**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Yisro 5771 & 5770**

Volume 2, Issue #20

**Chassidic Story #686**

**Tropical Oranges in a Russian Winter Orchard**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 Once the Baal Shem Tov was traveling during the winter in Russia with one of his close disciples, Rabbi Moshe Shoham. Being that the country roads in Russia were usually covered with snow during the winter, they were traveling in a sleigh.

 It became the 15th of Shvat, and they realized that they had no fruit with which to celebrate the holiday. So the Baal Shem Tov told his wagon driver, Alexei, to drive the sleigh off the main road and into the fields.

 They went for a short distance and came upon a field that not only was not snow-covered, but had in it an orchard of oranges. Moreover, not only was it not cold there, but the climate was tropical!

 They immediately went over, picked some of the oranges, and joyfully made the blessings, including the shehecheyanu one for enjoying a fruit for the first time in a year, to celebrate the holiday.

 Rabbi Moshe Shoham also took a few oranges back to the sleigh, to have for later. All this time, he did not even wonder how it was possible for an orange orchard, which requires a tropical climate, to appear suddenly in the Russian countryside in the middle of winter. In fact, oranges do not grow in Russia at any time of the year! But being that he was often in the company of the Baal Shem Tov, he was so used to seeing wonders that this miraculous event did not even cause him to marvel.

 As they started to walk back to where Alexei was waiting with the sleigh, Rabbi Moshe regretted that he had not taken several more oranges. They got onto the sleigh and started back to the main road. When they reached the main road, the Baal Shem Tov announced that he wanted to rest briefly before continuing the

journey.

 Rabbi Moshe immediately decided to take the opportunity to return to the orchard. He followed the path of the sleigh tracks to the field, but when he reached it, there was no orchard!

 And when he returned to the sleigh, the few oranges he had picked and put in the sleigh had also disappeared. When he asked the Baal Shem Tov about this, the Baal Shem Tov told him, “When I felt unhappy about having no fruit and not being able to celebrate Tu BeShvat, I brought-- by mystical means-- an orchard from the Land of Israel here. But since the whole point was to perform a mitzvah, not for personal benefit, the orchard and the few fruit you had taken disappeared afterward.”

 Source: Reprinted with permission from the rendition posted by Tzvi Meir Cohn on his website, baalshemtov.com.

 Connection: Seasonal - Tu b'Shvat

 Biographic note: Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer (18 Elul 1698-6 Sivan 1760), the Baal Shem Tov [Master of the Good Name], a unique and seminal figure in Jewish history, revealed the Chassidic movement and his own identity as an exceptionally holy person, on his 36th birthday, 18 Elul 1734. He wrote no books, although many claim to contain his teachings. One available in English is the excellent annotated translation of Tzava'at Harivash, published by Kehos.

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**The Rabbi and the Ox**

**By** [**Yanki Tauber**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=90)

 One day, the neighborhood butcher came to the study of Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (1730-1805), the famed rabbi of Frankfurt, with an halachic (Torah law) query. A defect had been discovered in the lung of a slaughtered ox, raising the possibility that it might be treif, forbidden by Torah law to be eaten.

 It was a complex borderline case, and the rabbi spent many hours studying the rulings of the great halachic authorities of previous generations, several of whom where inclined to forbid the meat under such circumstances.

 Finally, Rabbi Pinchas issued his ruling: the ox was kosher.

 Later, one of his disciples asked him: "Rabbi, why did you go to such lengths to render the ox kosher? After all, the Shach (Rabbi Shabtai HaKohen, the great 17th century halachist) deemed it treif. Would it not have been more advisable to simply throw away the meat rather than risk transgressing such a serious prohibition?"

 Rabbi Pinchas smiled and replied: "You know, for every man there comes the day when he must stand before the heavenly court and account for his life. I imagine that, when that day comes for me, I shall have to defend the decision I arrived at today.

 “The 'prosecution' will undoubtedly call a most prodigious witness to testify against me: the 'Shach' himself will explain how I permitted the eating of meat whose kashrut is in serious question. I shall have to respond by citing the opinions of his lesser colleagues who ruled that the ox is indeed kosher, and by explaining why I preferred their rulings over his. You can be sure that the prospect fills me with trepidation.

 "But what if I had ruled that the meat is treif? Then I would have to contend with another accuser -- the ox. He will take the stand against me and bellow his rage: 'How many hungry mouths might I have fed!' he will cry, 'How many hours of Torah study and prayer might I have sustained! How many good deeds might I have energized! And this man consigned me to the garbage heap, while there were grounds for rendering me kosher.'

 “To be sure, I could call on the great Shach to defend me. But, all things considered, I would rather take my chances against the Shach than confront an angry ox in court..."

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

**A Soldier's Journey Through**

**Judaism, Christianity and Islam**

**By Elad Benari and Yoni Kempinski**

 Meet Korey Bronson - a young IDF soldier who was born a Jew, raised as a Christian, converted to Islam, and returned to Judaism.



 Bronson now lives in Israel, but he was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father. He was raised as a Christian and the family continued to lead a Christian lifestyle even after his father died when Bronson was six years old.

 Bronson did not know that he was Jewish until a year after his father’s death, when his uncle came for a visit. It was a Friday afternoon, and young Korey told his uncle, who was dressed in a black suit, that “church is on Sunday.”

 “He looked at me and said: ‘You have a lot to learn, buddy. It’s Erev Shabbat today,” recalled Bronson. “And I didn’t know what Shabbat was. I didn’t know I was Jewish. He saw that I was lost and began to explain to me what Shabbat is all about.”

 When his uncle saw that his nephew was not grasping what he was explaining, he took him and his brother to experience what their first and last real Shabbat for a long time.

 Bronson continued to lead a Christian life and ignored the fact that he was Jewish, but the story does not end there. Later on in his life, along came Islam.

 “When I was 11 or 12 my mother met a friend from her childhood who was Muslim, fell in love and got married,” he said. “Upon their request everyone converted to Islam. We became Muslim, we began learning how to read, how to write, the prayers five times a day, the food, and we did this full out.”

 Yet Bronson felt something was missing. He learned about many cultures but not Judaism. He finally remembered that he is Jewish when he was taught in the Muslim school that Muslims are allowed to eat kosher food.

 “I called my uncle and I told him that I want to learn what it is to be a Jew,” recalled Bronson. “He spoke to his wife and they agreed that I could come for a month and learn, and take what I can.”

 Three months later, Bronson moved to his uncle’s house where he began to learn Hebrew and study about what it means to be a Jew. The local rabbi was impressed with his progress and took him under his wing.

 Bronson studied at a Zionist school, where he was inspired by his teachers, who were shlichim from Israel and passed on to him their love for the country. “We saw these families coming from Israel to teach us because they saw the importance. Even more importantly we saw them going back,” he said. “It wasn’t just ideas that we were being told. We also saw people who were making that move to go there.”

 After grade 12, Bronson came to Israel for a year to study in yeshiva. He learned Hebrew and ultimately fell in love with both the people and the land. This persuaded him to stay in Israel and enlist in the IDF.

 Bronson says that today he respects both his former religions but admits that seeing and reading about the religion-based hatred “eats at my heart. When I hear about bombings or I see shootings or simply slander it eats at my heart because I see that the situation doesn’t have to be this way. It can be worked out. There are things that can be done.”

 `He believes that he can contribute to Israel through leading by example. “I take the things that I learn and see and I do the best I can to be an exemplary figure to the people around me. I help them develop understanding. There’s no greater reward than giving and helping, and I feel that and I truly believe that, so I practice that.”

*Reprinted from the Arutz Sheva email of January 20, 2011.*

**When There Is**

**Nowhere to Turn**

**By** [**Mirish Kiszner**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=13564)

 It was the perfect apartment and the purchase was almost completed when, fueled by the deteriorating security situation, followed by the IDF incursion into Beit Jala, the shekel dropped steeply against the dollar. Aleksander Guravich – who had spent the better part of his week signing reams of paper at the bank, the mortgage broker, and a number of free loan societies – was suddenly obliged to come up with an additional forty thousand NIS. He didn't know where to turn.

 Weaving his way through the narrow streets of Geulah on his way to the synagogue, he hardly glanced at the plastered notices glaring from the stone walls, proclaiming the names of the latest terrorism victims. His mind was elsewhere as he tossed a few coins into an outstretched palm. Numbers and figures spiraled and twisted around in his mind.

