**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Terumah 5773**

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**Defining Honesty**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“And they shall take for me a portion.” (*Shemot* 25:2)

The *Bet Halevi* explains that the order of the *parashiot*, last week *Mishpatim* and this week *Terumah*, has great significance. Our *parashah* of *Terumah* speaks about making donations to build the *Mishkan*. Last week’s *parashah* speaks about the laws of honesty in one’s money dealings. The Torah is teaching us that first we must make sure our money is earned honestly and then that money can be given to charity. Our Sages tell us that the *Mishkan* was never destroyed because all the money used was pure.

One time Rabbi Chaim Volozhin had a group of Rabbis as guests in his house. Suddenly one of the guests mistakenly tugged at the tablecloth and all the glassware fell on the hard floor.

**A Family Tradition About Power**

**Of Pure Money Purchases**

Rabbi Chaim said that they should not think that anything broke. They looked and were amazed to see that nothing broke. He explained that the money used to buy them was earned with complete honesty and he has a tradition handed down that utensils bought with pure money will never break.

I recall about a year ago there was an interesting event. A shoplifter entered a store in the Bronx and stole some merchandise. Two employees saw him and screamed at him. The thief ran away with the goods and they gave chase. They caught up with him and held him down until they could call the police. At that point a crowd gathered and started heckling the people that caught the thief, saying, “Why are you calling the police? What do you care, it wasn’t your merchandise. You only work there!”

Society’s definition of honesty is very different than ours. It’s up to us to raise the standard.

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

**Reb Shmuel of Vitebsk**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Some one hundred years ago in the city of Vitebsk there lived two friends Reb Leib Pozin and Reb Shmuel Brin. Both were rich and both gave charity, but Reb Leib, the far richer of the two, was businesslike and unemotional while Reb Shmuel was warm and friendly.

They were Chassidim (followers) of the fourth leader of Chabad, Rebbe Shmuel (or the M'harash as he was known by the Chassidim) and would go to consult with him regularly.

**Tricked by Dishonest Businessmen**

Shortly before Reb Leib made one such visit to the Rebbe, his friend Reb Shmuel got tricked by dishonest businessmen and cheated out of his entire fortune, leaving him not only penniless but in considerable debt as well.

Reb Leib entered the room of the Rebbe and, after discussing his problems and receiving answers to all his questions from the Rebbe, let out a heartbreaking sigh and exclaimed, "Oy! My poor friend Shmuel Brin! What a tragedy! He lost all his money! Surely all that G-d does is just; I do not doubt the ways of HaShem, but what a pity!!"

The Rebbe didn't reply.

**Another Tragedy Struck a Yid in Vitebsk**

Shortly thereafter tragedy again struck, but this time to Reb Leib. A fire broke out in the city of Vitebsk consuming his store, his entire home and one of his three immense storehouses; a loss of over fifty thousand rubles none of which was insured.

He immediately traveled to Lubavitch, entered to the Rebbe and burst into uncontrollable weeping as he poured out his heartbreaking story.

The Rebbe looked at him silently and then quietly said. "For Shmuel Brin you didn't cry. You even were able to justify his misfortune. But on your loss, which is much less, you can't control your weeping; seems that by you 'I' and 'he' are two separate worlds."

These words struck Reb Leib like a sledgehammer. After several seconds of stunned silence he slowly backed out the Rebbe’s room and then wandered around Lubavitch like a zombie. It took him three days of deep thought to realize how right the Rebbe was. His entire way of looking at the world was lopsided and selfish.

He again requested an audience with the Rebbe but this time when he entered he let the Rebbe do the talking.

**A Lesson of the Baal Shem Tov**

"Reb Leib" the Rebbe said "The Baal Shem Tov taught that if one does not suffer at hearing bad news about his fellow man, or worse yet, he justifies that bad news; he draws that bad thing on himself as well. But one who genuinely feels bad when his friend suffers will be rewarded in the end.

"Now take all the cash you have on hand, three thousand rubles, and give it to Shmuel Brin as an interest free loan. Be sure to give it with a joyous heart. Then go to Moscow to buy merchandise to sell. HaShem will repay your loss twofold!"

