**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Shemini 5771**

**Volume 2, Issue #29**

**Chassidic Story #695**

**The Feminine Antidote**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

editor@ascentofsafed.com

 The Midrash says that Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, died young at the time of the dedication of the Tabernacle in the desert because they never married. However, the Torah verse (Lev. 10:1,2) specifically says that they died for having brought alien fire to the holy altar. How are we to reconcile these conflicting reasons?

 Consider the possible answer provided by the following story.

 Rabbi David of Zubeltov, son of the rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kosov, once became so ill that even the best physicians despaired of his life. Not so his wife, Rebbetzin Pesya Leah, daughter of the eminent Sassover Rebbe. She refused to make peace with this decree.

**Praying and Weeping for Her Husband**

 She sat by her husband's bedside and did not cease her praying and weeping. "Please, G-d," she pleaded tearfully; "let my saintly husband recover."

 The good woman's fervent prayer split the very heavens and, despite the doctors' gloomy prognosis, the patient began to improve slowly. Soon her husband was back on his feet, leading his flock as before.

 Reb David'l knew to whom he owed his recovery. He was well aware of his wife's devoted prayers. Once, in the company of his closest chasidim, he said, "Now that I am healthy again, I understand why the Midrash says Nadan and Avihu died because they did not have wives. If they had had wives like my own worthy Rebbetzin Leah, who would have prayed for them, they would surely have been saved from death despite their having brought improper fire before G-d!"

 [**Source**: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "Tales of Tzaddikim" (ArtScroll) by

G. MaTov]

 **Connection**: Weekly Reading -- Vayikra 10:1-2

 **Biographical Note**: Rabbi David of Zubeltov (1797 - 25 Iyar 1846) was the son of Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kosov and the son-in-law of Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov. He became a rebbe in his own right at the young age of 29. He was held in great respect for his wisdom, even by the other rebbes of his generation.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org. a project of Ascent of Safed*

[www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000m7G0:001DYTFl00003Yym&count=1300921308&randid=1302146500&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1302146500)

**It Once Happened**

**The Threat to the Jewish Community of Bodenheim**

 One of the great treasures of the old community of Bodenheim was a beautiful silver Torah pointer. There were many legends associated with the hand-shaped pointer, and according to tradition, it had been fashioned for a synagogue in Rome hundreds of years before.

 In the 14th century, the story is told of when the silver hand was credited with saving the Jewish community from ruin. A young carpenter's assistant claimed that he had heard two Jews plotting to poison the wells of the region. The arrest of all the leading Jews of Alsace followed quickly. Although the Jews protested their innocence, they were not believed.

**Declares the Innocence of the Jews**

 "How long will you keep up your lies when you meet the thumb screws and the Iron Maiden?" the police chief threatened. The Jewish leaders paled at the mention of these tortures, but Rabbi Wolf of Strassburg declared, "Neither torture nor death can sway us from the truth, we are all innocent."

 The Jews spent the entire wakeful night in prayer, and in the morning they were once again led before the police chief and the city council. "Are you ready to confess your guilt?" they demanded.

 "We have nothing to confess," replied Rabbi Wolf. "Please allow us to prove our innocence. Perhaps if we can question our accuser, we might be able to discover the truth."

 When the young apprentice was brought in, he described how he hitched a ride with two Jewish merchants and overheard the men speaking in hushed tones. "One Jew said to the other, 'We must see that the convention does something about the poison that has been spreading throughout our well of life-giving water in the province of Alsace.'"

**The Accusation of the Police Chief**

 "Aha!" exclaimed the police chief. "That surely proves the guilt of these Jews! They are killing our children and animals with their poison!"

 In spite of the terrible tension of the moment, Rabbi Wolf smiled. With great relief in his voice, he addressed the assembled:

 "I am sure that I can explain everything to your satisfaction. The purpose of our meeting at Bodenheim was to save our youth from ignorance and from neglecting their religious duties. In our Biblical language we call the Torah 'the well of living water.'

 “Those who distort or falsify our religion are referred to as 'poisoning the wells of our water,' since the Jewish people can live only if this, our spiritual fountain, is kept pure. When the two merchants were discussing the meeting at Bodenheim, they weren't speaking of anyone poisoning the wells of Alsace, G-d forbid, but the wells of our Jewish faith."

**Refusal to Believe the Rabbi’s Explanation**

 "How absurd! Do you imagine that you can fool us with such a ridiculous explanation? You had better come up with a better story. If not, we know how to draw the truth out of you!"

 Rabbi Wolf was now confident that he could prove their innocence. "Your Honor, there is a book entitled The Well of Life, which has been translated into Latin. One of your own priests can easily verify the truth of our words in this book, where he will find this figure of speech employed."

**A Perfect Chance for Revenge**

 "What do you say, gentlemen?" the police chief asked. One of the nobles, Bodo of Bodenheim, had a particular grudge against Jews, since he owed a huge sum to Jewish money-lenders. This was a perfect chance for revenge.

 "I don't see why a passage in some book proves their innocence. Even if this expression is used, it still doesn't negate the possibility that these Jews really planned to poison our wells. This is no proof! I propose that we search the homes of all the Jews. Let's confiscate all their valuables as collateral and imprison their leaders until the truth is found."

 Bodo knew the Jews hadn't planned to poison the wells, and he knew he wouldn't find any evidence of a plot. Nevertheless, he would find a way to produce the proof he needed.