 As he passed Stefansky's supermarket, a wave of wistfulness overcame him. The image of Simon rose in his mind, as he started reminiscing about his first years in the Holy Land, and how far he had come to date.

 Upon his arrival to Israel from the Soviet Union, the employment agency had assigned him to care for Simon Stefansky. Aleksander had been surprised to learn that the elderly man – bent, frail and trembling; his stern old face like a withered pear – owned a veritable financial empire. That this wiry man with steel grey hair and suffering from dementia had once been a successful business tycoon was hard to imagine.

 Simon's children, immersed in the business, were relieved when the care of their father went over to Aleksander. Simon, however, wasn't shy to express his own estimation of the caretaker. "You want to kill me," he remarked rather frequently. "You're here to finish me off."

 There were days, rare occasions, when Simon enjoyed some lucid moments, times when the two of them would sit together on a park bench and make small talk with little difficulty. Mostly though, Simon sat quietly, as though deep in thought, sometimes muttering softly, his eyes roving along the walls and ceilings. Aleksander cooked for him, managed his household affairs and took care of all his need with warmth and devotion.

 As Aleksander turned left into a narrow side street, the synagogue with the domed rooftop and arched entranceway came into view. Its white stones were bathed in the golden light of the afternoon sun. Once, at precisely such a time of day, when the same golden shafts of sunlight poured into the open windows of Simon's kitchen, Aleksander found the old man standing beside the cutlery drawer, pointing a kitchen knife at him.

 "You want to kill me, that's why you're here," said the erstwhile business man.

 "I'm here to care for you," Aleksander said, keeping his voice low. "Do you want me to leave?"

 The old man said nothing.

 "All right, then. I'll leave."

 Simon dropped the knife, it fell with a clang. Then he wept.

 "Who are you?" he asked after he'd calmed down.

 "I'm Aleksander, your caretaker. Try to keep that in your memory."

 "Don't make me believe that lie," he said.

 Aleksander gently led Simon to the couch, fed him his dinner and tenderly put him to sleep.

 Aleksander sighed. Alzheimers, terrorists, financial crisis, it all merged together in his mind somehow. "You ought to be thankful for all the good in your life," he chastised himself as he skipped up the stairs, taking them two at a time. "You have a family, you have health, you have an income, be grateful."

 In those days, on a caretaker's salary, his income wouldn't have sufficed for the purchase of a home. His current profession as a chiropractor – though by no means a wealth amassing machine – improved his lifestyle, he had to admit. But his real wealth had come not from aligning vertebrae.

 Good fortune had shined on him when he'd discovered his Jewish roots. The return to his heritage had connected him to G‑d, to His Torah. In its holy tomes, Aleksander had unearthed luminous jewels the likes of which he hadn't encountered while traipsing through the quarries of Tibet-Indian and Chinese philosophy. For this newfound oasis, where truth and joy actually existed, he was profoundly thankful.

 Aleksander fingered his prayer book. Only a short while ago – two or three years back – this prayer book had felt heavy in his hands. In fact the first time he'd entered this synagogue altogether was an experience that had engraved itself into his mind.

 Standing behind Simon's wheelchair with his long dark hair caressing his shoulders, and the vibrant colors of his t-shirt screaming out from among the black-hatted, white-shirted congregants. He felt awkward and obtrusive and he wanted only to merge into the walls of the synagogue, to remain unnoticed.

 And then a young man with laughing eyes with *tefillin* wrapped around his arm approached him.

 "Why don't you come pray?"

 The question was thrown at him with the nonchalance of a friend who wonders at his friend's hesitation before crossing the threshold of his home. The invitation pleased him; it was a gesture that made him feel welcome. Yet there was no denying the barricade that stood between him and the prayers.

 "I don't know how…" he answered simply.

 The lines on the man's forehead etched a little deeper. "So?" he said. His dancing, laughing eyes stood still for a moment, in thought. Then the corners of his mouth smiled again and he patted Aleksander on the back. "We'll teach you," he said.

 And here he was, a few short years later. The synagogue was quickly filling up as more congregants unhooked themselves from their day's activities. The voice of the one leading the services rang out, "*Ashrei*…" Aleksander closed his eyes savoring the distinct tenor. He had been taught well. First the *Shema*, later the *Amidah*. These kind people had appreciated him, looked beneath his exterior. In this synagogue he wasn't defined then as *the Russian caretaker*, just like *the chiropractor* wasn't his identity now. Here he always was Mr. Aleksander Guravich—a respected person all his own, a valuable member of society.

 The prayers now concluded, the congregants dispersed, the dim hues of twilight filtered in through the large oval windows. Only Aleksander, immersed in conversation with his Creator, lingered still. "G‑d," he murmured. "If you want me to buy the apartment so that my wife and I could have a place to live, so that we are able to raise our children…if this is Your will, help me, please. I have no one to turn to but You."

 A feeling of peace settled over him like a winged dove. He'd handed his worries over to the Master Planner. It was time to go home, time to spend time with his family, time to wrap up the day in tranquility and harmony

 When he entered his two-room apartment, the folding cots and cribs had already made their appearance across the dining room floor as it did every evening. The children freshly bathed and pajama clad clambered over him and giggled loudly as he tossed them playfully in the air. Elena, his wife, turned from the tiny kitchen sink and greeted her husband with a strange look.

 "You didn't tell me you spoke to them..." she said.

 "Spoke to whom?"

 Elena wiped her hands in her apron and hastened to undo the strings. Aleksander, realizing that something was afoot, said not a word as he followed her movements with his eyes. Then, from the single kitchen cabinet, Elena removed a small envelope.

 "A loan, likely?" she asked with an expression of mingled rapture and curiosity.

 Aleksander cast a quick glance at the sender's address. "Family Stefansky," it read.

 "This just came by a private messenger service. Maybe half an hour ago. You did talk to them, didn't you?" queried his wife.

 "Not in a year, I haven't," replied Aleksander. "Not since Simon passed away."

 He turned the envelope over in his hands. A check slipped out. Under "Pay To" the name Aleksander Guravich was written in a neat scrawl. Amount: 40,000 shekels.

 "A loan?" asked Simon's son when Aleksander phoned him. "No, why should we send you a loan?... A mistake? No, nothing of the sort... 4,000 instead of 40,000? Not at all.

 "The litigation attorney recently finished reviewing our father's will. Our father, of late memory, wanted 40,000 shekels to go to you."

*(Some names and details have been changed to protect privacy)*

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Golden Reign of**

**Queen Shlomit Alexandra**

 The life of Queen Shlomit Alexandra was fraught with violent, political conflict and internecine strife. The saintly queen, however, survived to right the enormous crimes of her predecessors, and eventually became known as Shlomtzion - she who brought peace to Zion.

 Her first husband, the ruthless king Aristobulus, seized power from his own mother, imprisoned his brothers and persecuted the Sages with great vengeance. After he died, having reigned only one year, the rule passed to his widow, Queen Shlomit Alexandra. She was the sister of the renowned Torah giant Shimon ben Shetach, the leading sage of the generation, and it was under his guidance that she did so much to repair the damage done to the Jewish people during this violent period.

 The Queen's first act after the death of Aristobulus was to free his imprisoned brothers, the oldest of whom, Alexander Yannai, she married. Unfortunately, and to the terrible detriment of the Jewish nation, Yannai was no better than his short-lived brother. He devoted his energies to war, which took up most of his 27-year reign. His military exploits, however, were performed for his own lust for power and glory.

 Far more serious for the Jewish people was the battle raging between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, tearing apart the fabric of the Jewish nation. The Sadducees, whose objective it was to eliminate the Oral Torah, strove in every possible fashion to seize power from the Pharisees, the ancestors of all Jews today. To that end, they exerted pressure on the rulers through political intrigue and even outright slander against their enemies. Eventually King Yannai used the mercenary troops which supplemented his own native army to mount a deadly persecution of these leaders of the Jewish people.

 We can only imagine the terrible pain of Queen Shlomtzion, married to two Jewish kings of noble lineage, who perpetrated terrible crimes against the Torah Sages, the greatest of whom was her own brother. It was under her benevolent influence that Yannai was persuaded to relent in his war against the Pharisees for a time, and allow those remaining to return to Israel from their forced exiles. Once back in the Holy Land, Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach and his sister the queen were able to do much to restore Torah to the people. They acted to restore the authority of the Sanhedrin and to insure the education of the young.

