

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS SHOFTIM 5779

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Sages through the Ages

Chacham Zvi

Trebic, Moravia 1656 – Lvov, Poland 1718

By Dr. Benji Schreiber



Rav Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi, known as the Chacham Zvi after his sefer of teshuvos, was born in Moravia, now in the Czech Republic. In his youth he learnt Torah from his father, Rav Yaakov, and travelled to Alt-Ofen (now Budapest) to learn with his grandfather, Rav Efraim HaCohen, author of Shaar Efraim.

From there he went on to Salonica in Greece, where he learnt for two years under Rav Eliyahu Kobo. He then moved to Constantinople where they called him Chacham, giving him the Sefardi title even though he was an Ashkenazi Rov.

He returned to Alt-Ofen and married and had a daughter. However in 1686 the Austrians invaded Alt-Ofen and tragically a canon shot killed his wife and daughter. He moved on to Sarajevo, where he took a post as Rav and then in 1689 he went to Berlin, where he married Sarah Rivka, the daughter of Meshulam Zalman Mirels Neumark, the chief rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck.

These three communities functioned as a single unit, קהילות אה"ו, for about 140 years. He spent 18 years in Altona (part of Hamburg), where he set up a Klaus (yeshiva). When his father-in-law passed away, the community could not decide whether to appoint Rav Ashkenazi or Rav Moshe Rothenberg.

They decided to appoint both on six month rotations. However, controversies ensued and in 1709 he stepped down from that role to continue in his Klaus. One of the controversies involved the kashrus of a chicken found to have no heart!

AMSTERDAM

He was appointed as Rov of the Ashkenazi community in Amsterdam with a huge salary of 2,500 Dutch guilden. He was firm and unselfish and showed no interest in money. His learning was profound and he was well respected for his clarity and erudition.

While he was in Amsterdam he published his book of teshuvos, Chacham Zvi. Although he was appointed with great warmth, one group was bitterly opposed to him and by 1712 they asked him to resign, which he would not do. Rav Moshe Chagiz who had come from Eretz Yisroel to raise money and lived in the Chacham Zvi's home.

They were both vehemently opposed to a locally appointed Rav, Rav Chayun, who they saw as a follower of Shabbtai Zevi. A huge battle followed with polemical books written by both sides and the rabbonim of Europe involved. Chacham Zvi ruled that Rav Chayun was a heretic and that his Seforim should be burned.

The community sided with Rav Chayun and the Portugese community persuaded the authorities to expel the Chacham Zvi and Rav Chagiz. Following this controversy he had to leave Amsterdam. He sent his family on to Emden, in North West Germany and he came to London to help arbitrate in a British controversy surrounding the Spanish and Portuguese leader Rav David Nieto who was accused of Spinozism.

Chacham Zvi exonerated him and praised him (described in Teshuva 18). From London he went to Lvov, then in the Kingdom of Poland, now in the Ukraine, where he was Rov until his death.

HALACHIC RULINGS

One of best-known rulings of the Chacham Zvi include his ruling that anyone who is in Eretz Yisroel for Yom Tov should keep just one day of Yom Tov

like Bnei Eretz Yisrael (Teshuva 137). His son, Rav Yaakov Emden famously disagreed with him, and the consensus amongst most poskim is to follow Rav Yaakov Emden rather than his illustrious father in this case.

The Chacham Zvi's ruling about the chicken without the heart is fundamental for questions of organ transplantation. Although the Gemoro discussed cessation of breathing as a sign of death, Chacham Zvi argues that really the beating heart is the true sign of life (Teshuva 77).

CHILDREN

He had 16 children in all, including a daughter from his first wife who was killed. His daughter Miriam was the grandmother of the first Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Rabbi Solomon Heschel.

Many were involved in Rabbinic positions. The best known was his son, Rav Yaakov Emden. Rav Chaim Halberstam, the Divrei Chaim of Sanz (1793-1876), was a descendent.