 It was past midnight when a masked figure climbed into a window of the Bodenheim synagogue. Ulrich, Bodo's servant, carried a bag of poison. Ulrich had faced danger so long, he had forgotten the sensation of fear. Yet, as he walked toward the Holy Ark, guided by the few rays of pale moonlight, he felt shivers across his skin. He approached the Holy Ark, pulled the heavy velvet curtain aside and, holding the bag of poison in his teeth, forced the doors apart. Panting with the effort, he inhaled some of the deadly powder.

**A Blood-Curdling Scream**

 The caretaker was awakened by a blood-curdling scream coming from the synagogue. There, writhing on the floor was Ulrich, unable to speak, the bag of poison still clenched in his teeth. He was gesturing to the huge shadow of a hand, a finger pointing directly at him. The caretaker saw that it was a reflection of the silver Torah pointer.

 The following morning a crowd gathered in the synagogue where Ulrich lay quiet now, with the poison still between his teeth. He pointed his finger in silent accusation at Bodo. The nobleman knew the game was up.

 His confession was sufficient to free the Jews of Bodenheim. After this incident, the silver hand became the most treasured possession of the community, and its story was retold from generation to generation.

*Adapted from Talks and Tales*

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**Formula for Happiness**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 For the last three years, Gallup [a highly respecting polling firm] has called 1,000 randomly selected American adults each day and asked them about their emotional status, work satisfaction, eating habits, illnesses, stress levels and other indicators of their quality of life.

 Gallup’s answer: He’s a tall, Asian-American, observant Jew who is at least 65 and married, has children, lives in Hawaii, runs his own business and has a household income of more than $120,000 a year. A few phone calls were made to find such a person.

 Meet Alvin Wong. He is a 5-foot-10, 69-year-old, Chinese-American, kosher-observing Jew, who’s married with children and lives in Honolulu. He runs his own health care management business and earns more than $120,000 a year.

 Reached by phone at his home on Friday, Mr. Wong said that he was indeed a very happy person. He said that perhaps he manages to be the happiest man in America because “my life philosophy is, if you can’t laugh at yourself, life is going to be pretty terrible for you.”

 He continued: “This is a practical joke, right?”

*Reprinted from this week’s Ohr.edu website of Ohr Somayach International in Yerushalayim.*

**Hospitality, 1939**

**By Chana Weisberg**

 The year was 1939. The Second World War had been raging for some months. The Jews in the Soviet Union, like the Jews the world over, were not yet aware of the horrendous events transpiring across the border in Poland, where the wholesale slaughter and genocide of their brethren by the barbaric Nazi murderers was already underway.

 Pinchas Sudak, who was living in Russia, had no idea that within a few short years entire communities would be wiped out. But he suspected that something was amiss.

**Ominous Signs from Poland**

 There were ominous signs emerging from Poland, as more and more Polish Jews began fleeing that country, even preferring to arrive within the dreaded Soviet Union than to remain in their homeland. Men, women and children were seeking refuge, hoping merely for the gift of life. Respected communal leaders, wealthy philanthropists and ordinary people from all walks of life had become wanderers overnight, seeking asylum and a roof over their heads and some nourishment for their empty stomachs.

 These Polish Jewish refugees would arrive at train stations in Russia, with nothing left from their worldly possessions except for the small suitcases clutched in their arms. They arrived in this hostile land, where the language and customs were strange to them, with not a friend in the world and knowing no one to whom they could turn.

**Typical Suspicion and Cruelty**

 The Soviet government reacted to their guests with typical suspicion and cruelty. Under the ruse of their being possible “enemies of the state,” the government forbade any contact with these foreigners. The refugees would sleep in the open stations, exposed to the elements, awaiting deportation to frigid Siberia. Any Russian citizen communicating with these “foreign spies” would be threatened and penalized with imprisonment.

 In such a climate of desperation, Pinchas and Batya Sudak opened up their home. To them it was simply unthinkable to desert one’s brethren in such a time of need, and they actively and resolutely sought out these refugees, despite the very personal danger.

 Several times a week Pinchas traveled to the train station along with his eldest daughter, Batsheva. He wrote out a note in Yiddish, briefly stating, “If you want a warm meal, come to . . .” with the exact address and directions to his home.

“Batsheva, approach the Polish children as if you are looking at their strange clothing,” Pinchas instructed his daughter.

**Approaching the Children of the Refugees**

 The Polish refugees wore different clothing, and tucked their pants into their socks, a custom considered bizarre in Russia. It wouldn’t arouse suspicion if a young child approached these children out of curiosity.

 “Hand them this note, and we will have the mitzvah of helping our fellow Jews.”

 Though only about seven years old, Batsheva understood the implications of her actions. Deftly and courageously, she would slip the note to the youngsters, acting like a curious child who had mischievously wandered away from her father.

 The Polish Jews were immensely grateful for this extended lifeline. One by one they would slip away and come to the Sudak home, to be greeted warmheartedly with a nourishing meal and a place to rest.

**Incredible Shabbos Hospitality**

 On some Friday nights, so many refugees arrived at the Sudak home that a few had to sleep on the floor, for lack of any other space. Occasionally, if the police would make a routine check, Pinchas warned his guests to exit rapidly through the back doors or windows, as he went to open up the front door, feigning innocence.

 Pinchas understood the risk to his family’s lives and security. But there was no question in his mind, or that of his wife, Batya, that this was their duty.