 The pair was responsible for establishing the first system of public education known. In earlier times education was the domain of the parents. If the parents were poor, uneducated, or deceased, the child was not educated.

 This respite in the persecution of the Sages did not last, however. In a desperate attempt to wrest power from the Pharisees, the king and his Sadducee allies staged a ploy which succeeded in enraging the populace and provided a pretext on which to enlarge their terrible, bloody designs. When this despised king finally died he transferred power to his queen, instructing her to make peace with the Pharisees, calling his erstwhile allies, the Sadducees, "hypocrites."

 Now the Queen could finally do as she wished, and her accomplishments are her praise even to our generation. It is said that during the reign of Queen Shlomtzion rain descended every Friday night (as a sign of blessing). The produce of the Land was remarkable. Wheat grew as big as kidneys, barley like olives and lentils were the size of gold dinars (the largest coin of that time).

 When the Queen assumed the throne all persecution of the Sages ceased and the Pharisees were restored to their rightful positions of power. Shimon ben Shetach sat at the head of the Sanhedrin, and in every area of life the queen and her brother worked diligently to restore peace and harmony to the Land. It was during her rule that the institution of the ketuba, the legal marriage contract, was established. This ensured that no Jewish woman would be left economically unprotected in the event of a divorce or widowhood. The courts were reorganized so that justice was again available to the people.

 Her reign was a true "Golden Age" for the Jewish people in their land. The Sages even preserved samples of the amazing grains which flourished in her time to show succeeding generations the rewards of observing the Torah. Just as during the reign of the pious King Shlomo, now also, the Jews lived securely in their land, undisturbed by the nations which surrounded them.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Miracle Cure**

 Almost every Jew is at least willing to accept upon himself the 10 Commandments, which we read in this week's Torah portion Yisro.  However, only if a Jew keeps Shabbos does he keep all 10 of the Commandments.  Otherwise, he is only keeping 9 of the 10.

 The Holy Chofetz Chayim writes in his introduction to the laws of Shabbos, quoting the Sages, that one who keeps Shabbos is counted as if he has fulfilled all the mitzvahs; while one who does not keep Shabbos is considered as if he has violated the entire Torah and all the mitzvahs.

 Why is that so?   Because, keeping Shabbos represents a belief that in six days Hashem created the world and on the seventh day, He rested.  If Hashem created the world, he is the Boss of the world and we must do what the Boss says.  Subjugating our will to the will of Hashem is the foundation of existence as Jews.  The following true story illustrates one Jew's dedication to Shabbos, the foundation of belief in Hashem.

 Yankel Rosengarten from Yerushalayim, was apprehensive about his trip to America. He had never been there before but now he had no choice.
     His school in Jerusalem, part of an orphanage for young girls, needed funds desperately and he had exhausted all other financial options. He had therefore resolved to make the long journey himself.

 He would spend the first few days in New York and then move his way westward to the Midwestern cities of Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago. He would conclude his fundraising trip with a flight to Los Angeles, where he had a few wealthy supporters who had pledged generously to the orphanage.

 As soon as he landed in Detroit he called a certain wealthy man named Reb Berel Gross. Before long, he reached Reb Berel's house. Yankel spoke with Berel for a while, discussing the school's dire financial situation and then sharing some thoughts of Torah learning. Yankel was pleasantly surprised that Berel was a scholarly individual who was well versed in every Torah topic they discussed.

 Berel was sympathetic and understanding of the school's needs and wrote out a generous check. Yankel was pleased with the donation but even more satisfied that he would be able to stay with such a fine family for the next few days.

 However, one comment caught Yankel off guard. Berel had mentioned something about the standard of kashrus in his home perhaps not being up to Yankel's standards. Yankel was confused. This was a man who was well versed in Torah learning and appeared to be a strictly observant Jew.

 Yankel felt he could control himself no longer and asked Berel what the problem could possibly be. "I'm not sure if my Shabbos observance was always what it should have been," Berel answered, while averting Yankel's gaze, but he knew that an explanation was necessary.

 Yankel sat back, quite puzzled, and listened closely to every word Berel said. "Many years ago I lived in a small shtetl in Poland. The poverty was extreme and although my parents tried, supporting the family was very difficult. I tried to help out as much as I could but as a young boy of 12, I was limited.

 “Finally my father decided to send me to my uncle who lived in America. There, he figured, things would be better. America was the land where they had 'streets lined with gold.' My father felt that this would be my only chance to break free of my impoverished life.

 "The trip by boat took several weeks and finally I arrived. My uncle came to greet me at the dock but his appearance startled me. Instead of the long beard that I had expected to see he sported a trimmed goatee. As a replacement for the long black coat my father wore he dressed in a stylish double-breasted herringbone gray sports jacket.

 But perhaps what startled me most was the fact that he walked around with his head uncovered. I tried to hide my shock, though the contrast between what I was expecting to see and the reality was overwhelming. "He quickly used his connections to find me a job and I enjoyed being a carpenter's apprentice. However, when I did not show up for work on Shabbos morning I was immediately fired. This happened for three consecutive weeks.

 Each time, my uncle would lecture me on responsibility and each time I would defiantly refuse to go to work. I couldn't believe that my uncle had forsaken his heritage. He entirely dismissed the notion that Shabbos was non-negotiable, rationalizing that during the era of the depression 'making a living' was not something that could be taken for granted. "On my fourth Sunday morning I was warned by my uncle to guarantee my boss that I would show up for work on the following Saturday.

 The pressure was so great and I was a lonely 12-year-old with no family other than an uncle who was urging me to give up the most sacred tradition I had known, and so I gave in. When I showed up for work, I told the boss that I would work on Shabbos. "He kept on asking me throughout the week if I would come to work on Saturday and I answered him that I would, sincerely believing that I was in fact prepared to sacrifice the holy Shabbos for the security of my job.

 Finally, on Shabbos morning I tearfully left the house with every intention of going to work. Instead of taking the train as I normally had, I walked toward my place of employment, crying the entire time. But as I walked up the steps and stood on the threshold of the shirt factory where I worked, the image of my father flashed before my eyes and I heard him warning me in his soft, loving tone, 'Guard the Shabbos, Berel. Guard the Shabbos.'

 Suddenly I stopped. What was I thinking? How could I have even thought of desecrating the holy Shabbos? I turned around and ran as fast as I could, though I had no idea where I was going. I finally reached a park bench and begged Hashem for forgiveness. I knew I could never return to my uncle's house — but I had made a choice about what was dearest to me."

 Berel looked up with red eyes at his guest and painfully recalled the event of which he was so ashamed. "I did not work that Shabbos. But every day of the preceding week I had planned to work on Shabbos, to desecrate its holiness. Shabbos isn't one day a week. You have to prepare a whole week for Shabbos and in that respect — I had failed. So if you want to eat in my house, that is your choice."

 Yankel stared at his host for a long while, overcome by the holiness of this man who had suffered for so many years not because he actually desecrated the Shabbos, but because he had planned to. He gently embraced his new friend and realized that, aside from the financial benefit of meeting him, he had gained in many more important ways from being in the home of Reb Berel Gross. (Touched by a Story, p. 98 R. Yechiel Spiro)

 The Fourth Commandment tells us "Remember the Shabbos Day to keep it Holy." (Shemos 20:8)  The Sages teach us that one of the aspects of this mitzvah is preparing for Shabbos both spiritually and physically, throughout the entire work week.

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

**Q&A: Steven Z. Mostofsky**

**By Michael J. Paquette**

 Steven Z. Mostofsky is a solo family law attorney who practices in both civil and religious courts.

 A lifelong resident of Brooklyn who speaks Yiddish, Mr. Mostofsky, 53, is a modern Orthodox Jew who earned his J.D. at New York Law School in 1982.



Steven Z. Mostofsky NYLJ Photo/Rick Kopstein

 He spent more than a decade in the state court system, working his way up from a law assistant in Brooklyn Family Court to court attorney for a Brooklyn Civil Court judge. For the past 15 years, he has represented mostly Orthodox clients from his offices on Court Street.

