**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas mishpatim 5772**

Volume 3, Issue #21 25 Shevat 5772/February 18, 2012

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

**The Day the Rabbi Testified on Behalf of a Non Observant Jew**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Do not pervert the judgment of your destitute person in his dispute*.” (Shemot 23:6)

 The above verse prohibits a judge to give preferential treatment to a poor person. However the Midrash (Mechilta) interprets this pasuk a little differently. If someone is destitute of misvot, a non-religious person, do not pervert the judgment against him. Do not say, “Since he is a sinner, I will turn the judgment against him.”

**The Religious Community Leader**

**And the Non Observant Pharmacist**

 A true story is told by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman: Two men were standing in front of Rabbi Chaim Leib Stavisker. One was considered the community leader. He was distinguished, wealthy and religious. His opponent was the town’s pharmacist, who was not observant.

 They had a monetary dispute so they came to Rabbi Chaim Leib’s bet din. The leader felt he was a shoe-in because he was right, and he was religious. The pharmacist agreed to come due to the Rabbi’s reputation as a man of integrity.

**Rabbi Heard Both Sides**

 The Rabbi heard both sides. He probed, contemplated and researched the appropriate sources. He then issued his ruling in favor of the pharmacist. The community leader was blinded by personal interest and felt humiliated by being handed a defeat by his Rabbi who ruled against him in favor of a man who did not observe the Shabbat. He declared, “I reject the Rabbi’s decision.” He then told the pharmacist, “It is clearly a miscarriage of justice and I have no intention of giving you even one cent.”

 The pharmacist reported these words to the Rabbi, and asked what he should do. The Rabbi said that it is normally forbidden for a Jew to go to a secular court, but in this case, where the case has come before a Jewish court and the other side refuses to abide by the ruling, it is permitted to go to a secular court to seek justice.

**Advises Pharmacist to Appeal**

**Local Secular Court’s Decision**

 The case was brought before the secular court and the community leader won. The pharmacist went back to the Rabbi. “What do I do now?” The Rabbi replied, “You will appeal your case before the Supreme Court in St. Petersburg, and this time I will testify in court on your behalf.”

 And so it was. The scheduling of the case forced the Rabbi to spend Shabuot in St. Petersburg, away from his beloved congregation. His efforts bore fruit, as the higher court overturned the original ruling and ordered the community leader to make restitution to the pharmacist.

**Asked by His Congregants Why He**

**Helped the Non Observant Jew**

 When Rabbi Chaim Leib returned to his town of Stavisk, his people asked him, “Why did the Rabbi go to such great lengths, even leaving us on Shabuot, to help a man who is not even part of the community and not even a Sabbath observer?”

 The Rabbi answered in wonderment, “What do you mean? It is an explicit teaching in the Mechilta. ‘Do not pervert the judgment of one who is poor in misvot’ It makes no difference who the litigant is, rich or poor, saddik or rasha. All must be treated the same and all must receive the full backing of the bet din against those who fail to heed the bet din’s ruling.”

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

**Story #742**

**The Full Name**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000vqW0:001FE_sC00001uzw&count=1329229146&randid=1482901223&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1482901223##)

 Once, in the 1940’s, a Jew living in Florida named Yosef Wolf had to undergo surgery. The doctors told him that it would be a simple procedure and short, and that after a relatively short rest he would be able to return to his full schedule. And so it happened. The operation was quick and successful, and after a few days of recuperation in the hospital, he was released to go home.

**Began to Feel a Lot of Pain**

 However, after he was home only a number of hours, he began to feel a lot of pain, and the pain kept growing and becoming more intense. He saw that the place of the surgery was greatly swollen, which appeared to be the result of a serious infection there.

 The infection worsened, the pain kept increasing, and he soon found himself hospitalized a second time. But this time the doctors were unable to find a solution for his condition. Whatever they tried did not help. His medical condition worsened quickly, to the extent that the doctors told him sadly that his days were numbered.

**Shocked Family Intensifies**

**Their Prayers and Charity**

 His family was totally shocked to find out that nothing more could be done medically to help him. They resolved to do all that was in their power to help him spiritually. They increased and intensified their prayers, and gave a lot of tzedaka (charity).

 Mr. Wolf’s son-in-law in the New York area decided to consult the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef-Yitzchak Shneersohn, of blessed memory. The Rebbe blessed that the critically ill man should have a complete recovery. Also, he suggested that to his name Yosef be added the name Zelig (happy in Yiddish). The relatives hurried to comply with the Rebbe’s instructions, and added the second name.

 Amazingly, in just a short interval after the name change, they received word that there was a recognizable improvement in the sick man’s condition! Over the next few days, Mr. Yosef Wolf, now called Yosef-Zelig Wolf, continued to recover and become stronger. Before a week passed, he was released to go home with a clean bill of health. Not a trace remained of the deadly infection which had taken such a strict toll of his health.

**The Doctors Are Astonished**

 The astonished doctors could barely believe the drastic change that had occurred in front of their eyes: after they had given up hope, a man on his death-bed had returned to being a completely healthy person.

 Yosef-Zelig Wolf returned to his regular life, full of gratitude and praise to G-d Al-mighty. A few months later, he decided to go to pray at the gravesite of his grandmother. He felt a special closeness to her, because he had been named Yosef after her father. Much to his great astonishment and delight, he realized that he had never paid sufficient attention to the inscription on her tombstone. Engraved on it was (in Hebrew) ‘Here lies Sasya bas Yosef-Zelig”!

