**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Tetzaveh 5776**

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**Story #950**

**Life and Death Matters**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?session_redirect=true&userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1455286605&randid=477081825)

In November 1938, before the onset of World War II, some Jewish children had the opportunity to escape from Nazi Germany and resettle in England through what became known as the *kindertransport*.

Unfortunately, there were not enough religious families able to accept these children and other families who were willing to take them were not willing to raise the children with Jewish traditions.

The Chief Rabbi of London, **Rabbi Yechezkel Abramski**, embarked on a frantic campaign to secure funding to ensure that every child would be placed in a proper Jewish environment.

Rabbi Abramski called one wealthy Jewish industrialist and begged him for a donation sizable enough to ensure that the children would be raised in proper Jewish environment. "It is *pikuach nefesh*!" cried Rabbi Abramski.

At that point, the tycoon became incensed. "Rabbi," he said, "Please do not use that term flippantly. I know what *pikuach nefesh* is. It means a matter of life-and-death! When I was young, my parents were very observant. When my baby sister was young, she was very sick. We had to call the doctor, but it was on Shabbos.

"My father was very conscientious of the sanctity of Shabbos. He would never desecrate Shabbos. But our rabbi told us that since this is a matter of life and death, we were allowed to desecrate the Shabbos! He called it *pikuach nefesh*.

"Rabbi Abramski," the man implored, "with all due respect. The children are already here in England. They are safe from the Nazis. The only issue is where to place them. How they are raised is not a matter of life or death!"

With that, the man politely bade farewell and hung up the phone.

That Friday evening, while the wealthy man was sitting at his Shabbos dinner, the telephone rang. He ignored it, of course. It rang again and again he ignored it. But it wouldn't stop; it rang incessantly. Finally, deciding that it possibly be signaling a true emergency, the man got up from his meal and answered the phone.

As he listened to the voice on the other end of the line, his face went pallid.

"This is Abramski. Please. I would not call on the Sabbath if I did not think this was *pikuach nefesh*. Again, I implore you. We need the funds to ensure that these children will be raised as Jews. It truly is a life-and-death matter"

Needless to say, the man responded immediately [after Shabbos] to the appeal.

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*Source*: Excerpted and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky in the name of Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin of Lev l'Achim in Shabbos Candle Lighting (Summer 2012), as printed in an email of Shabbos Stories for the Parsha (dkeren18@juno.com)

*Connection*: Weekly Reading of Trumah ("Contributions").

*Reprinted from last week’s Parshas Terumah 5776 email of KabbalasOnline.com*

**It Once Happened**

**The Tears of the Righteous Women**

One day there was excitement in the study hall of Zaslov: two emissaries of the Baal Shem Tov - the tzadikim (righteous) Reb Nachman Horodenker and Reb David Furkas - arrived on a mission from the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov had instructed them to raise the sum of sixty gold florins that very day. This money was needed for pidyon sh'vuyim (redemption of captives); the entire sixty florins had to be delivered immediately by special messenger, for time was short.

The emissaries arrived just as the people were finishing the recitation of Psalms. As soon as the emissaries finished speaking, a list was drawn up of all residents of the town who were the Baal Shem Tov's Chasidim. A Rabbinical Court was constituted to assess how much each citizen could afford to contribute. This court appointed collectors to go to peoples' homes immediately and collect the imposed tax. If there was anyone who did not have sufficient cash on hand, they could take from him some article of value as collateral until the sum was paid in cash.

Within less than three hours, the collectors returned to the study hall with the full amount of sixty gold florins. They had also drawn up a ledger in which they had recorded the names of those who had paid their assessment in cash, those who had made pledges and given collateral, and those who had given loans guaranteed by the collateral taken from those who had not yet paid.

Just then, wailing was heard in the antechamber of the study hall. Several women whose husbands were not at home had arrived: one was a tailor who worked somewhere in the country; one was a peddler who went from place to place with a pack full of merchandise; one was a teacher at an inn.