Leib went back to Vitebsk took all the cash money he had (it came out to be exactly the sum the Rebbe said) and walked to Shmuel Brin's home but to his disappointment Shmuel had left home a few days earlier and his wife didn't know when he would return.

**Reb Shmuel Shows Up in Shul Jubilently**

And so it was every day for over two weeks. Leib was getting desperate; he wanted to travel to Moscow as the Rebbe said as soon as possible but Shmuel was no where to be found. Then, on Shabbat evening Shmuel suddenly showed up in the Synagogue smiling as though he just won a million rubles.

When asked where he was he replied that had been by Rebbe and had even had memorized the 'mimor' (a deep Chassidic discourse on Kabalistic ideas) that he heard from the Rebbe when he was there.

**Feeling More Ashamed than Ever Before**

Reb Leib looked at his friend and felt even more ashamed than ever.

Here stood a man that, although he had become a pauper overnight, was full of optimism and joy while he himself was still anxious and sad. He watched as Reb Shmuel repeated the mimor for the congregation and then invited everyone to his home for a gala meal after the morning prayers at which time he would repeat the mimor again.

After Shabbat, Reb Leib went to Shmuel's house to give him the loan, but before he could open his mouth Shmuel began to comfort him about the fire that ruined his fortunes. "Don't worry Reb Leib." Shmuel said optimistically, "The saying is 'after a fire is richness'. I'm sure G-d will repay your loss a hundred-fold."

Reb Leib couldn't contain himself. "Tell me, Shmuel, where were you these last two weeks except Lubavitch? Did you make all your money back? Is that why you are so happy?

"No" Shmuel replied. "I'll tell you what happened. After I lost my money I became very downcast and seriously considered just working for someone else and forgetting about the business world. Then I fell ill for a few weeks which made me feel even worse.

**A Visit from a Jewish Teacher from Valiz**

Near the end of my sickness, when I was just beginning to feel better, I had a visit from a Jew, a teacher from the city of Valiz, who said he had been in Lubavitch and the Rebbe told him to visit me.

'The Rebbe said I should tell you to stop thinking foolish and sad thoughts and that your mind should rule your heart and make it happy, not your heart making your mind sad.'

"So, as soon as I felt better I borrowed enough for travel to the Rebbe and asked for advice. He congratulated me that I decided to be positive and told me I should go to Riga, buy merchandise that is already loaded on rafts on the river and try to sell it elsewhere.

So I did it. I went to Riga, found choice goods, but the seller wanted three thousand rubles, wasn’t willing to take credit but was willing to wait a week. So I decided to return to Vitebsk to wait.

**A Small Miracle Happened!**

"That’s when a small miracle happened! As I was boarding the train to Vitebsk I met someone who was on his way to visit me! He told me that two big businessmen in the city of Smolinsk heard about me and wanted me to arbitrate in an argument they were having… for pay! So I changed trains to Smolinsk and, thank G-d after a few days of hard work, I succeeded in making peace.

"They paid me three hundred rubles for my troubles and I felt that the Rebbe's blessing was beginning to work. At least I had money for my family to live on. Now I'm waiting for the money to buy that merchandise in Riga."

Reb Leib felt that now was the time. He pulled the wad of cash from his pocket and said "Here! It's a loan from me. Three thousand rubles! Return it when you can! The Rebbe told me to give it to you."

But Shmuel refused flatly saying, "The Rebbe ordered you to offer the loan but he didn't order me to take it. That must be all the money you have, right? Well, I'm sure G-d will provide for me without you having to suffer. You take that money and invest it."

Finally Reb Leib had no recourse than to travel again to the Rebbe who took the money, put it in an envelope, addressed it to Reb Shmuel with a note; "I'm sending you three thousand rubles to be repaid in full after the successful business enterprise" and sent it back with Reb Leib.

**Traveling with Only the Rebbe’s**

**Blessing in His Pocket**

Shmuel accepted the loan and headed for Riga while Reb Leib was now free to travel to Moscow albeit with nothing but the Rebbe's blessing in his pocket.