**Realizes that His Grandfather’s**

**Name Wasn’t Just Yosef**

 Up until that point he had been certain that his grandfather’s name was simply Yosef. Now it had been made clear to him that his full name, his real name, was Yosef-Zelig. Suddenly the current Yosef-Zelig was struck by why the Rebbe requested that particularly Zelig be added to his name in order to restore him to his true name, since his parents had intended to name him for his great-grandfather, and that this would facilitate his healing.

**Story Repeated in Beersheva’s**

**Shabbat Children Page**

 Source: Translated freely from Mamtak L’Shabbat (#253) a colorful weekly page for children by Chabad of Beersheva. Editor’s note (worth reading!):

 Listen to the story we have in our family relating to this story!

 (1) My mother-in-law passed away this month, a few hours before the Hebrew date of Yud Shvat, which is the yahrzeit of the Rebbe HaRayatz, as the Rebbe in the above story is referred to today.

 (2) Her name was Golda bas Yosef-Zelig (HaLevi).

 (3) It was not always known that was his name. When my father-in-law “ may he rest in peace “would make a blessing for her in the synagogue over the Torah, he would say Golda bas Yosef..

 (4) Then someone in the family -- almost for certain it was this writer who “ recalled or noticed on his tombstone that his name was Yosef-Zelig.

 (5) The funeral and Sitting Shiva was to be in Jerusalem. We live in Tsfat. I called my son, Yehuda, who currently lives with his family in the apartment of my in-laws in the Old City of Jerusalem, and asked him to put up signs in the Old City, where my in-laws were known. He told the sign maker, Golda bas Yosef. He forgot the Zelig!

**Went to Pray at the Western Wall**

 (6) He went down to the Western Wall to pray and to work (offering tefillin to whoever wants to wrap them). As soon as he got there, someone ran up to him and said excitedly, “Here! You have to read this great story about the Rebbe HaRayatz (whose yahrzeit was that day), and handed him the two-sided page from Beersheva in which one column of the second side was the above story. He quickly arranged to adjust the signs

 (7) There are not usually publications for children at the Kotel. There were never before publications from Beersheva at the Kotel. Divine Providence strikes again!

**Biographic Note on the Rebbe Rayatz**

 Biographic note: Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (12 Tammuz 1880-10 Shvat 1950), known as the Rebbe Rayatz, was the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, from 1920 to 1950. He established a network of Jewish educational institutions and Chassidim that was the single most significant factor for the preservation of Judaism during the dread reign of the communist Soviets. . In 1940 he moved to the USA, established Chabad world-wide headquarters in Brooklyn and launched the global campaign to renew and spread Judaism in all languages and in every corner of the world, the campaign continued and expanded so remarkably successfully by his son-in-law and successor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed*

[www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000vqW0:001FE_sC00001uzw&count=1329229146&randid=1482901223&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1482901223##)

**The A-mighty Meets**

**The Media**

**By Paul Greenberg**

 It was only a matter of time in this Age of the Poll that some mastermind at a political headquarters would decide to ask the almighty American public to pass judgment on G-d along with more temporal rulers.

 Given the temper of the times, it does not surprise that such a poll was undertaken by Public Policy Polling, a long-time part of the Democrats' national political network. Those polled were asked whether, "if G-d exists," they approve of "its performance."

 *Its* performance?

**Not Everyone Believes G-d is Male**

 The pronoun was chosen, we're told by the pollsters, "because not everyone who believes in G-d believes G-d to be male."

 Once again some learned, literal-minded fool has confused gender with sex, a grammatical usage with a biological description. The result is not only the usual confusion but, in this case, sacrilege as well. As if those who speak of the Deity as He, or the Lord, or Our Father Our King, or even First Cause Uncaused were visualizing some corporeal being and must be corrected.

**A Failure of Imagination**

 The writers of gender-free modern prayerbooks commit the same error -- a failure of imagination -- and the result is poetry-free Scripture.

 All of this is done in the name of not offending, when of course it offends all who still have some minimal sensitivity -- not just religious sensitivity but the artistic and linguistic kind. One needn't be a believer to show respect for the beliefs of others.

 How sophisticated, to poll the public on G-d's performance. What, no focus groups to discuss how He might improve His job performance? Maybe if He tried different packaging or started a Facebook page, His ratings might go up....

 The A-mighty was doubtless pleased to learn that a majority of the respondents, if only a bare majority of them (52 percent), approved of the job He was doing in those matters that fall under His jurisdiction, which, according to the pollsters, include natural disasters and animals. He got particularly high marks for having created the universe. And came in well ahead of the president and Congress.

 Reading about these straight-faced poll results, reported deadpan in our sprawling media, which replaced the mere press some time ago, I could only think: Oh, Gawd!

**The People Who Are**

**Polled Are Judging G-d**

 What next? In the spirit of old Job, patron saint of the plaintiffs' bar, will We the Polled People bring suit against the L-rd G-d for His alleged lapses?

 Wasn't there a time when what mattered was not what His creatures thought of the Creator but what He thought of us? But the science, art and general mumbo-jumbo of polling doesn't seem to have polled Him on that little matter.

