**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Nitzavim-vayeilech 5774**

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**A Spiritual Rebellion of Vishnitz Chassidim in the Concentration Camp**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Here is a story told to me personally by someone who heard it from an old Vishnitz Chassid who survived the war and has a sort of positive ending, that's why I'm telling it.

"The Nazis, may their name be blotted out, spent much needed manpower and time searching for Jews of all ages in basements, attics, forests and everywhere possible. And most of those caught were sent to 'concentration' camps, where the Nazis could concentrate on torturing and exterminating them in the most 'progressive, cultured and intellectual' ways.

"In the camp where we were, were a lot of religious Jews and a lot of other Chassidim that had been captured near the end of the war.

"I had heard that the Germans were unusually cruel around the Jewish holidays and it wasn't long before I saw how true this was.

"On Rosh HaShanna, they made us work all day non-stop, then on Yom Kippur they forced us to eat, and finally on Succot they decreased our meager rations by half. But when Simchat Torah came (the final day of Succot; a joyous holiday in itself) they really went berserk.

"They rounded up fifty of us, all young Vishnetzer Chassidim, and announced that we would be taken to the gas chambers in a matter of minutes.

"Everyone began to weep uncontrollably as we were led off to our deaths. Escape or resistance was impossible; we were so weak and they were armed to the teeth and besides there was no where to run to. Barbed wire was everywhere and the guards had ferocious dogs.

"Then one of our group said, "Listen friends, tonight is Simchat Torah… we are Jews! Right?! These perverted animals can't take that from us. We have to be happy!" He began a song and at the first note everyone joined in. We sang, louder and louder moving our feet to the tune.

"Suddenly for a second or two we were in control! We were free!! The Nazis could rule our bodies but our souls were free! Free!! We sang and even danced as much as possible as we were marching.

"Abruptly the German commander shouted 'Halt'! And the soldiers stopped the procession.

We fell silent as he swaggered before us in his high, shining black boots and perfectly fit black uniform and then said with a satanic sneer on his lips.

"So you want to rejoice on your stupid holiday ehh? Well, we also want to rejoice. Why are you so selfish?" He smirked, looked around contently, and continued.

"Instead of killing you now I'm taking you back. Tomorrow morning at five a.m. I will awaken the entire camp and everyone will be forced to watch how you happy bunch are publicly and slowly tortured to death, one at a time. We want ALL the Jew to be happy! Let us see how you Jews rejoice then!!"

"He barked an order and we were led back to a sort of prison room with a thick iron door that slammed ominously behind us.

"But HaShem had different plans.

"It seems that a few hours later, in the middle of the night there came urgent orders from on high that our camp had to supply one thousand workers to another location. A special unit was even sent to pick out and gather the workers.

But after a few hours of searching they could only come up with nine hundred and fifty able bodied men. Then someone remarked that he remembered seeing us fifty lively young men being led into the 'prison'. So at 2 in the morning the metal door opened and we dragged from our cell, herded into trucks and shipped away to work.

"Meanwhile at the crack of dawn the camp commander woke up, got his executioners ready, awakened all the Jews and gathered them all outside in the freezing cold morning for the 'show' but when he got to our prison he found it...empty!! There was no one to kill.

"Not all of us survived the work camp but one thing for sure; if it wasn't for our joy that night I certainly wouldn't be here to tell this story; we all would have been murdered."

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

**L’Maaseh…A Tale to Remember**

**The Innkeeper’s**

**Special Guest**

Once, Rav Saadyah Gaon stayed at an inn where the innkeeper was unaware of the identity of Rav Saadyah Gaon. He treated the Sage like he would any other guest and gave him a simple room to stay in.

When word got out that Rav Saadyah Gaon, the leader of the generation was in town, all the townsfolk flocked to the inn to meet him. When the innkeeper saw the crowds coming to see his guest, he finally realized who his illustrious guest was, and approached Rav Saadyah Gaon with tears running down his cheeks.

"Rabbi, please forgive me!"

"Forgive you?" asked Rav Saadyah Gaon, "You have treated me very well. What have you done wrong?"

"Rebbe!" replied the innkeeper, "I didn’t know who you were! If I had known that the great Rav Saadyah Gaon was staying at my inn, I would have treated you like royalty!"

When Rav Saadyah Gaon heard these sincere words, he burst into tears himself. "From what you said," explained Rav Saadyah Gaon, "I realized the extent of our obligation towards Hashem, our King. Just as your service of me changed as you recognized my identity, so it is with *my* service of Hashem.