 Mr. Mostofsky also has served for the past 10 years as president of the National Council of Young Israel, a confederation of about 150 modern Orthodox synagogues representing 25,000 households across the North America. The council's mission is to provide "a program of spiritual, cultural, social and communal activity towards the advancement and perpetuation of traditional Torah-true Judaism; and to instill into American Jewish youth an understanding…of the high ethical and spiritual values of Judaism and demonstrate the compatibility of the ancient faith of Israel with good Americanism."

 Q: What is a modern Orthodox Jew? In other words, what's the prime distinction between modern Orthodox and Orthodox? How large is the movement?

 A: *The National Council of Young Israel and the Young Israel movement were born out of a desire to build what has been called a "modern Orthodox" movement. One of our early leaders described our purpose as establishing that "the old traditional faith, unmodified and unchanged" could be "liveable" in the modern world and "provide our youth with a full and spiritual life."*

 *Over the years, modern Orthodox Jews have been generally considered the branch of Orthodoxy that is more engaged in modern society. They value secular education, access all forms of media and permit greater participation of women in private and religious life. Today, many of the distinctions have blurred and Orthodox Jews may call themselves different things, but a significant percentage would probably fit my definition of "modern" Orthodox.*

 Q: Do you have any formal religious training? Under what tradition were you raised?

 A: *My parents set a path for me mostly by example. They taught me the meaning of religion, family and public service. They made sure we attended yeshiva and synagogue and followed Orthodox law and traditions.*

 *I attended a dual secular-religious education program from elementary school through college. My education also took place at home and in the synagogue.*

 *I have been a member of a Young Israel synagogue for as long as I can remember. Young Israel has been a part of every important event in my life. My father passed away when I was 19, but I think he'd be proud—and maybe a little impressed—that I've become president of a prestigious organization like the National Council of Young Israel. And I think he'd be particularly proud of the fact that Young Israel is not just a religious organization, but an organization that serves the public good and helps people.*

 Q: Besides practicing in religious courts, how, if at all, does your faith impact your daily law practice?

 A: *My religion affects everything I do. I always wear a yarmulke. I try to follow the ethical guidelines of both my profession and my religion.*

 *I have a large Jewish clientele and I often am able to understand things that might not be readily apparent to a non-observant attorney. Understanding different customs, understanding how to talk to a client's rabbi, understanding the involvement of a religious court—all can make a tremendous difference in every aspect of the process.*

 *My religious beliefs also affect my scheduling. I always have to be aware of Jewish holidays and what time the Sabbath starts on Friday night when I calendar cases and plan appointments.*

 Q: Religiously speaking, what is the makeup of your clients?

 A: *About 75 percent are Jewish; about 70 percent of those are religious.*

 Q: What is the biggest difference between practicing in civil court and a Beth Din, or religious court?

 A: *The biggest difference is the procedural and evidentiary standards. In a Beth Din, they are based on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), written by Rabbi Joseph Karo, who lived in the late 15th century. This compilation was based on rulings by earlier rabbis, including Maimonidies, and was categorized into four volumes related to business; daily Jewish life; matrimonial and family issues; and "things that are permitted and prohibited."*

 *In a Beth Din, the members of the panel ask the parties most of the questions and to a large extent they control the discovery process.*

 Q: You've lectured on "When Getting a Get Isn't So Easy." What are some of the biggest hurdles in getting a get, or religious divorce?

 A: *A Beth Din may order a man to give his wife a "get" but the husband must do so of his own free will. In some cases, he may refuse and prevent the wife from remarrying. Sometimes, the get becomes part of the settlement negotiations. This issue never exists in a civil divorce.*

 Q: Based on your 15 years of experience as a solo family law attorney, what would you say is the top reason for divorce in the Orthodox community? Is that any different than for non-Orthodox?

 A: *Interference by in-laws, especially when couples marry at a young age. I was quite surprised to hear a radio report recently which listed in-laws as the number two reason for all divorces.*

 Q: During your career, have you seen any changes in attitude toward divorce within the Orthodox community? Within the Beth Din system?

 A: *Yes, there is less of a stigma if a person divorces. More women are walking away from marriages. Social networking has caused divorces. And despite statutes about removing barriers to remarriage, the [civil court system] still cannot uniformly deal with cases where a husband refuses to give a get.*

 Q: Before going solo, you spent more than a decade working for judges in the state court system. What was the trigger that caused you to strike out on your own?

 A: *A significant part of my time in the court system was working with two judges. When one resigned and then the other suddenly passed away, I realized that I needed to be in control of my own career.*

 Q: What advice would you give a young lawyer looking to branch out into religious court practice?

 A: *Young attorneys who want to open a practice with a large Orthodox Jewish clientele need at least a basic understanding of Orthodox Judaism and the Beth Din system. Clients often provide the best education.*

 Q: What is your top priority as president of the National Council of Young Israel?

 A: *My top priorities are to make sure the organization serves its constituent synagogues, to communicate and share information, to continue to build the Young Israel movement and to speak out on behalf of Jews and Israel whenever the need arises.*

 Q: On your firm website your first name is listed as Steven, but on the Young Israel site you're Shlomo. Which is it?

 A: *Most American-born Orthodox Jews have a secret identity. We have a Hebrew name and a secular name. My secular name is Steven and my Hebrew name is Shlomo. I usually can tell where a person knows me from by how they refer to me.*

 *The only place where it's ever posed a problem was when I was with a group visiting the Knesset in Israel. The name on the security list said Shlomo, but the name on my passport said Steven. I found it ironic that I had to explain my dual identity to Israeli security.*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the National Council of Young Israel Weekly E-Update after having originally appeared in the January 13, 2011 edition of the New York Law Journal.*

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas yisro 5770**

**Story #635**

**We Don't Ask Twice**

 A certain family that lived in Boro Park, Brooklyn, were relatives of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Whenever they had a question, they would ask the Rebbe's wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, and she would transmit the question to the Rebbe. Afterwards, she relayed the Rebbe's answer to the family.

 One day, she received a phone call that the mother was very sick and after many tests in the hospital, the doctors concluded that she needed an operation. They were calling to ask for the Rebbe's consent and blessing for the operation.

 When the Rebbetzin conveyed the message to the Rebbe, the Rebbe said they should not do the operation. The Rebbetzin told the family the Rebbe's answer, but a few days later they called again. They reported that the doctors said that because they refused the operation, her condition deteriorated and her life could be endangered. They asked her to ask the Rebbe again in the light of this new information.

 The Rebbetzin said that in Lubavitch you don't ask twice. I consider myself a chasid of the Rebbe and I do as the chasidim do, and so I cannot ask again, she said.

 The family was distraught, so the Rebbetzin said that although she would not ask again, if the Rebbe came home and asked whether she had heard anything from the family, she would repeat what they had told her.

 When the Rebbe came home for supper, he asked the Rebbetzin whether she had heard from the family. She told the Rebbe what they had said and then added, I'm not asking, I'm just telling you.

 The Rebbe looked serious and after a pause he said, I repeat, they should not operate! The Rebbetzin conveyed this clear answer to the family and a few days later they called again. They said that the doctors said her condition had deteriorated further and her life was in immediate danger. They were asked to sign that they took full responsibility for the woman and absolved the doctors and the hospital of any responsibility.

 The Rebbetzin said, The Rebbe said two times already not to operate. When the Rebbe came home, the Rebbetzin told him the latest events and the Rebbe said, Why don't they try medication?

 The Rebbetzin immediately called the family to tell them. They in turn mentioned it to the doctors, who laughed at them in response. A rabbi knows better than we do about medicine? We say that only an operation can save her and it's not a matter of medication.

 The family believed the Rebbe and went from department to department, looking for a doctor who would understand them. Finally, they found a doctor who thought for a moment and then said, I think I know which medication the Rebbe has in mind, and since I wear a white jacket and can go wherever I want, I will visit your mother and give her an injection and let's see what happens.

 A few days later, the doctors said her condition had suddenly stabilized. They did not know what had happened, but she was no longer deteriorating. The doctor was optimistic and told the family that apparently he had indeed used the medicine the Rebbe was thinking of. He gave the woman another injection and two days later the doctors who had been treating her admitted she had improved somewhat. Every so often, the doctor would come by and give her medication until she was out of danger and was released from the hospital.

 The family kept in constant touch with the Rebbetzin. When the Rebbetzin told the Rebbe that the woman had returned home, the Rebbe said, When they asked me about an operation, I saw that if they did it, she wouldn't make it off the operating table, which is why I adamantly opposed an operation. When they asked again, I thought the doctors would see that the family was adamantly opposed to an operation and would try medication. When I saw that they weren't thinking along those lines at all, I explicitly suggested medication.

