**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayeilech 5772**

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**What Would the**

**Abbot Say Now?**



**Reb Aharon Calderon**

 If only the abbot could see Justo Jorge Calderon now. With curling peyos dangling below his chin and the long black cloak of his small hassidic sect hanging off his broad shoulders, Calderon sure doesn't look like a Benedictine monk anymore. Besides, he goes by Aharon now, and he is the proud father of three little Jewish children.

 Calderon's story is one of those stranger-than-fiction tales that grows more intriguing the longer it goes on. Fortunately, it's also one he doesn't mind sharing....

 It begins in a small town outside Buenos Aires, Argentina, where Justo Jorge was born into a family of Roman Catholics. "Today I am a very kosher Jew," the 36-year-old says with a smile, "but once I was a very kosher goy."

**Spending Extra Times with the Monks**

 When Calderon was 12, he says, his parents sent him to a private religious school to get a better education than the public schools provided. Before long he was spending extra time studying with the monks. At 14, he joined the pre-mission seminar. "I was young and idealistic," he explains with a shrug. After high school, with his religious zeal increasing, Calderon went looking for the "ancient, original teachings" of Catholicism.

 The local Benedictine monastery offered the oldest, "purest" form of Catholicism life around. Based on a 1,400-year-old order and centered around a largely self-sustaining "holy village," it meant spending most of the day in silence, reflecting on what they thought was the "divine."

**The Two Surprises**

 Although Calderon's parents weren't happy about his commitment to the monastic life - he's their only son, and they hoped for grandchildren - the young man felt at home in the Benedictine monastery. At home, that is, until he experienced what he calls "my two surprises." The first came in the monastery's library. One of the largest around, it helped make the monastery famous, Calderon says. Of the thousands of volumes it held, though, one particular book would change his life.

 "One day," he says, "I chanced upon a Haggada, in Spanish and Hebrew. I was drawn to it, and read it from beginning to end, in amazement." At the end of the Seder service, Calderon read the prayer looking forward to celebrating the Pesach holiday "next year in Jerusalem - Jerusalem rebuilt" and stared at a drawing of the Third Temple.

**Sitting in Stunned Silence**

 Calderon sat in silence - not his usual contemplative silence, but a stunned silence. Justo Jorge Calderon. "Catholicism," he explains, "looks at Judaism as something of an archeological concept, not as something that is still alive, relevant and flourishing... Looking at this prayer at the end of the Haggada, I was shocked that modern Jews still nurtured hopes for the future of their religion."

 The discovery rocked Calderon, but he was still unsure what to make of it. Shortly thereafter, though, he experienced his second "surprise," which sent his spiritual quest in an entirely unforeseen direction. It came on one of his weekly visits to the abbot of the monastery.

**The Abbot was Poring Over a Hebrew Bible**

 Upon entering the abbot's study, Calderon found him poring over a Hebrew Bible. (The abbot, Calderon learned, had once studied in Jerusalem, and was comparing ancient texts.) "I was fascinated by the language," he recalls. "I wanted to know, what secrets are in those letters?" By that point Calderon had spent several years in the monastery and, although he was well on his way to a permanent stay there, he returned to his home for a planned one- or two-year break.

 Once at home he began attending classes at the Catholic-run university in town and working as a nurse for the Red Cross. But, with his "surprises" spurring him on, Calderon also sought out Jews who would be willing to teach him Hebrew. At the time, conversion was not on his mind. "I just wanted to know how JC prayed," he says.

**Attending Services at a Local Synagogue**

 On Friday nights, Calderon attended services at a local synagogue where the rabbi agreed to let him join the weekly Hebrew class. He also discovered a Messianic Jewish congregation, and prayed there as well. Thus began a period when, Calderon recalls, he would pray to JC while in synagogue on Friday night, and wear a kippa to church on Sunday morning. To Calderon, these interreligious prayer sessions didn't seem like a contradiction.

 "It sounds strange," he admits, "but at the time, it made sense to me. Judaism was not 'outside' Catholicism, but part of it... like an ancestor." Soon, however, something in the Shabbos prayers struck Calderon, and shook the foundations of his faith.

 It was part of the Shabbos morning kiddush, specifically, the passage from Exodus that says: "And the Children of Israel observed the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath for their generations an eternal covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever..."

 "This expression stuck in my mind," Calderon says, repeating the words. "'It is a sign forever.'" "That meant," he says, "that there is an eternal bond, established by Hashem. And since Hashem does not change, then that bond" - the sign observed by Jews, marking Saturday as the Sabbath - "must still be in effect!"

