**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas devorim 5775**

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**The Chassidic Rebbe**

**And the Black Horse**

The Chafetz Chaim taught that anyone who has money in his possession that does not belong to him, cannot possibly reach Olam Haba, the World to Come. He must return to this world reincarnated, as a gilgul, until he somehow returns the money that he owes.

Rav Shlomo Levinstein relates an incredible story that took place with Rav Meir Premishlaner, zt”l, the holy Chassidic Master, who once spent Shabbos at the home of one of his wealthy chassidim. That Friday afternoon, the chassid asked the Rebbe, “Is there anything I can do for you? Whatever the Rebbe asks, I will be happy to do it!”

The Rebbe replied, “I noticed that you have a number of horses and cows in your stable. Could you possibly give me a horse as a gift?”

“With the greatest pleasure!” the chassid responded.

The Rebbe stated, “If so, I would like the black horse.”

The chassid hesitated and said, “The Rebbe specifically wants that black one?”

“Yes. Is there a problem?” the Rebbe asked.

“Well, possibly. This horse works like ten horses. He is quick getting the job done and is waiting for more work. It is a great loss to me to give up that horse.”

“I specifically want that horse”, the Rebbe persisted, “but if you have difficulty parting with that horse, I would not be interested in any other horse.”

“Rebbe, please,” the chassid pleaded, “any other horse would not be a problem. It is just that this horse is very special.”

The Rebbe thought for a moment and asked, “I am sure you have many promissory notes which attest to people owing you money. Can I have one of these documents?”

“Absolutely, Rebbe, anything you would like and I will be most honored to give the Rebbe a document.”

The chassid immediately called for a servant to bring the document box containing all of the debts. The Rebbe rummaged through the box and pulled out a certain document and said, “I want this one!”

Once again, the wealthy chassid hesitated, “The Rebbe specifically wants this one?”

“Yes! This is the one I want. Is there a problem?”

The chassid explained, “Rebbe, this is a lost document. The man who owed me the money passed away and his sons deny the loan and refuse to pay. The Rebbe would do well taking another document.” The Rebbe insisted and was not willing to exchange it for another one.

The chassid said, “If this is what the Rebbe wants, it is his, and I am most happy to give this document to the Rebbe as a gift.”

Rav Meir Premishlaner acquired the document and said to the chassid, “Now the debt owed to you is instead owed to me. Correct?”

“Yes. The debt now is owed to the Rebbe and is no longer mine.”

“If so,” said the Rebbe, “I am canceling the loan. The deceased no longer owes any money.”

Five minutes went by, and the chassid's stableman came running in and said, “The black horse just suddenly died! One minute it was standing there and the next minute it was dead!”

The chassid realized that he had been punished by Hashem for refusing to give the horse to the Rebbe. He immediately turned to the holy sage and begged his forgiveness.

The Rebbe calmed him down and said, “It had nothing to do with you. The man who owed you the money passed away before he could pay you back. In Heaven, however, one is not permitted to receive his reward in Olam Haba until his obligations in this world have been settled.

“Since he owed you money, it was decreed that he should return to this world reincarnated as a horse, where he would work for you, without reward, of course. In this way he would pay back his loan. Your black horse worked so hard, because he was the gilgul of the fellow who owed you money and he wanted to pay back the loan as quickly as possible.

“When I noticed how hard the horse was working, I wanted to help him. This is why I wanted the horse. When you refused to give him to me, I was compelled to ask for the loan, and once I canceled the loan, the horse had fulfilled his function in this world and could now enter Olam Haba!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchos 5755 edition of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Profile on Chaim Lichtenstein of Riverdale, Bronx, NY**

**By Rabbi Shlomo Simon**

The Bronx is a New York City borough with a reputation for drugs, gangs and violent crime. Most “nice” people stay away from it. However, there is a corner of the Bronx that is separated from the rest of the Bronx by water and bridges and is, in part, actually rustic and bucolic – with grand homes on vast green and wooded lots on the bluffs high above the Hudson River. This is Riverdale — home of a vibrant Orthodox Jewish community and the home of Chaim Lichtenstein and his family.

