**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Vayakhel 5771**

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**Chassidic Story #691**

**Angelic Pleasure**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

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 The saintly Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk once recovered from a life-threatening illness. When his recovery was complete, his closest disciples mustered their courage to ask him what he had seen while hovering between life and death.

 The Rebbe said that he would tell one thing he learned:

 “As I walked in the Garden of Eden, I saw among the most honored souls a familiar face. He looked very much like Mottel the Bookbinder. To be sure, Mottel was a G-d-fearing Jew, an honest, hard-working bookbinder, but he was otherwise an undistinguished ordinary Jew, not even much of a Torah scholar.

 “Is it truly you, Reb Mottel? I asked the soul as I approached him.

 “Yes, it is I, called out Reb Mottel happily.

 “But how did you get to this exalted place? I asked Reb Mottel quite innocently.

 “When I was brought before the Heavenly Court, I was asked the usual questions. I had to admit that, regrettably, I had studied very little Torah. I didn't have much of a head for it. Besides, we were very poor, so I had to find a way of earning money to help my parents support the family. I was apprenticed, at an early age, to a bookbinder, I explained to the Court...

 “They began the weighing of my mitzvot (commandments) and sins. On the right side of the scale, angels began putting all my good deeds. Then they pushed the scale down to make it weightier, saying this was for the joy and sincerity with which I performed the mitzvot.

 “But then other angels came forward and began to load my sins and misdeeds on the left scale. I watched with horror as my sins were added up. Most of the sins were truly not serious, and they happened because of my ignorance. But, though they were small, they were adding up dangerously, till they tipped the scale.

 “As I stood there before the Heavenly Court, trembling and ashamed, an angel suddenly appeared with a worn-out siddur (prayer book) in his hand. Behind him was a line of wagons loaded with sacks.

 “'I am the angel in charge of stray pages from holy books. I go to every Jewish home, every shul and every Jewish school. I look to see the condition of the holy books. Whenever I see a worn out book, with crumpled pages and loose covers it gives me tremendous pleasure, for this is a sign that the books are in constant use.

 “’But when I see that some of these books are tattered beyond repair, I am troubled, for every holy book has a holy soul, and every page has a soul, which must be treated with care and respect.

 “'In the course of my travels I met this man here on trial. Ever since he was a child, Mottel loved his little siddur and would often caress and kiss it before closing it.

 “'When it came time for Mottel to be apprenticed, he told his father that there was nothing he would like more than to be a bookbinder.

 “'I have never seen a book-binder like Mottel,' continued the angel in my defense. 'He never got any pages mixed up, never missed a stitch, and always used the best materials. From time to time, he would go to the shuls in his town and collect holy books that cried out for attention. He took them home and worked late into the night to restore them, bind them and give them new life. He never charged for this and never even told anyone about

it.

 “'I respectfully request that the Heavenly Court permit me to unload all the sacks of worn-out holy books to which Mottel the Bookbinder has given a second life, and put them on the scale with all his other mitzvot and good deeds.

 “The Heavenly Court agreed. Long before the wagons were half unloaded, the scale with the mitzvot clearly outweighed the other side. Believe me, dear Rebbe, Mottel concluded, I was as astonished as you were at what happened before my eyes at seeing me in this place of honor.

 “I wanted to ask Mottel a few more questions, explained Rebbe Elimelech, but at just that moment I began to recover. Reb Mottel's story speaks for itself. But let us also remember, Reb Elimelech enjoined his disciples, that G-d never fails to give credit and reward for any good deed, even for such a seemingly trivial act as smoothing out a crumpled corner of a well worn page in a holy book.”

 Source: From Talks and Tales. (as posted on lchaimweekly.org #999]

 Connection: Seasonal - 224th yahrzeit.

 Biographical note: Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhinsk (1717 - 21 Adar 1787), was a major disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov, and the leading Rebbe of the subsequent generation in Poland-Galitzia. Most of the great Chassidic dynasties stem from his disciples. His book, Noam Elimelech, is one of the most popular of all Chassidic works.