 The Rebbetzin related this and said that the Rebbe had added, Now you see how important it is to listen to whatever we say, even when the experts say the opposite.

Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition in Living Jewish, the weekly publication of Chabad of the Cardo (livingjewish.net).

Biographic Note: Rebbetzin Chaya Moussia (Mushka) Schneerson (25 Adar 1901 - 22 Shevat 1988) was the daughter of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef YItzchak Schneersohn, and the wife of our Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Reprinted from KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed www.ascentofsafed.com

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**The Porter of Lodz**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*The entire people responded together and said, ‘Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!*’” (Shemot 19:8)

 The climax of the Exodus is now at hand. The Jews would prove that they were worthy to be redeemed by their readiness to serve Hashem at the mountain of Sinai. Our nation immediately accepted the Torah and all of its laws, then and forever. The following story, told by L. Finberg, illustrates the depth of this acceptance, even by the most simple Jew.

**Notice of the Lost Money is Posted in Shul**

 A sign was posted in the shul of Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meissels, the Rabbi of the city of Lodz. The sign said that a person lost 10,000 rubles. A few days after the sign was posted the person, a businesswoman, went to the Rabbi to hear if there was any response. He assured her that all the necessary signs were posted, but no response had come as of yet. The woman owned a few stores in Bialystock and had come to town to buy merchandise, but this time she lost the money with which she would make her purchases. After a lot of crying she left her address with the Rabbi and returned home.

 Not long afterward a porter, a simple laborer who hauled small loads asked to speak to the Rabbi. The Rabbi was very surprised when he said, “I found the money. Do I have to return it?” After the Rabbi determined that he was referring to the 10,000 rubles, he asked the porter why he thought he could keep the money.

**A Simple Laborer Relates His**

**Understanding of a Torah Law**

 He related that even though he was a simple laborer, he attended classes in his shul. The Rabbi taught that if someone loses something and he stops believing that he will ever find it again, he gives up hope. Meanwhile, if another Jew finds it, since the owner despaired of ever getting it back, the person can keep it. Rabbi Meissels agreed with him in theory, but who said she gave up hope?

 The porter answered, that since she returned home, she gave up, because she never would have left the town without turning over every stone in town. “Rebbe, I am not a dishonest person; I don’t want to do anything wrong. But, I am a poor man with a large family to support. If the halachah says I don’t have to give back the money, I don’t want to do it.” The Rabbi responded that he will have the answer in a few days.

 After studying the subject, the answer was simple. Since the woman was married, the money actually belonged to the husband. He didn’t even know about the loss and therefore never gave up. Therefore, the money belongs to the woman.

 The Rabbi summoned the porter and the woman. The Rabbi said his ruling. The porter immediately removed the money from his coat pocket. After the woman received all of the money, she offered to give the porter one thousand rubles as a reward. However, the porter refused to accept even a single ruble. “I only did what the Torah tells us to do. There is no need to give me a reward for doing that.”

 With these words the simple laborer left the room and disappeared into the crowded streets of Lodz.

**The Importance**

**Of Hearing**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

"*And Yitro heard*." (Shemot 18:1)

 This is the perashah which tells us about the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, perhaps the greatest event that ever took place in the world. Wouldn't it be proper to have the entire perashah devoted to that special occurrence, rather than begin with Yitro joining the Jewish? What was so important about Yitro that this had to precede Matan Torah?

 The answer is the first word – “Vayishma/and he (Yitro) heard!” The Torah is teaching us that if we don't hear, we will not be able to receive the Torah. Hearing means being able to concentrate and focus on someone else and not only on ourselves. It means to accept that we're not perfect and we can hear advice and criticism. The whole world was aware that the Jews came out of Egypt with great miracles but did nothing about it. Yitro, however, heard and came. Because he was willing to truly hear and understand, he changed his own life and ultimately gave some very useful advice to Moshe. That is why the giving of the Torah must be preceded by the story of Yitro, to teach us what hearing can bring.

 We often ask others how they are, but do we really hear their answers? Our kids are constantly talking to us, but are we truly listening? Even if we do allow the words of others to enter our ears, do we hear "between the lines"? Let us learn from Yitro to truly hear and listen to what's around us and this will make our lives a little bit better.

**Army Radio Reports on Strong Religious-Zionist Presence in Elite Units**

**By Hillel Fendel**

 Army Radio reports on various aspects of the increase in religious-Zionist representation in elite army combat units. Some see it as a “religious take-over” and cause for alarm, while others welcome the development.

 The report states that “after the Golani Brigade and Bahad-1 Officer Training Base, the religious-Zionist camp has now become an absolute majority in the Israel Air Force’s elite Shaldag unit.” Most of the new cadets in Shaldag also happen to live in Judea and Samaria, the report notes. In fact, among the first religious officers in Shaldag was none other than a son of the head of the National Union party, MK Yaakov Katz (Ketzaleh).

 Shaldag is one of the top elite units in the IDF, and its fighters carry out top secret and dangerous missions. For years it was thought of as a bastion of secular Jews – until today.

**Threat to Secular Character**

 Prof. Yagil Levi, of the Open University, fears that the demographic change in combat units will mean an end to the integration of women there. “This definitely means a threat on the secular character of the army, and we must certainly be concerned about it,” he said.

Founder: Not at All

 The founder of Shaldag, Col. (res.) Muki Betzer, sees it differently. “We don’t call this a take-over,” he said. “The fighters are chosen based on professional considerations alone. Just like we didn’t call it a takeover when the backbone of the army came from the working settlements [as agricultural communities connected to the Labor movement are called – ed – moshavim and kibbutzim.”

 The numbers show that two-thirds of the commanders, including the Deputy Commander, of Shaldag are from the religious-Zionist sector. Of the six cadets at Bahad-1 who came from Shaldag, four are from Judea and Samaria – and six of the next eight commanders in the Golani Brigade are of the religious-Zionist camp.

 Moshe, who just recently “graduated” from Shaldag, told Army Radio that he is not surprised: “Those who are good are accepted, and they are very anxious to have religious soldiers. I guess it all comes down to education, the kind that is provided in elementary schools, yeshiva high schools and pre-military yeshiva academies.”

*Reprinted from the February 3, 2010 Daily Israel Report emailed by Arutz Sheva*

**It Once Happened**

**The Amazing Legacy of**

**Queen Shlomit Alexandra**

 The life of Queen Shlomit Alexandra was fraught with violent, political conflict and internecine strife. The saintly queen, however, survived to right the enormous crimes of her predecessors, and eventually became known as Shlomtzion--she who brought peace to Zion.

 Her first husband, the ruthless king Aristobulus, seized power from his own mother, imprisoned his brothers and persecuted the Sages with great vengeance. After he died, having reigned only one year, the rule passed to his widow, Queen Shlomit Alexandra. She was the sister of the renowned Torah giant Shimon ben Shetach, the leading sage of the generation, and it was under his guidance that she did so much to repair the damage done to the Jewish people during this violent period.

**New Husband is No Better than His Brother**

 The Queen's first act after the death of Aristobulus was to free his imprisoned brothers, the oldest of whom, Alexander Yannai, she married. Unfortunately, and to the terrible detriment of the Jewish nation, Yannai was no better than his short-lived brother. He devoted his energies to war, which took up most of his 27-year reign. His military exploits, however, were performed for his own lust for power and glory.

 Far more serious for the Jewish people was the battle raging between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, tearing apart the fabric of the Jewish nation. The Sadducees, whose objective it was to eliminate the Oral Torah, strove in every possible fashion to seize power from the Pharisees, the ancestors of all Jews today. To that end, they exerted pressure on the rulers through political intrigue and even outright slander against their enemies. Eventually King Yannai used the mercenary troops which supplemented his own native army to mount a deadly persecution of these leaders of the Jewish people.

**The Shame and Pain of a Women**

**Married to Two Terrible Kings**

 We can only imagine the terrible pain of Queen Shlomtzion, married to two Jewish kings of noble lineage, who perpetrated terrible crimes against the Torah Sages, the greatest of whom was her own brother. It was under her benevolent influence that Yannai was persuaded to relent in his war against the Pharisees for a time, and allow those remaining to return to Israel from their forced exiles. Once back in the Holy Land, Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach and his sister the queen were able to do much to restore Torah to the people. They acted to restore the authority of the Sanhedrin and to insure the education of the young.