Chaim is the principal of a successful New York commercial real estate sales agency, LichtensteinRE.com. He is an owner of commercial and multifamily real estate in NYC and Florida, and has sold and helped finance almost one billion dollars’ worth of commercial real estate in the city. He finances real estate deals through another of his companies — DoctorMortgage.com. He is passionate about his business and in helping his clients realize their real estate investment dreams.

His journey to observance was an unusual one, even for Ohr Somayach. Chaim sees it as clear hashgacha pratit (Divine Providence). In the early 1990’s his father, Gedalia, who had been a successful businessman in New York, became frum and came to Israel to study at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. Chaim, who had recently graduated from NYU Stern School of Business with a major in accounting and a deep interest in real estate financing, went to visit him there in 1997.

His father introduced him to Ohr Somayach and Chaim decided that he would stay for a few weeks to see what yeshiva was like. He was interested enough to make a decision to return for six months of study at the Yeshiva. He returned a year later and was fascinated by the classes here. During that time he grew particularly close to Rabbi Akiva Tatz and Rabbi Dovid Gottleib. Towards the end of his stay in Israel he was introduced to his future wife by Rebbitzen Sinclair, the wife of staff member Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair.

They recently made a bar mitzvah for their oldest son Eli. Chaim describes his life as the pursuit of hashgacha. “I try to include Hashem as my partner in everything I do. I am totally reliant on hashgacha.” A few years ago he made a siyum on Shas. He attributes whatever success he has had in learning to his wife who “pushes me out the door every morning to learn”. His hakarat hatov (gratitude) to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and to the Yeshiva that educated him knows no bounds.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas edition of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Magazine of the Internet, a publication of Ohr Somayach Yeshiva of Yerushalayim.*

**The Apta Rebbe and**

**The Jewish Innkeeper**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

One summer day some 200 years ago in Poland a great, holy, genius Rabbi by the name of Yehoshua Heschel of Apta (A.K.A. the Apta Rebbe) was riding in his carriage back from an important meeting when he noticed a man standing in the road in the far distance, apparently a religious Jew, waving his hands as though trying to flag him down.

He ordered the driver to approach cautiously as it could be a robber or a trick and as he did the man began screaming and yelling at the carriage, "Rebbe? Apta Rebbe? Rebbe! Is it you?? Save me!! Help!!"

The Rebbe told the driver to stop a distance from the man and wait to see what happened. When the carriage stopped the poor fellow ran to it, weeping and sobbing loudly from the depths of his heart, fell to his knees on the dusty road and began begging and pleading for the Rebbe to help him.

The Rebbe finally opened his carriage door, got the fellow to calm down, stop weeping, and tell his sad story.

The Jew calmed down and spoke. For the last 30 years he provided for his family by running an inn on the properties of the local Baron. For the first 20 years things were fine and there were even small profits.

But then things took a turn for the worse and for the last ten years business had been so poor that he had no money, not only for rent but even to support his family.  They had to live off stale bread, rotten potatoes and the Baron's mercy. But now even that was gone.

Now the Baron was threatening him with imprisonment, his family was starving and he needed a sheer miracle. He was desperate. He heard that the Apta Rebbe, like Moses thousands of years ago, could take Jews from even the worst situations 'Egypt'.\

Right then and there the Rebbe did it! Just moments earlier a rich man had given him a bag of money sum to distribute to the poor! He stuck his hand in his pocket, pulled out a small pouch and emptied its entire contents into the trembling hand of the poor Jew, who we will call Avraham.

But when Avraham counted this miracle money he was broken. It was like a drop in the ocean. He needed several THOUSAND guilder and all there was here was three hundred; true it was a lot of money, but it was barely enough for a half-year's rent. The Baron would kill him!!

"Rebbe!" He groaned, clasping his hands to heart in supplication! "Rebbe, I thank you with all my broken heart but what I need is a blessing! A very big blessing!" And he held out the money for the Rebbe to take and began to weep.

The Rebbe fell silent for a few minutes and then repeated quietly but loud enough for Avraham to hear. "Aha! Now I understand. Hmmm, now I understand.
"You want a blessing? Well, if you really want it I think you'll get it. Let me tell you a story.