Unexpectedly the businessmen in Moscow gave Reb Leib unlimited credit and within a year he was twice as rich as he was before the fire, as the Rebbe said and Reb Shmuel succeeded fantastically in Riga. In no time had repaid his debts and was on his way to becoming wealthier than ever.

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

**Who's Who:**

**Amram**

Amram was the great-grandson of our Patriarch Jacob. His grandfather was Levi, his father Kehot. He and his wife Yocheved were the parents of Miriam, Aaron and Moses.

Amram was the leader of the Jewish people when they were enslaved in Egypt. He was named Amram because "am Ram" and exalted nation, was to descend from him.

He was one of four sinless people who died only because death was introduced to the world.

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

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

**Can a Jew Be**

**A Vegetarian?**

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| **QUESTION:** |

Is it good to be a vegetarian, if the purpose is to avoid cruelty to animals?

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| **ANSWER:** |

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| no-meat |

A vegetarian is an apikoros. You have understand; the Torah has stated openly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Noach that he can eat bosor. Therefore, if anybody has any qualms or kashes on that matter he's a kofer baTorah.

Certainly if a person is able to slaughter the behiema in a way that's less painful; let's say he has to turn the ox upside down so instead of knocking it down with a **thud**, a painful thud, he can gently lower it, why not? The principle in general is, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has told us that there is no such thing as sparing the animal if you need to eat it.

It's the same as not sparing the apple tree. You need apples, you pull the apple off the tree. But the apple might want to be planted in the ground because it has seeds in it? Never mind! You eat the apple. You can spit out the seeds if you want, but the apple is made to eat, and the animal is no less than the apple, it's made for your purpose.

Therefore, anybody who thinks in the lines of the Torah, wouldn't even **think** about such an ideal as vegetarianism. Unless it's done for health, that's a different story.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt’l” that is based on a transcription of Rabbi Miller’s answer to a question from a member of the audience at one of his class Thursday night hashkafah lectures at his Flatbush shul, circa 1970’s – 2001.*

**Love of the Land**

**The Fireflies of Tsefat**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

Fireflies abound in the beautiful city of Tsefat during the summer. Veteran Jews warn the younger generation to refrain from doing them any harm.

What is the reason for this attitude towards fireflies?

Legend has it that in ancient times the city was ruled by a cruel despot who persecuted its Jewish inhabitants. One of his wicked decrees was to ban

Jews from having any light in their homes and synagogues at night, and he even ordered them to bring him all their lamps.

**Jews Would Not Be Able**

**To Study Torah at Night**

This meant that Jews would not be able to study Torah at night. They came in desperation to their rabbi and complained that there was no value in a life without an opportunity for Torah study at night.

“Go out en masse to the fields,” he advised them, “and gather the fireflies. Bring them to the Beit Midrash and study Torah by their light.”

The suggestion was followed and ever since then the Jews of Tsefat have a special appreciation of the fireflies in their midst.

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**A Tale of Two Children**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

When the couple came to register their three-year old child in the Talmud Torah in Bnei Brak, the principal noted that they were far more excited than ordinary parents who make a routine application.

“Don’t you remember us?” they inquired of the principal as tears streamed down the face of the mother.

**Reminded of What Happened**

**Four Years Before**

When he replied in the negative, they reminded him of what took place four years earlier. Childless for many years, they had approached the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, for advice in how to seek Heavenly help.

He relayed to them that the Chafetz Chaim had suggested that raising someone else’s child could bring the Heavenly blessing of raising a child of

their own. He therefore suggested that they offer to pay the tuition of a child in the local Talmud Torah whose parents couldn’t afford to do so and this would be tantamount to raising that child.

**Blessed that Same Year**

**With a Son of Their Own**

They followed this advice and made an arrangement to pay a year’s tuition for a poor child in the Talmud Torah they were now visiting. It was in that year that they were blessed with a son.

Even though they lived a considerable distance from this particular school, they insisted on registering their son in the school where their miracle began.

