**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Ki Sisa 5773**

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**The Power of Loving**

**Even a Sinner**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 **Some three hundred years ago a G-d fearing Jewish couple came before the Baal Shem Tov with a tragic story.**

 **Their son had left Judaism! He always was a different sort of child that never could get enough attention and when he wasn't the center of attraction he was miserable.**

 **His parents and teachers tried their best but to no avail and if they ever gave attention to his siblings or to other students he became depressed and enraged.**

**Easy Prey for the Christian Missionaries**

 **So when the Christian missionaries came around he was easy prey. They gave him unlimited attention and did everything possible to snare his Jewish soul. And their work bore fruit. His parents saw him being drawn into their trap but both they and the Rabbis they contacted were helpless to do anything until one day he was gone… no one even knew where he went.**

 **Now his parents were standing before the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem (a.k.a. Besh’t) founder of the Chassidic movement) asking for his help.**

 **The Baal Shem heard their request, waited a few seconds and answered.**

 **"If you want him to return, only your love will bring him back. You have to love him even more than before."**

 **"But it's not easy for us to love him." The father said. "To tell you the truth we are really angry. How could he do such a terrible thing? Such a sin?”**

 **"And after all we've done for him" His mother chimed in.**

 **"To tell you the truth” they said together, “he gave us so much aggravation that we have stopped mentioning his name in the house and we almost hope he won't return." The father continued. "But we haven't completely given up. And that's why we're here. Maybe you can take this insanity from his mind."**

**Pray to G-d that You Love**

**Him Even More than Before**

 **But the Besh’t only repeated, "If you want him to return only your love will bring him back. You have pray to G-d that you love him even more than before."**

 **The parents left the room in a daze. How would it be possible to love someone that disappointed them so deeply and totally? Who has become a stranger… an enemy!!?" But they decided to give it a try.**

 **Every morning they both woke early and said the entire book of Psalms for their son and the rest of the day mentioned his name with love and admiration in the home. And so they continued for months, but with no results.**

 **Then, one stormy winter night the wind began howling and whistling outside with such fierceness that they couldn't sleep. It seemed as though the world outside was falling apart and that at any moment their old wood hut would be uprooted and blown away. Suddenly they heard a loud thud at the door… as though a large animal was trying to enter.**

**They Heard a Faint Knocking Sound**

 **But then they heard a faint knocking sound. It was hard to make it out over the screaming wind but… there it was again… unmistakable knocking, someone was out there. Someone wanted to come in.**

 **The father went to the door, lifted the bolt, braced himself and as soon as he turned the key clouds of snow and ice thundered in like a hurricane and with them a human being!!! Who would go out in such a storm?**

 **But then, unexplainably, the wind suddenly seemed to die down and it was no problem to close and bolt the door shut again.**

 **The ‘guest’ was shivering like a leaf and crying like a baby. They brought blankets to cover him, brushed away the snow, lifted the hood of his overcoat and revealed… their son!**

 **It took a while before he thawed out and calmed down. He explained that the other night suddenly he had become disgusted with the Church and wanted to leave but the priests wouldn't let him go. In fact they locked him in a room high in some monastery until he 'repented'.**

 **Then, just as he thought that all was lost, suddenly a powerful wind began to blow through the high window of his cell so powerfully that it burst the door open, swept him through it and carried him for miles till it slammed him against the front door of ….. home!**

 **As the Besh't advised; their love brought him back!**

 **The second story is about the pupil and successor of the Baal Shem Tov, 'the Maggid' (Rebbe Dov Ber of Mezeritz).**

**Had Sixty Holy Pupils**

 **The Maggid was an intensely holy person who slept only moments each night and was constantly involved in Torah, prayer or deep contemplation.**

 **He had some sixty holy pupils each a genius with Divine intuition (ruach HaKodesh) and versed in all the books of Judaism and these pupils took turns serving him.**

 **One night, when Rabbi Eli’melech of Lezinsk was on watch, he noticed the Maggid become very deeply immersed in contemplation to the point that he was completely detached from this physical world. Suddenly the Magid opened his eyes turned to Rabbi Eli’melech pointed up and said.**

 **"Elimelech, do you hear what they are saying in the heavenly court? They are saying that the commandment of 'Loving another Jew' (Lev. 19:18) means you must love a total sinner just like you love a totally righteous ‘Tzadik’."**

**Changing One’s Priorities Toward Wayward Jews**

 **When Rab Elimelech later told the other Chassidim what he had heard it had such an effect on them that they decided that from then on they would change their priorities and devote more time and energy to wayward Jews.**