“With each passing day I discover new levels of Hashem's kindness towards me. I realize that whatever respect and service I offered yesterday was quite insufficient, since I have seen so much more kindness from Him today! Had I known then what I know about Hashem *now*, I would have served Him with even greater devotion and intensity!"

Rav Saadyah Gaon taught that life is about constant rediscovery about Hashem's greatness and continuous kindness towards us. He thereby taught his disciples to examine their ways each and every day, even if they felt certain that they had not sinned, because with each passing day, one can recognize Hashem on a new and deeper level than the day before.

Reprinted from last week’s email of Torah U’Tefillah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights Compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

**Story#877**

**After Midnight Guests**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](mailto:editor@ascentofsafed.com)

Rabbi Hayyim Pinto awoke every night to recite prayers and to make "requests of G-d." Afterwards, he would study Torah until dawn. One day his daughter Mazal entered into his room in the middle of the night and saw him studying with a man she did not recognize. In the morning, he went to speak with her and asked her sadly, "Why did you come into my room without knocking? You are not at the level to see *Eliyahu Hanavi* (Elijah the Prophet). Now, Heaven has decreed a punishment: on the day of your marriage you will become blind."

A few years later, the grandson of the deceased Torah sage, Rabbi Khalifa Malka, came from Agadir to Mogador and went directly to Rabbi Hayyim Pinto's home. When he saw Mazal, she found favor in his eyes. Having already heard much about her excellent character and exemplary behavior, he asked Rabbi Hayyim to give his daughter to him in marriage, but the *tzadik* refused. He pleaded, he insisted, but the *tzadik* continued to refuse. The grandson of Rabbi Khalifa Malka returned to Agadir saddened and hurt because Rabbi Pinto had refused to let him marry his daughter.

Weeks later, Rabbi Hayyim Pinto had a dream in which he saw Rabbi Khalifa Malka, who told him, "I sent you my grandson happy, and you sent him back to me sad."

Rabbi Hayyim responded, "Your honor is aware that my daughter Mazal saw Eliyahu Hanavi when she shouldn't have and a decree was issued that on the day of her marriage she will become blind. This is why I refused to consider letting her marry your grandson."

Rabbi Khalifa replied that his grandson would accept this decree and still want to marry her. All this dialog occurred during the dream.

The next day, Rabbi Pinto sent a special messenger to Agadir asking that the grandson of Rabbi Khalifa Malka should come to him again. When Rabbi Hayyim saw him, he explained what would happen to his daughter on the day of her wedding. The young man quickly responded that even so, he still desires to marry her and no one else.

The young couple married, and then, thanks to the merit and righteousness of both of them, the decree of blindness was annulled. They had children and lived to ripe old age, eventually passing away in the same week.

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When Rabbi Hayyim Pinto would arise every night to study Torah, his *shamash* (attendant), Rabbi Aaron Ben-Hayyim, would also arise and prepare him a cup of coffee. Once, Rabbi Aaron awoke a little late and therefore hurried to prepare a cup of coffee for the Rabbi, when suddenly he heard two voices coming from the inner room. He then went and prepared an additional cup for the unexpected guest.

In the morning, Rabbi Pinto asked his attendant, "Why did you prepare two cups of coffee during the night?"

"I heard two voices and I thought to prepare a second cup for the guest."

Rabbi Hayyim told him, "Happy are you, my son, you who had the merit to hear the voice of *Eliyahu Hanavi*. However, I decree that you repeat this secret to no one while I am alive."

It was not until after the death of the *tzadik* that the *shamash* recounted this incident to the inhabitants of the city.

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Rabbi Maklouf Ben Lisha once needed to discuss with Rabbi Hayyim Pinto matters of importance for the community of Mogador. Due to the seriousness of the matter, he went directly to the Rabbi's room in the middle of the night. Entering, he was astonished by the "illuminated" face of Rabbi Pinto and the presence of someone else who resembled an angel. He wanted to approach closer, but was seized with such great fright that he fled to his home.

The next day the *tzadik* told him, "Fortunate are you, my son, who had the merit of seeing the face of *Eliyahu Hanavi*."

Rabbi Maklouf lived a long time, to the age of 110, and he described this incident in his prayer book.

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On the day of Rabbi Hayyim Pinto's passing (see "Biographical note" below), he promised his disciples that those who would invoke his name on the day of his *Hilula* would see their prayers answered.