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Story of Mottel Goldgrebber**

Many years ago, in a little Russian town, there lived a Jew named Mottel Goldgrebber. Now, this was quite a funny name, for a digger ("grebber") he was, but certainly not a digger of gold. He was, in fact, a digger of sand and lime, which he would sell to local builders who used it to manufacture mortar and cement. Unfortunately, there was not much building going on in the little town, and so, Mottel's sales were few and far between. As a result, he earned very little, and his family had barely enough to survive.

**The Time Had Come to Marry**

**Off His Oldest Daughter**

Years passed thus, and it was time for his oldest daughter to marry. But Mottel had a big problem. For without money, how could he make a match? To make matters worse, the match of Mottel's dreams was a Torah scholar, and with no dowry to speak of, that would surely remain what it was, just a dream.

Then, one day, Mottel became rich! He was digging as usual, when his shovel struck something hard. Mottel bent down and picked up a stone that looked like a piece of glass. He was about to throw it away, but something told him to put it into his pocket, which he did. There it remained for several days until he took it to the only diamond dealer in the little town. The man studied it through his glass. He scratched it and bit it, and then he spoke: "This is no piece of glass. It is a diamond of enormous value!"

Mottel nearly collapsed. "How much would you venture to say it is worth?" he managed to ask.

"I don't have enough to buy it, but I advise you to go to London to my cousin, who is a diamond dealer there. He will tell you how much it is really worth. You are a rich man, Mottel!"

Mottel was dumb-founded. "I can't go to London. I have no money!"

"Don't worry. I'll advance you the money for the trip," the diamond dealer offered. "When you go to London, sell the stone and buy a lot of smaller stones. When you come home, we'll go into partnership together."

Mottel made all of the necessary arrangements and soon arrived at the port. By the time he arrived, though, he had spent nearly all of the money the diamond dealer had advanced to him, for he was not accustomed to managing more than a few pennies at a time.

**Approached the Captain of the Ship**

He approached the captain of the ship and showed him the stone, explaining that he had no money to pay his passage now, but he would soon be wealthy. The captain agreed to take him and soon Mottel was comfortably ensconced in a first class cabin.

Mottel couldn't believe his luck. He would often take the diamond from his pocket and hold it up to the sun to marvel at its beautiful glittering colors. Even when he was eating he would take out the beautiful stone to admire. One day, as Mottel was reciting the blessing after the meal, the steward arrived to clear away the remnants of his repast. He gathered up the cloth and shook the diamond together with the crumbs out the porthole.

**Calmly Confident that G-d**

**Would Not Forsake Him**

Mottel was horrified at what had happened, but what could he do? He calmly blessed G-d for having given and taken away, and then set about to think through the new development. Things looked as bad as possible, but Mottel was a man of faith and he was sure G-d would not forsake him.

One morning, as Mottel was strolling on the deck, the captain confided in him. "I want to ask you a favor, which will also be to your advantage."

The captain then explained that along with cargo which belonged to the king, he was carrying precious ore which was his own property. The problem was that the king's men would take that cargo as well as the king's. The captain proposed to put the ore in Mottel's name and Mottel would sell it when they reached London.

The documents were duly signed and sealed. The captain instructed Mottel that exactly two weeks after docking he would come to collect the money from the sale, less ten percent commission.

On the appointed day everything was completed. Mottel waited and waited, but the captain did not come. After several days, Mottel went to the docks to inquire about the captain. There he heard the shocking news that the captain had been involved in a drunken brawl and had been stabbed to death! Mottel investigated and found out that the captain had absolutely no living relatives. He had inherited the huge profits from the ore deal. He was richer now than he would have been had he sold the diamond.

Mottel couldn't understand his good fortune. When he returned to his little town in Russia, he discussed everything with his friend, the diamond dealer, who offered this explanation:

"You had done nothing to merit the diamond. It was simply a gift of Divine grace. But when you lost it, your faith never waivered. You put your trust in G-d and for that reason, you merited the second fortune, which is not only larger than the first, but which will undoubtedly remain yours as long as you keep your faith in G-d."