 **Both of these stories have the same point. In order to really love others we must rise above our normal ways of thinking; outside of even our 'religious' egos. That is the real goal of Judaism as the great Rabbi Akiva once said “Loving others as one’s self is the whole of the Torah”.**

 **The Torah, when combined with love, can be used to unite and bring blessing to the world. But when that love is lacking it can, G-d forbid, bring the opposite. Or in the language of the Talmud: “The Torah can be the elixir of life or of death” (Yoma 72:b).**

 **Namely; when the Torah is treated as part of the world (even the spiritual part) then, like the world, it is limited and divides between one Jew and another.**

 **But if the Torah is taken as what it really is… the will of the CREATOR; above ALL creation. Then it transcends all divisions and unites.**

**The problem is that in order to do this we too must rise above our natures as the Besh't and the Maggid instructed in the above stories….even our 'religious' natures.**

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Fathers and Sons**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

 There is a beautiful program in Israel and other countries called “*Avot u’Banim*” – “Fathers and Sons”. By offering treats and prizes to elementary school-age boys if they study over the weekend with their fathers in a central synagogue, this program has created an exciting revolution in father-son relations and has remarkably increased weekend Torah study.

**The Opposite is Sometimes True**

 While the father is almost always in the role of teacher, the opposite is sometimes true. The program directors are fond of showing a photo of a non-observant truck driver studying with his son who somehow is enrolled in a religious school.

 Anxious to participate in the program, the youngster brought along his father and began to teach him Chumash

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**A Tallis in Auschwitz**

**By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman**

 Among the prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp was the Veitzener Rav, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Meisels, who had served his community with distinction until the German invasion. When the Nazis forced Rabbi Meisels and his family from their home, there was little time or opportunity to take anything along.

 One item that the Rav made sure to take with him was a precious tallis which had been presented to him as a gift by his father-in-law. The tallis had belonged to the renowned gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, author of Yeytev Lev.

**The Power of Tzitzis to Protect Against Evil**

 Our Sages teach that tzitzis protect a person from evil, and Rabbi Meisels was convinced that a tallis which had been worn by a tzaddik would provide additional protection in the dangerous times ahead.

 Upon arriving at Auschwitz, the Jews were forced to surrender all their possessions. Thus, Rabbi Meisels had no choice but to hand over his precious tallis. He was determined, however, to do everything in his power to get it back. Through careful inquiries, he learned that all confiscated possessions had been brought to one central location in the camp. There they would be sorted; all items of substantial value would be sent to Germany for the government and army personnel to enjoy.

**Miraculously Found His Tallis**

 Somehow, Rabbi Meisels managed to join the group of prisoners that was assigned to sort these possessions. In the course of his work, he found his tallis. Joyously, he stuffed it inside his clothes and brought it back to his barracks. He knew that in doing so he had taken his life in his hands; if the guards found the tallis and realized that he taken it back without permission, he would probably be killed on the spot.

 To minimize the risks, Rabbi Meisels was forced to cut the tallis and turn it into a tallis katan (small tallis) which he was able to wear underneath his inmates' garb. This, too, was fraught with danger; the gray inmates' clothing was very thin and upon careful inspection, anyone might notice that Rabbi Meisels's clothing looked somewhat bulkier than everyone else's.

 This, however, was a risk that he was willing to take. Incredibly, he wore the tallis katan until the final days of the war, when he was working in a labor camp near the city of Branzweig. It was at that time that the Germans decided to empty the labor camp of its prisoners. The sound of American gunfire could be heard in the distance, and in attempting to flee, the ruthless Nazis took with them those Jews who still remained alive.

**Another Search Before**

**Boarding the Cattle Cars**

 Before boarding the cattle cars for yet another time, the inmates were searched in case they had anything of value on their person. It was then that the tallis katan was discovered. A German guard named Willy ripped the garment off Rabbi Meisels' body and threw it into a fire as the Rav watched in horror. Rabbi Meisels was devastated. He firmly believed that the tallis katan had been a source of merit for him.

 Now, with the Germans in a panic as the Americans bore down on them, the danger was perhaps greater than ever. And his tallis katan was gone. Still, Rabbi Meisels knew that the other Jews who had survived to that point had done so without the benefit of a tzaddik's tallis katan. Just as Hashem had watched over them, He would continue to watch over him.