Reprinted from the Parashat Eikev 5779 email of ONEG SHABBOS 5779 (London, United Kingdom)

Rib Roast for Sale

\ Rivkah Reiser is doing her Shabbos shopping and she goes into Yitz's butcher shop that has a sign in the window saying, "Sale! Rib Roast Five Dollars/Pound!" Rivkah thinks that she's found herself a real metziyah (a find) so she asks the butcher for ten pounds worth.

But he shakes his head and says, "Sorry. I'm all out."

Disappointed, Rivkah goes down the street to Shloime the Butcher and asks, "How much is your Rib Roast?"

Shloimie replies, "It's \$15 per pound."

"Fifteen!?!?" Rivkah exclaims. "Just up the street, Yitz sells it for five dollars!"

Shloimie the butcher smiles calmly and asks, "Does he have any?"

"No. He's out of it right now."

"Well," says Shloimie, "When I don't have any, I can also sell it for five dollars per pound!"

Reprinted from the Va'eschanan 5779 email of Lekavod Shabbos.

Only Kosher Restaurant in London's West End Rescued

Reubens, which had operated for 46 years before being closed 3 months ago

By Arutz Sheva Staff



Restaurateur Lee Landau decided to save the last kosher restaurant in London's West End.

Reubens, which had been especially popular among London's Jewish population, had been in operation for 46 years. Three months ago, its owners decided to close the deli and restaurant "due to a family bereavement."

Now Landau, who owns a number of kosher cafes and restaurants in London, has purchased the lease on the 3,376 square-foot site and will reopen it as a kosher restaurant certified by the Federation of Synagogues, *The Evening Standard* reported.

“I would visit Reubens as a child ... and continued dining there in my adult life, so I felt even more motivated to try and save the last remaining kosher eatery in the West End,” Landau, who grew up in Golders Green, said according to *The Evening Standard*.

The site of the legendary eatery included a deli on one floor and a large restaurant underneath it. Landau has already opened the deli, whose menu includes favorites from the original Reubens.

The restaurant, which will open in the middle of next month, will combine old favorites with completely new dishes.

Reprinted from the August 22, 2019 email of Arutz Sheva.

The Amazing Shabbos Meal

R' Abraham J. Twerski M.D., writes, “According to tradition, the manna had a magical quality: one could taste in it whatever one desired. There is a magical quality within our means that can affect how we taste our food: that quality is love.

One of my favorite stories is that of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov (d.1760, Ukraine) who one Friday night saw a rather simple person whose face radiated with light.

‘What is this man’s secret?’ they asked. ‘Is he so spiritual a person that his face should shine in this manner?’

The Baal Shem Tov replied, ‘Let’s follow him home and see.’

“The man entered a small hut and greeted his wife with a hearty ‘Good Shabbos!’ Peering through the window, the Baal Shem Tov and his students saw a sparsely furnished room that testified to the austere conditions of the household. A wooden table was covered with a plain white cloth, and the two candles shed a warm glow.

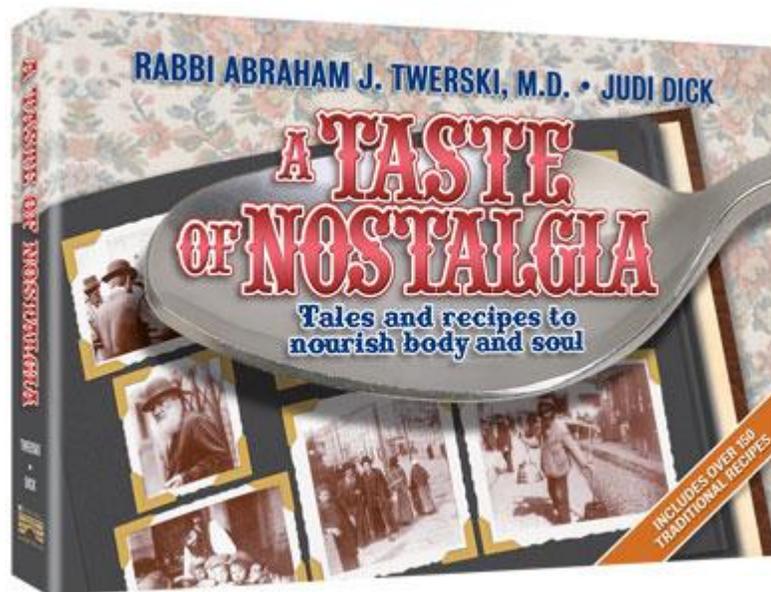
The man sang Shalom Aleichem, welcoming the angels with a lively refrain, then sang Eishes Chayil. Then he said to his wife, ‘Please bring the special wine.’ “The wife brought two loaves of coarse, dark bread. He washed his hands and recited the proper blessing, then chanted the kiddush.