 One time, among the group of Polish Jews who found their way to the Sudak home there was one particular individual who stood out from the rest. He wore a beautiful and expensive fur-lined coat and, unlike so many of the downtrodden refugees, he had an aura of confidence about him and carried himself like a distinguished person.

**The Wife is Uncomfortable about the Guest**

 Pinchas was pleased to host him during their Friday night meal and spent time conversing with him. He noticed, however, that his wife Batya seemed uncomfortable with him. She was hastily putting away their expensive dishes and silverware, which usually graced the Sudak Shabbat table.

 Towards the end of the meal, the individual asked to remain in the Sudak home for the night. Seeing his wife’s discomfort, Pinchas slipped into the kitchen for a private consultation with her. He was certain that, as always, Batya would be happy to open their home to this respected individual.

 “Absolutely not,” was Batya’s forceful response to her husband’s question. “Not him! He may *not* sleep in our home.”

 Pinchas was astounded by this reaction, so contrary to his wife’s usual generous spirit. He tried to dissuade her at first, but seeing her strong stance, regretfully explained to his guest that since his wife was not feeling well, it would not be possible for him to stay with them overnight.

**Helping the Guest with His Coat**

 At the end of the meal, Pinchas accompanied his guest to the door. He helped him with his coat and walked him out towards the street.

 When Pinchas returned his face was an ashen white. “How did you know?” he asked Batya incredulously.

 “What happened?” Batya responded.

 “As I lifted our guest’s coat, I felt something hard inside. I could discern the shape of three large knives. The man was an impostor! A robber! I pretended that I hadn’t noticed his weapons and respectfully walked him out towards the street. Had we let him stay overnight, he certainly would have killed us all and robbed our home!” The words were tumbling from Pinchas’s mouth and he paused for a moment, thinking about the disastrous implications. “But how were you able to tell?”

 “I just sensed something about him I didn’t like,” Batya answered simply.

**Protected by the Merit of Hospitality**

 The merit of the Sudaks’ *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality) allowed them no harm.

 This unfortunate scare, however, did not prevent the Sudaks from continuing to host their brethren and continuing to assist them even after they left their home.

 Pinchas made inquiries about the fate of several Polish Jews whom he had hosted, and learned that they had been sent to Siberia. Regularly he sent food packages to as many family names as he could remember. He knew how invaluable these packages would be for them. For his own and his family’s safety, he did not write from whom these packages originated, nor his return address.

 One time Pinchas did receive a letter back from a Polish Jew who realized that he was the benefactor. He thanked Pinchas for his benevolence and explained to him how “we shared your generous food with another member of your group who was slowly starving to death. This individual reminded us that in two weeks is the 19th day of Kislev.” These veiled words were a reference to the chassidic holiday of “Yud-Tes Kislev,” a day commemorating the first Chabad Rebbe’s liberation from Soviet prison.

**Helping a Nameless Individual**

 Though Pinchas never found out his identity, he was gratified to learn that he had saved the life of a fellow Chabad chassid. Some nameless individual who was imprisoned due to his “anti-communist” work in spreading Yiddishkeit and Chassidism, and teaching it to young children, was saved due to his efforts.

 On another occasion the Sudaks hosted an individual who, despite his modest demeanor, had a regal bearing and refined features, and was well versed in all areas of Torah. Immediately Pinchas sensed that this was a special person, and invited him to remain in his home for as long as he needed. The man, Hirsh- Melech, however, hesitated, seeing that he had no money to pay for this generosity.

**Offering Dignity to a Special Guest**

 Pinchas convinced him to stay by offering that Hirsh-Melech tutor his young son, Nachman, in exchange for the hospitality. Relieved with this offer, Hirsh-Melech agreed and remained for almost two years in the Sudak home.

 Several years later, after the Sudak family had escaped from Russia and were settled in Israel, a large entourage of chassidim drove up to their home. The rebbe of this group, dressed in his regal clothing, knocked on the Sudak door and greeted the family warmly.

 He explained to Pinchas that he had to come in person to visit them and to thank them for the kindness that they had extended to him when he had arrived, a penniless refugee, in the Soviet Union back in 1939.

 Pinchas welcomed him in and, turning to Batsheva, asked if she recognized the man.

 How could she not? It was none other than the unassuming “Hirsh-Melech.”

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**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas shemini 5770**

**Story #645**

**Perils of Pita and Pesach**

**Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles**

**From a recent issue of The Jewish Leadership Newsletter, #7025**

 In the first Lebanon War in 1982, the IDF essentially forced the PLO terror organization out of Lebanon and into exile in Tunisia. The PLO was in complete disarray. One of the prisoners in the Israeli detention camp, Ansar, was a senior terrorist, admired by his henchmen. His name was Salah Taamari and he was a broken man.

 In the book about Taamari, Mine Enemy, penned by Israeli journalists Amalia and Aharon Barnea, Taamari told Barnea of the transformation he underwent in Ansar. While in prison, he had completely despaired of any hope that the Palestinians would one day realize any of their territorial dreams. He was ready to renounce the struggle and was well on the way to convincing his prison-mates that they would never defeat Israel.

 Then, one Passover, he witnessed a Jewish prison guard eating a pita. Taamari was shocked, and asked his jailer how he could so unashamedly eat bread on Passover. The Jew replied: I feel no obligation to events that occurred to my nation over 3,000 years ago. I have no connection to that.

 That entire night Taamari could not sleep. He thought to himself: A nation whose members have no connection to their past, and are capable of so openly transgressing their most important laws, has cut off all its roots to the Land.

