**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Nitzavim 5775**

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**Story #927**

**The Paralyzed Fingers**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=00019hW0:001Ltga900002SyS&count=1441200379&randid=558297064&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=558297064)

There was a very rich man who lived with his family in the state of Walachia. Without warning, both of his wife's hands became paralyzed so that she could not move her fingers at all. The man, who was very rich, spared no expense in taking her to all of the most famous physicians that lived in and near their city. But alas, none had any idea as to the cause of her illness or a suggestion for a cure.

The husband was not willing to give up. He traveled with her in their carriage from one distant city to another in the hope of finding a physician who could heal her.

**A Frequent Topic of Discussion**

As they traveled, they stayed at inns along the way. At each inn, the condition of his wife and their search for a physician was a frequent topic of discussion. Many fellow travelers suggested that they visit ***Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov***, a famous miracle worker who lived in the town of Mezibush, deep in the Carpathian Mountains. The couple had never heard of the Baal Shem Tov and were hesitant to visit him, especially since he lived so far away. But after months of traveling, they agreed that since they were unable to find a doctor who had even an inkling as to the cause of her illness, they might as well visit the Holy Rabbi.

As soon as they arrived in Mezibush, the husband and wife immediately went to meet with the Baal Shem Tov in his study. After they talked for a while, the Baal Shem Tov told them to remain in the community.

The couple found a comfortable inn and stayed for several weeks. During this period of time, they met with the Baal Shem Tov on several occasions. Each time, the Baal Shem Tov told them to stay longer. The husband and wife were both skeptical as to whether the Baal Shem Tov could heal the wife, but they really didn't have a better option. And besides, wherever they went in Mezibush, there was always someone that told them a miracle story about the Baal Shem Tov. Also, everyone assured them that the Baal Shem Tov would heal her.

**A Number of Weeks Had Already Passed**

Finally, after a number of weeks had already passed, the Baal Shem Tov asked Alexi, his wagon driver, to harness the horses to his wagon and prepare for a long trip. Then, he told the man to put his wife in their carriage and to follow him. The man didn't have any idea where they were going but he immediately harnessed his horses to his carriage, put his wife in and followed closely behind the Baal Shem Tov's wagon.

After several days of travel, the wagon and the carriage stopped in front of an inn whose innkeeper was one of the Baal Shem Tov's followers. The noise of the wagon and carriage brought the innkeeper and his wife out to welcome the unknown guests. When the Baal Shem Tov got down from the wagon, the innkeeper was beside himself with joy when he realized it was his Rebbe. The Baal Shem Tov asked the innkeeper whether they could have several rooms for the night.

**The Innkeeper Agrees without Hesitation**

"Of course Rebbe," the innkeeper answered without hesitation.

"There is one thing," the Baal Shem Tov continued, "during our stay, you will have to lock all the windows and the doors to the inn. And most importantly, you must not open them for anyone, irrespective of who it is, even if it is a very important person. If anyone does manage to force his way in, you may tell him that the Baal Shem Tov ordered the doors and windows locked and then point me out to them."

The innkeeper was perplexed by this request, but he promised to carry out every detail of the Baal Shem Tov's instructions. So Alexei unharnessed the horses from the wagon and the carriage, put them in the barn and fed them. Meanwhile, the Baal Shem Tov and the couple carried their bags into the inn. Even before they got settled in their rooms, the innkeeper locked all of the windows and the doors to the inn.

After dinner, they all went to sleep except the Baal Shem Tov who sat at the dining table in the main room and studied from a Holy book. Also, the wife with the paralyzed hands couldn't sleep, so she sat next to the warm oven in the corner of the main room. The Baal Shem Tov cautioned her that if he should ask her to do anything the next day, she must do so immediately.

**The Governor’s Brother Visits after Many Years**

Coincidentally, on that very same day, the regional Governor who owned the inn was visited by his brother whom he had not seen for many years. They rejoiced at seeing each other by eating and drinking to excess. Being somewhat tipsy from the drinking, the Governor started to brag to his brother, "I built an amazingly beautiful inn on my property. It's not very far from here. You must go over and see it before you leave."

"Who runs the inn?" inquired the brother.

"Moishke, one of my Jews, runs the inn," answered the Governor.

"Those Jews again," retorted the brother, "they run everything. I can't stand them."

"Brother, please don't speak that way. The Jews manage everything on my estates and they do a very good job," said the Governor.

Just then, someone came to see the Governor on official business. The brother asked, "Since you'll probably be busy for awhile, could I borrow one of your horses and ride over to look at your inn?"