 Why, Calderon asked himself, would the Church move the Sabbath day to Sunday, if it wasn't really a day sanctified by Hashem? The question was more than a little troubling to Calderon. After all, if Sunday was not really the holy Sabbath, and if Hashem's covenant with the Jews had not been abrogated and superseded by Catholicism, then maybe other tenets of the Catholic religion were also not true.

**His Belief in Catholicism Just Fell Apart**

 Calderon stopped going to church. "Everything I believed," he says, "just fell apart." He started a conversion class at the local Reform synagogue. When the synagogue closed down due to financial difficulties, Calderon sought out more Jews and discovered the local Chabad rabbi.

 Rather than eagerly welcome a new convert, the rabbi at first tried to dissuade Calderon. "He would say, 'Why would you want to be Jewish? We have so many commandments, while non-Jews need only to observe the Noahide laws. Besides, you are already a good person in Hashem's eyes!'"

**Judaism Has a Place in Heaven for Everyone**

 This, however, only made Calderon's desire to convert even greater. "Until then, I had thought that Judaism was a religion of strictness and law, whereas Catholicism was a religion of love. But suddenly I realized that it was really the opposite." "You see," he explains, "in Catholicism, if you don't believe in JC you can't go to heaven. But in Judaism, there is a place in heaven for everyone; you don't have to be Jewish. So really, Catholicism is the religion of strictness, and Judaism is the religion of love!"

**A Desire to Move to Israel**

 After a period of "trying it out," Calderon knew that he wanted to convert, and that he wanted to move to Israel to do so. There was just one problem: finances. "A ticket to Israel cost $1,200. As a nurse, I was only making $200 a month. How could I ever afford to go to Israel?" he says. The situation was bleak. But then something miraculous happened. There was a raffle in Calderon's town, with a grand prize of a new ambulance; he entered.

 Just before Rosh Hashana, Calderon was informed that he had won the grand prize. He sold the ambulance and, suddenly able to afford the airfare, flew to Israel.

 At first, Calderon, in his new identity as Aharon, studied at a yeshiva for potential converts. But within a few months the yeshiva had closed. In early 1999, Calderon met Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum and joined the Spanish speakers' ulpan Rabbi Birbuam's wife had just started.

 Around Rosh Hashana that year, Calderon underwent a bris mila. Before Succos, he entered a mikva and completed his conversion. Back home in Argentina, there was little celebrating going on. Although Calderon's mother was happy that he would, having given up the monastic life, provide her with grandchildren, several family members told Calderon, "If you're Jewish, don't come back here."

**Separated Only by a Fine Line**

 "A few years earlier, I had realized that love, hate and jealousy were separated only by a fine line," Calderon says. "I made a choice to love the Jewish people. Later, I began to see the hatred that some people in my town had for Jews." Calderon currently serves as a gabbai in the Stropkover shul in Jerusalem.

 If a non-Jew who was saturated with impurity can turn his life around and purify himself and change his ways so drastically, then surely we too can change in the coming year.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Good Shabbos*

**What’s the Right Thing to Do?**

**Real-Life Questions of Social and Business Ethics.**

**Honoring the Old Books**

 Question: As the *gabbai* of my synagogue it is my responsibility to see that there are *Siddurim* and *Chumashim* for the

use of the congregants. After a while these holy books become very worn and must be rebound. The problem is that it is cheaper to buy new ones than to bind the old ones so that it is common practice in synagogues to discard the old ones by placing them in the *geniza* collection box for proper burial. What is the right thing to do?

 Answer: In response to such a question Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, ruled that it is preferable to bind the worn books even at a greater cost than purchasing new ones. This was based on the obligation to honor sacred books in the manner that we honor a Sefer Torah.

 The problems which you and other synagogue trustees face is that congregants are eager to donate new books in memory of deceased relatives but will not pay for binding old ones. This inevitably creates a crisis of sufficient space for both the old and new. Nevertheless, an attempt should be made to create a “*Tikun Sefarim*” fund in your synagogue to restore these books which have provided so much service, and to offer the rebound ones to a synagogue or yeshiva in need of them before giving up and putting them into the

*geniza*.

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

A Jewish American Hero

**By** [**Dr. James S. Robbins**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48867677)

 When the White House called Corporal Tibor "Ted" Rubin to tell him he was to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor he thought it was one of his friends playing a joke. President Bush has called the 76-year-old Korean War veteran "one of the greatest Jewish soldiers America has ever known." But Ted is characteristically modest. "I was just a country boy," he told me, "but next week I'll be honored with the country's highest award. This is unbelievable."