After he ate of the bread, he said, ‘We have never yet had such fine wine! Can you please bring in the fish?’

Moments later the wife served him a small portion of beans.

‘Hmmm!’ he exclaimed, smacking his lips. ‘This fish is unusually delicious.’ He sang a Shabbos song and said, ‘I’m ready for the soup.’

The wife appeared with yet another dish of beans. The man complimented his wife, ‘This soup is simply superb.’ He sang another Shabbos song and asked, ‘Can we have the roast meat and tzimmes?’



Again the wife served him beans. ‘How wonderful the roast and tzimmes are!’ he exclaimed.

“The Baal Shem Tov said to his disciples, ‘Our ancestors in the desert had the manna, a food from heaven, in which they could taste anything they wished. This man’s love for G-d, for Shabbos, and for his wife have enabled him to reach a level of spirituality so lofty that he can taste the finest delicacies in a dish of beans.’

“Is such a level of spirituality attainable? Even if it is not, it is certainly a far cry from complaining that the food was too cold or lacked salt. At the very least, we can certainly send our compliments to the chef and our gratitude to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for that which He has provided” (A Taste of Nostalgia, by R’ A. J. Twerski MD and Judi Dick, Artscroll, p.32-33)

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5779 email of A Short Vort by Mrs. Michal Horowitz.

Where Will You Daven?

By Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein



Sometime after I got married, my wife and I looked into going away to the Bahamas. We were both looking forward to this vacation very much, and we both anticipated it being a fabulous trip.

The first night after we arrived, I figured that I would give my parents a quick call and see how they were doing. I picked up the phone and spoke briefly to my father, telling him that we had safely arrived and everything was going well.

I must emphasize that I was extremely close to my father and our relationship was very trusting and truthful. Neither of us shied away or avoided honestly expressing ourselves and being respectfully blunt with each other. “Zecharia,” he said, “where are you?”

“We’re away,” I said, “on vacation.”

But my father was curious. “Where exactly are you?” he asked.

“We’re in the Bahamas,” I replied.

The phone immediately went silent.

“I take it there’s a minyan where you are to daven...”

Tefillah for my father was of extraordinary importance, and truth be told, there was not a minyan in the Bahamas that I was aware of. But we had just gotten married, and we were just going to be away for a few days and would return back to Florida for Shabbos. I planned on davening alone during this time.

My father was taken aback. “You mean there’s no minyan there?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Zecharia, make sure you’re at davening tomorrow morning in Miami.”

And with that, the phone went dead. My father had hung up. I was shocked. This was not the type of relationship I had with my father whatsoever. I knew he was extremely devoted to tefillah, but this came as a surprise to me.

My wife looked at me, wondering what had happened.

“I don’t know how to break this to you,” I said, “but I think we need to be in Miami tomorrow morning.”

Now that was an unpleasant surprise. We had just gotten to the Bahamas and we were both so excited, and now we would need to turn around and go back? In my father’s mind, vacationing was fine, but finding a set place to daven with a minyan was even more important. And my father was being very serious with me. I knew I needed to be at a minyan tomorrow morning. Stuck in this quandary, I came up with a master plan. I figured that the latest minyan in Miami was 9 o’clock, and so, we would at least head to the airport in the morning, and try to catch a plane. Likely, it wouldn’t be available, and I would still have tried, and thus everyone would be happy. I would stay in the Bahamas, having made the attempt to make the minyan as my father mentioned, and all would be good.