About a year ago I was approached by a poor Jew who begged me to preside over his wedding ceremony. At first I refused because there are a lot of very qualified Rabbis and I had a lot of very important work to do and my every second was precious.

But something told me to forget about myself and that G-d would give me the time back somehow. So I agreed. Believe me I don't know why, but only on the condition that I not participate in the meal and ensuing festivities but rather a swift carriage would be arranged to take me there and immediately back.

The Jew happily agreed and, sure enough, shortly before the wedding a carriage with four huge horses whisked me off to the ceremony and in short order I arrived and finished what I had to do.

But just as I was turning to leave they begged me to just wait a 'few seconds', make a 'L'Chaim' and bless the family of the bride and groom. But when I did that they all began to actually cry and beg me to just stay a few minutes for the meal … that it would give them such pleasure and it meant so much to them etc. etc

"I don't know why I agreed. I had so much work to do at home. I wanted to just refuse and stand on our agreement but I didn't. I stayed, washed my hands for bread, ate a bit, blessed everyone, even said a short speech and then apologized that my carriage was waiting and I had to leave.

"But as soon as I said that, a group of the groom's friends approached me and begged that I stay just five minutes more and see the play they had been working on for months in honor of the newlywed couple.

"I tried to refuse but before I knew it the players took their places and, seeing that it was important to them, I watched. The fact is I had never seen a play before and even considered stopping it but I didn't.

"The play was about a trial. The judge sat austerely listening to the pleas of first a simple Jew and then of an aristocratic snobbish noble. The noble claimed that the Jew owed him several years of rent and he demanded that the Jew either pay up in full or be sent to jail with his family until someone paid for him.

"The Jew, on the other hand, claimed that the noble had tricked him into believing the inn would be profitable when in fact it was a pure waste of time and energy.

"The impassioned performances by both sides were fascinating." The Apta Rebbe continued "But I kept asking myself 'what does this have to do with the wedding? Or with me? Why am I seeing this?"

"Anyway, the judge in the play, after hearing both sides, deliberated loud enough for all to hear and finally brought his gavel thundering down on the desk before him and announced …… that the Jew was totally innocent and exempt from all payment!

"Of course the groom and all the wedding guests cheered and applauded with glee and everyone thought the play was over.

"But then the play took an unexpected turn; the Jew in the play stood, cleared his throat and demanded, in an angry, loud voice that because he had worked for ten years for nothing and suffered, together with his family, hunger, cold and humiliation…. he wanted the noble to pay him damages! He demanded that he be given the entire inn and all the land around it!

"The 'noble' stood to his full height, fuming with anger and screaming threats and curses like, 'impudent serf! Worthless dog! Insolent Jew! 'Then suddenly he fell silent and all the actors turned to me and asked in unison,

"'And what does our holy guest, the Rebbe of Apta, say?'"

"I was half amused and half surprised by how the play jumped off the stage to me! So I thought for a moment and played along. I announced 'The Jew is right! The nobleman must pay in full!!" Everyone answered 'Amen!!' began laughing, clapping and making ' L'chaims'.

"I hurriedly made the blessing after eating, wished everyone well, shook hands with them all, ran to the carriage and in an hour was back home. My conscience bothered me terribly over the time I wasted at that wedding especially over that play. What childish frivolity! But I consoled myself that at least I made the newlyweds and the guests happy.

"This was over a year ago and I had totally forgotten it" concluded the Rebbe to Avraham, "but just now it just popped into my mind and I have a feeling that it relates to your case. Let's wait a few days and see.

Avraham returned home empty handed but full of alternately hope … and fear. The date was approaching! What if he wasn't deserving of a miracle? But on the other hand he heard that trust in G-d makes miracles happen…. so he tried his best to only think positive thoughts.

Early the next morning there was a knock at the door, a loud knock, only the Baron knocked like that

Avraham looked at his wife, took a deep breath, straightened his jacket and opened the door.