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition on //www.hevratpinto.org, based on the book, The Light of the Righteous. Biographical note: Rabbi Hayyim Pinto Hagadol ("the Great") [Tammuz 15, 5509 - Elul 26, 5605 (July 1, 1749 - September 28, 1845)], a descendant of Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto--the "Rif" of Ein Yaakov--was born in Agadir, Morocco on the 6th *Hilula* of Rabbi Hayyim Ben Attar. At age 20, he became the head rabbinical judge in Mogador, exercising this function for more than 70 years.

The greatest Torah scholars of the generation esteemed him, and Jews and Muslims alike venerated him. It is said that *Eliyahu Hanavi* revealed himself regularly to him and studied with him. On the day of his passing, at age 96, he promised his disciples that those who would invoke his name on the day of his *Hilula* would see their prayers answered.   
 Connection: The 171st *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Hayyim Pinto Hagadol (2014: Sat. night, Sept. 21).

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

**Forgive, For Your**

**Own Good!**

**By Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

**(Hilkhot Teshuba 2:10)**

The days of Elul are days of Teshuba. We ask forgiveness from G-d for any transgressions we might have done against His will.

We should also seek forgiveness from our peers for any offenses or damages we might have caused them.

And, we also need to be willing to forgive.

In Chapter 2, Halakha 10, Maimonides discusses forgiveness. He says:

"It is forbidden for a person to be insensitive and refuse to be appeased... rather, when someone approaches him seeking his forgiveness, he should forgive him wholeheartedly and with a positive spirit... he should not seek revenge, nor harbor resentment... ".

Forgiving is a complex and difficult emotional task. But in these days of Teshuba, when we are requesting from HaShem to grant us the gift of forgiveness, we should be willing to forgive others as well. How would we expect G-d to forgive us, if we are not capable of forgiving our peers?

Complete forgiveness implies the capacity of forgetting. We should definitely remember the lessons we have learned from all negative experiences. But we should let go or erase anger, grudge and personal feelings of revenge that might be growing inside us.

Emotional forgetfulness is the ultimate state of forgiveness. If we have decided to forgive whoever has offended us, but somehow we are still filled with hatred and resentment, then forgiveness has not been achieved. If we don't erase the negative feelings of animosity towards the offender, we are giving the perpetrator a free ride to the control center of our mind and heart.

Forgiving is good for the offender, because we are generously giving him or her the opportunity of reconciliation. But without a doubt, the main beneficiary of the act of forgiveness is the victim, the offended person, who regains control over his emotional health by eliminating from his system the destructive feelings of hate and resentment.

**Clarification**: What we wrote concerns particularly to social and personal offenses, i.e., when a friend, a family member, a colleague or a neighbor did something bad to us or said something negative about us. We are not referring to criminal cases, terrorism, etc.

*Reprinted from the September 4, 2014 email of the Shehebar Sephardic Center.*

**It Once Happened**

**A Request to the Baal Shem Tov for a Brocha for a Child**

Reb Moshe Chaim and his wife, Miriam, had been married for 33 years. They were simple but very generous people. What greatly upset them was the fact that they had no children. One night, Reb Moshe Chaim was sitting in a corner of the shul listening to a discussion about the Baal Shem Tov.

The people spoke about how a childless couple, already advanced in years, had come to the Baal Shem Tov and begged him to bless them with a child. The Baal Shem Tov gave them the blessing and, with G-d's help, a son was born to them.

A few days later, Moshe Chaim told his wife about the story. Miriam had heard similar stories from Bashe, a righteous woman who was the wife of the famous chasid Reb Gedalia Boruch the Shoemaker. Miriam and Bashe worked together in providing medical care and nourishment for mothers who had just given birth, and in dowering brides and supporting orphans. Miriam was overjoyed to hear her husband was considering a trip to the Baal Shem Tov.

Months passed, though, and still Moshe Chaim and Miriam had not made the journey. In the middle of Passover, Moshe Chaim heard that a group of people led by Reb Gedalia Boruch were planning to visit the Baal Shem Tov seven weeks later for the festival of Shavuot. After discussing it between themselves, Moshe Chaim and Miriam decided to join the group.

On the second day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, they set out on their journey. Moshe Chaim and Miriam came to the Baal Shem Tov and, weeping profusely, poured out their hearts to him. The Baal Shem Tov, however, gave them no blessing. They entered his room again a few days later and then a third time, but the Baal Shem Tov gave them no reply.