And so, the next morning, we arrived at the airport very early in the morning to see if any flight was available. The airline we had flown to the Bahamas and would be our best option for a flight back to Miami was Eastern Airlines. But guess what? The next flight out to Miami was at 1:30 p.m.! That was it! I wouldn’t make it to davening in Miami, but at least I tried. I would call my father and tell him I was at the airport and I could not make it back in time.

As my wife and I began walking out of the airport, however, we glanced over and noticed a small table with the name Bohemian Airlines. And what did it say? Miami, 7:00 A.M.

At this point, I knew I couldn’t lie to my father. At the very least, however, I hoped that they wouldn’t have seats. I walked up to the table, and asked to buy two tickets to Miami on their upcoming flight.

“Sure, we have plenty of room!” said the attendant. That was the last thing I wanted to hear. “Alright,” I said to myself, “this is what we are going to do.”

We were taken out onto the runway, and lo and behold, what did we see? A tiny plane which had just six seats. My wife and I looked at each other, both surprised and shocked, but we weren’t going to turn back now. We got onto the plane and my wife and I took seats next to each other. All of a sudden, on walked a man with shorts and a colorful shirt. I figured that he was the steward. I was wrong. “Hi everybody! I’m the pilot.”

At this point, I became a little nervous. But it wasn’t over.

“You two,” said the pilot, pointing to me and my wife, “you need to move apart from each other. We need to have the weight distributed equally on the plane.”

Now, the other four people on the plan from the Bahamas were much, much larger than both my wife and I put together. So there we were, flying back to Miami as newlyweds, with my wife in the front squeezed between two huge strangers, and me in the back sandwiched between another two huge strangers.

I didn't know if we would make it back alive. But... I made it back to Miami on time and davened with a minyan. That was my father. He understood that if I missed those four days of davening with a minyan while in the Bahamas, it will be the beginning of becoming lax in other mitzvah observances. This would have set the bar and allowed me to easily rationalize missing other minyanim during future trips in my life.

I learned this lesson that day, and also witnessed the love that my father burst forth with for davening with a minyan, to the point that he was ready to have little to do with me if I wouldn't have made it back to Miami. He wished to impress upon me what I already knew was deep down the right choice, and make me examine what I was doing. And he certainly did just that.

Years later, I related this story while I was giving a class. Afterwards, life moved on. But just a month later after that class something happened, and I came to a personally empowering realization. I was davening with a minyan one morning, when I noticed a man continuously staring at the Tallis bag which was situated in front of me.

Little did he know that I was not standing in front of my own Tallis bag, but someone else's. I wondered if I should ask if he was looking for something or someone or even mention that it was in fact not my own Tallis bag, but I remained quiet and said nothing.

When I finished davening, the man turned to me and asked, "Are you Zecharia Wallerstein?"

"Yes, I am," I said.

"I have to tell you something," he continued. I wasn't sure what surprise he was about to tell me, but I was ready for whatever it was.

"I haven't been davening with a minyan for many, many years. Since the story you shared on TorahAnytime a month ago about your trip to the Bahamas and your father, I haven't missed a minyan."

Now, I understood. He had been staring at the Tallis bag because he had seen my face on the video, but it didn't match the name on the bag.

"Thank you very much for telling me," I said.

Reflecting further, I wondered to myself what message I could take away from the story altogether and this follow-up incident. And then I realized. The camera placed in front of me and recording is a sophisticated piece of metal with a battery and lens.

Yet this camera had caused this man to hear this story, and because of that, not miss one opportunity for davening with a minyan already for an entire month. That

was a simple lesson that we all easily appreciate. But it was more meaningful once I thought about this for just a minute more.

This story took place thirty years ago, and what my father told me on that phone call then affected someone now. This man might have been under thirty and not even born at the time that the story occurred. But now, thirty years later, look at the effect it is having... From my father having one conversation with me on the phone, to me making the decisions I did, to me retelling the story on camera, to this man hearing and internalizing the message. That is powerful.