It was the Baron all right, but he had a strange look on his face. "Please come in honorable Baron." Avraham said, "You came a bit early...a few days. I'm just getting the rent together, if your majesty could only….. "

But the Baron didn't seem interested. He seemed terribly anxious about something else. Avraham invited him to sit down, poured him a small glass of brandy and a large glass of water. The Baron drank both, motioned for silence and began to talk.

"Listen my friend, here, see this?" He took out an official looking document, put it on the table and continued, "Several years ago I got involved in a crime, it's not important what. The trial has drawn out until now but yesterday it ended and I was sentenced to seven years in prison. They gave me a day to put my things in order.

“Now, you know that I never married and have no family and so, well, I got to thinking and, well, I decided that I'm not a young man and, well, if anything happens to me, instead of the government taking possession of all my properties I figured, well, you have a family and, to tell you the truth, you are the most honest man I know. So that's what this document is for, it's a deed to all my lands from now on … and forever if I don't come back. And, in any case you can forget what you owe me. What do you say?"

Of course Avraham agreed, took the deed and neither he nor anyone he knew ever saw the Baron again. The Apta Rebbe's blessing' came true.

*Reprinted from a recent email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**The Windless Windmill**

One of Jerusalem’s most famous historical sites is the large windmill in the Yemin Moshe neighborhood. This windmill was sent to Jerusalem from London by Sir Moses Montefiore to enable the Jews of Batei Yehuda Touro to grind their own wheat and earn a livelihood. This also enabled them to no longer be dependent on the Arab monopoly on wheat grinding. Despite the good intentions behind its establishment, the windmill had a very short lifespan. It soon became evident that there was not enough of a steady wind where it stood. It could therefore, unfortunately, not live up to the expectations of those who saw it as the first attempt to introduce economic self-sufficiency into a Jerusalem neighborhood.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas edition of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Magazine of the Internet, a publication of Ohr Somayach Yeshiva of Yerushalayim.*

**Defining the Perimeters of Pikuach Nefesh (Life and Death)**

Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin of Lev L'Achim related the following story: 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 kindertransport.

Unfortunately, their 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. Pikuach nefesh 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 pikuach nefesh!" With that, the man politely bade farewell and hung up the phone.

That Friday evening, the wealthy man was sitting at dinner, when the telephone rang incessantly. Finally, 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."

Needless to say, the man responded immediately to the appeal.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas email of Shabbos Candle Lighting.*

**Modern Day**

**Rabbinical Shepherds**

**Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky,** on whose insights this discourse is based, offers two stories of modern-day shepherds. **Rabbi Elazar Shach,** of blessed memory**,**, the head of the Ponovezh Yeshivah, was in his 90s and in terrible physical shape when a father came with his young son to ask advice on how to best educate the new generation.

Rav Shach, in his frail state, got up from his chair and willed his way across the room to a cabinet. He opened the cabinet, took out a box of chocolates and told the young lad, “Here’s something delicious. Make a Bracha (blessing).”

Rav Shach was the shepherd whose aim wasn't to dictate. He just wanted to take care of the sheep.

**Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik,** of blessed memory**,** was another classic example of relating and commiserating with his people. One time, a Jewish maidservant approached the Rav in a panic with what she would call an emergency question.

The Rav attentively listened as the girl asked, Rebbi, what do you think I should make for dinner tonight for the family? The students who were present had to masquerade their disbelief regarding this maid wasting the Rav’s precious time. The Rav thought about it for a second and then asked the girl. “What did you make last night?” “Fish,” came the response. “Then make chicken tonight,” the Rav decided.

When the girl left, the incredulous students asked the Rav why he bothered with such an apparently silly question. Rav Soloveitchik explained that this girl was probably an orphan girl taken in by a rich family and when she asked the lady of the house what to cook, she was facetiously told to go ask the Rabbi. “If I would’ve dismissed her, the next time a REAL question would come up, she wouldn’t bother coming to a Rabbi to ask it.” Rav Soloveitchik was a shepherd who knew how to see things from the sheep’s vantage point.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas email of Mendel Berlin’s weekly IVORT.*

**Short Story of the Week**

**A Concern for the Living**

Continuing with the theme of the righteous worrying about others, even immediately before their death, the **Tnuas Mussar** relates the following incident.