These women had heard that the Besht had sent emissaries to collect contributions for a great mitzva (commandment). Since no one had approached them to ask for a contribution, they had come themselves, bringing pledges (for they had not cash on hand). One had brought her candlesticks, one had brought a wine goblet, another had brought a down-stuffed pillow.

The collectors, in turn, declared that their mission was to demand cash or pledges from those whose names appeared on the assessment list given to them by the court. From people whose names did not appear on the list, they had no authority to accept cash or pledges. Upon hearing that their husbands' names were not even mentioned on the list, the women raised such a cry that even Reb Nachman and Reb David heard it, and became very frightened.

When the members of the Rabbinical court learned that the collectors had returned with their mission accomplished, they hurried through the rest of their prayers. Against their better judgment (for the husbands were very impoverished Chasidim), they accepted the pledges from the women. The special messenger was dispatched to bring the sixty gold florins to the Baal Shem Tov.

When the Baal Shem Tov's emissaries finished praying, a feast was prepared in honor of the great privilege the Baal Shem Tov had bestowed upon them. For the Baal Shem Tov loved them so much that he had given them the privilege of participating in the mitzva of pidyon sh'vuyim; he was so devoted to the Chasidim in Zaslov that the had sent to them the two famous tzadikim. All the Chasidim were in such a joyful mood: you can't imagine how great their delight was.

When the feast was finished, Reb Nachman spoke about the women who had wept while begging the collectors to accept their contributions toward the sum the Baal Shem Tov had assessed the Chasidim of Zaslov. "The Rebbe," said Reb Nachman, "is very fond of simple Jews. He says that a simple Jew who recites a chapter of Psalms with his whole heart and sincerely loves his fellow Jew is favored by the Supreme King more than great tzadikim.

"How profoundly genuine those women's tears were! Their sole desire was for their husband's names to be included in the list of those assessed to contribute money for the great mitzva of pidyon sh'vuyim. A mitzva is so precious, and the Baal Shem Tov so sacred to them, that when their husbands' names were omitted from the list their poor hearts broke and they burst out weeping. How precious such tears are to the Master of the World; how sweet and delightful they are to the Angel Michael and his 180 thousands legions of defending angels! Such genuine heartfelt tears can annul all evil decrees."

Reb Nachman then related an awe-inspiring story about an evil decree against an entire Jewish community. When a certain woman uttered a few truly sincere words that came from the depth of her heart while she wept profusely, the decree was annulled. "If only we would weep on the holy Yom Kippur with the same sort of tears with which our own women wept!" he concluded.

*Translated by Shimon Neubort, published by Sichos In English in The Making of Chasidim.*

*Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5776 edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**L’Maaseh Rav**

**The Teacher’s Fortunate Mistake**

Yissocher Frand once related a story: Rav Yehudah Mandelkorn, zt”l, the former Menahel of Neveh Zion in Yerushalayim, spoke about the effectiveness of a good education and good educators on the minds and hearts of children.

There was once a class of students who were so unruly and misbehaved, that they had two different teachers quit on them in the middle of the year. This class was so bad that substitute teachers began to refuse to take it.

Out of desperation, they called a teacher who had applied for a job earlier but wasn’t hired. They asked the woman if she would be willing to come in and finish out the year with the class, in return for the promise of a full-time teaching position the next year. She eagerly accepted.

The principal decided not to warn the teacher about this class, afraid that she would be scared off if she heard what she was up against. The new teacher took over her class and the principal was bracing himself for her to soon say that she was not able to do the job, but for some reason, this did not happen.

After the new teacher had been on the job for about a month, the principal sat in on one of her classes to see how things were going. To his amazement, the students were well behaved and enthusiastic! The teacher had full control over the class, and the kids were engaged and excited to learn.

When the class was over and the students had filed out of the classroom, the principal stayed behind to congratulate the teacher on a job well done. She thanked him for his kind words but insisted that it was he who deserved thanks for giving her such a special class for her first assignment.