Reb Gedalia Boruch, knowing that the Baal Shem Tov always acted toward his visitors with intense ahavat Yisrael (love of one's fellow Jew), was deeply upset at the bitter lot of the couple. As he was one of the Baal Shem Tov's earliest disciples, he sought the advice of his colleagues about the case. They decided that ten men should gather to fast, pray, and plead for the couple for three consecutive days, and then they would see what the Baal Shem Tov would say.

Reb Gedalia Boruch and his colleagues carried out their plan with true ahavat Yisrael. They were careful to avoid uttering any words that were not for a holy purpose and poured out their hearts pleading for Divine mercy for Moshe Chaim and Miriam. No one else was aware of what they were doing. On the evening of the third day, when they were still in the middle of the evening prayer service, the Baal Shem Tov's attendant came and told them that the Baal Shem Tov was inviting them to a celebratory meal.

The meal took place with the participation of the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples and all the guests then visiting the holy Rebbe. The Baal Shem Tov was highly elated and expounded on new Torah insights and on the verses, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and "How good and pleasant it is for brothers dwelling together." He also told them various stories on the subject of ahavat Yisrael and how dear Jews are to G-d. The Baal Shem Tov explained the tremendous effect that brotherly love can have and how, when friends plead for Divine mercy for a comrade in distress, they can even annul a heavenly decree of 70 years duration and transfer "the curse to blessing, and death to long life."

Reb Gedalia Boruch and his colleagues realized that the reason for the celebration was what they had done and that their plan had worked. They immediately urged Moshe Chaim and Miriam to press their plea. When the couple approached the Baal Shem Tov, he gave them his blessing to have a child who would live a long and happy life.

G-d fulfilled the Baal Shem Tov's blessing and on the second day of Iyar the following year, Miriam bore a son. They named him Shlomo. At about the same time, Bashe, Reb Gedalia Boruch's wife, bore a daughter whom they named Yocheved. When Shlomo and Yocheved were 17, the parents arranged a match between them. Shlomo became known as Shlomo Bashe's after his wife's mother, a great woman who was known for her deed of kindness and charity.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization of Brooklyn, New York.*

**Thoughts that Count**

The anger of G-d burned against this land... and G-d rooted them out of the land in anger... and cast them into another land (Deut. 29:26-27)

The curses and punishments enumerated in this section of the Torah are merely warnings, not promises that G-d must fulfill. Their purpose is to arouse the heart of man to choose good over evil so that they will never come to pass.

*(Peninei HaGeula)*

G-d will circumcise your heart... in order that you may live (Deut. 30:6)

When G-d will circumcise your heart, the pleasure and delight that you will take in Torah and mitzvot [commandments] will be as keenly felt as the pleasures of the physical body; you will love the Torah as much as you value your very life.

*(Ohel Yaakov)*

If any of you are dispersed at the outermost parts of heaven, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you (Deut. 30:4)

No matter how far a Jew may be from Torah and Judaism, G-d promises to gather him back into the fold of the Jewish people when Moshiach comes. When a Jew is spiritually brought back from "the outermost parts of heaven," it hastens Moshiach's coming and brings the Redemption closer.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil (Deut. 30:15)

One should not perform good deeds in order to live; one should live in order to perform good deeds.

*(Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk)*

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

**An Old Friend**

**By Irwin Benjamin**

Last week my wife received a call from a Mose Chaimowitz, who said he was a childhood friend of mine, asking for my cell number. He called and we spoke.

Now, although I had not seen or heard from him in a very long time—68 years, to be exact—I remembered just who he was: a big bully who once destroyed my best toy. His father, on the other hand, I remembered with great admiration and affection. He was a tall, large man who was one of the first Orthodox Jews in the New York City Police Department. I was so very proud of him, because he was a frum Jew, yet also a feared policeman who protected the wellbeing of the entire neighborhood.

In those days I was very sensitive to how frum Jews appeared in the eyes of the world. I guess I still feel the same way. He was always nice to me. On Shabbos, he used to take his gun to shul and place it on the seat next to him. From time to time he even let me hold some of his bullets. But that was Mr. Chaimowitz, not Mose.

When Mose called, the first thing he said to me was that he did not go under the name of Mose Chaimowitz any longer. He had changed his name, and today he is Martin Chasen. He had taught in the New York City public schools, and the students had a hard time pronouncing his name, thus the change.