 He concluded that the Palestinians could, in fact, achieve all their goals. From that moment, he determined to fight for everything - not a percentage, not some crumbs that the Israelis might throw us - but for everything. Because opposing us is a nation that has no connection to its roots, which are no longer of interest to it.

 Taamari goes on to relate how he shared this insight with tens of thousands of his colleagues, and all were convinced. Taamari did indeed influence his co-terrorists and breathed new life into the war against Israel. It is hard to exaggerate the damage done by the pita in the mouth of just one Israeli prison guard on the holiday of Passover.

 Moshe Feiglin is the leader of the Jewish Leadership faction of the Likud party in Israel <manhigutyehudit.blogspot.com>. In the quoted article he goes onto lament the damaging folly of [past and] present Israeli government leaders who voluntarily and publicly dine on non-kosher food at state dinners in [the USA,] Russia [and around the world].

Connections (2): Seasonal Passover, and Weekly Reading kosher diet

KabbalaOnline.org is a project of Ascent of Safed www.ascentofsafed.com

To subscribe to weekly emails of inspiring stories related to the parsha, send your request to: [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1270674003)

**Rav Shea of Yerushalayim: Part Two**

**Continued from our last Email**

 **Good Shabbos Everyone.** After their seder was over, the children of R' Shea respectfully approached their father. "We understand that you wanted to help the widow and her family," they began, "but what about your own family? We were kept waiting for hours'. And besides, what about your own mother? She is an older woman, and she too is a widow! Why did you favor the widow there over the widow here?"

 R' Shea understood that their questions were justified. Patiently he said to them, "My dear children, your questions are legitimate. I will answer them with a story that happened to me many years ago with the Chazon Ish."

 This is the story he told them: Many years earlier, R' Shea and a group of friends were studying in yeshivos in Bnei Brak. One of the older fellows in their group was having a difficult time finding a shidduch (partner in marriage). One day a number of the young men in the group were told that the Chazon Ish wished to see them. Immediately they made their way to the home of the great sage.

 After inquiring as to their own personal welfare, the Chazon Ish said to them, "As friends of this young man [with the shidduch problem], it is your obligation to work on his behalf as diligently as possible to find him a suitable partner in marriage."

 The Chazon Ish stressed the importance of this mitzvah and encouraged them to do whatever they could. The young men obeyed his directive and dedicated themselves totally to the effort. They contacted everyone they knew, they made calls, they visited people, they spoke, they cajoled - and finally they were told about a girl who would be suitable for their friend. The young man was introduced to the young lady, and within a short time the two of them decided to marry.

 The young men in the group were thrilled. They had accomplished what they had set out to do, and now they couldn't wait to tell the Chazon Ish. They ran to his home to announce that they had fulfilled their mission. The Chazon Ish was overjoyed. The boys informed the great sage that later that same evening there would be a t'na'im (official engagement) and they invited the Chazon Ish to come, for they assumed he would want to participate in this wonderful simchah. The Chazon Ish told them that indeed he would like to come, but that he was occupied at the time with certain matters; however, he asked that once all the people were assembled and the families were ready to make the t'na'im, they should please call for him and he would come.

 That evening the families and friends got together, the chassan, and kallah made their entrance, and after some joyous singing, two young men (one of them was R' Shea) were sent to bring the Chazon Ish to the festivities. When R' Shea and his friend came to the home of the Chazon Ish the door to his room was open, so they knocked softly and walked in. They saw that he was involved in a detailed discussion with a man and a woman. The Chazon Ish realized that the young men had entered, but the two young me understood that they could not interrupt the Chazon Ish. They were sure that he would finish with the people shortly and then make his way with them to the t'na'im of the new chassan and kallah.

 But the Chazon Ish was in no rush. The two people had a very long list of items written on a sheet of paper from which they were reading. The man would mention an item and the woman would say, "Should we buy this?" If the Chazon Ish said, "No," they would go to the next item. If he said, "Yes," one of them would ask, "How much should we pay for it? Is that the cheapest price we can get it for?" Over and over the same questions were asked for every single item on that sheet. Patiently and carefully the Chazon Ish thought about each item mentioned and then gave his opinion as to whether they should stock the item or not.

 Finally, after more than an hour, the man and the woman rose to leave. They couldn't stop thanking the Chazon Ish for his valuable time. Only then did the Chazon Ish get up to go with the two young men. "You must be wondering," began the Chazon Ish, before the two young men could even ask, "why I kept you waiting so long, and what was so important about my discussion with those two people.

 “Let me explain. You see, that husband and wife are survivors of the concentration camps. They recently came to Eretz Yisroel, hoping to rebuild their lives. They decided to open a store and they came to me for help. I couldn't help them with money, so the least I could do is help them with advice. Every shekel they invest is important for their future and so I tried, to the best of my ability, to help them decide what to purchase for their store. It is my mitzvah to assist them, but it is not only my mitzvah - it is your mitzvah as well- because by your waiting you also had a share in that mitzvah, as did all the people who were kept waiting at the t'na'im. We all had the obligation to help those two get started in business again so they could begin a new life."

 "And that is the reason," said R' Shea to his children, late into the night, that Pesach, "why I went to the widow with the young children and helped them with their seder before coming home. Because all of us - myself, you, your mother and grandmother - as members of Klal Yisroel had the obligation to help her. By your waiting patiently for me to come back, you too shared in the mitzvah of helping that unfortunate family through this seder night."