 When **Rabbi Yisroel Salanter,** of blessed memory**,** was on his deathbed there was only a single individual in the room, a young attendant. Rav Yisroel realized that most people would feel very uneasy about being alone in the same room with a corpse. To allay his companion’s fears, Rabbi Salanter spent his final moments in this world convincing the lad that it is needless to be afraid of a corpse and that he should not be nervous.

Comment: It sounds like a nice thing to do, but one really has to imagine himself about to die in order to appreciate the unbelievable sensitivity Rav Salanater demonstrated. This sensitivity wasn’t a product of a split second decision. Rabbi Salanter’s entire life was dedicated to the public; to making the lives of those around him easier. *"*Spiritual life is superior to physical life. But the physical life of another is an obligation of my spiritual life," he would be often quoted as saying and practicing, to his very last minute. How incredible!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas email of Mendel Berlin’s weekly IVORT.*

**Sparks of Greatness Rashi**

Rabbeinu Shlomo Yitzchaki, commonly known as Rashi, wrote the first complete .commentary on the entire Tanach and Shas Living in Troyes in France, Rashi learned in the yeshivos of Mainz and Worms under the tutelage of Reb Yaakov ben Yakar and the R”i Halevi. He had three daughters who were exceedingly great and are the matriarchs of the “Baalei Hatosfos.”

Rashi .(1105) passed away on the 29th of Tamuz Rashi began to write his commentary on the Tanach and Gemara at an early age. He was very humble, and so he wrote his commentaries on slips of parchment and set out on a two-year journey .visiting the various yeshivos of those days.

Rashi would come to a yeshivah and listen to the shiur, until they reached a passage in Gemara in which the Rosh Yeshivah had difficulty explaining When Rashi was left alone, he took the slip with his commentary, in which that passage was explained simply and clearly, and put it into the Gemara of the Rosh Yeshivah.

On the following morning, when the Rosh Yeshivah opened his Gemara he found a mysterious slip of parchment in which the passage of the Talmud was so clearly and simply explained that he was amazed. Rashi listened to their praises of his commentary and was very happy to know .how useful it was, but he did not say that it was his.

Once Rashi was discovered planting a slip of his commentary in the usual manner, and the secret was out. Looking through the many teshuvos of Rashi the great ahavas Yisroel of Rashi presents itself very readily. In his time, many Yidden faced the ultimatum of converting to Christianity or death with many choosing the latter. Of those who saved themselves by outwardly accepting the Christian faith, many remained faithful to Hashem in their hearts and behind closed doors.

When these Yidden, known as anusim, eventually returned to openly practicing Yiddishkeit, they faced hostility from within the Yiddishe community, seen as .traitors to their nation. For these unfortunate people, Rashi interceded penning many letters in their defense. Though they had done wrong in not sacrificing their life, nevertheless they are not to be ostracized for this.

In one particular halachic responsa, he wrote Heaven forbid to ban their wine or to humiliate them. They sinned only because of the fear of the sword and returned as soon as they were able. He lived during the days of the bloody Crusades and witnessed tremendous Yiddishe suffering. Rashi composed a piyut mourning these horrifying times which we read on Yom Kippur at Musaf beginning .with the words “Umishecharav beis Hamikdash

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinchas email of “Sparks of Light,” a weekly publication of The Baal Shem Tov Library in Flatbush.*

**How Dressing Modestly Changed My Life**

**By Kelsey Osgood**

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Before I began my formal conversion to Judaism, when I was a wee reporter who covered various stories in the very religious neighborhood of Borough Park, Brooklyn, a Hasidic subject gently suggested that when I attend her organization’s meetings, I dress to fit in. By this, I knew she meant that I dress according to the rules of tznius [modesty], and cover my elbows, collarbone, and knees. Some might have found such guidance irritating, but I wasn’t offended at all. I was thrilled. It felt a bit like going undercover in a culture I had always admired from afar. And, if I’m honest with myself, I also thought covering up would allow me to ignore, if not overcome, any lingering body shame.