 The Nazis herded their prisoners onto the cattle cars in their typically brutal way. The cars had little ventilation, and no food or water for the Jews, who were packed tightly next to one another with no room to move. Willy, the wicked guard who had destroyed the tallis katan, was one of those placed in charge of the car carrying Rabbi Meisels and his son, Zalman Leib.

**The Nazi Guards Aboard the Train Cars**

 The guards made sure that conditions for themselves in the car were better than for their prisoners. They placed benches down in the center of the car and sprawled themselves out. They also made sure to have an ample supply of food and drink. Darkness fell as the train wound its way along the countryside.

 Rabbi Meisels was overcome by exhaustion and attempted to sleep in the only way possible: as he stood, he turned his head to the left and rested it upon the shoulder of his son. Later, Zalman Leib would rest his head upon his father's shoulder. This was how they had slept on all their cattle car journeys since the war had begun.

 Rabbi Meisels had been asleep only a few minutes when he was awakened by his son's anguished voice. " Tatte (Father), my shoulder hurts so much! I'm sorry, but I can't take the pain any longer." Rabbi Meisels had no choice but to raise his head, though he found his son's complaint strange, since they had slept this way many times before. Rabbi Meisels' neighbor to his right then told the Rav to rest his head upon his shoulder, while Zalman Leib, now also overcome by exhaustion, placed his own head upon his neighbor to his left.

**The Sound of American Warplanes**

 Moments later, the sound of American warplanes was heard. The drone of the engines soon mixed with the sound of gunfire as the Air Force crews, mistakenly assuming that the train was carrying German soldiers, strafed the train.

 Suddenly, the gunfire ripped a hole in the roof of the car in which Rabbi Meisels stood, and shot directly between the tilted heads of the Rav and his son — hitting Willy and tearing off both his hands. Soon after, the sounds of the planes grew fainter as they headed off. The Jews in the car were all unharmed. Willy screamed in agony and pleaded for the others to do something for him. One of the other guards called out sarcastically, "Well, Willy, I guess you won't be able to throw the Jew's prayer shawl into the fire any more."

**Begging the Rabbi for Forgiveness**

 Upon hearing these words, Willy turned to Rabbi Meisels and begged forgiveness. Rabbi Meisels still had with him a small Book of Tehillim, from which he had never stopped praying since the German invasion had begun.

 Now, he and his son sang a chapter in unison, "Behold! The Guardian of Israel does not sleep, nor does He slumber One of the Jews in the car, who was not religious, said to Rabbi Meisels, "Please continue to pray for us. It is obvious that G-d is watching over you. And just as He made that gunfire miss your heads and punish your persecutor, so may He soon rescue us all from these evil tyrants" (from Sefer Mekadshei Hashem). (Shabbos Stories, p.175 R. Shimon Finkelman)

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

**With One Heart:**

**Growing Up with Four**

**Developmentally Disabled Brothers.**

**By Hinda Mizrahi**

*(Hinda and Robert Mizrahi were recently honored with OHEL's Children's Advocacy Award at the OHEL Annual Gala. This is an edited version of Hinda Mizrahi’s moving speech.)*

 I grew up with two "regular" brothers, four "regular" sisters and four developmentally disabled brothers.

 As consequence I am looked at with both awe and skepticism. I am someone to socialize with and befriend, but not someone to get too close to, or even marry, because my genes are considered blemished.

 My special brothers, who I would not trade for anything in the world, are considered imperfect and defective.

 I have seen people believe that they can dictate to G-d what challenges they want in life. But I have learned that G-d only gives what he knows we can handle.

 It is up to us to rise to the occasion.

 I am told that there is such a thing as sibling rivalry, that siblings are jealous of one another, or fight so much they can hurt one another physically and mentally. I wouldn't know. Because in my family of 11, we never fought, were never jealous, and certainly never used words like moron, stupid or crazy.

 We defended each other. We cheered each other on. We knew from a young age what challenges really meant.

 While some may poke fun at you for reading funny, or not reading fast enough, we knew there were those who couldn’t read at all.



***The Four Special Reisman Brothers***

**We Coached Each Other and Gave Each Other Tips**

 So we coached each other, gave each other tips, and tried to help each other succeed.

 When a friend came over to play and another sibling wanted to play along, we let them because we saw the hurt when one of our brothers waited for a friend to play with but no one came.

 We were good to our friends, too.

 When we were captain of a sports team, or brought our ball to play with at recess, we made sure everyone who wanted to play got picked for a team - no matter their ability, because we saw and felt rejection when one of our brothers sat on the side lines day after daym, wishing to participate in a game.