 The pair were responsible for establishing the first system of public education known. In earlier times education was the domain of the parents. If the parents were poor, uneducated, or deceased, the child was not educated.

 This respite in the persecution of the Sages did not last, however. In a desperate attempt to wrest power from the Pharisees, the king and his Sadducee allies staged a ploy which succeeded in enraging the populace and provided a pretext on which to enlarge their terrible, bloody designs. When this despised king finally died he transferred power to his queen, instructing her to make peace with the Pharisees, calling his erstwhile allies, the Sadducees, "hypocrites."

**Finally Free to Do as She Wishes**

 Now the Queen could finally do as she wished, and her accomplishments are her praise even to our generation. It is said that during the reign of Queen Shlomtzion rain descended every Friday night (as a sign of blessing). The produce of the Land was remarkable. Wheat grew as big as kidneys, barley like olives and lentils were the size of gold dinars (the largest coin of that time).

 When the Queen assumed the throne all persecution of the Sages ceased and the Pharisees were restored to their rightful positions of power. Shimon ben Shetach sat at the head of the Sanhedrin, and in every area of life the queen and her brother worked diligently to restore peace and harmony to the Land. It was during her rule that the institution of the ketubah, the legal marriage contract, was established. This ensured that no Jewish woman would be left economically unprotected in the event of a divorce or widowhood. The courts were reorganized so that justice was again available to the people.

**A True “Golden Age” for the Jewish People**

 Her reign was a true "Golden Age" for the Jewish people in their land. The Sages even preserved samples of the amazing grains which flourished in her time to show succeeding generations the rewards of observing the Torah. Just as during the reign of the pious King Shlomo, now also, the Jews lived securely in their land, undisturbed by the nations which surrounded them.

*Reprinted from an issue of L’Chaim, a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Yourth Organization that was published 18 years ago - Parshas Yisro 5752*

**Seven Questions to**

**A 9-11 Survivor**

**By Judy Hazan**

A 9-11 brush with death changed Ari Schonbrun's life.

He thinks it should change yours, too.

 Ari Schonbrun survived 9-11. A series of eerie coincidences led the 52-year-old father of five to emerge safely from the 78th floor of the World Trade Center’s north tower (Tower One) moments before it collapsed, bringing down with it 658 of his 1,025 colleagues at Cantor Fitzgerald.

 Schonbrun, who worked tirelessly to rebuild the global financial services firm after 9-11 and now serves as a company director at their new headquarters in Midtown Manhattan, has spent the last eight years since 9-11 grappling with the events that shook his life, the nation, and the whole world, that ill-fated day. Why did it happen? Why was he spared? What is the meaning of it all? He shares with Aish.com some of the answers.

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 **Q1: Tell me what happened to you on September 11, 2001**?

 My day started late. Normally, I was at my office, on the 101st floor of Tower One, by 8:00-8:30 a.m., but I was helping my son, who was eight at the time, fill out his Scholastic book order. I was supposed to help him with it the night before, but didn’t get around to it. I finally negotiated him down to two books. Strangely, he chose them from a series called Survival. And I left for work.

 I got to the office and I was changing elevators at the 78th floor sky lobby at 8:46 a.m. (you couldn’t take one elevator all the way to the 101st) when a blast threw me off my feet and the hallway filled with smoke. At the time I thought it was a bomb. Only afterwards did I realize it was the first plane striking the building. If I had been there a few minutes earlier, I would have been on the elevator going up to the 101st floor.

 Virgina DiChiara, a coworker at Cantor Fitzgerald, was on that elevator and had to jump through fire to get out of it. I ran into her on the 78th floor. She was burned very badly, with third degree burns on her arms and back. She asked me to please stay with her. I sat her down and got her something to drink. Then the fire warden helped us to the stairwell.

 If we wouldn’t have heard that voice, we would have been under the building when it collapsed.

 We got down three flights when my cell-phone rang. This was one of the biggest miracles of the day. There was no reception anywhere; all lines were down. It was my wife. She had heard what happened and was terrified. This call was vital. At least she knew I was alive.

 When Virginia and I finally got to the ground floor, a fire warden told us to keep going down and exit through the garage. As we went down, a voice called out and told us to come back up and exit from the ground floor. If we wouldn’t have heard, we would have been under the building when it collapsed.

 **Q2: How did you get away from the building before it collapsed?**

 Initially, I wanted to take the West Street exit, but we ended up taking the Church Street exit instead. Fortunately, this spared us from seeing the horror of people jumping from the building.

 There was an ambulance across the street, in front of the Millennium Hotel. Virginia got in. I wanted to stay close to the building, but she insisted that I come with her. So I hopped into the front of the ambulance. If I wouldn’t have done that, I wouldn’t be talking to you today.

 It never occurred to me that the towers would collapse the way they did. I saw the fire and the damage, but I didn’t think they would come down. I saw it happen from the entrance to St. Vincent’s Hospital.

 When I look at that day, it’s such a miracle. It was like my own personal Purim story; a whole series of coincidences that when you look back, you realize were not coincidences, but instead were the hand of God.

 **Q3: What’s your personal take on why 9-11 happened?**

 On one level, the terrorists did it because they want the entire world to be subservient to Islam. If you’re not a Muslim, you’re an infidel.

But on another level, I believe that G-d was sending Wall Street a message. That world is driven by greed, where everyone is measured by their possessions. I believe this was a wake-up call. G-d was saying, “You’ve got it all wrong. This is not what it’s all about.”

 **Q4: Why do you think you were saved?**

 There are two reasons, I believe. The personal one is that when my wife was pregnant with our third child, she had an ovarian cyst that caused her to lose the baby. Then, after she gave birth to our fourth child, the doctors told her she would not be able to conceive again. After 9-11, she miraculously got pregnant with our fifth child. We went to a Kabbalist who told us that Yoni, who is now 6, was the soul of the baby we lost; a soul that needed to come into this world. So when you ask me why I survived 9-11, my first reason is that this soul had to come down.

 The second reason I believe is to use my public speaking skills to convey a message; to inspire people of all faiths to re-prioritize; to have faith in God; to give a little bit more charity, be kinder to people, and not speak ill of others. It doesn’t matter where you’re at, what matters is that you are moving forward. You want to know how to change the world? One person at a time. One mitzvah at a time.

 **Q5: How has the experience changed your life?**

 My life has changed in so many ways. I spend a lot of time public speaking and spreading the message. I have done speaking tours in the U.S., U.K. and Israel, to all kinds of groups: universities, high schools, different organizations.

 Some people have come up to me and said, “You have changed my life.” That is so powerful. I have been given this ability, and I have to use it. I am not nearly done. There is so much more to do, so many more people to reach.

 Before 9-11, my whole world was consumed by Wall Street. I still work hard, but work is no longer my first, second and third priority.

 My personal life has changed, too. Before 9-11, my whole world was consumed by Wall Street. I still work hard, but work is no longer my first, second and third priority. I spend more time with my family. It used to be, “Daddy can’t make it to the school play or the class trip because he’s working late,” but now I go. I am there more for my kids than I have ever been.

 Also in terms of Jewish observance, as I started talking about what happened, the miracles of the day started to sink in and I started to change. I now take time to learn Torah and to perform more mitzvot. For instance, at the office I started gathering a daily minyan for Mincha. I have also tried to be more careful about the types of words that come out of my mouth, to stop cursing.

 I am trying to become a better person. People who know what I have been through feel that I am a bit different.

 **Q6: How do you respond to conjectures that 9-11 was part of an international Jewish conspiracy?**

 If Jews were in on 9-11, then how come I didn’t get a call? Many of my Jewish friends and colleagues were there. You know how many people who died in the towers that day were Jewish? Israelis, too. The whole thing is ridiculous.

 **Q7: What do you think of efforts to memorialize 9-11?**

 It’s horrible that there is a 9-11 memorial in Israel and we still don’t have one in New York. The whole thing has become political, with a lot of infighting, with people who are making decisions who should not be involved at all. It’s the families of the victims who should be the ones making the decisions. It’s their loved ones being memorialized and yet they are being left out.

 Thankfully, the idea of randomizing the names was withdrawn, as well as the idea of building the memorial on the footprint, which is the burial ground for a lot of people who were never found.