When I exited the 55th Street subway station wearing a gray knee-length skirt and high-necked black and gray striped T-shirt, I was able to imagine myself as a character, a person who walked humbly and thought of G-d often. Now, here I am, three years later, a religious Jew, while less observant than many of the people I met in Borough Park, but nonetheless, committed to my faith.

This might seem like a trivial stop on the way to an identity, but to me, it was transformative. Dressing as a religious woman gave me a chance to try on the persona, and I found, that to some extent, the persona fit. (Though I should note there’s variation among Orthodox Jews as to how they observe tznius — some groups wear short sleeves, and others wear stockings year-round).

Even so, I’m not sure I’m the best person to teach others about tzniut, which often refers to women’s clothing, but can also mean general humility or proper conduct between genders. I’ve only been learning Jewish culture and belief for a few years, after all, whereas many people have been steeped in the tradition their whole lives.

Some Orthodox Jewish fashionistas have made careers revolving around modest clothing. There’s style blogger Adi Heyman, for example, or the designers behind Mimu Maxi, who produce a line of modest clothing from their home base in Crown Heights, Brooklyn — which, to my knowledge, is the world’s largest community of hipsids (that’s a portmanteau for “hipster” and “Hasid”— you heard it here first.) These women have taken rightful advantage of the increased popularity of modest fashion, and have managed to become style icons for all women, secular or otherwise. They, better than I, can speak to the power of modesty.

But, I don’t relish in telling others what to do, and Judaism is against proselytizing, which works out well for me. Still, there are certain pieces of Jewish wisdom that I plan to harp on in the book I often fantasize about writing: Hasidism for Everyone. One laudable tenet of Hasidism is the primacy of the action over the feeling or intention behind it. At Mount Sinai, when receiving the Torah, the Jews responded, “We will do and we will understand.” The teaching is that because when they first said they would do, it meant they were taking on the obligation, before the understanding.

There are two types of ways to do without understanding: the first is to do something you’ve been told is good that you know you’ll never understand (in a Jewish context, that might mean not wearing garments that contain both linen and wool, which makes no apparent sense). The second is to do something you know you can comprehend, but you just aren’t feeling it yet. An easy example of this is charity. Sometimes you don’t want to give five dollars to a cause. You want those five dollars for a PBR and a bag of chips, or you’re worried that you’re more motivated by the ego boost of doing good than the actual charity itself.

Hasidism says: stop fretting, and do it anyway, because the recipient of the charity cares not a whit for your internal struggles. Do the good thing, and eventually, the feelings will come. It’s kind of a precursor to the well-known 12-step maxim, “Fake it ‘til you make it.”

That’s where my own conception of tzniut comes in. When I dress modestly, I’m forced to think about portraying myself as a person who behaves modestly, and therefore, most importantly, I act accordingly. It makes me contemplate the facets of modesty as a virtue: humility, gentleness towards others, and an effort to push back against one’s natural egotism. And, it makes me consider what people often mistake modesty for: meekness, passivity, and painstaking conformity. As for body image, it’s not a panacea, at least in my experience — I realized that you have to take care of your body, rather than ignore it.

Last month, I took a research trip to central Ohio to visit a young man and his wife, both of whom are converts to a conservative Mennonite church. If you saw them at the grocery store, you’d guess they were Amish, though there are some big differences in their lifestyles. The husband told me that when he initially became interested in Mennonite people, he was obsessed with their dress. Before he even knew anything about them, he would occasionally show up at his high school in a button-up shirt and suspenders. “I’m dressing Mennonite today,” he’d say. His wife told me that she rebelled against her parents (who didn’t approve of her religiosity) by sneaking out and dressing in a long monochromatic dress and a small bonnet covering her bun.

Aside from how hilarious a reversal that is — a teenager terrified that her parents will find out she’s been out on the town, dressing conservatively — it’s a poignant reminder that if you embody that thing you admire, you can eventually become it. It’s as a spiritual twist on the idea of dressing for the job you want.

A little girl puts on her mother’s makeup and high heels because one day she will be a grown woman, and she wants to feel what that’s like. An actress puts on a costume in order to become the character (excuse the Method speak) and thus do her job. I dress with tznius in mind because maybe not now, but some day, I will be a good Jew.