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**The Death of Shraga’s**

**Two Horses**

**By Tuvia Bolton**

 Shraga was a simple wagon-driver. He eked out a meager living by taking people from one town to another. When the weather was nice, his two horses were trotting along without mishap, and he had a customer, it was easy for him to be happy. If not, Shraga would look for something to be happy about.

 But today he was miserable.

 It all started about six months earlier, in the beginning of the winter. When he had set out that morning, the sky was clear and the cool autumn air was fresh and crisp; but when he was about an hour from home the temperature suddenly dropped, clouds blackened the sky, and in no time the pouring rain and freezing winds cut through his clothes and made it almost impossible to move.

 He whipped the horses. He was freezing and drenched to the bone. It looked like it would rain forever, and the horses were barely making progress. In a few hours it would be night. Who knows if he would make it home alive?

 Then, suddenly, through the wind and rain he noticed someone standing at the side of the road up to his ankles in mud, waving furiously and trying to shout through the howling wind. He stopped and yelled to the man to get in the wagon.

 It was a Jew! What was he doing on the road in the middle of nowhere? They huddled together, and two hours later they had miraculously reached Shraga’s home, put on dry clothes, and were sitting by the stove sipping hot soup.

 The traveler turned out to be none other than the famous Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov, the holy Sassover Rebbe. He too had set off in the morning to visit his elderly parents and got caught in the storm.

 “Well,” the rebbe said, “now that you saved my life, I want to give you a blessing of riches and fame. What do you own? Do you have anything of value?”

 “Riches? Blessing? Thank you, Rabbi! Wow! Thank you!! Err, anything of value? Not much,” Shraga shrugged his shoulders. “Except for, maybe, my horses. I mean, no one would buy my wagon or my house or anything else. I guess the only things worth anything are my horses.”

 “Nu,” answered the rebbe matter-of-factly, “one will be for Purim and one for Passover. Now I must be gone. Thank you again and G‑d bless you!”

 He shook Shraga’s hand and left, closing the door behind him and leaving poor Shraga more confused than happy. “Wonder what he meant by that?” he said to his wife.

 A few months later, just before Purim, one of Shraga’s horses suddenly died. Well, dead is dead, and the only thing left to do was to sell the meat to the local gentile butcher and the hide to the tanner, leaving the wagon-driver with enough money to celebrate the holiday in style and even to invite a few guests.

 Then, a week before Passover, another tragedy struck—the second horse died as well! Again Shraga had no choice but to mournfully sell its carcass, which yielded enough money to prepare a Passover holiday fit for a king. Now he understood what the Rebbe meant “One for Purim and one for Passover.” But he wished the Rebbe hadn’t said it. The holidays were wonderful, but now he was left with no horses and no source of income. What would he do?

 He asked around in the streets and in the synagogue if anyone knew how he could make a few kopeks to feed his family—with no luck. There was simply no work.

 But Shraga did not lose hope. He talked it over with his wife and decided to take to the road. G‑d would certainly help. One thing for sure, he would starve sitting at home. He packed his tallit and tefillin, a loaf of bread and a change of clothes, and set off early the next morning to wherever his feet would carry him.

 A few days later he was in an inn resting his weary bones, when he heard two fellows sitting in the corner talking in loud tones.

 “What are we going to do?” said one of them, slapping the table in frustration. “Every manager we bring, he fires. The man is insane! This makes the fifth manager in two months. Next thing we’ll be out in the street. What are we going to do?” The other fellow just kept letting out moans and grunts, shrugging his shoulders and throwing up his hands in despair.

 Shraga immediately stood up and walked over to them. “Excuse me. I just came in from the road and, well, I couldn’t help overhearing what you were saying. What type of manager are you looking for?”

 The two men looked at Shraga, then at one another in disbelief, and one of them answered.