 When we were counselors and color war captains, we made sure each person had a place and felt included; because we saw our brothers fight with everything they had to be included and be just like everyone else.

 We saw as young kids what it really meant for parents to want their kids to be the best that they could be, and not what parents wanted.

**Sending Four of Their Six**

**Boys to Public School**

 Who would have believed that my father, a prominent Orthodox Rabbi of a large, illustrious community, and my mother, daughter of a world renowned Rosh Yeshiva, would send four of their six boys to public school, and set their goals as simply saying *shema* and blessings every morning, slowly and clearly, and to greet everyone they meet with a nice *shalom* and strong handshake while looking them in the eye?

 We learned what responsibility as a parent really meant, as my parents would get up and *daven* (pray) with my brothers every morning and say *shema* with them every night.

 Even today, when they live in an OHEL Bais Ezra home, they still *daven* with them, never relying on others to do what they believe needs to be done.

 We were reminded daily of the proper way to treat our parents as our brothers always listened to what my parents said, never spoke back to them or talked in a disrespectful manner.

 When I stepped out of line, even before my parents had a chance to discipline me, it was one of my special brothers who would say, “Hindy, that is not the way you talk to a mother!”

 And how can you argue with someone who has limited intellect, and is right?

**“It’s Nothing to be Embarrassed About”**

 We learned that when a sibling starts singing in a busy street, on a rainy day in April, it’s nothing to be embarrassed about.

 In fact, we could be happy for him, that he made the connection of "April showers bring May flowers," something we probably all understood right away but took him longer to comprehend.

 More importantly, there was nothing any sibling could do to embarrass us because we experienced very early on that being different still offers something unique to the family.

 In our home, there was never a bad morning because every morning meant a new day, a new beginning, something to look forward to.

**Why Monday Mornings Were Especially Exciting**

 Monday mornings were especially exciting because Monday and morning both started with the letter “m.”

 We knew the importance of structure because structure has a way of keeping things in line and manageable.

 But we learned very early on that life is unpredictable, and you can plan and hope, but humans and children are not robots, and things sometimes happen or change - just because.

 We learned how to make sacrifices.

 Yes, it hurt that I couldn't get a cabbage patch doll when all my friends had one.

 But if it meant my brother got an extra physical therapy lesson and he could now ride a bike – I was excited for him and I learned to play with my friend’s doll.

 Lastly, and probably most importantly, I learned the true meaning of love.

 I learned what it means to love someone and not see their faults, and to love with no strings attached, because in my brothers’ eyes I am perfect; they love me for being me and expect nothing back.

 They are truly excited to see me every time I see them, or they see a friend of mine.

 They call me daily to say hello, yet when they meet someone who knows me, they will ask them to send me their regards because i am their sister, their perfect older sister.

**Suffering the Death of One of My Special Brothers**

 This past summer, we suffered the death of one of my special brothers, Moishe.

 A friend of mine, who hadn't had the opportunity to meet Moishe commented that he never saw grown men cry at a funeral like they did at Moishe's.

 Over a thousand people were at his funeral, a few hundred at his grave side; many cancelled their vacations to be around for shiva, as they mourned and felt Moishe's loss;

 But only 12 people sat shiva because we were his kin. We were special.

 So the next time you meet someone who looks funny or acts funny, whose mental capacity is different, remember they are not just a physical body with a gene or two that went wrong.

 They have a special story to tell. They have a unique story to share.

 Get to know them. Get to know their parents and their siblings.

 You will be transformed. You will be inspired. You will become special.

**The Legacy of OHEL Bais Ezra**

 Growing up, I always wondered what would happen with my brothers when my parents could no longer care for them. Would my siblings and I be able to care for them like my parents did?

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***A Special Family at the Recent OHEL Dinner***

 Would we be able to give them the love and security that made them so happy?

 Now, I don't have to worry because I know they are in good hands. At their home in OHEL Bais Ezra, they are people not numbers.

 They have healthy meals; go on outings, trips and summer vacation. They go to work or programs and they are surrounded by caring staff. They even got to pick the paint color of their bedroom before they moved in.

 And when tragedy struck our family, OHEL was there to help in every way they could, whether it was doctor appointments, overnight hospital stays, or even breaking the sad news to my brothers the right way.

 They have laughed with us, and cried with us. They have shared in our joys and in our sorrow.

**Not an Honor that Belongs to Me Alone**

 But this is not an honor that belongs to me alone.