I did not recognize his voice or demeanor. He was two years older than me, the same age as my best friend, Chaim Kessler. The three of us together were a real threesome. I tried to figure out what he would look like now, but couldn’t conjure up any image at all. Time could be hard on some men; they tend to age in the blink of an eye—young and virile one minute, wrinkled paper the next.

He sounded a little slow, but of course he was now 80, so it sort of comes with the territory. A few things he said, though, piqued my interest and curiosity. He told me he lived in Monsey, and I asked him whether he would like to get together and meet in the city. He said he never ventured into the city, that it was too much of a hassle with traffic and parking. I suggested we first talk about a date to meet before we talked about where to meet. He thought we should meet after the yamim tovim, because everyone was now busy with yom tov.

I felt differently. I felt that since nothing happens by chance, especially during Elul, I was anxious to discover the meaning of his unexpected and unusual call. And secondly, I couldn’t wait; I was very anxious to see how the long years had treated him, and, I have to admit, was curious to compare how he fared during those long years vis-à-vis myself. He agreed to meet with me before yom tov.

He suggested we compromise on the place. Since he lived in Monsey and I was in the city, he figured that a good halfway meeting place was Teaneck, New Jersey. I was agreeable. I also said that I preferred dairy; he said he did, too. I gave him my e-mail address, and since I did not know any places in Teaneck, and he obviously did, told him to pick the place.

He e-mailed me soon thereafter that we should meet at Shelly’s, a fish and dairy place. I immediately answered that his choice sounded great and that I was excited about meeting with him. His e-mail gave further evidence to my suspicion that he may not have been a hundred percent, because he wrote the entire e-mail in the “subject” space, and wrote “Teaneck, NY,” not “NJ.”

However, after meeting him, all my suspicions were proven totally wrong. At the appointed place and time, as I walked into the restaurant, a well-dressed, nice-looking man approached me.

“Irwin?” he asked.

“Mose?” I countered.

We both said yes at the same time and shook each other’s hands. Mose—or Martin, as he is now called—was a fair-sized, well-trimmed man, a shade under six feet. He wore a paisley print sport shirt, gray flannel pants, and loafers. He had a full head of silver hair that was neatly combed, with a small, knitted blue yarmulke held on with a clip.

Since it was early evening, the place was still empty. The proprietor approached us, seated us, and explained that tonight they had buffet-style dinner—all you could eat for $25 and you help yourself.

As we both tried to get comfortable in our seats, we couldn’t help but stare at each other, trying to take it all in. I decided to break the awkward silence.

“Mose, we have a lot of catching up to do. At least 68 years’ worth, by my count.”

The first thing he asked was about our mutual friend Avraham Chaim Kessler, or “Abie.” I told him he now lived in Ramat Gan in Eretz Yisrael, and I filled him in on his not-so-wonderful life. But then I said to him:

“You go first. Tell me about your life.”

He said, “Why don’t we first go up and fill our plates, and then come back and talk.”

I complimented him on his procedural choice, and with that we both arose and made a beeline to the buffet table. It was all very appetizing. They had at least three varieties of fish: tilapia, perch, and salmon. I took a little of each. There were all kinds of salads and pasta, french fries, and baked potatoes. They even had a tray with pizza. It all looked delicious.

Our colorful plates were piled high as we brought them to the table. We again awkwardly stared at each other. I said to myself that this was going to be quite an interesting evening. Sixty-eight years. A lot of catching up to do!

He began by telling me about his family. He had three children—a girl and two boys. At that point a waitress came over and brought us piping hot vegetable soup and a plate of toasted baccala bread. Mose stopped his narrative to take a couple spoonfuls of soup.

While having the soup, I asked him, after all these long years, what prompted him to call me at this time. He told me he just bought a computer two months ago and was still learning how to use it. He Googled a lot of the names he remembered from the old days, and mine was obviously among them. That fully explained his ineptness regarding the e-mail, and my jumping to a misimpression about his mental competence.

He continued by telling me that he had nine grandchildren, all of whom he was very proud of. I interrupted him to ask that he tell me first about how his youth played out, what schools he went to, the jobs he had, and so forth.

He told me that he finished Torah Vodaath, the same yeshiva I went to, and then went on to Ner Yisroel, and at the same time got a master’s degree in education. He retired at the age of 58, but is still a part-time teaching consultant. He told me that every day he takes his ArtScroll and goes to a daf yomi shiur.