 “The poritz (noble landowner) needs a manager for his lands,” the first man said. “We are two of his tenants,” the other interrupted, and then the first one resumed: “He owns all the farmland in these parts, and for some reason, he assigned us the task of finding him a manager. Were you ever a manager…that is…could you do such a thing?”

 Shraga agreed, they took him to meet the poritz, and for some reason, the cruel maniac took a liking to him and gave him the job immediately.

 Shraga succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. He seemed to always be making the right decisions and saying the right things at the right time. And most importantly, the poritz loved him! The landowner kept on transferring to him more and more responsibility over his affairs, until our horseless wagon-driver became a wealthy and influential benefactor, providing a livelihood for hundreds of families in the area and helping many of his needy brethren. Even the poritz became more charitable and easygoing.

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**Fringes of Fright**

**Adapted by Dovid Zaklikowski**

**As heard from Betzalel Schif**

 Freedom of religion was a concept that was foreign to us, citizens of the Soviet Union. As a child, it was ingrained in my bones that my every move was being monitored; with every step that I took in the street I needed to look back to see who was following me, who was keeping track of my activities. Invariably my shadows were KGB informers, and specifically the Yevesektzia, the notorious Jewish branch of the KGB, whose mission it was to eradicate religion in the Soviet Union, with special emphasis placed on stamping out Judaism.

 Families like mine were right in the KGB’s crosshairs. They knew that we were members of the “Schneersons,” as they dubbed us: Chabad chassidim who worked tirelessly to keep alive the flame of Torah and mitzvot, and its infrastructure, in Communist Russia. The “Schneersons” who built an underground network of Torah schools, synagogues, and mikvahs.

 This was my childhood. Despite the risk and the constant vigilance required, we lived a traditional Jewish life. We prayed, studied Torah and all about Judaism, and even had chassidic gatherings, complete with singing and dancing as is Chabad tradition. Needless to say, all of this was done in utmost secrecy.

 Public school attendance was mandated by the law, and school life was understandably difficult, presenting many challenges for a boy who wished to follow all Jewish laws and traditions. For example, I would always have to find a place to ritually wash my hands before eating my lunch sandwich.

 I had three classmates who were religious. Naturally, we bonded and became close friends. After school we would go to a secret location to learn Torah in a clandestine afternoon school. Sometimes the location of this “school” changed four or five times a week, for fear that the previous location might have been compromised. We took all this in stride; it was “normal” life for us.

 One particular event sticks out in my mind. The school principal came to our class one day together with the school nurse. It was actually quite unusual for them to visit a classroom together. The principal informed us that we would be receiving immunization shots.

 Now, while this might seem to be a routine medical procedure, for me it was far from simple. I was wearing tzitzit beneath my shirt. Tzitzit is a four-cornered garment with eight knotted strings dangling from each corner. This garment reminds us of the 613 commandments contained in the Torah, our holy guidebook for life.

 If I would now pick up my shirt to receive a shot in my back, the nurse would definitely notice my normally concealed tzitzit. That could mean doom for my family and me.

 I’m not talking about a small fine or even some lashes. This could mean that my father, and maybe even me, would sit in a dark and dingy jail cell. My father had already sat in prison before, and my friends’ parents too. It was hell on earth. A wave of heat overcame my body. I immediately devised a plan: I would request permission to use the bathroom, and there I would remove my tzitzit.

 I requested permission to the go to the bathroom. In a sly voice the principal responded, “Sure, you will receive the first shot and after that you can go right to the bathroom.” I am not sure why he did not let me go to the bathroom first; perhaps he thought that I was trying to avoid getting the shot. I am certain that he was unaware of my tzitzit.

 I tried to hide the fringes by hiking up my tzitzit as a high as possible. All went seemingly well. The nurse administered the shot and didn’t mention a word about the fringes. I wasn’t sure whether she didn’t notice them, or whether perhaps she simply ignored them.

 The next day during lunch break, the nurse called me in to her room. I was sure that my time had come. She must have noticed them, and now I was in grave trouble. She closed the door behind me and gently asked, “Are those tzitzit or tefillin?”