 It is an honor I share with my siblings; my "special" siblings, because they helped make me who I am today. They made me worthy of receiving such an honor.

 It is an honor I share with my "regular" siblings because it is their story, too.

 It is an honor I share with my husband, sibling-in-laws, and their parents because they didn't see us as damaged goods, but rather as siblings of a beautiful story.

 It is an honor that I give to my parents, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Reisman, the true owners of the story. They are the master story tellers.

 Thirty plus years ago, when situations like this were kept hidden in the closet and not talked about, they realized they had a beautiful story to tell and brought it to the forefront.

 It is a credit to their outlook and acceptance of life and their guidance through life that a small story of young children became a grand story of grown adults.

 It is an honor that I, along with my parents and siblings, thank G-d for choosing us to be the vehicle to tell this special story.

 And thank you OHEL for all that you provide my family, the comfort, the care and the peace of mind. And for allowing me to share my story.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**A Dispute in the**

**Wedding Party**

 The Gemara in Shabbos (130a) says that "every kesuvah - (wedding) involves some sort of disagreement." When the brothers Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg and Reb Pinchas the "Haflaah", made a shidduch among their children (first cousins), Reb Shmelke turned to his brother before the Chupah and asked him how they were going to fulfill the words of ths Sages quoted above that every wedding involves some sort of disagreement among the parties?

 Reb Shmelke didn't wait for answer, he immediately told his brother Reb Pinchas: "You are greater than me in Torah and fear of Heaven!" At which time his brother Reb Pinchas immediately responded: "No, YOU are greater than me!"

 And with that, the two brothers fulfilled the words of the Sages!

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “A Taste of Chassidus.”*

**Who's Choni HaMaagal?**

 Choni HaMaagal was a scholar from the first century BCE. His name "HaMaagal" means "the circle drawer." This name is derived from an incident that is recorded twice in the Talmud.

 When Israel suffered from a terrible drought, the people approached Choni to pray for rain. He drew a circle around himself and swore to G-d that he would not leave the circle until G-d provided "rain of blessing."

 This prayer for rain that was answered took place on 20 Adar (this Shabbat). His tomb, a place of prayer for many, is in Chatzor HaGlilit, Galilee.

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Miraculous Story**

**Of Rabbi Meir**

 Bruria sat at the table staring at the open scroll of Torah, but she didn't see the words before her. Her anguished past was usually held at bay by her intense study of the Law, but on days like today the painful scenes intruded into her present and irrepressibly dominated her thoughts.

**The Martyrdom of Bruria’s Father**

 The horrible scene was as fresh in her mind as the day on which it had occurred. "Father, Father," she screamed over and over. She had tried in vain to go to him, whether to help him or to join him in his martyrdom. It seemed like only hours had passed since his pure soul escaped from his tormented body, flying heavenward together with the holy letters of the Torah scroll wrapped around his body which refused to burn. The same day saw the martyrdom of her holy mother and the enslavement of her sister.

 Her husband, Rabbi Meir, entered the room, interrupting her thoughts, but she didn't look up. "What are you thinking of, my wife?" he asked softly.

**Thinking of Her Imprisoned Sister**

 "So much time has passed since that terrible day. I'm thinking about my poor sister. Oh, Meir, we must do something again to try to ransom her. It's been so long since we've tried. Please, I can't bear to think of her a captive of the wicked Romans. I can't live with myself, imagining what she's going through."

 "You're right, Bruria. I promise to try. Perhaps G-d will have mercy on her and intercede on her part. Perhaps this time I will succeed."

 The following day Rabbi Meir prepared for his mission. He changed from the clothing which marked him as a scholar and dressed for the road. He loaded his horse with provisions, and carefully tucked in his belt a bag of gold coins. With this small fortune he hoped to bribe the prison guard and free his sister-in-law.

 When he reached the Roman fortress, he dismounted and approached the guard. "Halt! What is your business here?" barked the Roman guard.

 "I have come to ransom the Jewish girl who is being held here."

 "If that's it, you may as well get back on your horse. There's nothing I can do about it. I have superiors to answer to. Do you think I can let prisoners out just like that? What do you think would happen to me?"

 "I understand your problem, well," replied Rabbi Meir as he removed the bag of gold from his belt. He made sure that the guard saw the bag and heard the clinking of the coins.

Tries to Bribe the Guard with the Bag of Gold

 "Maybe the contents of this bag will solve your problem," said Rabbi Meir. "Keep half for your trouble, and use the rest to keep the other guards quiet. I'm sure that now you can free the girl."