He continued telling me about his children. His daughter, he said, was exceptionally pretty, and even today, at the age of 49, when she walks into a room all eyes turn. He had a son in Texas, who worked for a large accounting firm, and then told me about the other son, whose profession I don’t remember.

Although “only” a schoolteacher by profession, he seemed like he was definitely a man of means, perhaps even considerable means. Whether he made money in the stock market or in real estate, I do not know, nor did I ask.

“Now, tell me about you,” he said wide-eyed. “How did a person like you wind up in one of the famous Five Towns?”

Right off the bat I decided that I was not going to best him on the number of my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, or all the things I had done in my life. I decided to only give him a smattering. But before I began, I gave him a copy of my new 600-page book, To Climb the Mountain.

His jaw dropped. He could not believe it. “How could it be?” he kept saying. “I know how poorly you did in YTV, and you only went to Eastern District High School for one year. Your family was not that frum. How did you stay frum? In fact, none of the families wanted their children to associate with you. \

“My father said that you were a sweet boy, but your family was in a shambles. You had no father, your mother was always sick, you were on welfare, and you stayed out until all hours of the night with no supervision. You were a street urchin, for goodness’ sake! You must have had a ghostwriter write the book for you. You couldn’t have written this yourself.”

I interrupted him to say, “And I love you, too!”

He pretended he did not hear that, and continued: “And you now live in Lawrence, which is not cheap, and you’re still frum. How were you able to accomplish all of that?”

Although I did not want to brag about what small successes HaKadosh Baruch Hu bestowed on me, I did feel I was obliged to at least tell him something.

I told him about my tour of duty in the army during the Korean War, during which time I received a high school equivalency diploma and learned how to type. When I got out of the army, I married and studied court reporting. It became apparent that I had an unusual ability for court reporting, and I wound up with a relative degree of success, finally opening my own agency, and working it up until I had a fair-sized business. I told him that I finally sold my firm to a public company and retired at the age of 62. That was about all I said.

I said little about my family. I did tell him, however, about my mazel in meeting someone of the character and stature of Rabbi Eliyohu Rominek, who took me in hand and made somewhat of a ben Torah out of me. I also told him about my good friend and mentor Rabbi Shmuel Fishelis, shlita, who had always encouraged me to stay on the straight and narrow.

We spoke and spoke. We talked about the State of Israel, about our views on Zionism, and about our old friend Meir Kahane, zt’l. We spoke about Florida, our wives, the pros and cons of kollel learning, and, of course, what people our age are usually consumed with—our health.

The time was getting to be about 7 o’clock and it was nearing Minchah time. Since I was in an unfamiliar place, I had no clue where I would be able to find a Minchah minyan. So I told him that it was about time to bentch, which we did.

Before we got up, we asked each other how it was that although we had been such good friends, we had stopped seeing each other. He said it was because his family moved to Keap Street from Rodney Street, and although it was only one block away, he got a whole new group of friends and never saw me again.

I told him that I remembered it vividly and distinctly—and very differently. It was about a toy. I was very poor, and toys were not easy to come by, but I had this one precious toy, a wooden rifle that I guarded with my life and was so very proud of. I remembered that we had a fight about something, I don’t remember now what it was about, but then out of frustration, he grabbed the gun out of my hand, ran to the corner, and threw the rifle down the sewer.

“At that moment I only saw black. I saw my whole world come crashing down before me. I thought I would faint. My whole world was gone. My best toy. gone forever. I remember sitting on the curb, putting my head on my lap and crying my poor little heart out.

Mose listened and was obviously touched. He said that he did not remember this, but if that’s what happened, he was very sorry and asked me to be mochel him, especially since it was just before Rosh Hashanah. I told him that I surely would.

It was then that I knew the true meaning of our “out of the blue” meeting in Elul. And I was sure it was hashgachah pratis that we decided to meet before yom tov and not after.

As we both stood, I thought I saw indistinct shadows that seemed to cover the entire interior of the restaurant. We hugged each other in the middle of the restaurant, and as tears rolled down my cheeks, I again told him that I forgave him.

I was sure I could hear rusty hinges creaking as the gates of teshuvah opened wide at the strange sight: in the middle of Elul, in the middle of Teaneck, New Jersey, in the middle of someplace called Shelly’s, two old Jews, after a period of 68 years, hugged each other and cried for mechillah.

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