 You can imagine my shock! She continued, telling me that she was Jewish and how she recalled her grandfather wearing the same sort of garment. She distinctly remembered two Jewish ritual objects mentioned in her home, and she wanted to know which of them I was wearing.

 She told me that she was inspired and heart-warmed by my strength and courage, maintaining my Jewish traditions under such harsh conditions. We discussed what it meant to be a religious Jew in Soviet Russia as well as my personal hardships in school. She told me that from that day on I could come to her room to ritually wash my hands and eat my lunch. And indeed, that was what I did from that day on.

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**It Once Happened**

**The Ruzhiner Rebbe’s**

**Reason for Being Imprisoned**

 The wealthy chasid had stopped at the home of the mother of Reb Yisrael, the Ruzhiner Rebbe, before continuing his journey to visit Reb Yisrael in prison. "I would like to give his regards from his family, and especially from you, his mother," said the man.

 The woman was visibly touched, and answered, "If you ask my son to give you a sign that he received my regards, I would be very happy."

 The chasid arrived at the prison and was permitted a visit with Reb Yisrael, during which they discussed many hidden secrets of the Torah.

 The conversation was so congenial that the chasid chanced a delicate question. "I would like to ask you something, but only if you won't be insulted or hurt by the question." Reb Yisrael agreed.

 "The story is told of the Baal Shem Tov's visit to the city of Be'er where he was slighted by the rabbi who refused to greet him. The rabbi resisted all entreaties by the chasidim, saying that he did not consider the Baal Shem Tov knowledgeable in Torah despite the many miracles he performed. The chasidim laughed at this accusation. 'Why, our rebbe is a genius of the revealed Torah.' The rabbi thought for a moment, and said, 'Very well, then. I will test him on a part of the Talmud, and if I feel he knows it well, even I may ask him for advice.'

 "The Baal Shem Tov agreed to be tested. The rabbi gave him a page to study in the Talmud, but then was called away on an urgent matter. When he returned, he tested the Baal Shem Tov, who replied satisfactorily, but the rabbi was suspicious. He thought that in his absence the Baal Shem Tov might have reviewed the text with someone more scholarly. He demanded another test.

 "Again the Baal Shem Tov submitted to the test, and this time the rabbi was satisfied. The advice he sought was in regard to his salary; he needed more money. The Baal Shem Tov at once requested the raise on the rabbi's behalf and it was given."

 The wealthy chasid stopped in his narrative for a minute. "From this story we see the greatness of the Baal Shem Tov. He was not insulted by the rabbi's tests, on the contrary, he was eager to do him some favor. But, in your case, it struck me as very different. I have heard that when your visited Lemberg, the rabbi's son insulted you. He died soon after, and you are in prison. Could you perhaps explain the difference to me?"

 The Ruzhiner Rebbe replied: "When I travelled to Lemberg I passed through many villages and towns, and through all my travels I was accorded the greatest respect. By the time I reached Lemberg a great crowd of people awaited me.

 "When the son of the rabbi of Lemberg saw that I was given such a great honor, he was angered, since he felt it belittled his father. He told the owners of the hotel where I was staying to prohibit me from forming a minyan to pray. So that even though it was Shavuot, and I had brought my own Torah scroll, I was unable to pray with a minyan. Nevertheless, I refused to take offense.

 "Before my departure, my chasidim implored me to go visit the rabbi. I lit my pipe and went to his home, but as I approached, the rabbi's son stopped me, saying, 'How dare you come to my father while smoking!' My chasidim tried to defend me, but the son was furious. He must have brought the tragedy on himself.

 "As for my imprisonment, I will explain it to you, and this will be a sign to my mother. Before my wife became pregnant with my youngest son, I learned that a unique soul was to descend to earth. I had waited over eight hundred years to come down and would have a special mission. However, Heaven had decreed that the tzadik who would father this soul would have to spend some time in jail. I went to my mother to ask her advice. She answered me directly, 'What does a father not do for his children?' And that is why I am here."