 The most hopeful thing about the prospects for religious faith in this modern, increasingly secular society is that it retains the power to incense its critics. Today's flood of atheist polemics testifies to faith's continued ability to inspire, even if only to inspire attacks. Atheist books, articles, pamphlets and general outpourings continue to appear in profusion. Their quality may range from the thoughtful to the just snide, but their quantity is impressive.

 It's as if atheism had inherited the passion that the religious once had. But so long as religion can evoke so spirited a reaction, it is not yet a spent force.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of* [*www.JewishWorldReview.com*](http://www.JewishWorldReview.com) *Mr. Paul Greenberg is a Pulitzer Prize winning editorial writer who currently is the editorial page editor of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.*

**The Mezuzah**

**By Aviva Ravel**

 When Elsie moved into her new flat, she removed the *mezuzah* on the doorpost of the front door. The ancient case had broken into shards as she dislodged the nails and pried loose the metal container. A piece of parchment containing Hebrew script fell out of the case; brittle and yellow with age, it crumpled in her hand.

**Storing the Fragments in a**

**Paper Bag in Her Sewing Bag**

 She gathered the fragments of metal and parchment, stored them in a paper bag, and placed them in her sewing basket, which contained a myriad of odds and ends such as balls of wool, knitting needles, and threads of many colors. Then she set about cleaning her new kitchen.

 Shel nodded in approval at the empty space that had been occupied by the *mezuzah*. He had had a hard day at the knitting mill, and looked forward to his hot cup of tea. “So you did it,” her husband said as he stirred sugar into his cup and turned to the editorial pages of the evening newspaper.

 “I said I would,” came the reply.

**What About the Mother’s Reaction**

 “What will your mother say?”

 “It’s my home. She won’t say anything.”

 Elsie was right. When Mrs. Klein visited her daughter’s new home, in her arms toys for her four-year-old granddaughter, a new tablecloth and dish towels, she noticed immediately the blank oblong space once occupied by the *mezuzah*. To prevent herself from commenting, she bit hard on her lip, then summoned Miriam to receive her Chanukah presents: a red-haired doll that came with a pretty dress, and miniature dishes. “Thank you, Bubby, thank you,” the little girl squealed.

 Two years before, Mrs Klein’s daughter and son-in-law had joined the Party. She bit on her lip then too. She knew what this entailed: her daughter would refrain from lighting Shabbos candles; neither would she light candles on the Chanukah menorah; and attending *shul* was out of the question. Although Mrs. Klein had raised her daughter in an observant home, now she feared that the rituals she had so carefully maintained would be lost to the next generation.

**Declaring Her Opposition**

**To the Opiate of the People**

 Elsie noticed the pained look on her mother’s face and declared fervently, “We are against religion. Religion is the opiate of the people. We are atheists. We don’t believe in myths and miracles. You have to understand that.”

 Of course, Mrs. Klein understood. She was up-to-date on current events, since a day didn’t go by without her having read *Der Tog*, as well as the daily English *Star*, from cover to cover. “Has everyone in your organization renounced their religion?” she asked in Yiddish.

 “Yes, of course. None of my gentile comrades go to church.”

 “But you’re having a Christmas party in a few weeks. I see the notice on the refrigerator.”

**Everyone Has a Party**

 “Christmas is a national holiday. It’s not religious. Everyone has a party.”

 Although Mama was deeply wounded, she brushed a grey strand of hair away and maintained a stubborn silence. She was generally not a cheerful person; she had experienced hunger, war, and the loss of family and friends, while a bout with typhus in Romania left her frail for the rest of her life. However, she never grumbled, and attended to her household duties with the diligence and care associated with devoted Jewish mothers.

**“We Want Equality for All People”**

 “Look, Mama, I know you don’t agree with the principles of the Party. But what we want is equality for all people, no matter their race, color or nationality. Justice for all. One day we’ll have one beautiful world, no separate countries, no borders, no racism. Religion and nationalism separate people.”

 “The Hindus will also be part of the new world?”

 “Sure, why not?”

 “So what are they going to do with all their temples?” Mama’s attempt at a joke was lost on Elsie.

 “Ma, you’re missing the point.”

 “I know, I’m old-fashioned. But, my daughter, I love you, I love our Miriam, and I will never tell you what to do and what not to do. It says in the Torah, the most important thing is *shalom bayit*—peace in the house. And, for your information, we also believe in Justice. *Tzedek, tzedek tirdof..* Didn’t you learn that in Jewish school?”

 Elsie looked at her mother with the impatience you reserve for a disobedient child, and passed her a plate of homemade strudel.

**Never Refused to Babysit**

**Her Granddaughter**

 At least, Mrs. Klein thought, they come to me for Shabbat, and the Seder, and the Rosh Hashanah meal. Moreover, Mrs. Klein never refused to babysit Miriam, as Elsie and Shel attended frequent clandestine meetings held in secret locations. “But please,” Elsie pleaded, “don’t fill Miriam’s head with ridiculous stories.”

 “Like what?” her mother asked, knowing full well what her daughter had in mind.

 “Like the waters of a sea opening up and people walking across on dry land. Yesterday she asked me if G‑d would open the lake in the country so she could walk across to the other side to play with the children there.”

 But Mrs. Klein continued to tell her stories, and Miriam listened, her dark eyes wide open in awe and concentration.

**Sitting Shiva with Her Siblings**

 Years passed, and Mrs. Klein succumbed to old-age ailments. Elsie sat at her mother’s bedside in the hospital until the old woman took her last breath. For the sake of propriety, and out of respect for the observant members of the family, Elsie sat *shiva* with her brothers, sister and aunts.