 The guard stood wide-eyed, looking down at the bag. Only his fear stopped him from grabbing it. "If they find me out, I'll be in the kind of trouble there's no getting out of."

 "I will make you a promise: If you need help, just cry out, 'G-d of Meir, answer me!' and you will be saved."

 "How can I trust you?" No sooner had the guard uttered his question when Rabbi Meir spotted a pack of wild dogs. He picked up a few stones and threw them at the dogs who leaped at him with bared fangs.

 "G-d of Meir, answer me!" cried out Rabbi Meir. Instantly, the dogs ran away. When the guard saw that, he reached for the bag of gold. Obviously, this wasn't your average horseman, but a miracle-worker.

 In a few moments Bruria's sister was running down the road, free.

**A Major Government Investigation is Begun**

 When news of the girl's escape reached Rome, a government investigation was quickly begun. It wasn't long before the guard was implicated, convicted, and condemned to death by hanging. He was led to the gallows and the rope placed on his neck. But he hadn't forgotten what Rabbi Meir had told him, and at the last moment he cried out, "G-d of Meir, answer me!" At once, the rope snapped. The hangmen brought a new rope, but no matter how they tried, something always went wrong. Even the executioners sensed that something out of the ordinary was occurring.

 They removed the guard from the scaffolding and asked him, "What's going on here? It seems that some great power is saving you. Nothing like this has ever happened before!" The guard told them about the strange horseman who had come to ransom the girl, and about his promise of help.

 The strange story was told and retold until it reached the ears of the highest officials in Rome. Rabbi Meir's reputation as a holy man who could work miracles was well known to them, and they surmised that the daring horseman was none other than Rabbi Meir himself. No effort was spared to apprehend and punish him. Those Jews would be taught an indelible lesson.

 One day as Rabbi Meir was walking down the street, he was recognized. He fled down the winding, narrow paths as fast as he could, but soon they would catch up to him. Just then he saw a non-kosher restaurant. This was the perfect place to hide. Why, who would imagine that the great Rabbi Meir would be found inside a treife restaurant? He entered, ordered some food, and sat with the plate in front of him, sticking one finger into the food, while licking another.

**Seemingly Enjoying a Plateful of Non-Kosher Food**

 Just as he had assumed, his pursuers arrived in no time. They looked into the door and stared hard at Rabbi Meir. No, it couldn't be - they must be mistaken. True, there was a man who looked just like Rabbi Meir, but he was sitting and licking his fingers, enjoying the plateful of non-kosher food. No, it couldn't be Rabbi Meir. They quickly left to continue the search elsewhere.

 Rabbi Meir waited another few minutes and then left. He knew that he couldn't stay in the Holy Land any longer. That very day Rabbi Meir would make plans for his escape to Babylonia and safety.

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

**Chasidic Story #796**

**Two Points**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

 When Rabbi Moshe Weber was diagnosed with serious heart illness, money was raised to fly the tzadik from Jerusalem to the well-known heart specialists in South Africa.

 When Mordechai Abraham from Toronto started becoming more religious, he decided to go to Israel and study in Yeshiva. During his time there in 1980 he became quite close to Rabbi Moshe Weber, one of the most beloved and holy inhabitants of Jerusalem.

 Whenever he could he went to visit him, to imbibe of his wisdom, his warmth and his exemplary personality traits. For several months he even had an extraordinary arrangement with him on Shabbat mornings.

**Early Morning Torah Studies**

 Mordechai would get up at 5 A.M. in order to be at Reb Moshe's house by 5:30. They would study the weekly reading with the commentaries of the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Mezritch and the Alter Rebbe of Chabad for two hours, and after walk to the Western Wall and pray the Morning Prayers for another 3-4 hours. Then they would leave the Wall and walk hand-in-hand back to Reb Moshe's house for the Shabbat Day meal.

 After his year in Israel culminating in receiving rabbinical ordination, he continued his studies in the USA. In 1982 he married a young woman from New York and a year later accepted a job offer from the Jewish community in Johannesburg, South Africa. The entire time he maintained his connection with Rabbi Weber through phone calls and letters.

**Diagnosed with a Serious Heart Illness**

 In the early 1990's Reb Moshe was diagnosed with a serious heart illness. Rabbi Abraham took it upon himself to raise the money to fly the *tzadik* from Jerusalem to South Africa to receive medical treatment from the well-known heart specialists there. Both the fund-raising and the surgery by Professor Kinsley were successful.