**Saddles Up His Finest Horse**

The governor was happy that his brother was going to see his pride and joy. "Quick," he ordered one of his servants, "saddle up my finest horse for my brother and give him exact directions to the inn."

Since the inn was located near the Governor's mansion, the brother rode off without a warm coat. After riding for some time, a light snow began to fall. Soon, the light snow fall turned into a heavy snowstorm. The brother got lost and rode for several more hours in the snow before arriving at the inn, nearly blue from the cold. Relieved that he had finally arrived at the inn, he jumped off his horse and tried to open the door. But it was locked. He could see people in the inn through the windows, so he started to knock with all his might on the door.

The innkeeper yelled through the door, "I'm sorry but I can't open the door because Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov is here."

The Governor's brother started to plead with him, "Please open the door, can't you see it's snowing and I'm freezing to death."

But the innkeeper answered, "I can't let you in because the Rabbi said to keep the doors and windows locked."

The Governor's brother started to pound frantically on the door with his fist while yelling to let him in.

**The Baal Shem Tov Motions**

**For the Door to be Opened**

Finally, the Baal Shem Tov motioned the innkeeper to open the door.

The governor's brother burst into the inn and rushed over to the hot oven to thaw out his nearly frozen hands and feet. When he finally warmed up, he asked: "Who is this Rabbi that wouldn't let me in?"

The innkeeper and his wife told him, "The Baal Shem Tov," and pointed towards him.

The Governor's brother looked at the Baal Shem Tov who was still reading and not paying the slightest bit of attention to him. This disregard by the Baal Shem Tov made the man even more angry as he walked back and forth across the room, all the while glaring at the Baal Shem Tov.

"Who is this Rabbi Baal Shem Tov," he screamed at the innkeeper, "that you did not open the door for me until I almost died of the cold?!"

The innkeeper and his wife again meekly pointed towards the Baal Shem Tov.

**The Brother is Overwhelmed with Anger**

The Governor's brother became overwhelmed with anger. He drew his sword and shouted at the Baal Shem Tov, "Prepare to die you fool!" Then he rushed towards the Baal Shem Tov with his upraised sword.

At that very moment, the Baal Shem Tov called out to the paralyzed woman, "Lift up both your hands!"

She raised her paralyzed hands. Immediately her fingers began to move. At the same time, the Governor's brother stopped in his tracks as his sword fell out of his hand. He could no longer move his hands or fingers and he could see his hands beginning to curl and gnarl before his eyes.

"Please help me Rabbi," he screamed, "I'll do anything. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. My hands are paralyzed. My fingers won't move. Help me. I beg of you."

The Baal Shem Tov answered, "I cannot help you. The transference has occurred and it cannot be reversed."

When the couple returned to Mezibush, everyone crowded around to ask what happened. All the woman could say was "Baruch Hashem - Blessed be G-d Al-mighty," and wiggle her fingers to everyone's delight.

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*Source*: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Tzvi-Meir Cohn on *//BaalShemTov.com*, of a story found in Shivchei HaBesht and translated in In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov by Ben Amos and Mintz.

*Connection*: Seasonal--Wednesday is the 317th anniversary of the birth of the Baal Shem Tov (and the 270th of the Alter Rebbe of Chabad).

Biographic note: **Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer**(18 Elul 1698-6 Sivan 1760), ***the Baal Shem Tov***["master of the good Name"], a unique and seminal figure in Jewish history, revealed the Chassidic movement and his own identity as an exceptionally holy person, on his 36th birthday, 18 Elul 1734. He wrote no books, although many claim to contain his teachings. One available in English is the excellent annotated translation of Tzava'at Harivash, published by Kehos.

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**A Life-Saving Suggestion Heard in a Shiva House**

In a shiur, Rabbi Paysach Krohn emphasized that giving Tzedakah doesn’t mean just to give money, but it also means doing Chessed, acts of kindness with others. He related a story that displays tremendous Chessed shel Ahavah, loving kindness.

Out of care for another, a woman went to pay a Shiva call to a woman she had never met, who was sitting Shiva for her husband who had passed away. Before leaving, she said, “Please tell me something about your husband.”

His wife said, “My husband never delayed doing a Chessed. Any time someone asked him for a favor or if he would have a chance to help someone, he would always do it immediately, and never delay the kindness.”

She left the house, and as she was driving, she saw in another car, a woman who was fast asleep. She thought to herself, “This person is probably very tired, and thought she would catch a few minutes to rest while she waited to pick up one of her children from the bus stop.”