 The day after the *shiva*, when all the visitors and mourners had gone, Elsie drove to the local Judaica shop and purchased a *mezuzah* and a finely decorated case made in Israel.

**Hammering the Mezuzah to the Doorpost**

 She hammered nails into both ends of the *mezuzah* case and affixed it to the doorpost, meticulously following the instructions—the upper end pointing inward, the lower one outward. A prominent *shin* in gold lettering graced the upper end of the case. Elsie looked at her handiwork and was pleased.

 “What on earth are you doing?” Shel asked, perplexed.

 “I put a *mezuzah* on the door. Inside, a Hebrew inscription is written on special parchment. Two passages from the Book of Deuteronomy. One is the Shema.”

 “But why?”

 “Simple.” Elsie faced him and spoke without a hint of uncertainty in her voice. “When Mama’s soul visits us from heaven to say a blessing, there has to be a *mezuzah* on the door, so she will feel at home.”

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

**The Principles of Jewish Faith**

**The Prophets of Israel**

**Were True**

**By Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

 The Prophets of Israel were exceptional human beings, called by G-d to rebuke the Jewish people. In order to be credible preachers, the Prophets had to be role models individuals, possessing an extremely refined character.
 Maimonides explains that not every person could become a prophet. There were three key character-traits which were a prerequisite to become a candidate to prophecy and eventually, if G-d's so wished, to be called by Him.

 An individual had to be strong, wealthy and wise.

**Strength is Not the Ability**

**To Control Other People**

 "Strong" is a person with the ability to control himself, his body, his appetites and the words he utters form his mouth. The highest level of strength is achieved when an individual is also able to control his emotions and thoughts. 'Strength' is not measured by the ability to control other people, but by the ability to overcome our own impulses and appetites.

 "Wealthy" is the one who is content with his material possessions, whatever they are. He does not need more and he is not greedy to have more than what he possesses. In Judaism, wealth is not about quantity but appreciation. One person could be wealthy with 100 dollars, while other person could be considered poor even if he has one billion dollars.

 Richness is not measured by what one has but by what one needs. The correct formula is not: the more you have the richer you are, but the less you need (regardless of how much or little you have) the richer you are.

 "Wise", is not the person who knows everything, for that is impossible, but the one that is constantly growing in his or her thirst to know and learn. Usually, we think we know something, but as our life's experience become richer, we get to new levels of understanding on the matters we thought we knew. Jewish wisdom is the opposite of intellectual stagnation.

*Reprinted from the February 14, 2012 email of the Shehebar Sephardic Center.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Emunah of**

**“Honest Meir”**

 In a small village in Poland there lived an unassuming and pious Jew named Meir. While he was by no means well-to-do, his family never wanted for their daily bread. Each day on his way home from the synagogue Meir passed through the farmers' market, buying produce and poultry which his wife sold from a small store attached to their house. The prices were always fair, and they earned a reputation for honesty.

**He Would Never Haggle Over Prices**

 Meir stood out from the other buyers at the market, for he would never haggle over prices. Meir had his one fair price, and that was that - he would never budge. Eventually the farmers came to respect him and would even seek him out when they had some special goods for sale, and he became known to everyone as "Honest Meir."

 Meir had only one regret in life - his business took time away from his beloved Torah study. One day he decided that he would work only half as much, and spend the time saved learning Torah. His wife was worried by his decision, but he calmed her saying, "Don't you think that G-d can send us enough in those three days?"

 She wanted to reply that of course He could, but would He? But she stopped herself and decided to wait and see what would happen. As it turned out, their income was the same and her husband thrived on his Torah learning.

 One day his wife came to Meir to discuss the marriage of their daughter, Mirele. "G-d has been good to us, and we must certainly be grateful, but our daughter isn't getting any younger, and the time has come for us to start saving for her dowry."

**“Trust in Him (G-d) and Stop Worrying”**

 Meir looked at his wife and replied, "G-d has taken care of us so far. Trust in Him and stop worrying."

 But his wife couldn't rest. "Meir, we aren't supposed to rely on miracles. Maybe you should go out and work like you used to."

 Meir replied, "What you're saying may seem true, but don't forget my 'silent partner' - G-d. Haven't you seen with your own eyes that since I've spent extra time with my 'partner' we have lost nothing. I can not stop my Torah studies, especially now when we need Him even more." There was nothing more his wife could say except a heartfelt "Amen."

**A Peasant Offers a Large Honeycomb**

 A short time later a peasant showed up at the marketplace with a large honeycomb encased in a block of wood. Several prospective buyers approached him, but he refused them, saying, "I will sell only to Honest Meir." And there he sat and waited until finally, late in the afternoon someone told him that Meir wouldn't be coming to market that day.

 The peasant made his way to Meir's house where he was greeted by his wife. "My husband isn't at home now," she told him, but she asked him to wait while she ran to fetch her husband. Meir measured the honeycomb and lifted it; then he made his offer.

 "Judging by its size and weight, and even allowing for the wood, there should be a lot of honey in it." The two men agreed on a figure which seemed fair to both. The only problem was that Meir didn't have such a large sum. Meir's wife interrupted, saying: "I will try to borrow the money from some of our neighbors."

 Meir served the peasant a cup of tea, and then he questioned the man: "Tell me, how did you come to have such a strange honeycomb?"