 Being awarded the Medal of Honor is another of a series of adventures in Ted Rubin's remarkable life. He was born in Hungary in 1929, and at age 15 was sent to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. His first day there an SS captain told the assembled, "None of you will get out of here alive."

**Most of His Family Perished**

 Ted turned to the man next to him and said, "Nice fellow." Ted survived the next 14 brutal months of captivity, but most of his family perished. His father died in Buchenwald. His ten-year-old sister Elonja was sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz, and his mother Rosa, who was slated for forced labor, chose instead to face death with her daughter.

 Mauthausen was liberated by the U.S. 11th Armored Division on May 5, 1945. With nothing left for him in Hungary Ted emigrated to the United States. He promised himself that he would show his appreciation to the country that gave him his freedom, and saved his life.

 Ted joined the Army in February 1950, and five months later landed in Korea with the 3rd battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, one of the first American units sent to help repel North Korean invasion forces. Ted was soon involved in the fighting withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter.

**Tricked an Entire Company**

**Of North Korean Soldiers**

 In one engagement near Chirye, Ted's company was redeploying from one hill to another, and he volunteered to stay behind to keep the enemy guessing until the movement was completed. As Corporal Leonard Hamm relates, "the North Koreans, thinking the hill was still occupied by a whole company, made an all out offensive with all their available troops.

 PFC Tibor Rubin had stocked each foxhole with grenades, and during the attack the following morning made his way running from foxhole to foxhole, lobbing, one after the other, grenades down upon the enemy, he became almost hysterical in his actions but he held the hill."

 For this and other actions, Ted's immediate superiors recommended him for the Medal of Honor. However, before the paperwork could be processed these officers were killed, and a sergeant who might have sent the papers up refused to do so because Ted was Jewish. "Not on my watch," he said.

**Captured During the Battle of Unsan**

 After the Inchon invasion, the 8th Cavalry Regiment moved north towards the Chinese border, and was at the forward edge of the U.N. offensive when the Chinese Red Army entered the conflict. Ted's battalion was destroyed at the Battle of Unsan in early November 1950, while fighting a delaying action against Chinese forces swarming south from the Yalu. Hundreds of Americans were captured, among them Ted, who had manned a machine gun to hold off the enemy as the rest of the unit attempted to withdraw.

 Ted found himself in the Pukchin POW camp, also known as "Death Valley," and later at Pyoktong, along with hundreds of Americans, Turks, and others. The camps were at first run by the North Koreans, then by the Chinese, whom Ted said treated them slightly better.

 Nevertheless, life was nightmarish for the prisoners. They were cold and hungry, and disease was rampant. "Healthy men became like babies, helpless," Ted said. "Everything was stink, death, it was terrible, terrible." 30-40 a day were dying. "It was hardest on the Americans who were not used to this," Ted said. "But I had a heck of a basic training from the Germans." Ted used all the experience he had gained as a Holocaust survivor in helping to keep himself and other prisoners alive.

 Ted used all the experience he had gained as a Holocaust survivor in helping to keep himself and other prisoners alive. "I did it because I was an American," Ted told me, "and because it was a mitzvah. Regardless of color or nationality, they were my brothers."

 Food was vital for survival, so he began to steal rations from the enemy, who had little enough themselves. Fellow POW Sergeant Carl McClendon stated, "every day, when it got dark, and we went to sleep, Rubin was on his way, crawling on his stomach, jumping over fences, breaking in supply houses, while the guns were looking down on him. He tied the bottom of his fatigue pants and filled up anything he could get a hold of. He crawled back and distributed the food that he had stolen and risked his life."

**Treating the Sick and Injured**

 Ted also did what he could to treat the sick and injured. But many were beyond saving, and diseases such as dysentery could strike anyone. "No one knew when he would die," Ted noted, "It was all random." When prisoners passed away, Ted would bury them, and recite the Kaddish. "I buried my friends, my comrades, American soldiers," Ted said, "and asked the Good Lord to let them rest in peace."

 When the Chinese learned that Ted was originally from Hungary they offered to let him return to his home country, which at the time was a Soviet satellite. They promised him a job, good clothes, all the food he could want. But Ted refused to be a pawn for Chinese propaganda and turned them down. "I stood by my oath," he said. Ted stayed in the camp until the end of the war when he was released. The Army credits him with saving over 40 lives during his two and a half years of imprisonment.