A person must realize that one decision they make in life can affect someone completely unrelated to them and their family even decades later. Perhaps, now because of this story, this man's children will go on to daven at a minyan consistently, and so, the story's effect continues even further.

Never underestimate the long-lasting impact that a few words or one action can have on so many people for so many years.

Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5779 email of the Torah Anytimes Newsletter.

How the Times Have Changed



Rabbi Sholom Bluming of Chabad of the Bahamas who with his wife Sheera opened a Chabad House on the island in 2010 is seen above addressing members of the local community and tourists preparing to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. Too bad Chabad hadn't opened up in time for Rabbi Wallerstein's vacation with his wife. He could even have gotten hot kosher meals. Or maybe for the sake of the man who was inspired by Rabbi Wallerstein's story, it was for the best that there was no Chabad in the Bahamas then. (Note from the Compiler of the Shabbos Stories for the Parsha.)

Upset About a Pothole in Front of Your House

By Rabbi Reuven Semah



Have you ever had a prayer answered? Stop for a moment and consider the implications. Let's imagine you live in a small town in the Midwest. There is an extremely large and unsightly pothole in front of your house. For the last four months, the local municipality has ignored your persistent requests to have it fixed. Finally, in an act of frustration, you call the White House in Washington, D.C. and ask for the President of the United States of America, (Hey, it's worth a try.)

To your utter amazement, the President himself gets on the phone. You quickly explain your problem. The President listens for a minute, takes down your address, and then hangs up. You don't really expect anything to be done about it.

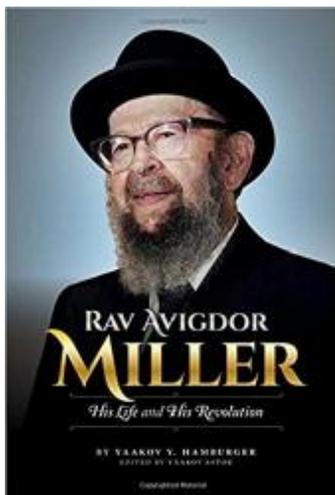
The next morning you look out your window and, lo and behold, an Army Corps of Engineers is busy at work fixing your road. The President of the United States took your request seriously and sent in the troops to fix the pothole. (Parable by Rabbi Noach Weinberg, a"h)

This is what it means to get your prayers answered. Now, we all know that this isn't happening to a regular Joe. But who is the one person who can always get through to the President? His child, of course. G-d is our father, and each one of us is His child.

Reprinted from the Parashat Ekeb 5779 email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

Always Remember Hashem's Kindnesses to You

By Sam Gindi



On one Erev Shabbat, the Rav told me four personal stories with the lessons of remembering the kindnesses done by Hashem.

“When I was about 3-4 years old in Baltimore, I was walking and tripped on a wooden board which had a nail protruding from it. The nail struck me in the head above my brow (the Rav pointed to the spot).

“I was taken to the hospital for stiches. If the nail had struck a bit lower in my eye, maybe there wouldn’t have been a Rabbi Miller! But...Baruch Hashem, I am still here!

“When I was in school it was a very cold day and there was a chubby fellow playing and sweating in the yard. When he returned to the school he drank cold water. He caught pneumonia and fell sick and did not return. But...Baruch Hashem, I am still here!

“I knew a young man of 20 years old; he did not make it to 21. But...Baruch Hashem, I am still here!

“I was learning in Slobodka Yeshiva, 1932-1938. The Nazis yemach shemom killed all my chaverim (friends) (the Rav sobbed when he recalled this). But...Baruch Hashem, I am still here!”

I was told that the Rav always reviewed the thousands of kindnesses that he kept recorded in his mind. He wrote this Pasuk, ‘To remember all the journeys in your life’, in his instructions given to his family before he passed away. This is what he held as a Purpose of life. Hakarat Hatov!

Reprinted from the Parashat Ekeb 5779 email of As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt'l.