 There is the annual memorial ceremony, carried by every network. But I am fearful that memorial day for 9-11 will become like Memorial Day in the U.S., marked by shopping and picnics and parties. Although the day is being memorialized, it is also being forgotten. It’s not being taught enough. People don’t want to talk about it. They want to move on and I think that’s a mistake. To move on is to let the terrorists win. 9-11 needs to be remembered. We cannot forget.

*Reprinted from this week’s Aish Hatorah website (Aish.com)*

[**The Human Side of the Story**](http://ohr.edu/yhiy.php?seriesid=17&archive=1)

**Returning a Loss Up**

**In the Clouds**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

"*Mazal Tov and best wishes for your future.*"

 Thus responded the venerable rabbi to the young man who approached his seat on the flight from New York to Israel and informed him that he had become engaged in the States and was now returning home.

 After giving him this blessing the rabbi asked him if by any chance he or anyone in the family accompanying him had lost some keys. The ring of keys had fallen from someone during the passport checking upon arrival in New York and was picked up by the rabbi without knowing to whom it belonged. Anxious to fulfill the mitzvah of returning a lost object, he fervently prayed for Heaven's help in locating the loser.

 The young man, who had been on the same flight with the rabbi both coming and going, suddenly realized that he had indeed lost his keys. Imagining the trouble his family would have had by coming home late at night after an exhausting trip only to find a locked door, he profusely thanked the rabbi and expressed gratitude to Heaven for this providential experience.

Reprinted from this week’s website of Yeshiva Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem (Ohr.edu)

**How Can the Commentaries**

**All Be Right?**

**By** [**Yisroel Cotlar**](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.asp?kid=12471)

 **Question:**

 I bought a set of Torah and the Prophets with all the classic commentaries and I enjoy studying it very much. I am unsure, however, how to understand the vast differences of opinions concerning any particular story. Often, the opinions contradict one another.

 How can I appreciate studying such commentaries when only one could be right?

***Response:***

 This is a commonly asked question. It is predicated on the assumption that the purpose of the Torah is to tell us the history of our people, and history had to happen in a certain way.

 But that isn't the purpose of the Torah. True, it is stories that fill much of the Torah. And true, these episodes literally happened in a specific manner. Nonetheless, when studying the Torah, we are meant to go past "what happened" and view the stories as a means for G‑d to convey us a message—a lesson for our lives right now.

 Indeed, one needs look no further than the very translation of the word "Torah" to realize that the Torah is not a mere guide to Jewish history. Torah means "teaching"—not "history book." This is also apparent from the Torah's (seemingly strange) selective history, the occasional non-chronological order in which events are recorded, and the mysterious wording it sometimes uses to tell a story.

**A Glimpse into a Higher Truth**

 For, beyond the storyline, each story, verse, word, and letter in the Torah is a glimpse into a higher truth. It is the infinite wisdom of G‑d concentrated into stories the human mind can comprehend.

 This truth can be observed from four primary dimensions, called *pshat* (simple), *remez* (hint), *drush* (seek) and *sod* (secret). And there are countless avenues of understanding within each of these perspectives.

 *Pshat* is the simple interpretation of the Torah, following the smoothest, most elegant path of words and context. *Remez* uncovers the hints and allegoric meaning behind these words. *Drush* (or midrash) seeks the deeper meaning of the verse. And *sod* is the esoteric, mystical part of Torah, the meaning that can only be known to those who have been told. Read [this article](http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?AID=819698) for more about these four, with examples of each of them.

 When our holy commentators studied a story in the Torah, they each noticed another aspect of this truth. And so, we treasure them all.

 And if you will ask, "So which one is true? Which one really happened?"—the answer, quite simply, is that all are true, all really happened.

**The Torah Knows of Many Realities**

 Why is it difficult for us to swallow that? Because we believe that there is only one reality, and so only one history. The Torah, however, knows of many realities, all of them true, each of them containing a different lesson for us in this reality now. There are worlds where *pshat* is real—different worlds for different *pshatim*. Then there are worlds of *remez*, of *drush* and of *sod*.

 For example, in our physical world, Moses may have been say, six feet tall. But in a certain world of *drash*, he was 10 *amot*—about 15 feet tall. Which one is more true? That depends: Are you looking for his height or for his stature? Are you measuring the Moses that fit into a physical body in a physical world, or are you measuring the *real* Moses, the soul and true character of the man–so that you will know how to relate to him and appreciate his character?

**A Person Complete in Every Way**

 A stature of 10 *amot* implies that this person is complete in every way—since there are 10 aspects of the human character. That's who Moses really was—a whole and balanced person in the ultimate sense of those words. Our physical world cannot handle a human being of those proportions, and so we see the truth in a poise of compromise. But in a world that does not have our physical limitations, Moses is actually 10 *amot* tall.

 It all has to do with what we are taking from the story, what we need to learn. And each different approach to Torah will provide another lesson, all equally valuable, all equally true.

**Sources:**

Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz presents and discusses the classic views concerning the study of Midrash in Shnei Luchot Habrit, Torah Shebaal Peh, 17 (Klal Hadrushim). He refers there to the idealist perspective in Torah that he presents ibid, Toldot Adam, Bayit Acharon. The concept is based upon the words of Rabbi Menachem Azaria of Fano in Assara Maamarot, Maamar Chikur Din, 3:22.

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

**Human Achievement Lies In The Ten Commandments**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**

 The basis for all civic morality and personal piety lies in the words of revelation granted to Israel at Mount Sinai and recorded for us in the Torah in this week’s parsha. It is difficult to imagine any sort of human progress or civilization absent the Ten Commandments and its value system. Monotheism, respect for parents and authority, protection of person and property, the importance of a day of rest and spiritual serenity, truthfulness and justice, are all the bases of human existence and progress.

**Basic Concepts are Still Not Universally Accepted**

 We are aware even today, millennia later, that these necessary ideas for human achievement are still not universally accepted. Crime, murder,and immorality of all sorts still rule much of human society. Perhaps that is one understanding of the dire statement of the rabbis in Avot that there is a heavenly voice that emanates daily from Sinai that states: “Woe to My creatures due to their abuse and insult of Torah!”

 These basic rules of life that are so clearly and logically self-evident in their wisdom and essence are nevertheless observed more in their breach than in their true observance. One look at any daily newspaper anywhere around the globe will confirm this sad assessment of human affairs in our current world. We are a long way from assimilating the ideas of Sinai into our lives even after thirty three hundred years of their existence as the basic building blocks of human civilization.

**We Must Combat the Individual Evil Nature Within Us**

 Sadly, the evil nature of humans remains somehow paramount in our society. But the Torah bids us to combat this inherent individual evil nature within us. We have to begin with ourselves. It is related that a great sage once stated in his elderly years:

 “When I was young I attempted to rectify everything that was wrong in the world. As I grew older I realized that this task was beyond my abilities, so I concentrated on my community. After time I realized that this was also beyond my abilities, so I now concentrated on my family and my descendants. Sadly, I realized that this was also not given to me rectify easily. So now I have decided to concentrate on myself – my own selfdiscipline and improvement.”

 The Torah always speaks to us in personal terms, as individuals who are held responsible for our actions and omissions. The Ten Commandments are therefore written to us directly, in second person, and not merely as nice moral generalities.

**Not Just Advice that Can Be Accepted or Rejected**

 They are commandments and not just advice that can be accepted or rejected. The Talmud and Halacha have The Talmud and Halacha have defined for us each of these commandments in a legal and technical manner. Jewish tradition, customs and mores have expanded on these legal details and fleshed out for us a moral code for daily, practical human behavior.

 It is only in this broader moral context that we can understand the commandment “not to covet.” It may be unenforceable legally in a court of law by itself unless one has actually stolen because of it but the moral implications of the commandment should be clear to all. Fortunate are we to whom such a Torah and moral value system was given.

*Reprinted from Rabbi Berel Wein’s syndicated column in the Jerusalem Post.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Roming Air Time**

**(Continued from last week)**

 Last week we began telling the amazing true story of how a fellow lawyer and I were trying desperately to get to Eretz Yisroel in time for Shabbos.  In route to the Holy Land on early Friday morning, our plane experienced some sort of trouble and we had to make an emergency landing in Rome.

 By about 10 am they fixed the plane, however, by the time we were actually ready to take off, it was about 1:00 p.m. Eretz Yisroel time, and Shabbos was to start just after 4:00 p.m. and the flight was supposed to take about two and a half hours from Rome.