She thought very little of it and wanted to continue driving on her way, telling herself that if someone wanted to rest in her car, it was really none of her business. However, something didn’t look right about the way this woman was sleeping, perhaps the way her head was tilted.

She suddenly remembered what the lady sitting Shiva told her, ‘My husband never delayed doing a Chessed’, so she pulled over to the side of the road and called Hatzalah. She told them, “There’s a lady in her car, and I'm just not sure if she's sleeping or if something is wrong. Can you please come and check if she’s all right?”

Hatzalah was there in an instant, and soon after, one of the Hatzalah members came over to her and said, “You saved this woman’s life. She was in diabetic shock. If she remained in the car like that for another 20 minutes, she would have died.”

The woman was stunned. A few months later, the woman who was saved called her and said, “I know I have thanked you so much for saving my life, but I wanted to tell you that I am expecting a child. You actually saved two lives that day!”

Rabbi Krohn taught that this all happened because she took the time to notice a stranger and was caring enough to make a phone call on her behalf, which only took place because she didn’t push off doing a Chessed!

*Reprinted from last week’s email (Parshas Ki Savo) of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Living in Order to Do Good**

“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)

“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)*

*Reprinted from “L’Chaim Weekly” (Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5774)*

**Hospital Visit to a Sick Boy Turns into A Tefillin Wrapping for Jon Moscot, Rookie Pitcher of the Cincinnati Reds**



Jon Moscot of the Cincinatti Reds and Avi Newhouse

While sports players and other celebrities often visit children in hospitals, it’s rare that the two end up putting *tefillin* on together. It’s rarer still that the experience becomes the start of a long-term plan to spread awareness and raise money for other sick kids.

Avi Newhouse, 13, from the New York metropolitan area, is currently in the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital undergoing treatment for a rare form of lymphoma that has robbed him of the ability to ingest food and has pretty much put his life on hold.

Jon Moscot, 23, a California native, is a rookie pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds. Together, the two are busy making plans to encourage athletes to wear gold this September to draw attention to pediatric cancer.

They were brought together by two Chabad rabbis: Yisroel Mangel of Cincinnati and Eli Baitelman of the Pacific Palisades, Moscot’s hometown.

“It all began,” explains Mangel, “when I saw a post on social media from Avi’s mother, Leah Newhouse, asking if anyone knew of a professional athlete who would be able to visit her son, an avid Yankees fan who could use a bit of cheering up. I immediately thought of Jon, whom I had been introduced to by his rabbi, Rabbi Eli Baitelman.”

Moscot says his inspiration for visiting children in the hospital—something he has done before—and reaching out to others in need is a value he learned as a child attending Hebrew school, services and other celebrations at Chabad of Pacific Palisades, directed by Rabbi Zushe Cunin.



Moscot says at first, Avi was lying lethargically in bed, though he lit right up and started talking baseball.

“Chabad shaped my character to do mitzvahs,” he says. “The atmosphere of love and kindness is bound to have an effect on you, no matter who you are. So as soon as I heard there was a Jewish kid in the hospital—knowing that there aren’t many Jewish athletes out there—his plight was immediately relatable to me.”

Before the visit, Mangel, director of the Chabad Jewish Center in Cincinnati, told Moscot that he would be bringing tefillin for him to put on—something the ball player admits he had neglected in the years following his bar mitzvah at Chabad.

When the rabbi came into the room with the tefillin bag, Leah Newhouse turned to him and said with surprise, “How did you know?” Avi had been putting on *tefillin* every day with the help of his father in the months since his bar mitzvah. But since his father was not present that time, she had been wondering who would help her son do so that day.

Moscot says that when he first came in, Avi was lying lethargically in bed, not smiling, appearing to be in pain. “But as soon as I began to speak to him,” he recalls, “he perked right up. I was actually very impressed by how much he knew, quoting baseball stats. It’s rare to find someone who really knows baseball that well. He is a Yankees fan, so we were able to talk about some Yankees players that I know, which was nice.”



Moscot putting on tefillin

Moscot would later learn from Leah Newhouse that their visit was the first time Avi had smiled in a week.

Then the two strapped up in *tefillin* and took a few minutes to say the Shema prayer.

In the days since their meeting, Moscot says the two have been in regular contact via text as they coordinate Avi’s effort to enlist athletes to wear special wristbands and gold colors next month in support of pediatric cancer.