She had been concerned, she admitted to him, that as a new teacher, she would have drawn one of the tougher classes which would have seriously tested her determination as an educator. She was quite thankful to him for giving her such a great bunch of kids!

The principal was astounded to hear this, and told her that he really didn’t deserve any thanks. She continued to explain, “You see, I discovered the secret about this class on my first day here. I looked in the desk drawer and found the list of the students’ IQ scores. I knew I had a challenging group of kids here, so bright and rambunctious, that I would really have to work hard to make school interesting for them because they are so intelligent.”

She slid the drawer open and the principal saw the list with the students’ names and the numbers 136, 145, 127, 128, and so on, written next to the names. She picked up the paper and handed it to the principal. The principal studied the paper for a moment, trying to remember why he had put that paper in the desk, when suddenly, it came to him.

He exclaimed, “These aren’t their IQ scores, these are their locker numbers!” But it was too late. The teacher had already expected the students to be bright and gifted, and they had responded with energy and eagerness to her positive view of them and her general impression, that they were assertive, intelligent, and very well behaved!

Rabbi Frand said that there is a message here for all of us, as educators, and even more importantly, as parents. If we put faith into our children or students and show them that we have expectations from them and that we respect them, they will live up to that and become great!

*Reprinted from last week’s Parshas Terumah 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Stories compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages**

**A Lesson from Non-Jewish Farming Boys**

Rav Yisroel Salanter, zt”l, once observed how young non-Jewish farmer boys were drafted into the Russian army, usually for 20 years at a time. He saw how before they left for the army, they were care-free, not orderly and not particularly concerned with their cleanliness or how they presented themselves. However, while they were in the army, they were drilled with discipline, orderliness, and how to keep neat and clean, and when they would return home many years later, they almost immediately went back to their old habits of disorder and disarray.

Rav Yisroel Salanter asked, “After 20 years of constant, harsh drilling and training, how could it be that these young men so easily lose all they have learned in the army?”

He explained, “The answer is very simple. These farmer boys had no interest in internalizing what they were taught, despite the fact they had lived it for 20 years. In order for one to improve their way of life, there has to be a yearning and a sincere desire to change, and this was missing from these boys.

What they accomplished in the army was only a temporary, external habit, until they were released from their obligation to live that way, and then they immediately went back to their prior ways.

The same applies to one who desires to work on his Middos, his Davening, his learning, his Emunah, or any aspect of his Ruchniyus. There has to be a genuine desire to change for the better if there is to be any lasting improvement in his life. It can’t be a temporary adjustment— even if it is a change that is decades long, it will only last if the adjustment is internalized!”

*Reprinted from last week’s Parshas Terumah 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Stories compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Emunah Daily**

**You Never Lose**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

Hashem has so much good that he wants to give us. He has told us over and over in the Torah that blessing comes from observing Torah and mitzvot. However, it will not be obvious from the regular way of the world. Many times it will appear that by choosing to do the right thing, a person will lose; and by choosing to do the wrong thing, he will gain. Nevertheless, it is all a setup; it's a test.

One person could violate the Torah and make money as a result. Another person could do a mitzvah and lose money. This is because Hashem doesn't make open miracles. Yet, in the larger picture, good always wins and evil always loses. Like it says in Kohelet, "שומר מצוה לא יידע דבר רע"- A person never loses as a result of doing a mitzvah; he will be reimbursed for any losses, and he will even gain. It says in Tehillim (Ch.37) "....**אל תקנא בעושה עולה**"-never be jealous of those who do evil, because their gains will not remain with them. The baal-emunah is never scared to do the right thing. He knows the real Boss is watching, and He will take care of him.

 Sometimes, Hashem has blessing waiting for us, hoping that we will make the right decision so that He can give it to us. A man, who we will call Yosef, told me that his employer notified him that his salary was going to be cut by 30%. He immediately started to look for another job. He made some phone calls, spreading the word, and a wealthy gentile business owner called him and said he was possibly interested in hiring him.