 The Talmud tells us that a Jew is distinguished by three character traits: Shyness, Mercifulness, and the tendency towards doing of acts of kindness.  (Yevamos 79b) The Talmud goes so far as to say that someone who lacks one of these qualities must be checked out to make sure that he is really Jewish.

 Let us use these weeks between Pesach and Shavuos to work on ourselves, especially in the area of helping others. The more desperate one is for our help, the bigger the mitzvah it is to help them. Sometimes we wonder in life how and why certain opportunities to do chesed (kindness) for others, materialize in our lives. The answer is, that Hashem is sending us a test, to see where we are holding in the midah (character trait) of kindness. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Reprinted from last week’s Good Shabbos email.**

**An Appeal to Sign an E-mail Petition On Behalf**

**Of Sholom Rubashkin**

[**www.justiceforsholom.org**](http://cts.vresp.com/c/?JusticeforSholom/0ec33e055c/614fb007f6/c7404157ee)

Dear friends,

 American Jewish leaders (including the leadership of Agudath Israel of America, Chabad Lubavitch, National Council of Young Israel and Rabbincal Alliance of America) who have been working closely with Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin''''s lawyers are very concerned about his incarceration and his upcoming sentencing, currently scheduled for April 28.  This tragic case is at a critical juncture right now, and demands our immediate attention and action.

 In issuing this call to our friends and constituents, we are in no way condoning any criminal conduct.  However, as detailed in the memo below, prepared by a lawyer familiar with the case, it is clear that the federal government has been overly zealous in pursuing Mr. Rubashkin and has submitted him to considerably more severe restrictions and potential punishment than others in similar cases.  The memo is quite an eye-opener, well worth reading despite its length.

 The bottom line is that Mr. Rubashkin is being kept in jail pending sentencing, and was not even allowed to go home for the Passover Seders despite his willingness to post a large bond and hire a full-time guard. With respect to the sentencing, he faces the possibility of life in prison (the Pre Sentence Report prepared by the probation department tallied the sentencing guidelines to  be life in prison) and the probability of a 27 year sentence,  - far beyond the sentences imposed on others whose crimes were significantly more severe than anything Mr. Rubashkin may have done. (Notably, Mark Turckan, who pled guilty to a 21 year cover up of misapplying funds from the SAME bank, and was found to have caused a 25 million dollar loss, was sentenced to  a year and a day in prison.)

 We are therefore asking you, our friends and constituents, to take a few minutes to communicate your respectful concern over the handling of the Rubashkin case, and the excessive sentence being considered.

 Please sign an online petition available at [www.justiceforsholom.org](http://cts.vresp.com/c/?JusticeforSholom/0ec33e055c/614fb007f6/3711191e3b) and please call or email the Justice Department''''s Intergovernmental and Public Liaison Office  202-514-3465 / [oipl@usdoj.gov](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1270674003) (please copy pr@justiceforsholom.org) with your concerns.

 Some suggestions for topics to  be covered in your email or phone call:
 --- Sholom Rubashkin shouldn’t be in jail pending sentencing  He has a right to bail!

 --- Stop treating Sholom Rubashkin more harshly than you have treated others!

 --- Sholom Rubashkin should not be sentenced to a long prison term for his convictions. He did not gain personally from the mistakes he made and had no intention causing any monetary loss to anyone.

 These emails are critical and will be forwarded to the US Attorney handling the case.   We are hopeful that this expression of public support will have a positive impact on the outcome of the case.

 Please consider forwarding this to your family and friends as well.

 For more information, please visit the website: [www.justiceforsholom.org](http://cts.vresp.com/c/?JusticeforSholom/0ec33e055c/614fb007f6/c7404157ee)

**April 4, 2010**

**Journeys**

**China’s Ancient**

**Jewish Enclave**

**By Matthew Fishbane (The New York Times)**

 THROUGH a locked door in the coal-darkened boiler room of No. 1 Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Kaifeng, there’s a well lined with Ming Dynasty bricks. It’s just a few yards deep and still holds water. Guo Yan, 29, an eager, bespectacled native of this Chinese city on the flood plains of the Yellow River about 600 miles south of [Beijing](http://travel.nytimes.com/travel/guides/asia/china/beijing/overview.html?inline=nyt-geo), led me to it one recent Friday afternoon, past the doormen accustomed to her visits.

 The well is all that’s left of the Temple of Purity and Truth, a synagogue that once stood on the site. The heritage it represents brings a trickle of travelers to see one of the more unusual aspects of this country: China, too, had its Jews.

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| **A mezuza at the doorway of Guo Yan's house in Kaifeng, where traces of a thriving Jewish community remain (Photo by Matthew Fishbane)** |  |

 Ms. Guo, who identifies herself as a Jew, says she hears it from scholars, visitors and Chinese people alike: “‘You Chinese Jews are very famous,’ they say. ‘But you are only in the history books.’“

 That seemed a good enough reason to come looking, and I quickly found that I was hardly alone. Ms. Guo and I were soon joined by a 36-year-old French traveler, Guillaume Audan, who called himself a “nonpracticing Jew” on a six-month world tour of “things not specifically Jewish.” Like me, he’d found Ms. Guo by recommendation, and made the detour to see what the rumored Kaifeng Jews were all about.

 Earlier, Ms. Guo had brought us into a narrow courtyard at 21 Teaching Torah Lane — an alley once central to the city’s Jewish community, and still home to her 85-year-old grandmother, Zhao Cui, widow of a descendant of Chinese Jews. Her one-room house has been turned into a sort of dusty display case, with Mrs. Zhao as centerpiece.

