others.

When the home eventually wanted to bring in hospice, Sarah wouldn’t have it. “Intermediaries would have disturbed my mother’s peace of mind. I didn’t want her to be with strangers in her last days.”

Indeed, as Millie’s end in this world drew near, Sarah made a commitment to herself that her mother would not die alone. “Even though she no longer recognized me, I didn’t want her to feel abandoned. I stroked my mother’s hand until her very last breath. Right before she passed, a single tear trickled down her beautiful face. I felt like it was her way of saying “Goodbye my Susie – I love you and I will always love you. It’s time for me to go. I know you love me and of course you are forgiven.”

*Reprinted from the current website of Aish.com*