 The peasant replied, "I was walking through the woods collecting fire-wood. When my cart was full, I got inside and fell asleep, but it seems that my mare wandered a bit, for when I awoke, I found myself in a different part of the woods, in front of a tree stump. Looking up, I noticed bees buzzing, and being something of a beekeeper myself, I hopped out of my cart and with a long thin twig I removed the queen bee from the hive. I tried to take out the honeycomb, but it was impossible to do so without breaking it. That's when I got the idea of sawing off the stump."

**The Peasant is Paid**

 By the time the peasant had finished his tale, Meir's wife had returned with the money. Meir gave it to the happy peasant who went off feeling very pleased. Meir's wife began to extract the honey.

 She pulled out two and then three heavily laden honeycombs and reached in with a deep ladle for more, when she found there was nothing there but a deep, empty hole. The poor woman was horrified. They were now in debt, and for nothing but a bit of honey and a piece of wood!

**Fetch Your Longest Cooking Spoon**

 She called for her husband, who was equally shocked at the find. "What will we do now?" his wife wailed. Meir was also at a loss, but not willing to give up he said, "Go fetch your longest cooking spoon and maybe we can salvage something from the bottom."

 Meir dipped the spoon into the wooden cavity, and lo and behold, the spoon was filled with a pile of golden coins and jewels! His wife almost fainted from the shock.

**The Smiling Husband**

 Her husband turned to her, smiling, "Probably someone hid this treasure years ago and had to abandon it for some reason. Then the bee colony settled in the trees stump and built their hive on top of the treasure. Now, it seems that G-d must have decided there was no longer any reason to leave it hidden since we need the money to marry off our children and do other good things. So, you see, the peasant was rewarded for his labor, and we were even more richly rewarded for our faith and trust in G-d."

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

**Who's Who**

**Elijah the Prophet**

 The great prophet Eliyahu (Elijah) lived approximately in the Jewish year 3,000 (760 b.c.e.) and lived at a time when the Jews were greatly tempted by idol worship.

 He pitted himself against 450 priests of the Baal cult on Mount Carmel when he successfully demonstrated the veracity of G-d. When the prophet Jonah died as a young boy, Eliyahu was able to bring him back to life.

 Taken by a fiery chariot, he was one of the seven saints who went into the next world alive. Tradition names Eliyahu as the one who will announce the advent of Moshiach.

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

**Jewish Family Life**

**Inspires Oprah Winfrey**

**By Joshua Runyan**

 After spending the day immersed in Chasidic Jewish life and culture, television personality Oprah Winfrey concludes that Judaism’s focus on family life and on developing individuals’ innate potential offers a wealth of lessons for people all over the world.

 Sharing her thoughts with the Judaism website Chabad.org, Winfrey – who toured Jewish homes and communal institutions in the New York neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Borough Park and Brooklyn Heights as part of her new “Oprah’s Next Chapter” show on OWN:

 Oprah Winfrey Network – says that the greater world’s reliance on popular entertainment has caused society to lose focus on what really matters. In stark contrast to that trend are families like the Ginsbergs of Crown Heights, who, Winfrey notes, are not only not “plugged in,” but are just as happy as their secular counterparts.

|  |
| --- |
| Oprah Winfrey sits down with Rabbi Aron and Shterna Ginsberg and their family. (Photo: George Burns / Harpo, Inc.) |
| Oprah Winfrey sits down with Rabbi Aron and Shterna Ginsberg and their family. (Photo: George Burns / Harpo, Inc.) |

**Toured Jewish Homes**

**In Brooklyn**

 Sharing her thoughts with the Judaism website Chabad.org, Winfrey – who toured Jewish homes and communal institutions in the New York neighborhoods of Crown Heights, Borough Park and Brooklyn Heights as part of her new “Oprah’s Next Chapter” show on OWN:

 Oprah Winfrey Network – says that the greater world’s reliance on popular entertainment has caused society to lose focus on what really matters. In stark contrast to that trend are families like the Ginsbergs of Crown Heights, who, Winfrey notes, are not only not “plugged in,” but are just as happy as their secular counterparts.

**Was Amazed by What She Saw**

 “It’s amazing to me that you can raise children in this world and not have them” consume hours and hours watching television or texting friends or playing videogames, says Winfrey. “What’s gonna happen when people see this family and see that it’s possible that in the United States of America, in Brooklyn, you can have nine children and none of them are watching television, and none of them are on computers all day long, and none of them are sassing their parents, and they’re well-mannered and live in harmony with their families.”

**Enjoyed a Traditional Meal**

 During her visit to New York last fall, Winfrey sat down with two Jewish families, enjoyed a traditional meal, discussed communal affairs with five women and toured a Chabad-Lubavitch run Jewish ritual bath, known as a mikvah, in Brooklyn Heights.

 “The moment I walked into the Ginsbergs’ home, I felt welcomed and I felt a sense of warmth, and I felt a sense of family and comfort and values,” details Winfrey. There’s a “sense of reverence for acknowledging that there [is] the power of G-d that is greater than yourself.”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Programs) Update. Originally published on the Chabad.Org website.*

A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l

**The Importance of Having Appreciation For Hakodesh Baruch Hu (G-d)**

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION:** |

What should you think when saying Amen Yehei Shmei Rabah?

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

|  |
| --- |
| **oIMS1490696** |

I'll just tell you one thing now, just to be brief. A man has to be able to look back on his life and to see what Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for him. If you don't do that, then you can't say anything. You won’t say Amen Yi’hei Sh’mei Rabah properly, or anything else.