 “Here are the Kaifeng Jews,” Ms. Guo said, a little defiantly. “We are they.”

We were surrounded by signs that supported Ms. Guo’s statement: A mezuza was attached to the door frame. A copy of the Sh’ma, widely considered the most important of Hebrew prayers, decorated with Chinese lettering, hung on the wall. A menorah sat by a Chinese-style altar displaying a black-and-white portrait of Mr. Zhao.

 Indeed, some 50 descendants of Kaifeng’s Jews are embracing this legacy and relearning Jewish ways. And a few, like Ms. Guo, are tapping a quirky vein of religious tourism.

 From the 10th to the 12th century, Kaifeng was the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty and a cosmopolitan center on a branch of the Silk Road, attracting Chinese imperial suitors and Persian merchants with camels. Amid this ferment was a small community of Sephardic Jews, who arrived most likely from Persia and India as traders, or perhaps fleeing the Crusades.

 Scholars still debate the time of their first arrival, but for at least 700 years, Jews prospered free of persecution, largely out of mind of the various Chinese dynasties that dubbed them “blue-hatted Hui” — people from the West. They settled into trades and, around 1163, built a synagogue. In 1605, the peripatetic Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci met one of their emissaries in Beijing and reported their existence back to Europe.

 But time, isolation and assimilation took their toll. When European missionaries in Kaifeng purchased a 17th-century Hebrew Torah in 1851 (it is now housed at the British Museum in London, one of 15 known Kaifeng scrolls), no locals could read it. The synagogue, which had fallen into neglect after repeated flooding, was never rebuilt.

Yet for 150 years following the death of the last rabbi, tiny embers of a heritage still glowed in Kaifeng. Grandparents told their grandchildren, as Mrs. Zhao told Ms. Guo: “You are a Jew.” Without knowing why, families avoided pork. And at Passover, the old men baked unleavened cakes and dabbed rooster’s blood on their doorstep.

 Most Jewish-themed tours of China skip Kaifeng, focusing instead on the immigration of persecuted European Jewry, in cities like [Shanghai](http://travel.nytimes.com/travel/guides/asia/china/shanghai/overview.html?inline=nyt-geo), Harbin, Tianjin and Beijing. Thanks to American, Israeli and European support of places significant to their own past, Harbin and Shanghai, for example, enjoy a regular flow of tourists to museums and sites of synagogues, restored though no longer used for prayer.

 Kaifeng, by comparison, attracts word-of-mouth backpackers and three or four rabbi- or scholar-led Jewish heritage groups a year. Most visitors, according to Shi Lei, a 31-year-old descendant of Chinese Jews who has been leading tours here since he was sent to Israel to study Hebrew and Judaica, stay for a day, “have a look, and leave.”

 Part of that has to do with the lack of actual sites to visit. Like an old battlefield, Jewish Kaifeng exists mostly in the imagination of the visitor. Here stood a synagogue. Here once lived the Chinese Jews, who made unleavened bread and ate no pork.

 China does not recognize Judaism as one of its five approved religions. And unlike the Muslim Hui people, who populate much of Kaifeng, Jews are not considered one of the country’s 55 minorities. Though foreign Jews are allowed to practice their religion while on Chinese soil, there are currently no officially active synagogues in China. The state, in short, holds that no Chinese Jews exist.

 “Teaching Torah Lane gets historical landmark status,” Mr. Shi said, walking me down the narrow alleys of the city’s Muslim quarter, “but no Jews exist in China. What is this history of, then?”

 Local authorities seem to tolerate discreet activity from the Jewish community and the visitors it draws. In the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, it takes an extra 50 renminbi and a request to be led to the locked room with three barely legible 1489 and 1512 steles describing the Jewish presence in Kaifeng.

 And to see the Jewish pavilion at Millennium City Park, a Song dynasty-period-costumed theme park modeled on a famous painted scroll, Mr. Shi had to ask an attendant to bring keys. The modest exhibition there was put together a decade ago by China’s foremost scholar on Chinese Jews, Xu Xin, who told me the limited access to his display was “a very complicated issue.” With this in mind, Ms. Guo and Mr. Shi both label their tours with a wink: they are taking you to meet “descendants of Jews,” not “Jews.”

 On Friday evening, after buying some bread from a Muslim street stand, Ms. Guo took Mr. Audan and me into a half-completed shopping center. She marched purposefully around several corners, past closed shops, to a second-floor balcony of empty stores. Smoggy daylight was waning, but through a curtain in one of the shops came the distinct yellow glow of candles. An Israeli flag was just visible through the glass door. And inside, around a simple gray table, sat a dozen people bowed before ritual books in both Chinese and Hebrew, about to begin their Sabbath prayers. The men wore yarmulkes. The women were perched under a poster of the 10 Commandments, written in Chinese script, hung below photos of their ancestors.

 Then the group, most of whom requested anonymity, took turns reading from Hebrew prayer books. Mr. Audan put on a cap and joined in the singing. When the Sabbath meal of spiced shredded potato, Chinese wine, peanuts and kumquats had been shared (with chopsticks), he passed on a gift from Parisian friends to Ms. Guo for the Zhao family: a ceremonial knife from the [Sydney Jewish Museum](http://travel.nytimes.com/travel/guides/australia-and-pacific/australia/sydney/21062/sydney-jewish-museum/attraction-detail.html?inline=nyt-classifier) gift shop.