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

**Chassidic Story #793**

**The Haunted House**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000nQk0:001H6rCB00001dBt&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1360768627&randid=1634028893&content=central##)

In the city of Posen, Reb Boruch Batlan (the great grandfather of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Chabad) lived as a tenant in the multi-dwelling house of the goldsmith Avigdor Tuvia and his wife Gittel. These two, though they gave much tzedaka (charity) and helped many, were not refined people; he played cards, drank and used bad language, and his wife also spoke in an unrefined way and would curse when angered. People trembled in fear at her curses, for they were known to materialize.

**Avigdor and His Wife Pass Away**

In the year 5442 (1682), Avigdor Tuvia and his wife passed away, without children. Neighboring residents began hearing wild screams and drunken laughter coming out of the apartment the couple had lived in. Stamping and dancing feet would shake the house. Reb Boruch and family moved to another area, because they were unable to fall asleep at night.

On his next visit to his Rebbe, **Rabbi Yoel, the Baal Shem of Zamostch**, he told him about the haunted house in Posen and about its past residents Avigdor Tuvia and Gittel. Reb Yoel Baal Shem said that the only way to drive the demons from the house, was to turn it into a "Beis Medrash" Hall for Torah Study.

**The Rebbe Gives Clear Instructions**

The Baal Shem then gave clear directives: Ten of the Baal Shem's disciples should fast the following Sunday, read the Torah passages for fast days that begin Vayechal at the beginning of the Mincha Afternoon prayer at the end of the day, and then spend the night learning Torah continuously. The following morning, five Torah scrolls, each wrapped in a tallis, should be carried by two students each, and they should march from the shul to the goldsmith's house. At the door, they should call out to the demons, telling them, “Leave the house; make way for the holy Torah.”

They should then go inside and say certain chapters of Psalms, even if the demons had not yet exited. A prayer minyan should be convened there three times a day, and Torah classes for young and old should be organized. "Then everything will be in order," concluded Reb Yoel Baal Shem.

**The Mayor of Posen Investigates**

**The Haunted House**

Meanwhile, the Mayor of Posen, who was friendly to the Jews, came one evening to see for himself. When he heard the sounds of screaming, drunken singing and wild clapping of hands and banging on tables, he recoiled in horror. Being a devout Christian, he hurried to ask the bishop for a special prayer to remove the demons from the town.

The bishop called together his priests, and they walked in a procession, carrying their crosses and icons, until they reached the house where they sprinkled water on the walls and closed their eyes, mumbling a prayer.

The apartment was on the first floor and had four windows facing the street, where the priests were standing. Suddenly, the windows flung open and terrible faces popped out with blood-curdling yells, so frightening that some priests fainted and many of the onlookers fled in terror.

That Sunday, the ten followers of the Baal Shem did as he had instructed. Hundreds of men and women, both Jews and non-Jews, crowded outside, waiting to see what would happen. Unafraid, the disciples called out three times for the demons to leave.

When the noises from the house did not stop, they broke down the door and entered. At that moment, every window pane was shattered, as the weirdest collection of evil-looking creatures flew out in a stampede, as if fleeing for their lives.

**A Sickening Smell Remained in the Room**

They left a sickening smell in the room which they had just occupied, and a stinking smell pervaded the atmosphere. But as soon as the special minyan entered the room the smoke disappeared, taking the awful smell with it.

For six weeks, everything went smoothly, but then the terrifying sounds were heard once again, this time coming from the cellar. The neighbors, who had been enjoying the relief, were horrified to once again hear loud barks and noises, giving them no peace by day or night.

One tenant, a dealer in furs, was an opponent to the Baal Shem, and denied the miraculous nature of the demons departure the month before. Now that they had returned, he was delighted. When the neighbors suggested inviting the Baal Shem himself to resolve the matter, he became furious and declared he would fight to prevent this.

**A Customer Came to Examine Some Fur Skins**

One day soon thereafter, a customer came to see some fur skins, so the dealer sent his son with the customer down to the cellar, where his pelts were stored. As soon as they moved to open the cellar door, it flew open on its own, and out jumped the most frightening creature they had ever seen. The customer turned white as snow, and the son lost his mind. They both ran screaming into the street, eventually fainting from fright. When they came to, the son had to be tied with rope to keep him from damaging himself or others. Now, even the opposing tenant did not object to have the Baal Shem come and get rid of the demons.