**Pilot Announced He Couldn’t Guarantee What Time the Plane Would Land**

 The pilot announced that he could not guarantee exactly what time the plane would arrive in Eretz Yisroel, and therefore, anyone who was concerned about arriving in time for Shabbos should consider deplaning and remaining in Rome, although Continental would not take any responsibility for anyone who chose to do so.

 Shraga Feivel and I made a "cheshbon" an accounting... We figured that at the worst, we could spend Shabbos the airport in Tel Aviv and at least there we could have kosher food.  But staying in Rome would be risky, because we didn't know our way around and we didn't know the language and who knows where we would end up for Shabbos.

**All the Jewish Passengers Decided**

**To Stay Aboard the Flight**

 It seems that our fellow Jewish passengers agreed with us and thankfully, none of them chose to deplane.  If they had, our flight would have been even more delayed because it is well known, that a plane will not take off carrying the baggage of a person who is not on the plane (due to security concerns.)

 In any case, the plane finally took off and the rest of the flight to Eretz Yisroel was uneventful.  We watched the clock carefully.  Every minute counted!  We ended up landing a few minutes after 4 pm local time, mere minutes before candle lighting.  It is important to note that while in America candle lighting is generally at 18 minutes before sundown, the custom in Eretz Yisroel is to light candles even earlier, usually about 30-40 minutes before sundown.
         While the airplane was taxiing, I turned on my cell phone and attempted to call a friend in Ashdod, thinking that maybe we could make it close to him in time and walk the rest of the way. Thankfully, he didn't pick up, because there are many more closer places than Ashdod to the airport.  I called a friend in Yerushalayim and his wife picked up.  She was holding the match in her hand ready to light the Shabbos Candles!  She told me to forget about Ashdod and to go to Bnai Brak.

**Shomer Shabbos Passengers Given**

**Preference When Exiting the Plane**

 Continental was courteous enough to announce that the Shomer Shabbos passengers should be given a preference when exiting the plane.  Thankfully most of the passengers obliged.  Once off the plane, Shraga Feivel and I hit the ground running, literally.  When the security personnel saw me rushing off the plane, they parted like the splitting of the sea.\ Anyone who has been to the new airport in Tel Aviv knows that it is a long way from deplaning to the passport control.  Shraga Feivel and I both had one carry- on bag.  We ran the whole way.  Between my panting for breath I kept saying to myself quietly "Shabbos Koydesh"  - the "Holy Shabbos."  I had had nightmares many times of being stuck somewhere around sundown time before Shabbos, and now, it was really happening.  Finally, we made it to the passport control.  After a short wait, we made it through.

**Decision Made to Leave**

**Luggage in the Airport**

 I told Shraga Feivel that we would have to leave our luggage there because there was no time.  He didn't have anything to wear for Shabbos, but I told him that that was the least of our worries.  We ran out to the street towards the taxis.  I jumped into a waiting taxi but was quickly rebuffed by the driver who chastised me for not waiting in line.  (Boy, has Israel changed over the years!)

 I kept running towards the last taxi in the line of taxis and amazingly, I found just what we needed... an Arab cab driver.   It was truly one of the miracles of the day, for it would have been very tricky to drive so close to sundown with a Jewish (non-observant) driver, because he would no doubt have to violate Shabbos to drive away from wherever he would take us.

 In short order, Shraga Feivel and I, along with a couple the Benders from Lakewood jumped into the Arab's cab and... what do you know?  The Arab cab driver also refused to take us because we didn't wait in line!!!  Thankfully, a police officer was there and understood what was happening and he told the cabbie to take us.  The driver protested a little more but finally agreed to take us.  He drove like a maniac to Bnai Brak, racing against the clock.

**Making it to Bnai Brak in Record Time**

 On the way, I was able to call home to tell my wife what happened.  We made it to the Bnai Brak in record time.  It took us about 34 minutes from the time we landed to the moment we were standing on the street next to the bridge which leads into Bnai Brak!  At first the cabbie didn't want to take dollars, and we had no shekels.  Finally he relented and took the dollars.  The streets were closed already for Shabbos by then and he let us off by the bridge by the highway across the street from the Coca Cola plant in Bnai Brak.

 The streets were full of young people wearing their Shabbos finest.  We were an odd sight, carrying our luggage on the street at that time.  Initially we planned to walk with the Benders to the Vishnitz area, where they had friends who could put us up for Shabbos.  However, on the way, a kindly Bnai Brak resident asked us if we had where to stay.  I told him no, and he promptly invited us to stay with him for Shabbos.  We accepted and parted ways with the Benders.

**Borrowing a Bekish (Shabbos Coat)**

 We went straight to the apartment of a neighbor so that I could borrow a Bekishe - a Shabbos coat, which I had sent in my luggage under the plane.  (My shtreimel and a shtievel I did have, thankfully).    The neighbor of our host was surprised to see us carrying what we were carrying at that late hour and I hurried into one of his rooms where I unloaded my "muktzeh" items (forbidding to handle on Shabbos) onto his floor.  Among the things I dropped there was a large sum of cash and my passport.  It was amazing, here I was emptying my pockets onto the floor of a person I never saw before in my life!

 When I went upstairs to our host, I saw that Shraga Feivel was busy trying on the host's Shabbos suit.  Miraculously, the suit and even the host's shoes fit.  It was also a miracle that our host happened to wear a short suit on Shabbos like Shraga Feivel does.

 Still wanting to catch a mikvah that day (it is the custom of Chassidim to go to the mikvah daily, as well as on Erev Shabbos), Shraga Feivel and I walked to a nearby mikvah.  We managed to go to the mikvah, then daven mincha and still daven with a minyan Kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv!

 By the time we walked home after davening to the host's house, we were walking on air.  We were shaking our heads in disbelief that we had actually made it!  It was not exactly the Shabbos we had planned, but we made it!   Kiddush had a special meaning that night, and I was very moved by the words I recited over the cup of wine.  "And Hashem blessed the seventh day and He sanctified it...

**Had Barely Eaten the Entire Day**

 Besides the fact that we had barely eaten the entire day, we were thankful to be eating a hot Shabbos meal, instead of subsisting on dry bread, potato chips and nosh like the 9 passengers who we later learned were unfortunately left stranded in the airport in Tel Aviv.  (Some had waited for their luggage others just couldn't handle the rush...)

 We tremendously enjoyed Shabbos in Bnai Brak.  Our host's hospitality was unforgettable.   When I told him that I would be memorizing the event in my weekly publication, he asked to remain anonymous Motzoi Shabbos we picked up our bags in the airport.  The rest of trip was amazing.  We experienced a true spiritual uplifting from the events surrounding that Shabbos.  We hope not to descend from the "aliyah" we experienced then.   We have told this story this past two weeks in the hope that those who read it will be influenced not to "test it," i.e., to avoid flying so close to Shabbos.

**Included in the Ten Commandments**

 The importance of Shabbos is evidenced by the fact that Shabbos appears in the Ten Commandments, which is these minimal creed of the Jewish people. As we read in this week’s parsha Yisro in the fourth commandment:*“You shall remember the Shabbos day to make it Holy.Six days you shall work and you shall do all of your labor. But the seventh day is Shabbos for Hashem your G-d, you shall not do any work...”* (Shemos -Exodus 20:9)

 Many people are willing to accept upon themselves the Ten Commandments. However, one who does not keep Shabbos is only observing nine of the Ten Commandments. (Shabbos, Rav Aryeh Kaplan) The Sages have told us in many places about the greatness of Shabbos. For example,*“Whoever is careful with Shabbos observance will be forgiven for all of his sins, even idol worship.”*(Ibid, citing Shabbos 118b) And,*“Respecting Shabbos is greater than fasting 1000 days.”*(Ibid., citing Tachuma, Bereishis 3)

 Also,*“Whoever takes pleasure in the enjoyment of the Shabbos will be granted all his heart’s desires.”*(Ibid., citing Shabbos 118b) And,*“Observing Shabbos is equal to fulfilling all the mitzvahs of the Torah.”*(Ibid.,citing Pesikta) And,*“Proper observance of just one Shabbos is equal to having observed every Shabbos since the time of Creation.”*(Ibid., citing Mechilta, Ki-Sisa 31)  Good Shabbos Everyone.

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