 The chasid returned to Reb Yisrael's mother and recounted the conversation.

 Shortly after Reb Meir of Premishlan helped Reb Yisrael escape. He hired a smuggler to bring Reb Yisrael over the Russian-Austrian border, promising him, "When you get to the river, you must take our rabbi on your shoulders. If you succeed, I guarantee you a place in the world-to-come."

 Reb Yisrael eventually settled in the town of Sadigura.

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**The Baal Shem Tov’s**

**Snow Warning**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This week we read almost the exact same thing, word for word, that we read three weeks ago in "Parshat Truma" about the building of the Tabernacle in the desert! The only main difference is that in then we learned what G-d commanded the Jews to do and this week we read about how they ACTUALLY did it.

 At first glance this is hard to understand. Each word of the Torah is exact, written by G-d Almighty. Why repeat an entire Torah portion just to tell us that the Jews followed instructions? Why not just add a few words at the end of 'Truma' that the Jews did what G-d commanded?

 Even more perplexing is; why Jews needed a Holy Temple or Tabernacle at all? Especially in the desert when everything around them; the Clouds of Glory, the pillar of fire, bread from heaven, water from a rock, Torah, Moses and Aaron, reminded them of G-d every moment. Even more; all they did in this Tabernacle was slaughter animals! How could that be more better than, for instance, the pillar of holy fire that blazed their path at night?!

 To illustrate here is a story.

 The Baal Shem Tov had a pupil who we will call Mordechi (the name wasn't mentioned in the original) that wanted to learn sorcery.

 Sorcery is forbidden according to the Torah and Mordechi certainly knew it was but he had a great yearning.

 It is known that the greater that a person is, so is his selfish ego (evil impulse). But as soon as he heard there was such a thing he felt that his life was gray and empty without it. Now he was desperate, bored, angry, depressed! He wanted action, REAL ACTION!

 He already had made contacts, and everything was set. This Shabbat he would spend it with the Baal Shem Tov and early Sunday morning he would head out for a new life…. a REAL life!!

 That Shabbat night he sang the songs, ate the meal, and listened to the words of Torah with all the other Chassidim, but his mind was far away. He vaguely noticed that it was unusually warm in the room and, not giving it much thought, he removed his Shtrimel (large fur hat worn by Chassidim), wiped the sweat off his brow and opened the top button of his shirt but it didn't help. He unbuttoned another button and removed his over coat. He'd never remembered it being so hot here before.

 Through the window across from him he saw the icy winter wind howl through the trees and whip up the deep snow covering the forest outside. But he was sweating and he felt as though he was about to faint. "Please, may I step outside for a moment?" he asked the Master "I need some fresh air."

 "Just for a minute, no longer" answered the Besh't "Just make sure that you return immediately, it's dangerously cold out there. Remember no longer than two minutes!"

 It was already getting hard for him to breathe as he stood from his place, opened the door and stepped into freezing fresh air hitting his face. "Whew! Another minute and I would have passed out," he thought to himself as he closed the door quickly behind him. But suddenly he felt hot again. Without hesitating he opened his shirt and began rubbing his face and chest with snow. But this too only brought temporary relief. In just seconds he felt again as though he was standing in a furnace.

 So he began running. Ahhh… The cool wind against his body felt good, he took wider and wider strides, stumbling and falling into the snow but he didn't care. He needed cold! Wind!! He staggered to his feet and began running … running like a madman through the woods the trees, leaves, snow on the ground racing, spinning by him, he was out of breath, the cold wind, the stars, the sky…… then he fell and everything went black.

 He woke in a strange warm room and a freshly made bed. An old farmer and his wife were standing over him.

 "Are you all right?" one of them asked worriedly "We thought you were dead when we found you there in the snow" said the other. "You've been sleeping for over a week. Are you all right? Do you want some warm soup? Where are you from?"

 Our young hero was in a daze. He sat up, looked around and didn't remember anything, but he took up the offer on the soup.