Story #1133

The Almost Certain Death Sentence in Tiberias

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com

Rabbi Yaakov-Shimshon of Shepetovka lived the last eight years of his life in the Holy Land. When he first arrived in 1794, after docking at the port in Acco, he travelled due east, making a point of visiting all the known burial places of *tzadikim* in the *Meron-Tsfat* ('Safed') -*Tiverya* ('Tiberias') area of northern Israel.



Photo of the Burial Place of **Rabbi Yaakov-Shimshon of Shepetovka** (courtesy of zissil@zissil.com **Kever Rabbi Yaakov Shimshon of Shepetovka Photo Gallery**)

At the end of his journey he settled in Tiverya, where he was immediately appointed to be the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazic Jewish community, so great was his reputation that preceded him of being a leading authority in Jewish Law.

In Tiberias itself, when he prayed at the grave site of the great Rabbi Akiva, an eyewitness reported that the Rabbi quoted by heart all of the statements of Rabbi Akiva in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds.

One time, a local Jew quarreled seriously with one of his Arab neighbors. The Arab summoned him to court, where according to Muslim law it seemed virtually certain that a death sentence would be decreed upon him. The terrified Jew didn't know what to do. He hurried to the home of the new Rabbi of the city and poured out his heart to him.

Rabbi Yaakov-Shimshon advised him to give a *pidyon nefesh* (soul-redemption donation) to a fellow-Jew in need. The man did so wholeheartedly, praying that this good deed would somehow lead to his salvation.

On the day of his trial, the Jew walked with trembling steps to the courthouse which was located in the lower section of Tiverya, on the west bank of Lake Kinneret ('Sea of Galilee').

When he was near the entrance, he spotted his Arab neighbor ascending the steps to the courtroom, accompanied by his lawyer who was carrying a packet of papers, which the quaking Jew assumed to be incriminating documents.

Suddenly, there was a loud rumbling sound, followed by panicky screams and a loud splash! The Jew rubbed his eyes in disbelief. Where a broad staircase had stood a moment earlier, there was now a chaotic pile of rubble. The structure had collapsed, throwing the two accusers into the water together with all their papers for the court. [IMHO, it is unlikely that the two Arabs suffered serious injury. The Kinneret waters are calm, and near the bank they are shallow. But all the papers were certainly destroyed by the immersion. - Y.T.]

Later that day, the grateful man went with joy to thank Rabbi Yaakov-Shimshon, and to tell him all about the miracle that had taken place. The Rabbi was not surprised. "It is not a miracle at all," he said dismissively. "It is an clear verse in the Torah (Deut. 15:8): '*Ki Paso'ach tiftach es yodecho lo*' -- 'For open, you must open your hand to him [the needy fellow-Jew]...'"

כִּי פָתַח יָדוֹ

He went on to explain to his puzzled but still smiling guest. "The intonation on the first two words is determined by the trope (cantillation note), *`Darga Tavir*' under the '*sof*' in '*paso'ach*' (the middle letter in the second (left) word). [The Aramaic name of this tune marker,] *`Darga Tavir*' literally means *`broken steps*.' So there you are. By opening your hand and giving *tzedakah* ('charity'), you merited that the steps should break, thereby saving your life!"

Source: Adapted, rewritten and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article on /charedi.org (Chukas 5775).

Biographical

note:

Rabbi Yaakov Shimshon of Shepetovka [? - 3 Sivan 5561 (? - May 1801)], a descendant of Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropole, was a student of the Maggid of Mezritch and Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz (two of the three main followers of the *Baal Shem Tov*) and a close friend of Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuz (the grandson of the *Besht*). As a great authority in Jewish Law, he earned considerable respect also in rabbinic circles. In 1794 (according to charedi.org), he moved to Israel and settled in Tiberias, where he is buried.

Connection: Weekly Reading of Re'eh -- the verse, "For open, you must open your hand to him [the needy fellow-Jew]..." (Deut. 15:8) plays a starring role in the story.

Reprinted from the Parashat Re'eh 5779 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed. www.ascentofsafed.com ascent@ascentofsafed.com