 After the surgery, Reb Moshe stayed with the Abrahams for a month, recuperating. One day, while he was resting, his young rabbi host decided to ask him a question. He loved playing basketball with Israelis in the community, and felt it afforded him the opportunity to get needed exercise and have fun, as well as the hope to be a positive Jewish influence upon them, but he wasn't sure if this was proper behavior for a rabbi.

**How Do You Dress [When Playing Basketball]?**

 Reb Moshe, a long-time resident of Meah Shearim, a very strictly religious neighborhood in Jerusalem, appeared skeptical. "How do you dress?" he questioned. [Many religious boys in Israel remove their dress shirt, *tzitzis* and *kippah* when playing sports. -ed.]

 "I play dressed just as you see me now," replied Rabbi Abraham; "I don't even wear short-sleeved shirts."

 "But what is the point of it anyway? Reb Moshe pursued. "What good comes out of it?"

 Just at that moment-really, no exaggeration, right then!-they heard a knock on the door. In came Avi Ovadia, an Israeli who had first come to South Africa many years ago as a security bodyguard for someone important in the South African government, and later decided to settle there and go into business. He announced that he wished to receive a blessing from the *tzadik* Rav Moshe Weber, for his most recent economic venture had lost a fortune.

**Asks Questions of Avi**

 "Tell me about yourself," Reb Moshe queried, in Hebrew.

 "I'm a *Baal Teshuva*" (a Jewish returnee to Torah observance)."

 "Did someone influence you?" asked Reb Moshe.

 "Rabbi Mordechai Abraham, your host!"

 "And how did you get involved with him?"

 Avi's innocent reply to this query was: "From playing basketball together."

 Divine Providence strikes again!

 But the story does not end there.

 While Rabbi Abraham was raising the money to help Rabbi Weber, the main Lubavitch-Chabad educational institution in all of South Africa, the Torah Academy in Johannesburg, was in the midst of a vital fundraising campaign. The administrators were quite annoyed with Mordechai for his "competition" on behalf of a "foreign" cause.

 Part of their campaign was a large raffle, in which first-prize was an expensive luxury car, a Daimler, that lists for around $50,000. Avi Ovadia, a short time before he received a whole-hearted blessing from Reb Moshe, bought a ticket in this raffle.

**Won the Raffle’s Grand Prize**

 He won the grand prize, the Daimler!

 Rabbi Abraham came home one night to find an envelope marked "*Tzedaka*" (charity) with a cash check inside for 18,750 rand. He understood that this was maaser, 10% of the proceeds from the sale of the car.

 He donated it right back to the Torah Academy!

 So, with the R18,750 from the sale, together with all the income from the lottery tickets, the school ended up with a much more successful fund-raising campaign than they had dared to anticipate...thanks to the "competition"!

 And yes, in case you are wondering, Rabbi Mordechai Abraham is still playing basketball--twice a week with Jews half his age.

 First heard from Rabbi Mordechai Abraham's son Dovi (DovBer) during his visit to Israel in 5772/2012, at the *Shushan Purim* celebration at my son Yehuda's home, then in Old city Jerusalem (where he had a salaried position working 4-6 hours a day at the Chabad "Tefillin Stand" on the men's side at the Western Wall, which was started by Rabbi Moshe Weber after the Six Day War in 1967, and maintained by him nearly single-handedly for almost 20 years!). This stretched into Shabbat, which took us to only two days before Reb Moshe's yahrzeit! Now, I can't vouch for my sobriety at the time, or Dovi's, but recently I was able to check the details with Rabbi Mordechai by telephone and email and amend my notes accordingly.



**Rabbi Moshe Weber putting tefillin on an IDF soldier at the Western Wall**

**Biographical Notes**

 *Biographical notes*: Rabbi Moshe Weber [5 Kislev 1914 - 18 Adar I 5700/2000] was a central and beloved figure in Jerusalem's religious community. Nearly every day he went to the Western Wall from his home in Meah Shearim to pray and to help visitors wrap tefillin.

 Less publicly, he distributed enormous sums of tzedakah to the city's poor. It is known that, decades ago, the Lubavitcher Rebbe said of him that he is one of the holiest and kindest people in the world. He published several volumes of Torah insights in Yarim Moshe. There is an ongoing periodical of his teachings distributed weekly called Shemu V'Techi Nafshechem, which also offers for sale his audio recordings.