The owner wanted to meet at a certain non-Kosher restaurant to discuss the opportunity. Yosef asked if they could perhaps meet for coffee instead. The business owner said that he wants to go out for dinner. Although this was a great opportunity, Yosef courageously said, "I can only go if it's a kosher restaurant." The owner said that he'll get back to him. Yosef said that although he really needed this job, he was not going to compromise his standards.

A couple of days later, the owner called him back and suggested a kosher restaurant. He said that he was bringing his friend along. During dinner, the owner explained that he had asked his wealthy Jewish business friend to recommend a kosher restaurant and he ended up joining them.

After the meeting, the Jewish businessman called Yosef and said he was so impressed with his credentials that he wanted to hire him for his own business. They called the gentile owner and asked if it was okay and he said, "No problem." This business was very close to Yosef's house and the salary was more than he expected. Yosef said that his decision to go kosher immediately paid off.

It's not always this obvious. Sometimes we might never see a connection between a blessing and our decision to do good. However, Hashem is watching every effort, and He is trustworthy to pay-whether we realize it or not.

A diamond dealer told me that a representative of the Queen of Saudi Arabia came into his store a few years ago. He showed her different jewels, and she said that one piece looked very nice; it was a twenty karat diamond priced at over two million dollars. She said she needed to show a picture to the Queen, and she would get back to him. They had discussions back and forth during the week, and finally she said, "You have an appointment with the Queen on Friday evening at a certain hotel lobby."

He tried to suggest other times, but that was the only appointment available. The appointment was very close to the beginning of Shabbat. The man told the representative "I'm going to leave the ring with the hotel manager. If she likes it, she can call me, and we'll finalize."

The Queen was late. This man saw his cell phone lighting up with the number of the Queen's representative after Shabbat started. She called back a few times, and eventually the Queen herself called. But the man said, "I would not violate Shabbat for any amount of money."

He called them after Shabbat, but they didn't answer. The hotel manager told him that they had been interested, but when he didn't pick up the phone they decided to forget it. The man did not see two million dollars fall from the sky the next day. But he said, "I know באמונה שלמה-with complete faith, "**שומר מצווה** לא **יידע דבר רע"**. I didn't lose a penny by keeping Shabbat, I only gained."

Hashem did not make it obvious, but this is where emunah comes into play. A person only gains by following the Torah. Sometimes he sees the blessing the next day and sometimes years down the line. We must know Hashem isנאמן-trustworthy to pay everybody what they deserve.

*Reprinted from the February 8, 2016 email of Daily Emunah.*

**Lessons from Our Contemporary Sages**

**By Rabbi Dov Brezak**

One day Rav Avrohom Pam, zt,”l, (One of the great Torah sages of our generation) was standing outside his home with a student. They were engaged in a Torah discussion as the student’s young children played with each other. Suddenly, in the middle of the discussion Rav Pam turned to the children and said, “How does a person talk? Like this, the way I am talking to you . He then continued, “And how does a dog talk? By barking. That is its way of talking. Now next door to my house there is a dog. Most probably it is soon going to bark. But don’t be afraid that’s just the way it talks. (“Beloved By All,” Page 176).

Why did Rav Pam interrupt his Torah discussion. Wasn’t Torah learning important to Rav Pam? (First of all, we learn Torah in order to keep the Torah. If we learn Torah but we can’t be bothered to be kindly to others that need us at this time, then our Torah cannot be considered true Torah, heaven forbid. In addition Rav Pam was known for his love of Torah and his love for his students. Still as much as he loved the Torah he loved people and kindliness to others was for him a top priority.

One Shabbos afternoon a young scholar came to the house of the esteemed Gaon and zaddik Rav Avrohom Ganichovsky, zt”l, (Rosh Yeshiva of Tchebin Yeshiva in Jerusalem and student of the Chazon Ish). The young man was not paying attention and accidently rang the bell. But Rav Avrohom did not come to the door. The young man waited patiently and knocked but Rav Avrohom did not come to the door. Finally after 10 minutes Rav Avrohom showed up in his pajamas. He apologized profusely for keeping the student waiting. He realized that the young man must have been waiting for a while. He apologized profusely saying that he was very tired and fell into a deep sleep. That’s probably why he didn’t hear the avreich knocking.