**Stunned His Former Soldiers**

**By Showing Up at a Reunion**

 When Ted returned to the United States, he finally received his U.S. citizenship. "I was the happiest man in the world," he said. He left the Army and worked at his brother Emery's store. Ted married, and he and his wife Yvonne had two children. By this time there was no talk of medals; the country was moving on, and anyway many men in Ted's original unit thought he was dead. He created a wonder at a 1980 Korean War veterans' reunion simply by showing up.

 Ted's case was brought to the Army's attention in 1985, but he was ineligible to receive the award until statutory language was amended in 1996. His is one of many cases being reviewed under section 552 of the 2002 National Defense Authorization Act, which requires the military to "review the records of certain Jewish American and Hispanic American war veterans to determine if any of these veterans should be awarded the Medal of Honor."

 Most such awards will unfortunately be posthumous. But on September 23, President Bush will give Corporal Ted Rubin long overdue recognition for his many acts of valor in the Korean conflict. Ted will receive, in his own words, "the highest honor of the best country in the world." How does he feel about it? "It still hasn't sunk in," he said. "I'm just a country boy. It's a dream come true."

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com This article originally appeared a few years ago on National Review Online.*

**Oy, Vey! The Case of**

**The Spoiled Brisket**

**By Zev Singer, Ottawa Citizen**



**Only a week before Rosh Hashanah, Ottawa’s Jewish community was shocked to learn that most of the kosher meat in the city was gone because of a malfunction in fridges at College Square Loblaws, the main source for kosher meat and prepared foods in Ottawa. Photograph by: John Major**

 OTTAWA — Call it the “Oy!” Heard ‘Round the Greenbelt.

 Only a week before Rosh Hashanah, Ottawa’s Jewish community was shocked to learn that most of the kosher meat in the city was gone.

 On Saturday night, a technical malfunction shut down a number of fridges at the College Square Loblaws, including most of those in the store’s kosher section, which is the main source for kosher meat and prepared foods in Ottawa. The section had been full of extra stock for the Jewish holidays.

 By the time the problem was discovered Sunday morning, it was too late. The store, unwilling to take a risk in case the meat had gone bad, tossed tens of thousands of dollars worth of merchandise.

**Greeted by Empty Fridges**

 Later that day, customers looking to start their holiday cooking were greeted with empty fridges.

 The briskets? Gone. The chicken? Forget about it. There was no gefilte fish, nary a knish.

 “What a shtunk!” said shopper Murray Lieff.

 The news began to spread.

 “PSA: NO kosher meat at Loblaws until Tuesday!” declared a warning on Jewish Mommies, an Ottawa-based Yahoo email group.

 While the staff at Loblaws scrambled to re-order meat from Toronto and Montreal, people rushed to grab what they could from the Walmart at Baseline Road and Maitland Avenue and the Metro on Greenbank Road, which have smaller kosher sections.

**Some Items Were Restocked**

 By Tuesday, the section at Loblaws was restocked. Not all of the specialty items could be replaced: Go try to find 20 kosher beef tongues on short notice. But chickens and roasts were available, which wasn’t chopped liver. (Actually, chopped liver wasn’t available, either — it never is, which is a sore spot for Loblaws patrons, but a whole other story.)

 By mid-morning Tuesday, a hoard of shoppers descended on the store, and whole flocks of chicken flew out the door in minutes.

 Renee Rapoport, shopping there later that day, said she heard about the great kosher section disaster from her sister-in-law, whose Facebook posting said it was going to be a vegetarian Rosh Hashanah.

 Rapoport said she was glad she’d done some advance work.

 “I made my four pounds of meatballs two weeks ago,” she said.

 Though glad there was food for sale, shopper Tova Lynch was fretting over the beef selection and wondering what she would do with a mere two-pound brisket.

 How many people did she have to cook for? Actually, none; she was invited out for all the holiday meals. But she was still rattled by the sudden scarcity.

 “If you don’t cook, you don’t feel it’s Rosh Hashanah,” she said.

 Mitchell Bellman, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Ottawa, said he felt sorry for Loblaws, which suffered from unfortunate timing. If the kosher fridge disaster had happened a week and a half later, he noted, it would have coincided with the next big Jewish holiday, when eating is forbidden.

 Said Bellman, “It would have been better if this happened just before Yom Kippur.”

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**A Slice of Life**

**Kaparos**

**By Tzvi Jacobs**

 It was just before dawn. Faige whisked her baby down the stairs while her husband, Beryl, balanced their two and three year olds in each arm. The other children piled into the station wagon on their own.

 An hour later we arrived in Bridgeport and began looking for Oak Street, in the section called, "The Hollow."