**The Baal Shem Travels to Posen**

The Baal Shem traveled to Posen and arranged three Rabbinical Judges for a Torah trial he intended to instigate with the demons. It was to take place in the newly established Beis Medrash in the apartment. The room was prepared with a special area for the demons sectioned off by heavy furniture and curtains.

The Baal Shem called out for the demons to appear, warning them not to hurt anyone. As soon as the demons made their presence felt, the Baal Shem began, "I have called you to a trial according to the laws of the Torah, for you have exceeded the limits the Creator has set, by coming among humans."

The response was strange incomprehensible sounds. At the instructions of the Baal Shem, the head of the rabbinical panel stood up and decreed that one of the demons be granted the capability to speak clearly.

**Demons Defend Their Right to Stay in the House**

"We have every right to come here," the representative demon began their defense. "We were created by the curses of Avigdor Tuvia and his wife, Gittel. As they have no living children and we are their spiritual inheritors, their house rightfully belongs to us. We left the upstairs apartment only because the light of the Torah scrolls was too dazzling for us to tolerate."

The demons then began to roar and hiss loudly, terrifying all those present. The Baal Shem called out loudly, "I command you, in the name of the Holy Name that emerges from the verse (Psalms 91:7), ‘ thousand may fall at your [left] side and ten thousand on your right, but it shall not reach you,’ you be silent immediately and remain hidden from human eyes. And you are to cease emitting your nasty odor. I bind you to obey the decision of the Rabbinical Court."

**The Rabbinical Court Makes its Ruling**

The shul became absolutely silent and the demonic figures vanished from sight. The rabbinical judges ruled after a few moments of consultation that, as non-humans, the demons had no legal right to the property. Yoel Baal-Shem promptly ordered the intruders to depart peacefully without harming anyone or anything, and instructed the townsmen to recite the Ketores (Incense) passages from the sacrifice sections of the daily prayers, and then to convene a minyan for the Afternoon Prayer.

The demons were never seen or heard from again.

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Lmaan Yishmeu #101 and Memoirs of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, vol. 2, section #98-99.

Connection: Weekly Reading -consider Ex. 25:8.

Biographical note: **Rabbi Yoel Baal Shem of Zamostch** (1613-1688?) studied five years with great success under Rabbi Joel Sirkes (the Bach) and another five years under Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Wurms, the great kabbalist and founder of the tzadikim nistarim - secret righteous movement, whom he eventually succeeded. He in turn passed the mantle to Adam Baal Shem, who designated Israel Baal Shem Tov as his successor, under whom the movement became revealed in 1734 and eventually known as the Chasidim.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of the Ascent of Safed.* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)

**Tales from Renowned Children’s Storyteller Now Online**

**By Dovid Zaklikowski**

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| Rabbi Shmuel Kunda's creativity included richly compelling storytelling and illustrations. |
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Feitel van Zeidel was exasperated when his Chanukah *dreidel* top did not stop spinning. The rich man had paid Chatzkel Brown to create a *dreidel* that had the winning Hebrew letter *gimmel* written on all four sides, and Zeidel was planning to go home with all the spoils. But his top would not stop spinning. “Oh why doesn’t it stop?” he shouted and cried, “By now every *dreidel* would have been dropping!”

If this story sounds fictitious and fun—it is, and it has delighted tens of thousands of Jewish children since its release on audiocassette tape in 1970s, produced and narrated by the renowned Jewish storyteller Rabbi Shmuel Kunda.

In honor of Kunda's passing late last year at the age of 66, [*The Incredible Dreidel*](http://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/2076356/jewish/The-Incredible-Dreidel.htm) and other classic recordings by Kunda are now being made available online for the first time on [Kids Zone](http://www.chabad.org/kids/default_cdo/jewish/Kids.htm), the joint website of Chabad.org and Tzivos Hashem, the organization for Jewish children.

Shmuel Kunda was the writer, creator, illustrator and producer of Jewish stories and recordings that entertained and enlightened generations of Jewish children. Always an optimist, Kunda created stories that humorously intertwined moral lessons with encouraging tales for the young and the young at heart.