**When a Man Looks**

**Back on His Life**

 Now, when a man looks back on his life, and he sees that Hakadosh Baruch Hu spared him so many troubles that he noticed occur to other people in this world, and that he is perfect almost without any blemish.

 Some people never broke a bone in their lives. If you're one of these people, it's a remarkable history. You never broke a bone in your life? Think how many people broke bones! They had casts at least for a few weeks. You never broke a bone in your life?! How many people never had a fire in their homes, even once in their lifetime? You never had a fire?! So many people had fires in their homes.

**You Were Never Unemployed in Your Life?**

 How many people were without work, didn't have a job for some time? You never were unemployed? Never in your life were you unemployed?

 How many people had trouble, serious trouble in their houses, marital troubles? Either he ran out of the house or his wife ran out, and it was a great to-do before they were reunited in embarrassment. You never had that in your life?

 So when you look back and you see Hakadosh Baruch Hu spared you, so you start thanking Him. But you'll never get through, there's so much, there's so much!! So you say, Yi’hei Sh’mei Rabah Me’vorach, I have to thank you Hashem and bless you, Le’olam, forever U’lolmei Ol’mayah, and ever and ever. No matter how much I'll say, I won't live long enough. In the next world I'll continue to thank You and praise You forever and ever. There's so much to be grateful for.

**What Good is a Blank Check?**

 Of course, if a man’s mind is empty of gratitude, so it's just empty words. It's easy to sign a blank check, he gives a check, a blank check,or he writes a check even for a million dollars. You don't have a penny in the bank, however. What good is check like that? A man says "I thank you Hashem forever and ever and ever, don't bother me anymore."

 When a man’s heart is overflowing, when he says it, let him think of at least one thing. Next time another thing.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l,” that was transcribed from one of the questions posed to Rav Miller by the audience at his classic Thursday night lectures in his Flatbush shul. To listen to the audio of this Q & A, please call (201) 676-3210.*

**Rav Moshe Wolfson Asks:**

**“Why Are We Silent?”**

**By Yochonon Donn**

 Rav Moshe Wolfson spoke Tuesday night in a rare mid-week assembly for his kehillah, Emunas Yisroel in Boro Park, asking bluntly why there is no greater uproar within the community over the potential for war over Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

 “Why are we quiet? Where is the awakening? Why is everyone so apathetic?” asked Rav Wolfson, who is also mashgiach of Yeshivah Torah Vodaath. “Everyone is busy with narishkeiten, we don’t hear the alarm? We don’t know that we have to pierce the heavens for rachamim from the Ribbono Shel Olam?”

 Rav Wolfson told the packed beis medrash of nearly 1,000 people that the potential for a war encompassing Iran, Israel, Europe and the United States over the next few weeks is a real one, and Klal Yisrael must prepare itself spiritually.

 “Everyone knows that there is currently a growing danger from Iran - and it is a great error for whoever does not know this,” Rav Wolfson said. “Why should a Yid not know what is happening to [other] Yidden? Everyone must know what is happening in regard to other Yidden. Everyone must know what is happening in Eretz Yisrael.”

**Talking About the Dangers**

**Of Current the Iran Crisis**

 Rav Wolfson began talking this past Shabbos about the dangers from the Iran crisis, when he stopped and said that it was not a subject to discuss on Shabbos. He said he would continue the topic during the week. The last time he called for a special asifah during the week to discuss current events was in 1991, prior to the Gulf War.

 Rav Wolfson started his address, which was carried live by Kol Halashon, with the famous Rambam, who writes that it is a mitzvah to daven during troubled times. “If you don’t daven,” the Rambam says, “then it is a cruelty, since it will get worse.”

**Iranian Leader is Just Like Haman**

 “The leader in Iran says clearly - he repeated it this week - that he wants to kill, Rachmana litzlan, every Yid in the world, just like Haman,” Rav Wolfson said. “If he will be successful, chas v’shalom, in getting the nuclear bomb - and experts says he will have it by the summer - it will be a great danger for Klal Yisrael.”

 “A good part of the world’s Jews live in Israel, and the government there says that they will attack Iran first, before they could get the nuclear bomb. If that happens, everyone knows that that will cause a world war.”

**Hashem is Judging Us on Every Detail**

 Rav Wolfson said that he heard that Harav Yosef Rosenblum, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Shaarei Yosher, spoke recently about the crisis with Iran - he said that during this eis tzarah, “Hashem is judging us on every klal and on every prat.”

 Rav Wolfson quoted the Pesikta, who says that the year when Moshiach will come all nations will battle each other. The spark that will set it off, according to the Medrash, will be when the king of Paras - which is modern-day Iran - will threaten “Arabia,” presumably Saudi Arabia, such as is happening today.

 Arabia will go for an alliance with Edom - the culture of Edom is today’s Western world, Europe and United States. Paras will then destroy the world and the Yidden will be thrown into turmoil. Hashem will then say: “Do not fear, the time for your Geulah has come.”

 Rav Wolfson noted how eerily similar this Medrash is to what is occurring today.

 “We don’t have to be in a panic,” Rav Wolfson said, “Hashem will perform miracles for us. But efsher takeh. Maybe the time for the Geulah has arrived. We must prepare for the Geulah.”