 In the 40s and 50s this old part of Bridgeport was a thriving immigrant neighborhood of Jews and Italians, but this was 1985 and all the Jews had long gone; some hardy Italians remained in the "neighborhood" and ran their auto body shops or small slaughter houses, or visited "The Hollow" for their motorcycle club meetings.

**Asking for Directions**

 A man appeared out of nowhere. He walked with a swaying gait. "Excuse me, sir," Rabbi Beryl Levitin called out his window. "Do you know where Oak Street is?"

 "Right there. (Hiccup.) Just swing around by the Columbus School," he said, pointing to the old grammar school at the next corner.

 With no street signs we could easily have passed the decrepit- looking building, with an ancient, peeling wooden sign which read, "Live Poultry."

 Stacked crates of chickens lined the walls. Chicken feathers, straw and chicken waste matted the concrete floor.

 "Get out of the way," a big gruff man barked. We jumped back as he barged through with a crate of cackling chickens under each arm. "Stand by the door. Can't you see you're in the way?"

 He wasn't in a good mood. Sweat mixed with dirt covered his face and his bare, muscular arms.

 "I'm Levitin. We came from New Haven," Rabbi Levitin said softly, but undeterred.

**Not a Cheerful Greeting**

 "You said you'd be here by 6," the man said angrily. It was five after 7.

 "I'm too busy, don't have time for this nonsense," he said.

 "We'll wait till you have a break," Rabbi Levitin said quietly.

 "Forget it. I got a lot of work to do. Go home, and do your rituals someplace else," he said, turning his back and going about his business.

 I figured there was no taking to this guy. "Beryl, should we leave?" I asked.

 "We'll wait," Beryl answered.

 Beryl did not give up easily when doing a mitzva.

 On the eve of Yom Kippur it is customary to rise early in the morning and perform the rite of "Kaparot." But if it is not possible to do it on the eve of Yom Kippur, the rite may be enacted the previous day... which is exactly what many people did in New Haven at the New Haven Hebrew Day School where Rabbi Levitin and I taught.

**A Legacy of Having Been**

**Raised in the Soviet Union**

 And, if one cannot procure live chickens, even a fish can be used. Or a person may recite the Kaparot verses while swinging some coins wrapped in cloth over his head. Afterwards, the money is given to charity.

 But when one is raised in a home in Soviet Russia, where one's father was a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and a teacher during the Stalinist years, driving to Bridgeport early in the morning was not an impossibility -- especially compared to Siberia, where Beryl's father spent his final years for the crime of teaching Judaism.

 So, waiting for that cranky Italian butcher to give us some live chickens was not too difficult for Beryl. After an hour had passed, the butcher called out, "O.K., take a chicken!"

 "My wife and daughters need hens, and my sons and friend and I need roosters," Beryl said.

 "I'll give you one rooster and one hen," he said.

 "One for everybody. I'm paying you for them," Beryl answered firmly. "White ones, please."

**Swing a Crate of Hens Onto the Table**

 The angry look on the butcher's face scared me. He grabbed a crate and swung it onto the table. "Hens. Take what you want," he said.

Wasting no time, Rabbi and Mrs. Levitin each took a hen and started helping two of their daughters do kaparot.

 Chaya Elke, 5, held the hen in her right hand and repeated in Hebrew the words after her mother.

 Next Faige and Chaya Elke lifted the hen over Chaya Elke's head, and said the following words as they turned the hen nine times around her head: "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This chicken shall go to its death and I shall proceed to a life, good and long and to peace."

 Suddenly, painful sobs were heard. Tears were streaming down the butcher's face.

 "What's wrong?" Beryl asked compassionately.

**The Butcher’s Revelation**

 The butcher was really crying. "My Zaide used to do that with me when I was a little boy. When Zaide died, I was only seven, and that was it for anything Jewish. My parents were too busy working, they ran a store six days a week. On Sunday, they were busy doing the books.

 "Two weeks before I turned 13, my father took me to a rabbi and said I need a Bar Mitzva. The Rabbi said, 'No problem. Just give me $20; he'll repeat the blessings after me. Bring him back in three Sundays; we'll be reading the Torah then.'

 "Like your three-year-old daughter, I repeated the words after the Rabbi. Only, being 13, I was so embarrassed. What's worse, no one was listening, just talking and laughing through the whole thing. That day I swore to myself that I'd never set foot in a shul again. And I haven't."

 "Do you want to 'shlug kaporos?'" Beryl asked.

 The Jew reached for a white rooster, and he repeated the kaporos prayer after Beryl, word for word. But this time, no one was laughing. There were only tears.

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