The close family members explained that it was not Rav Avrohom’s custom to wear pajamas on Shabbos afternoon! Apparently he felt that if he would answer the door right away the avreich would be embarrassed because he rang the bell. Therefore Rav Avrohom went, put on his pajamas, and only appeared minutes later so that the young man would think that he was sleeping and did not hear the bell. In this way he would save the young man from becoming embarrassed.  (“Agan Hasahar,” page 170)

A. Why did it take Rav Avrohom so long to answer the door ? (He went to put on his pajamas. In addition he wanted the avreich to think he was sleeping, so he didn’t come out right away).

B. Why would the avreich be embarrassed if Rav Avrohom would answer the door right away? (Because he made a mistake (he rang the bell). When we catch others making mistakes it is embarrassing for them.

C. Do we ever catch others making mistakes and point it out to them?

A certain talmid chochom was notified that he had a cancerous tumor (heaven forbid). He began a campaign of praying at the graves of zaddikim. He also began to personally visit the homes of the live zaddikim to ask for their blessings and advice.

One day he decided to travel to Meiron and pray at the grave of Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Before going he decided to visit one of the great zaddikim of our generation and inform him of his plan.

The zaddik (whom he must have been familiar with) gave him a heartfelt blessing for a refuah and when he heard that he was going to Merion said, “I will give you a letter to place on the kever of Rebbi Shimon.”

The talmid chochom opened his eyes wide in wonder. What letter is the zaddik talking about, he thought.

“I will explain”, said the zaddik. “You must know that your wife is an exceptional zaddekes.”

The zaddik then related that before the talmid chochom got marred someone had hurt his wife (emotionally not physically) in a very serious way. “When the other person realized their mistake and came to ask forgiveness your wife to be was not prepared to forgive. The one who hurt your wife came to my house and asked what could be done to appease her.

“When I saw how broken the person was I sent a shliach (emissary) to your future wife asking that she forgive. Even after this request she still refused to forgive.

“After many many attempts and requests she agreed to forgive.

“When I heard that she was prepared to forgive I asked her to write down her forgiveness on paper twice. I asked her to keep one copy for herself and give one copy to me.”

Now the zaddik turned to the talmid chochom and said, “When you go to Meiron, take with you the letter of forgiveness that your wife wrote and before you begin to daven place the letter at the monument of Rebbi Shimon. Ask that in the merit of your wife’s forgiveness she be spared the fate of becoming a widow.”

The talmid chochom did as he was told and took the letter with him.

When he arrived at Meiron he placed the letter as he was told and cried and cried. He davened that in the merit of her forgiveness his wife should not become a widow and he should have a refuah sheleima.

After returning from his trip he went once again for his medical tests. The new results showed that the tumor was no longer there. It had vanished.

Rav Zilbershtein concludes this story by saying , “On any given day when the opportunity to forgive will present itself, it would be worthwhile to remember this story.” (Barchi Nafshi, Vayikra pg. 517)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5776 email of Peh Torah.*

**The Secret of Having a Successful Business**

Rabbi Chaim Kreisworth, of blessed memory, the Chief Rabbi of Antwerp, Belgium, tells of a member of his congregation who approached him obviously quite upset.

"Rabbi," he exclaimed, "I just don't understand." My friend Yankel and I began businesses of the same type at approximately the same time. He is doing remarkably well, while I am just floundering!"

"Are you working as hard as he is?" Rabbi Kreisworth asked.

"I sure am!" came the reply. "My place is right down the block from his, and I never close my shop until I see his car pull away!"

"Perhaps he has more employees?"

"It can't be. I checked with his manager, and I have recently added two more than he has!"

"Perhaps the decor of his store is more attractive to consumers?"

"It just can't be that, Rabbi. He remodeled last year, I checked the lighting, square footage, display cases – and on each count I outdid him when I remodeled a month later!"