Rabbi Shmuel Kunda, zal

Rabbi Shmuel Kunda was born in Shanghai, China, where his parents met and wed after fleeing Europe during the Holocaust. The Kundas immigrated to the United States in 1947, and young Kunda attended The Rabbi Jacob Joseph School in New York. To the parents of many of his classmates—a generation where many had lost extended families in the Holocaust, life was a depressing struggle. “It is hard to be a Jew,” was a common statement made by many survivors.

Kunda wouldn’t hear of it, and he learned early in life that his positive feelings were shared by many other children born to Holocaust survivors. “These kids were going to Dodger games,” says Kunda’s son Aaron. “They were not interested in a depressing version of Judaism.”

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The desire to experience and teach Judaism joyfully motivated Kunda and a few of his friends to begin a weekly Sabbath gathering in the Borough Park neighborhood in Brooklyn, N.Y. The group focused on the positive, and soon began to attract hundreds of children every week.

It was there that Kunda discovered his unique gift for storytelling, and he would tell a different story each week, many of his own creation. The stories were entertaining, funny and always taught a Jewish lesson.

As in story of *The Incredible Dreidel*, Kunda’s lessons are taught through the medium of entertaining conversations. Even if you lose, “the game of dreidel is still so much fun!,” says one of the characters. To which Zeidel asks: “You mean you could still have fun even if you lose, where no one will care if they are losing or winning?” Van Zeidel concludes: “This young boy is genius, a scholar!”

“He went deep in to the heart of every boy and girl,” says Rabbi Yosef Karmel. Giving the example of a story by Kunda about a child who was not the best in his class, Karmel notes that for children who lacked self-confidence, Kunda showed them how “to feel good about themselves and excel at whatever they wished.”

**The Joyful Educator**

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| Kunda in the studio. |
| Kunda in the studio. |

The talented educator, storyteller, composer and illustrator received many offers to join ad agencies and other creative enterprises, says his daughter Sara Gestetner, yet he refused the substantial fees he could have earned from this work.

Telling and illustrating stories and creating professional recordings was very costly and not very profitable. Yet Kunda chose to devote himself to teaching Jewish values through his storytelling and his art.

“He had to give up a lot to do what he did,” his daughter says, “He thought about how people could benefit from his work, and he focused on that.”

Kunda’s desire to continue to create illustrations that would teach and inspire children caused him to suffer years of chronic shoulder pain that surgery might have alleviated. He believed that “art is a tremendous way to get through to kids,” says Aaron. “He did not want to have surgery, fearing that it might limit his drawing ability.”

The entertainer did not see children as a nuisance who just needed to be entertained, rather he saw them as real people, just like adults. “He greeted them, spoke with them and listened to them as one would with an adult,” recalls Karmel.

Kunda’s family said that his kindness when dealing with children was not only in person. He took the time to respond to every letter he received from his young fans, making drawings on the letters and taking what they wrote very seriously.

In a response to a letter from then 10-year-old Nissi Unger, Kunda wrote poetically that he cherished letters like hers. “To show me each time that the work was all worth it; ‘Cause making a tape takes much work till it’s done; But a letter like yours makes it all seem like fun!”

“He took the time to make me, a young dreamer, feel like I was the only fan of his in the world,” says Unger, who still has the letter, complete with personalized drawings.

Kunda consistently empathized with those around him, sharing in their joy. “He loved people, he absolutely loved people,” recalls his son Zalmy. When he did see someone who was down, he would always try to cheer them up. He notes that one woman recently told him that when she was a girl was five or six, she was crying, so he asked her name and drew a picture of her. “The girl was so touched and amazed that she keeps the drawing in her purse until this day.”

Above all, says his son Aaron, “he loved when people enjoyed themselves, he loved Judaism and expressed it via his storytelling and art work.”

“Rabbi Shmuel Kunda's colorful personality adds fun and drama to our children's audio collection,” says Dini Druk, director of Kids Zone. “The familiar voice of Zaidy,”’ one of Kunda’s best-loved characters, “along with his suspenseful stories and addicting songs is a treasured addition to our ever-expanding site.”

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