“Going through chemo tires you out, makes you nauseous, makes you weak,” Newhouse posted on Instagram. “Most people just see pediatric cancer as ‘the cute bald kids running around in Disneyland,’ but trust me, it’s really not like that.”

*Reprinted from the September 1, 2015 website of Matzav.com The article was written by Chabad.Org*

**Sabbath**

**By Oliver Sacks**



Oliver Sacks

MY mother and her 17 brothers and sisters had an Orthodox upbringing — all photographs of their father show him wearing a yarmulke, and I was told that he woke up if it fell off during the night. My father, too, came from an Orthodox background. Both my parents were very conscious of the Fourth Commandment (“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”), and the Sabbath (Shabbos, as we called it in our Litvak way) was entirely different from the rest of the week.

No work was allowed, no driving, no use of the telephone; it was forbidden to switch on a light or a stove. Being physicians, my parents made exceptions. They could not take the phone off the hook or completely avoid driving; they had to be available, if necessary, to see patients, or operate, or deliver babies.

**Lived in a Fairly Orthodox Jewish Community**

We lived in a fairly Orthodox Jewish community in Cricklewood, in Northwest London — the butcher, the baker, the grocer, the greengrocer, the fishmonger, all closed their shops in good time for the Shabbos, and did not open their shutters till Sunday morning. All of them, and all our neighbors, we imagined, were celebrating Shabbos in much the same fashion as we did.

Around midday on Friday, my mother doffed her surgical identity and attire and devoted herself to making gefilte fish and other delicacies for Shabbos. Just before evening fell, she would light the ritual candles, cupping their flames with her hands, and murmuring a prayer. We would all put on clean, fresh Shabbos clothes, and gather for the first meal of the Sabbath, the evening meal. My father would lift his silver wine cup and chant the blessings and the Kiddush, and after the meal, he would lead us all in chanting the grace.

**Hearing the Old Medieval Prayers Sung**

On Saturday mornings, my three brothers and I trailed our parents to Cricklewood Synagogue on Walm Lane, a huge shul built in the 1930s to accommodate part of the exodus of Jews from the East End to Cricklewood at that time. The shul was always full during my boyhood, and we all had our assigned seats, the men downstairs, the women — my mother, various aunts and cousins — upstairs; as a little boy, I sometimes waved to them during the service. Though I could not understand the Hebrew in the prayer book, I loved its sound and especially hearing the old medieval prayers sung, led by our wonderfully musical hazan.

All of us met and mingled outside the synagogue after the service — and we would usually walk to the house of my Auntie Florrie and her three children to say a Kiddush, accompanied by sweet red wine and honey cakes, just enough to stimulate our appetites for lunch. After a cold lunch at home — gefilte fish, poached salmon, beetroot jelly — Saturday afternoons, if not interrupted by emergency medical calls for my parents, would be devoted to family visits. Uncles and aunts and cousins would visit us for tea, or we them; we all lived within walking distance of one another.

**Jewish Community in Cricklewood was not the Same**

The Second World War decimated our Jewish community in Cricklewood, and the Jewish community in England as a whole was to lose thousands of people in the postwar years. Many Jews, including cousins of mine, emigrated to Israel; others went to Australia, Canada or the States; my eldest brother, Marcus, went to Australia in 1950. Many of those who stayed assimilated and adopted diluted, attenuated forms of Judaism. Our synagogue, which would be packed to capacity when I was a child, grew emptier by the year.

I chanted my bar mitzvah portion in 1946 to a relatively full synagogue, including several dozen of my relatives, but this, for me, was the end of formal Jewish practice. I did not embrace the ritual duties of a Jewish adult — praying every day, putting on tefillin before prayer each weekday morning — and I gradually became more indifferent to the beliefs and habits of my parents, though there was no particular point of rupture until I was 18.

After I qualified as a doctor in 1960, I removed myself abruptly from England and what family and community I had there, and went to the New World, where I knew nobody. When I moved to Los Angeles, I found a sort of community among the weight lifters on Muscle Beach, and with my fellow neurology residents at U.C.L.A., but I craved some deeper connection — “meaning” — in my life, and it was the absence of this, I think, that drew me into near-suicidal addiction to amphetamines in the 1960s.