Rabbi Kreisworth smiled and said: "I have it all figured out. The reason Yankel is doing so much better than you is that he’s only concerned in running his business. You, my friend, are running two! If you’d just stay in your own place, you will also become a success."

Comment: Because we don’t live in a bubble, we sometimes get so caught up with what other people are doing that we get distracted from our own tasks. The most applicable example of this would be chasing and then staring down a driver who cut us off on the road to teach him a lesson to be careful.

While we are looking at someone else’s “track,” we are taking eyes off our own lane, which may lead to a disastrous outcome.

We need to concentrate on our own path, only diverting our gaze in situation when it’s safe. If this applies on the actual road, how much more so in the road of life.

We can look at others for inspiration, or to learn what NOT to do, but ultimately we need to focus on getting to our destination at our own pace. If we do that, we can learn to live happier lives.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mishpatim 5776 edition of Mendel Berlin’s Torah’s Sweet Weekly email.*

**Bar Mitzvah on Death Row: A Texas Rabbi’s Unique Challenge**

**By Menachem Posner**

Jedidiah Murphy has spent the last 15 years on death row in Livingston, Texas.

Like all of the men in the Polunsky Unit, he’s been convicted of terrible crimes. On Oct. 4, 2000, high on cocaine, he shot and killed a 79-year-old woman, stole her car, and used her credit cards to purchase alcohol and cigarettes. Less than a year later, at the age of 25, he was sentenced to death.

“We first met a few months ago,” says Rabbi Dovid Goldstein, director of Chabad-Lubavitch of West Houston, associate director of Chabad Outreach in Houston and the lead Jewish chaplain in the Texas prison system. “I was in the prison to meet another inmate and came to visit him as well. We began talking, and he opened up. He told me about his childhood with his Jewish grandparents in Texas who raised him because his parents in New York were not able to, and he told me about his childhood in foster homes after his grandparents were no longer able to keep him.

“When I showed him my *tefillin* and asked him what they were,” continues Goldstein, “he told me, ‘Yeah, those are *tefillin*. I was in foster care by the time I was 13 and never got to have a bar mitzvah. For the past 15 years, the rabbis from Aleph Institute have been visiting me, and each time, they were prevented from putting them on me.’ ”

The Florida-based, Chabad-run [Aleph Institute provides services and support](http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380554/jewish/Prisoners-Families-and-Torah.htm) to Jewish military servicemen and women, as well as to Jews in prison and their families.

State law generally forbids prisoners on death row from having direct contact with their visitors, but Goldstein was determined to see if he could arrange for an exception.

**‘Reach Out to the Soul’**

When asked how he manages to work with people who have committed serious crimes, Goldstein replies that he makes a point of never researching the inmate’s criminal records. “If they tell me what they did, that’s their choice, but I never ask,” he says simply. “It’s not my place to research their challenges and conditions. My purpose is to reach out to the soul that’s beyond any external deficiencies and help that soul shine.”

This would not be the first time he would be putting *tefillin* on a death-row prisoner. He had done the same for Douglas Feldman, 55, in 2013—a week before Feldman would receive a lethal injection at the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville for a pair of double murders he committed some 15 years earlier. In that case, he was allowed direct contact with the prisoner—the first Jew known to have been executed by the State of Texas—since the *tefillin* were considered the man’s “last rites,” for which special allowances could be made.

Goldstein has a long history of advocating for the rights of Jewish people in prisons. “I first got involved shortly after my wife, Elisa, and I moved to Houston as Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries in 1998,” recalls the red-bearded rabbi, who grew up in McAllen, Texas.

“There was an older rabbi, Ted Sanders, of blessed memory, who was tasked with caring for the Jewish prisoners, and he asked that I assist him with some of his duties.

“One story that pierced my heart was that of a religious Jew from out of the country who was incarcerated near Dallas. He could not get matzah for Passover or even enough kosher food to subsist. At that time, there was no kosher facility in the Texas penal system, and there was just no system in place to facilitate religious observance. He could not even wear *tefillin* every day since it needed to be kept in the chaplain’s office, and the chaplain did not work every day.