**Helping Jewish Addicts and Psychiatric Patients**

 Rabbi Mordechai Abraham of Johannesburg works with Jewish Addicts , psychiatric patients and is a hospital chaplain. He learns Talmud and jewish law in depth and teaches Gemorrah and Chassidus. He can be contacted at addictsrabbi@gmail.com or +27-83 288-4568

 *Connection*: Seasonal--13th yahrzeit of Rabbi Moshe Weber

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.com, a project of Ascent of Safad.*

**Chabad Librarian Honored By the Queen of England**

**By Karen Schwartz**

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| Zvi Rabin was honored with an MBE award – Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire – for his voluntary role over more than 40 years in starting and growing the Chabad-Lubavicth Library in Stamford Hill, London. |
| Zvi Rabin was honored with an MBE award – Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire – for his voluntary role over more than 40 years in starting and growing the Chabad-Lubavitch Library in Stamford Hill, London. |

 Bookworms often live in a fog of fiction – legends and fairy tales, battles and drama, building great things, even a brush with royalty. And sometimes, those tales actually come to life.

 Take the story of Zvi Rabin.

**Inspired by the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**To Found a Jewish Lending Library**

 The British native founded the Chabad-Lubavitch lending library in Stamford Hill, England, more than 40 years ago, after hearing a talk on the topic by the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of righteous memory. It was around 1970, and Rabin was a young student of librarianship who got married in the middle of his course work to a young lady named Feigie, who shared his connection to Chabad.

 “At the time, I worked at a college library,” recalls Rabin. “I often stayed up late into the night to listen to the Rebbe’s talks by telephone hookup.” In one particular talk the Rebbe discussed the importance of setting up libraries in all Jewish communities. But who would take on the task?

 “Everybody knew I was a librarian, so we started 40 years ago and never let up,” he says.

 After a year of involvement in the effort, he traveled to New York and spoke with the Rebbe about libraries – the ones he was working at for a living and the new Lubavitch one. “The Rebbe counseled me not just about the books,” Rabin recalls. “He also spoke to me about library cabinets and library furniture and how to treat people in libraries.”

**Eventually He and His Wife**

**Became Full-Time Volunteers**

 Inspired, he and his wife eventually went from volunteering their time on Sunday evenings to full-time volunteer work at the library. They embraced the lifestyle, making it their goal to open up the Jewish world for others. Little by little, they seemed to do just that.

 Two-and-a half years ago, the couple moved the library's growing collection into a bigger space on the first floor of the Lubavitch Children’s Centre in Stamford Hill – and it has simply “taken off,” they say.

 It seems that the Queen of England agrees with that assessment. Rabin and the library have been honored with an MBE award – Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire – after being nominated for services to libraries.

**Goes With His Family to Buckingham**

**Palace to Receive His Award**

 The biannual honor roll fills up with everyone from politicians to sportsmen to ordinary people who are recognized for accomplishments such as his, according to Rabin. So he headed to Buckingham Palace this week to receive the award, accompanied by his mother, wife and a daughter whose birthday is that same day, Feb. 20.

 Rabin says he hopes to see Chabad-Lubavitch libraries receive more of a spotlight as a result of his award. While Chabad might be known as a great place to learn about tefillin, mezuzahs or keeping kosher, he hopes to see libraries take on more of a central role. He said he would also hopes to see Chabad librarians get together annually to discuss how to increase their collections and clientele.

 Rabin hopes the award raises visibility for his library, which today holds about 18,000 books in Hebrew, Yiddish and English. It lends out everything from children’s books to folios of the Talmud, books on marriage and a variety of other texts – to the tune of 5,000 to 6,000 books a month.

 The Rabins keep long hours – he estimates 50 or so a week – to accommodate patrons. “One of the secrets of making a library a success is to have very long hours,” he says. It sees people of all backgrounds come for recommendations, resources and advice, and draws a much wider mix of readers from other Chasidic and Orthodox groups where it used to see more of a Chabad base.

**A Welcome Place of Refuge**

**For a Mother of Four**

 Zissi Ciment of London is an avid reader who discovered the lending library as a teen. Now a mother of four, “library” was one of her 2-year-old son’s first words, she says. She considers the library her place of refuge and brings her children there frequently.

 She likes the layout, the atmosphere and the availability of new books she can put on reserve, she says. It also offers a selection she can count on: “In this library, every single book is kosher, inspirational and educational.”

 As for the librarian himself, Ciment says she’s glad to see Rabin recognized publicly for the volunteer work he does day in and day out with his wife. “They do this all single-handedly; it’s very special,” she says. “They really deserve it. You don’t see this kind of devotion for altruistic reasons very often.”

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