I’ll often think of this when my inner critic pipes up. I’ll be riding the subway in a particularly modest outfit and hear that sneering voice say, Look at yourself. You’re all done up like a good Jew. You may wear the clothes, but you aren’t good and you know it. Here’s a list of all the things you do wrong…

But, then another small voice interrupts, Hey, instead of freaking out like this, why not take the time to say a psalm? Why not give up your seat for that pregnant woman, because the Torah tells us to relieve our neighbors — indeed, our enemies — of their burdens? And, just like that, by pretending to be good, I’m one step closer to actually being good.

*Reprinted from the July 8, 2015 website of Matzav.com. The article originally appeared in REFINERY 29.*

**A Lesson from the**

**Baal Shem Tov**

The gaon, Reb Chaim Rapaport, the rov of the city of Lvov, was a great adversary of the Baal Shem Tov. Once, when he was learning alone in the beis midrash, a man walked in, and when Reb Chaim asked who he was, he replied, “I am mere dust and.ashes (afar va’eifer.

The guest then asked, “And who are you?”

Reb Chaim responded, “I, too, am mere dust and.ashes.”

“If so,” said the unnamed guest, “why should there be machlokes (disputes) between us.

Reb Chaim then understood that this man was the Baal Shem Tov. From that day on he became attached to him, and later fulfilled many significant .missions on his behalf.

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**Golf for Life**

Items that always seems to be available at garage and yard sales throughout the summer, or at any other time of year, are golf clubs. Whether the avid adolescent golfer is away at college or beyond, or Dad never really took to the new pastime, or Mom has perfected her stroke and game to the point where she needs better clubs, golf clubs can easily be purchased for the neophyte golfer.

In keeping with the Baal Shem Tov's teaching that we can learn something to enhance our lives spiritually from everything we see and hear, even if you've only tried your skill with clubs and balls at the local mini-golf, there's a lot that can be learned from this mellow sport.

"Hold the club firmly with both hands," a seasoned golf expert will tell any newcomer to the game. Applied to Jewish living, this means that our approach to Torah study and mitzvot (commandments) observance has to be firm, not wishy-washy or laissez faire. In addition, Torah teaches that "the right hand brings closer and the left hand pushes away." This means that our "hands-on" approach to Judaism has to include bringing that which is beneficial and positive into our lives while pushing away that which can be harmful or negative to Jewish living.

In real golf (as opposed to miniature golf, where people sometimes skip a hole if there is a long wait and then come back to it) you must complete all 18 holes as established by the course. Similarly, a set course has been established for us by the Torah, beginning with our daily routine and encompassing our entire lives.

When we get up in the morning, we train ourselves that our first conscious thought is to thank G-d for giving us another day of life. Throughout the day we have a sequence of activities and mitzvot that we fulfill up until the time we go to bed, following the declaration that we forgive all those who might have knowingly or unknowingly wronged us, after which we entrust our soul to G-d's safekeeping. Just as our day is ordered and sequential, so is our week, month, year, and entire the Jewish life-cycle.

To truly hone our living skills (unlike when we putter around on a mini-golf course, where we can dodge the rules) we must follow the established progression of the Torah. And though the mitzvot are "written in stone" (at least the Ten Commandments, to be exact), Judaism allows for, acknowledges and even encourages individual expression and personal preferences within the established guidelines.

Any golfer worth his tee will inform you that one of the main guidelines of the game is to keep your eye on the ball. In the big golf game of life, the ball is the goal. As long as we keep our eyes on the goal and know where we're going, it's hard to get off track.

Jewish teachings have always explained that our goal is the Geula (Redemption), at which time the Goel (Redeemer, i.e. Moshiach) will lead the Jewish people out of gola (exile). No one knows which tiny mitzva-tap on the ball of exile will gently drop us into the final hole (numbered 18 perhaps for "chai-life," for after the Redemption we will experience life as G-d truly intended it to be). It might be your kind word, or his extra charity, or her heartfelt prayer, or my Shabbat candles. If each one of us tries our best, then certainly, very soon, we will get the ultimate hole in one.

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