 In a few weeks he had regained his strength and was already learning how to clear the land and work behind the plow. Gradually the farm began to change. Mordechi, although he still had no idea who he was, had a sense of business. He hired new workers, purchased all the neighboring fields and farm and five years later what had been a simple farm had become a massive spreading estate.

 One day, the old happy farmer returned from a trip into town and showed the young man an advertisement he had taken from the post office. "They are looking for new officers in the army" he said, "Just read this. I think you should apply; it's your chance to be someone really important. Just look at the miracles you have done here. You are someone special; don't waste your life here on this farm. You've been here long enough"

 The young man took to the army like a fish to water. He passed all the entrance requirements with flying colors and after two years of officer's training a war broke out between his country and Poland he found himself a captain in the Czar's Royal cavalry.

 Several chapters would be necessary to describe the many fierce battles and brave accomplishments of our hero, his innumerable brushes with death, his brazen spirit, split second decisions and impressive victories against impossible odds.

 But suffice it to say that five years later he had already been promoted to the rank of Major-General with ten thousand mounted lancers at his command, when suddenly, as he was sitting astride his magnificent white steed reviewing his troops, as if from nowhere it came back to him in a flash of memory… that night twelve years ago when he left the Baal Shem's Shabbat table!

 He paused for several minutes, deep in thought remembering every rich vivid detail, and every emotion that passed through his mind back then. Suddenly he came to himself and announced, "Dis…mount! Return to your tents, and prepare to travel. In one hour we are beginning a three day march!"

 It was late at night three days later when the huge army reached forest surrounding the small synagogue of the Besh't. The General turned to face his myriads of mounted soldiers and yelled orders: "Light torches!" Suddenly the entire forest was illuminated with an eerie flickering light. "Draw Swords" the ringing of the swords and the glistening blades was everywhere.

 He dismounted, approached the large old hut, drew his sword and began pounding with its hilt on the closed door "Open in the name of the King! See what happens to a Chassid who leaves the Holy Master! Ha HA HAAAAAA!"

 No one answered, but he heard someone speaking within the house and he got angry.

 He furiously stuck his sword in the snowy ground and began pounding on the door with both fists and screaming "Open! Open for a General in the King's army!" Slowly the door opened, the wind was whistling furiously as Baal Shem Tov stuck his head out and said, "Mordechi, are you still here? You have been outside for almost five minutes! Do you want to become ill? Come in immediately!"

 "Five minutes?!" the General screamed "Look at all my troops and tell me about five minutes!" He turned around and…. there was no one there, even his horse had disappeared! The wind was howling through the trees and deep snow covered the silent forest. Even his uniform and sword were gone! He was in the same garments as he was…twelve years ago, it was all an illusion. The entire twelve years were an illusion. Suddenly he realized that the Besh't also knew magic, and he humbly reentered the house, back to the real world.

 The point of the story is this: What if our hero hadn't woken up? What if he died thinking he was a general? Would that have been better?

 The same for us; What if it were possible to live a 'virtual' life; to have our brains attached to electrodes so we can experience whatever life we wanted. Everyone could be movie stars, generals, multi-billionaires or even kings. All mankind could live 120 imaginary years of pleasure with no disappointments or pain. No wars or hatred. Would it be worth it?

 This week's section tells us, NO!

 An imaginary life, a life that is not devoted to actually doing the Creator's will is a false life, and no healthy minded person wants to be fooled.

 That is why the Torah doesn't mention heaven or hell and why Judaism regards death as the worst thing possible, even for those whose souls are in heaven! Because heaven is a virtual, spiritual life while here is a real world where one can ACTUALLY serve the Creator. (Which is why doing commandments and saying words of Torah in a Jewish Graveyard is called 'scoffing at the poor).

 So this answers our question. The novelty of this week's Torah portion is ACTION. And that is why the Jews had to have a tabernacle and make sacrifices even while surrounded by miracles in the desert. Because miracles are what G-d does for us… but the Temple service was what WE do for G-d.