 The day before, Mr. Shi had led me down Yiyuanhou Lane, a hutong, or alley, where his Jewish grandfather used to live, past half-demolished houses and plots full of felled bricks. Last October, residents there, as in many places in China, were told to move out, as the old neighborhood had been scheduled for redevelopment.

 Mr. Shi’s mini-museum to Kaifeng Jews on Yiyuanhou Lane is a one-room collection of photographs of visits by Westerners, reproductions of historical documents used as evidence of Kaifeng’s Jewish past, and a few donated objects, including a menorah, under glass. He wasn’t sure where to put the museum now that it had to move.

“Next year,” Shi Lei said with a disapproving click of the tongue, “this hutong will disappear from the map.”

**IF YOU GO**

 The closest airport to Kaifeng is in Zhengzhou, reached from major Chinese cities. Shuttles from Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport to downtown Kaifeng take one and a half hours and cost 16 renminbi, or $2.40 at 6.7 renminbi to the dollar.

 You can book a two-day detour to Kaifeng through Ctrip (866-992-8747; [ctrip.com](http://ctrip.com)), which also suggests hotels. Or try the faded but centrally located Dajintai (23 Gu Lou Street; 86-378-255-2888); doubles start at 120 renminbi.

 Xu Xin’s authoritative book “The Jews of Kaifeng, China: History, Culture, and Religion” (Ktav, 2003)is worth reading.

 To explore Jewish Kaifeng, you will need a guide. Shi Lei ([jewishchinatours.com](http://jewishchinatours.com)) is licensed, charming and experienced. Guo Yan (yisrael-kaifeng@hotmail.com; 86-387-115-2704) has built a mini-museum of her own and is happy to take you to a Sabbath gathering. At Passover, you may find yourself sharing food with a group of 50 or more.

 In 1985, Wendy Abraham, on the board of the Sino-Judaic Institute, recorded oral histories of the last generation to remember a Jewish past in Kaifeng. Her next Kaifeng Connection tour ([kaifengtours.org](http://kaifengtours.org)) to China, three weeks, is scheduled for October starting at $4,000, including airfare from San Francisco.

**It Once Happened**

**The Miracle of the Half Shekel Gold Coin from the Era of the Holy Temple**

 Rabbi Avraham Benyamin Sofer was the son and successor of the illustrious rabbi known as the Chasam Sofer. Rabbi Avraham Benyamin, who was called the Ksav Sofer, was appointed by the secular government to the head of Austro-Hungarian Jewry. To mark the Ksav Sofer's appointment, a gathering was made with all the heads of the Jewish communities throughout Austro-Hungaria.

 At the gathering, the Ksav Sofer addressed the crowd: "In honor of my illustrious guests, I would like to make a surprise presentation." All eyes turned to the Ksav Sofer as he removed his wallet and withdrew from it a small silk pouch. He opened it and took out a gold coin. "This coin is a half-shekel, the same coin used in the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple for sacrifices, and other needs."

 Everyone in the room craned their necks to get a better look at the coin. Each person wanted to see it and hold it in his own hands, to experience a personal brush with history. The Ksav Sofer continued, "I received this half-shekel from my father, who received it from his father and so on through all the generations of my family from the times of the Holy Temple. This coin is the only one left; it is unique in the entire world."

 An excited murmur passed through the crowd as the coin was passed and lovingly examined. While this was occurring on one side of the room, the rabbis across the room sat discussing its weight and shape and exchanging their differing opinions. A short while passed when suddenly one voice rose above the others saying, "Where is the half-shekel now?"

 Everyone started searching for it, but it was as if the coin had disappeared into thin air. The Ksav Sofer turned white. He turned to the assembled crowd and said, "I do not, G-d forbid, suspect anyone of taking the coin. It is forbidden to suspect another Jew. But, it is possible that while your thoughts were so absorbed with the coin, one of you might have accidentally laid it down amongst his other possessions. Therefore, I ask you to please look through your things, and perhaps you will find it."

 Everyone did as the rabbi requested, but the coin was not found. Then, the Ksav Sofer had another idea. "Since the coin has not been found, please check your neighbor." Everyone agreed, but suddenly one elderly rabbi who was known as a great scholar, opposed this idea. "It would be good to wait for fifteen minutes. Perhaps the coin will be found."

 The Ksav Sofer agreed, but after the fifteen-minute wait, the coin failed to turn up. The elderly rabbi requested another fifteen-minute waiting period, but again it wasn't found. When a third time the rabbi asked for another fifteen minute period, everyone was coming to the conclusion that the rabbi had quietly pocketed the coin and was stalling in the hopes of finding a graceful way to extricate himself from the situation. Even the Ksav Sofer said, "Despite the request of the honorable rabbi, I won't extend the time. In the next five minutes please check your neighbor."

 The rabbi again rose and with tears in his eyes, pleaded with the Ksav Sofer to wait yet another fifteen minutes. The Ksav Sofer stood in silence for the allotted time while the elderly rabbi stood in a corner and prayed. Many of the assembled notables were confident that the rabbi would soon admit that he had taken the coin, and waited expectantly.

 Suddenly the shammes (orderly) rushed forward and exclaimed, "We found it! After the meal we removed the tablecloths and shook out the crumbs. I started thinking maybe we accidentally shook the coin into the garbage. I searched for it and just now I managed to find it in the garbage."