**Hashem Has Performed Great Miracles**

**For the Yidden Since the Holocaust**

 Rav Wolfson said that since the Holocaust, Hashem has performed great miracles for the Yidden. Eretz Yisrael, whicsh today hosts most of the world’s Yidden and most of the Torah world, merited supernatural siyatta diShmaya during its wars. When the Palestinians shoot missiles from Gaza, they land mostly in empty areas and cause little damage.

 When then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein shot 39 Scud missiles during the Gulf War, only one Yid was killed - that man had previously received a klalah from the Chazon Ish.

 “This a hashgachah niflaah that is reserved only for Yidden who learn Torah, who keep the mitzvos and who will ultimately do teshuvah,” Rav Wolfson said. “Hashem wants to do nissim for us. Israel is surrounded by 300 million Arabs and we are still there; that means Hashem wants to do yeshuos. We must prepare for yeshuos.”

**Hashem Still Wants the**

**Prayers of Jews Today**

 But just like Eliyahu had to daven on Har Hacarmel even though Hashem had already promised to bring rain, Hashem still wants the tefillos of Klal Yisrael today, even though He had promised to bring yeshuos.

In order to qualify for these miracles, Rav Wolfson said, we must strengthen in Torah, tefillah and chessed.

 He specifically suggested saying Tehillim 46 every day, adding that he is asking his own kehillah to have the kapitel printed out and stuck to the back of every siddur. During the Suez campaign in 1956, the Belzer Rebbe asked that people say that particular kapitel, since it is a segulah to prevent warfare.

 “Everyone has to be mispallel that Klal Yisrael should be saved from chevlei Moshiach, that he and his family should be saved,” he said.

Rav Wolfson also spoke about kevias ittim for Torah, not interrupting even “if the cell phone rings.”

 “I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt”l, that when a Yid sits down to learn it should be like Shabbos,” Rav Wolfson said. “That is the only time that one is pattur from work.”

**It is Shabbos in**

**The Beis Medrash**

 “In a beis medrash it is Shabbos. … If someone interrupts his learning and he picks up the phone, he brings the marketplace, he brings the office into Shabbos. He is mechallel the Shabbos.”

 But above all, Rav Wolfson said, Yidden should keep in mind that we live in momentous times, and we should prepare for the upcoming era with emunah and bitachon.

 “In the next couple of weeks there will be news,” Rav Wolfson said, “and with the help of Hashem, it will be good news for Yidden.”

*Reprinted from the website of Matzav.com. The article originally appeared in the February 16, 2012 edition of the Hamodia newspaper.*

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Muffed Haftara**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 Yossie’s parents looked forward to the Shabbat of his Bar Mitzvah when he would read in their synagogue the Haftara. Blessed with a beautiful voice and musical talent he was certain to do a great job on the Haftara he had so diligently prepared and to thus bring great nachat to his proud parents.

 But something went wrong. The reading of the Haftara was marred by several off-tune moments and some bouts with hoarseness. As they left the synagogue Yossie’s father noticed that his son suffered no hoarseness at all and asked him why his reading was so characterized by loss of voice and tune.

Explaining His Poor Performance

 “A friend of mine read the Haftara last week for his Bar Mitzvah, explained the boy, and he did a rather poor job because he has a hard time carrying a tune. Next week another friend with little musical ability will be reading the Haftara for his Bar Mitzvah. If I would have read the way I was capable of doing because of my musical ability, people would have made the comparison between my beautiful rendition and the poor showing of the others. How could I thus embarrass my friends? I therefore decided to mess up my own reading a bit so that no comparisons would be in order.”

 It was Yossie’s father who revealed this incident when he spoke at a Sheva Brachot celebration for his son almost a decade later. Yossie had met with great success in his learning and in his shiduch, and it was his father’s conviction that his nobility as a Bar Mitzvah boy earned him these blessings from Heaven.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Enveloping Words**

 This week we will discuss the power of prayer. Every Jew has the ability and obligation every day to speak to His Creator through the vehicle of prayer.  We learn of the obligation of prayer in our weekly parsha Mishpatim.  As the verse states, "You shall worship Hashem..."  (Shemos 23:25)  From this verse, the Rambam derives the source of the mitzvah of daily prayer.  (Hilchos Tefilah, 1,1)

**Hashem Hears Our Prayers**

 Hashem hears our prayers, and if we are worthy, we answers our prayers also.  As Dovid HaMelech tells us in Tehillim (Psalms) "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon him sincerely." (145:18) The following amazing true story will help us be inspired to daven - to pray to Hashem with kavona - intent and with an understanding of the words we are saying.

 His name was Siberiak.  He was a short stocky man with a weathered look, as he spoke in front of a group of survivors who were like himself. They did not have much left of their own lives. The evil Germans and Russians, and years of loneliness had taken an immense toll, but the group gathered together occasionally to share their emotions.

 And now it was his Siberiak's turn: I always thought that the most important thing in the world was money. After all, what could be more valuable than gold? That is, until I came to Siberia. Together with other prisoners, I was given the task of mining gold. We would work long hard days, sometimes up to 18 hours with little or no rest.

**Horribly Cramped Sleeping Quarters**

 Our sleeping quarters were horribly cramped and our food rations were minimal. But when I saw where we would be working, I was immediately overcome with a feeling of joy. Our group was going to be working in the gold mine. And although the slave labor was difficult I managed to bring along a small pouch in which I was able to smuggle out a few golden nuggets each day.