 This is the reality of the Holy Temple and why it is so important that Moshiach will rebuild it! And also why he will gather all the Jews (from the desert) to Israel and cause the dead to rise; because ACTION in this physical world is, in fact, holier than all the spiritual worlds.

 It all depends on us; just one more deed, word or even good thought can make it all happen a minute sooner to bring…Moshiach NOW!!

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**A Day of Siesta**

 The negotiations were taking much longer than expected. Two representatives of a real estate conglomerate were trying to complete the purchase of an office building in downtown Mexico City, but the lawyers were discussing the details slowly and meticulously. Every office had to be inspected, the insurance policies verified, and the terms of payment specified to the last penny.

 Jacobo Sherem, the managing partner of the owners' group, was desperate to complete the transaction. With every passing moment, he was becoming more impatient and exasperated.

 An architect by profession, Jacobo had been trying to sell this particular office building for months, so that he could finally turn a profit on his investment. He had designed, bought and sold buildings in the past, but this building on Calle Presa Salinillas had been his biggest investment, and so far it had been a losing proposition for his group. Due to the depressed financial climate in Mexico, most of the office space was unoccupied.

 As the hours passed, Jacobo became increasingly nervous. The buyers had told him unequivocally that they were leaving Mexico on the first plane out the next morning, which was Saturday. They would not delay their trip. If they could complete the purchase that day, that would be wonderful; otherwise they would cancel the negotiations and move on to prospective deals in other countries.

 It was the late hour of the day, Friday, that was putting pressure on Jacobo. For the last year he had been attending evening study classes in the Aram Tzovah Kollel in the Polanco section of Mexico City.

 He studied Torah a few nights a week, but he was not as yet shomer Shabbos (Sabbath observant). After many discussions and much introspection and inspiration from avreichim (kollel members) at Aram Tzovah, Jacobo and his wife Sophia were inching closer to total commitment to Shabbos observance. Jacobo had already started going to shul every Friday night and his office was closed on Shabbos, but he and Sophia were not yet complete Sabbath observers.

 Frustrated at being so close to, yet so far from, fulfilling his dream of selling the building, Jacobo looked at his watch and saw that there was less than an hour and a half to Shabbos. Reluctantly he told the prospective buyers that the negotiations would have to continue Sunday or Monday - he had to leave and close his office. The buyers threatened that it was now or never, for they were flying out of the country the next day. But Jacobo would not budge. Shabbos was coming. He hadn't missed a Friday night in shul in weeks and he wasn't going to miss tonight. The buyers were incredulous that Jacobo would scuttle a deal that would lift him out of the financial doldrums, but he would not be moved. The parties to the negotiations bid each other a final farewell, and Jacobo went home to prepare for Shabbos.

 He couldn't help but second guess himself. Had he acted correctly? There would be other Shabbosos when he would be in the synagogue, but now he might never be able to sell this building that was becoming an albatross around his financial holdings. He tried to enjoy the Shabbos, but it was difficult. An internal debate raged in his mind. He was proud of his commitment but he wondered if it was worth the price.

 Two weeks later, early Thursday morning, September 19, 1985, (during the Selichos of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah) Mexico was struck by the greatest tragedy in its history. In a matter of seconds, a monstrous, rumbling earthquake gashed and shook Mexico City, toppling buildings, swallowing homes, wreaking havoc and bringing instantaneous death to thousands of people!

 Within 24 hours, as the country staggered to adjust to the shock and magnitude of the Thursday tragedy, an aftershock staggered the city. The number of people killed in these earthquakes reached a shocking 4,541. Another 14,236 were injured and 2,637 required hospitalization. In the downtown district there was utter devastation. People searched in vain for relatives and friends, but it was mostly for naught. The destruction, mayhem and sorrow was beyond imagination.