**Found Meaningful Work in a**

**Bronx Chronic Care Hospital**

Recovery started, slowly, as I found meaningful work in New York, in a chronic care hospital in the Bronx (the “Mount Carmel” I wrote about in “Awakenings”). I was fascinated by my patients there, cared for them deeply, and felt something of a mission to tell their stories — stories of situations virtually unknown, almost unimaginable, to the general public and, indeed, to many of my colleagues. I had discovered my vocation, and this I pursued doggedly, single-mindedly, with little encouragement from my colleagues. Almost unconsciously, I became a storyteller at a time when medical narrative was almost extinct. This did not dissuade me, for I felt my roots lay in the great neurological case histories of the 19th century (and I was encouraged here by the great Russian neuropsychologist A. R. Luria). It was a lonely but deeply satisfying, almost monkish existence that I was to lead for many years.

During the 1990s, I came to know a cousin and contemporary of mine, Robert John Aumann, a man of remarkable appearance with his robust, athletic build and long white beard that made him, even at 60, look like an ancient sage. He is a man of great intellectual power but also of great human warmth and tenderness, and deep religious commitment — “commitment,” indeed, is one of his favorite words. Although, in his work, he stands for rationality in economics and human affairs, there is no conflict for him between reason and faith.

He insisted I have a mezuza on my door, and brought me one from Israel. “I know you don’t believe,” he said, “but you should have one anyhow.” I didn’t argue.

In a remarkable 2004 interview, Robert John spoke of his lifelong work in mathematics and game theory, but also of his family — how he would go skiing and mountaineering with some of his nearly 30 children and grandchildren (a kosher cook, carrying saucepans, would accompany them), and the importance of the Sabbath to him.

“The observance of the Sabbath is extremely beautiful,” he said, “and is impossible without being religious. It is not even a question of improving society — it is about improving one’s own quality of life.”

In December of 2005, Robert John received a Nobel Prize for his 50 years of fundamental work in economics. He was not entirely an easy guest for the Nobel Committee, for he went to Stockholm with his family, including many of those children and grandchildren, and all had to have special kosher plates, utensils and food, and special formal clothes, with no biblically forbidden admixture of wool and linen.



**Robert John Aumann**

**Sabbath Would Have**

**Trumped Even a Nobel**

THAT same month, I was found to have cancer in one eye, and while I was in the hospital for treatment the following month, Robert John visited. He was full of entertaining stories about the Nobel Prize and the ceremony in Stockholm, but made a point of saying that, had he been compelled to travel to Stockholm on a Saturday, he would have refused the prize. His commitment to the Sabbath, its utter peacefulness and remoteness from worldly concerns, would have trumped even a Nobel.

In 1955, as a 22-year-old, I went to Israel for several months to work on a kibbutz, and though I enjoyed it, I decided not to go again. Even though so many of my cousins had moved there, the politics of the Middle East disturbed me, and I suspected I would be out of place in a deeply religious society. But in the spring of 2014, hearing that my cousin Marjorie — a physician who had been a protégée of my mother’s and had worked in the field of medicine till the age of 98 — was nearing death, I phoned her in Jerusalem to say farewell. Her voice was unexpectedly strong and resonant, with an accent very much like my mother’s. “I don’t intend to die now,” she said, “I will be having my 100th birthday on June 18th. Will you come?”

**Reversing a Decision of Almost 60 Years**

I said, “Yes, of course!” When I hung up, I realized that in a few seconds I had reversed a decision of almost 60 years. It was purely a family visit. I celebrated Marjorie’s 100th with her and extended family. I saw two other cousins dear to me in my London days, innumerable second and removed cousins, and, of course, Robert John. I felt embraced by my family in a way I had not known since childhood.

The peace of the Sabbath, of a stopped world, a time outside time, was palpable, infused everything, and I found myself drenched with a wistfulness, something akin to nostalgia, wondering *what if*: What if A and B and C had been different? What sort of person might I have been? What sort of a life might I have lived?

In December 2014, I completed my memoir, “On the Move,” and gave the manuscript to my publisher, not dreaming that days later I would learn I had metastatic cancer, coming from the melanoma I had in my eye nine years earlier. In February, I felt I had to be equally open about my cancer — and facing death. I was, in fact, in the hospital when my essay on this, “My Own Life,” was published in this newspaper. In July I wrote another piece for the paper, “My Periodic Table,” in which the physical cosmos, and the elements I loved, took on lives of their own.

And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life — achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one’s life as well, when one can feel that one’s work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.

*Oliver Wolf Sacks was a professor of neurology at the New York University School of Medicine and the author, most recently, of the memoir “On the Move.” He passed away in New York City on August 30th of this year.*

*Excerpted from the August 14, 2015 edition of The New York Times.*