“Here is the tragedy that really set a fire in my soul: For years, he begged and pleaded for a *sukkah*—a small, branch-covered booth used during the holiday of Sukkot—but we were always rebuffed. One year, I purchased a small collapsible *sukkah* and brought it to a meeting with the prison brass. Seeing that it could be easily taken up and down before and after every use, they relented. That year, he would finally sit in a *sukkah* like Jews all over the world. Three days after the meeting, he collapsed and was diagnosed with acute leukemia. He passed away on Rosh Hashanah, two weeks before Sukkot.

“From then on, the work I did to facilitate religious observance for Jewish prisoners is in his memory.”

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| Rabbi Dovid Goldstein—director of Chabad-Lubavitch of West Houston, associate director of Chabad Outreach in Houston and the lead Jewish chaplain in the Texas prison system—leads a ''shiur,'' a lesson, in the Jewish-enhanced program at the Stringfellow Unit, a Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison located in Rosharon, Brazoria County, Texas. |
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*Rabbi Dovid Goldstein leads a "shiur," a lesson, in the Jewish-enhanced program at the Stringfellow Unit, a Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison located in Rosharon, Brazoria County, Texas.*

Goldstein began drafting plans for creating an infrastructure that would accommodate Jewish prisoners, much of it based on what is already standard procedure in federal prisons.

Today, four units cater to the needs of Jewish prisoners (there are between 60 and 120 Jewish people incarcerated in Texas), and one “enhanced” unit, which has a kosher kitchen, weekly classes, and other services provided by Goldstein and Rabbi Mendy Traxler, program director of Chabad Outreach.

Goldstein also reports that he is often inspired by many of the inmates’ sincere wishes to better themselves. “There was one man who joined our kosher program barely knowing a word of Hebrew. One day, I’m in prison for services and I notice that he is praying in Hebrew as fluently as someone who grew up with it. That takes real dedication,” he notes, adding that some of the men regularly attend his lunch-and-learn classes after their release.

“I feel that prison is about rehabilitation,” he says. “I’m not there to judge them. They’ve been judged. I’m not here to punish them. They’ve been sentenced. I am here to help them live the rest of their lives and reach their potential from this day going forward.”

With Goldstein's intervention, Jedidiah Murphy had the long-awaited opportunity to don tefillin and celebrate his bar mitzvah, as he sits on death row in Texas.



*Death Row Inmate Jedidiah Murphy wearing tefillin for the*

*first time in his life with the help of Rabbi Dovid Goldstein*

It took the rabbi three months to make arrangements for the *tefillin* for Murphy, but he was finally allowed to return to Polunsky Unit on Feb. 2 with it in hand.

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“When he saw that I brought the *tefillin* for him, he smiled—and no one ever smiles on death row,” recalls Goldstein. “I had to give the guards the *tefillin* and *kipah*, as he was on the other side of a glass wall the whole time. He put a *kipah* on his head, and followed my lead as he wrapped the *tefillin* and said the Shema together. I purchased some chips and soda from the vending machine, and we had a bar mitzvah reception.”

Murphy asked to keep the *kipah* he wore that morning as a souvenir, as is commonly done by attendees at “normal” bar mitzvahs, but he was forbidden to do so.

He did have a photo taken, however. The rabbi paid the standard fee of $3, and a guard snapped a shot of the two of men separated by the glass wall.

“I know that people will be horrified by the fact that a man who committed murder is smiling in this picture, and I respect that,” acknowledges Goldstein, “but I sincerely believe that there is a spark of G‑d in each and every soul, and that my job as a rabbi is to reach into their souls and touch that spark to the best of my G‑d-given ability.

“Within the greatest darkness, you can always find light. Prisons—and especially death row—are the darkest places in the world. Can you imagine the light that came into the world when a Jewish inmate put on *tefillin*?”

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