 Yet, amidst all the devastation, one building remained standing - the one Jacobo couldn't sell. Its windows were blown out and some of the facade of the building had peeled off, but remarkably it was structurally sound. The Mexican government had to regroup. Aid and rescue efforts had to be directed and coordinated. People needed the assurance that the government was functioning and accessible. Thus within days of the earthquakes, Jacobo's building, conveniently located downtown, was checked for its strength and stability.

 When it passed inspection, the government bought most of the offices in the building and the remaining space was sold to large corporations who had lost their offices when other buildings collapsed or were deemed unsafe. Jacobo's extraordinary profit was far beyond what he would have made had he sold the building weeks before. The deals for his building propelled Jacobo into a category of wealth he never imagined.

 The Hashgachah Pratis (Divine Providence) of the Shabbos not allowing him to sell the building propelled him into being a total Shabbos observer. Jacobo and Sophia never told the story to anyone.

 Word got out that their building was sold to the government, but no one in the community knew about the frantic Friday negotiations two weeks before the earthquakes, and Jacobo's decision to close his office for Shabbos.

 Years later, in the palatial lobby of his new magnificent office building, Jacobo and Sophia tendered a grand party in honor of his first completion of a Talmudic tractate, which he had studied for several years with Rabbi Shea Deutsch (now teaching in Lakewood, N.J.) at the Aram Tzovah Kollel. There, in the presence of rabbis, community leaders and friends, Jacobo told the story that changed his life. (Reflections of the Maggid, Rabbi P. Krohn p. 193)

 We read about the holiness of Shabbos in this week's parsha Vayakhel. As it states in the verse "On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death." (Shemos 35:2)

 Shabbos is the paradigm of Judaism. Why is that so? Because on Shabbos, we must control our actions, speech, and thought, the three realms of behavior. We may not do certain actions on Shabbos, such as driving, which involves lighting fires. We may not speak about certain topics on Shabbos such as business dealings. And it is preferable not even to think about weekday activities on Shabbos.

 Thus, Shabbos trains us to control our behavior in life. Therefore, Shabbos is the paradigm of Judaism. Because the essence of Judaism is modifying our behavior to live according to Hashem's rules, not our own rules.

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

**New Zealand Chabad House Destroyed in 6.3 Earthquake**

**By Joshua Runyan**

 A 6.3-magnitude earthquake rocked New Zealand’s second-largest city Tuesday morning (February 22nd), sending buildings crashing to the street and toppling the city’s central Chabad-Lubavitch center.

 According to Rabbi Shmuel Freedman, who moved to the area three months ago to co-direct the Christchurch headquarters of Chabad-Lubavitch of New Zealand under RabbiMendel Goldstein, he and other personnel were inside the center when the earthquake struck. Shoutinginto his cell phone – one of the few forms of communication that offered some connection to the outside world after the quake – the rabbi described a scene of pandemonium.

 “We all ran out as it was falling down, but thank G-d everybody is okay,” he said fromLatimar Square, where Jewish families were congregating in the search for survivors. “We are getting everybody together now at the square to see if anybody is missing, and we are working very hard to help everybody.”

 Unconfirmed news reports indicated that a number of hotels had collapsed in the city, and *The Wall Street Journal*, citing SkyTV News, reported that police had confirmed numerous fatalities in Christchurch. “Other reports include multiple building collapses, fires in buildings and persons reported trapped in buildings,” the police reported in a statement. “All available police staff are assisting with evacuations and emergency responses.”

 At Latimar Square, 600 meters fromthe Chabad House, Freedman, Jewish community officials and the Israeli embassy set up an emergency meeting point. But according to Tzippy Freedman, events were forcing people to evacuate to tent cities set up in the parks around Christchurch Hospital.

 The Freedmans’ personal home was still standing, she said. But “everything inside is ruined.” “Everyone’s just trying to evacuate. It’s really hectic right now,” she said. “Everyone is going to be sleeping in tents tonight.”

 The temblor follows a 7.1-magnitude earthquake in September 2010 that caused significant damage to buildings throughout Christchurch.

*Chabad.org News staff writers Tamar Runyan and Levi Stein contributed to this report.*

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