 One night as I was counting my bag of golden nuggets one of the inmates noticed what I was doing and burst out laughing. He called over some of his friends and enjoyed a hearty laugh. They mocked me and ridiculed my little pouch. "Don't you think we all could smuggle out golden nuggets? You fool, what value does a golden nugget have here in the cold abyss of Siberia?"

**Realizing that Gold Isn’t the Most**

**Valuable Thing in the World**

 It was at that moment that I realized that gold is not the most valuable thing in the world. At least not here in Siberia. What good could it bring me? The hunger pangs gnawed at my insides as I dreamt of a thick juicy slab of meat, something I had not tasted in years. That's it! I thought to myself. The most valuable thing in the world is not gold but good food to alleviate my hunger pangs. There could be nothing that is more valuable than that. And so the daily grind of finding food continued.

 It was comical in a sad way that those glistening golden nuggets were no more valuable to me now than the dirt into which they were wedged. They were worth nothing to me. All I could think of was the gnawing hunger.

 Every moment of every day my thoughts were focused on food — until one of the passing guards walked by while he was smoking a cigarette. The smell of the cigarette wafted through the cold Siberian air and the aroma filled the surrounding area. All of a sudden my hunger pangs dissipated and the craving for a cigarette became my focal point. Nothing else mattered.

 Food was something that lasted for a short while but a cigarette provided much more than that. There was something that was more meaningful about it. The calm feeling and relaxation it provided were significantly deeper than the food or gold that I had previously desired. But a cigarette was something that was more difficult to come by.

**The Most Elusive Paper**

 Although tobacco was readily available and fairly easy to obtain, the paper in which it needed to be wrapped was scarce. Even the guards had a tough time getting hold of the elusive paper. I now realized that the most important thing in the world was not gold or food or even tobacco: it was paper.

 For days I would look forward to the next opportunity to smoke and the feeling from those few moments would provide me with enough satisfaction for the next few days. And so it developed into a routine.

 But one day I came across a Russian peasant from a neighboring village. The older man approached me and asked if I knew how to read. He explained that I appeared to be slightly more educated than the rest of the prisoners and he had a favor to ask of me.

**The Reward for Reading a Peasant’s Letter**

 His son, an officer in the Soviet Union's army, was stationed hundreds of kilometers away and would periodically send a letter to inform his father of how he was managing. "Recently another letter arrived and I need someone to read it for me. If you help me I will give you the envelope to use for wrapping the tobacco.”

 I could hardly believe my good fortune. I figured that I could probably roll at least two or maybe even three cigarettes with the envelope he had. I assisted him with his letter and thanked him for his "gift." And then I took the letter back to the barracks where I slept. I removed a small pouch of tobacco and placed the envelope on the floor.

**Something Caught My Eye**

 But just as I was about to empty the pouch into the envelope something caught my eye. I had to look closer to make sure that I was not dreaming. Lo and behold! In front of my eyes an envelope was made out of paper that had Hebrew lettering on it.  I carefully read it and saw that the writing was words from davening - daily prayers.

 I had not prayed in many years but I was familiar the prayers and fluent in my reading. I picked up the paper and carefully folded it j into my pocket. In he camp, there was a man whom we called the "Rebbele." It's not that he was so learned but he was someone who kept track of when the Yamim Tovim were and so he was the closest thing we had to a rebbe. When I showed him my newfound treasure, he could not believe it.

**If Hashem Had Not orgotten About Us…**

 Here we were, thousands of miles from the closest semblance of Yiddishkeit (Judaism) and G-d had sent us, a page of a siddur - prayer book. We figured that if Hashem had not forgotten about us, then we should not forget Him.

 So we began a minyan. It was certainly not conventional in any sense. We only had this one page of a siddur. At each tefillah the shaliach tzibbur (leader of prayer) would read from the envelope. Whether it was a Shacharis (morning prayers), Minchah (afternoon prayers), Maariv (evening prayers) or Shabbos and Yom Tov davening, the leader of prayer would stand up and read from the envelope.

**Finding Strength and Solace Through Prayer**

 The formerly depressed inmates found strength and solace through this prayer gathering that I had helped organize. Watching the transformation of these poor wretched souls taking place was nothing short of a miracle.

 The prisoners now walked around and conducted their daily lives with a sense of purpose. Their lives had meaning and for that they were forever grateful. And then one day it hit me. I had discovered the most valuable thing in the world. It was not gold nor was it food. It wasn't a cigarette or the paper it was rolled in. It was "Prayer." The ability for one to connect with his Creator for but a few moments a day was something invaluable.

**The Timeliest and Most Potent Message**

 But perhaps what was most incredible about the envelope was the prayers that it contained. To receive an envelope that was made from some recycled siddur page was in itself a miracle, but the prayers it contained were the timeliest and most potent messages we could have ever hoped for.

 The page began with the declaration from the paragraph in prayer beginning "Az Yashir:" with the words "Hashem yimloch le'olam va'ed — G-d will rule forever" And the small lettering on the page continued until the heartfelt plea found in middle of the prayer "Ahavah Rabbah." with the words "Avinu, Av HaRachaman, HaMeracheim, racheim aleinu — Our Father, our Compassionate Father, Who is merciful, have mercy on us!"  (from  TOUCHED BY A STORY p. 174, Rabbi Yechiel Spero)

 Hashem should help that our prayers be answered.  Amen.

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