 When everyone settled down, the rabbi asked permission to speak. "Gentlemen, I also have in my possession a gold half-shekel which has been passed down in my family as well. When I set out to attend this gathering, I intended to share with you my prized possession, and so I brought it with me.

 "But when our host surprised me by bringing his coin, and in addition saying that his was unique, I left it in my pocket. Imagine what would have happened if we had searched and the coin had been found in my possession! I would have been considered a thief. Each time I requested another fifteen minutes, I prayed that in the merit of the Chasam Sofer I would not be shamed. Thank G-d, my prayers were answered and the coin was found." The rabbi removed the coin from his pocket and solemnly looked at the half-shekel, which was identical to the other.

 When the gathering drew to a close the Ksav Sofer again addressed the crowd. "Do you know why we gathered today? It was to explain the words of the Mishna which teach that we should judge every person in a meritorious fashion, rather than assume that he is guilty. The Mishna appears clear and simple. But we can see for ourselves that if we had found the coin in the rabbi's pocket, would anyone have believed that he hadn't stolen it?

 “Especially as I had stressed that it was unique, would anyone have believed that there was another like it in this very room? So we are gathered here to understand that sometimes circumstances point to someone's guilt, but we should still see him as innocent. We see how deep is this Mishna and how far we must extend ourselves to really fulfill this commandment."

Reprinted from this week’s L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

**Powerful Words from the Rambam on the Importance Of Praising Hashem**

 “The primary rule is that a person should always call out to Hashem for the future and ask for His mercy; and give thanks for the past and praise Hashem, each person according to his strength. And the more one thanks Hashem and constantly praises Him, the more praiseworthy he himself is.” (Hilchos Brachos 10:26)

 Rav Chaim Friedlander, Z’tl, deduces from this, and notes that, the Rambam does NOT write that the more one calls out to Hashem and asks for His mercy, the more praiseworthy he is. Rather, the Rambam writes the more one thanks and praises Hashem, the greater he is.

 Indeed, Chazal teach us that in the future, the Korban Todah -- the Thanks Offering -- will be the Korban that continues on and remains with us after the world becomes filled with the knowledge of Hashem. The Sin Offerings and the Guilt Offerings will no longer have a place in our lives, but thanks always will.

 It is amazing to note that the level of thanks and praise to Hashem on Pesach is so high that no Korban Todah can be brought because they must be brought with chometz loaves of bread -- which is impossible on Pesach! This is obviously no coincidence, as the Torah could have either excluded the chometz loaves from the offering on Pesach, or permitted them for the sake of the offering only. The message is clear -- on Pesach, we have grown even above this Korban.

 Let us start the Spring/Summer season with our right foot forward, by keeping our Pesach spirit of Thanks and Hallel, so that as we begin to once again recite Mizmor L’Sodah daily, we will merge and blend our joy over the redemption of the past into an everlasting thanks continuing into the future.

 **PRACTICAL SUGGESTION:** As you go through davening (especially Pesukei D’Zimrah) focus on and feel the words of thanks -- especially considering your being born close to the time of the Final Redemption and your having the tremendous opportunity to contribute to the last stages of Zechusim, putting up those last few bricks on the wall, to bring Moshiach, Bimhera B’yameinu.

*Reprinted the Hakhel Email Community Awareness Bulletin of 24 Nissan 5770/April 8, 2010*

**PERASHAT SHEMINI**

**As Heard From**

**Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt’l**

**“*Derech eretz precedes the acquisition of Torah*”**

 We traditionally study the Mishnayot of Perke Abot, The Ethics of the Fathers, during the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot. These Mishnayot are especially selected because of the instruction/mussar of ourgreat Sages through which we can perfect our character in order to be prepared to accept Hashem’s Torah.

 This is one way to understand why Sefer Beresheet, which includes only three Mitzvot , preceeds Sefer Shemot, which includes the giving of the Torah. Sefer Beresheet is known as Sefer Derech Eretz. Through the many episodes which Hashem relates to us, we can see clear examples of Good and Evil, Kindliness, Honesty, Loyalty, Respect, Reward & Punishment, Power of Prayer, Prophesy, Inspiration, Family, Plan and Purpose, Hashem, Olam Haba; Greatness of Man; Self Control… Beresheet is filled with models of good character in order for us to follow them and be prepared to be able to accept the Torah.

 The Gaon of Vilna, in ‘Even Shelema’, opens his sefer with this great principle.

 “All Hashem’s service is dependent upon the improvement of one’s character. Character traits are fundamental to the performance of Mitzvot and to Torah principles”.

 The Rambam devotes a whole chapter in his ‘Yad Hachazaka’ to the subject of perfecting our character traits. He titles it ‘Hilchot De’ot’, The Laws of Opinions. When we study this chapter we do not find any ideas regarding ‘opinions’. It contains detailed instructions regarding correcting and perfecting our character traits.

 So, why did Rambam name his chapter ‘De’ot’ (opinions/ideas) and not ‘Midot’ (character traits)? In order to teach us the real sources of both ‘Opinions’ and ‘Character Traits’. “Opinions (good or bad ideas) are what shape our Character. And Character (healthy or otherwise) will determine our opinions”.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l” as edited by Mr. Sam Gindi.*

**U.S. Military Analyst Declares Obama To be the First Anti-Israeli President**

**By Hillel Fendel**

 Lt.-Col. (ret.) Ralph Peters, military analyst and author of a book on Middle East politics, says Obama apparently has a chip on his shoulder against Israel – and it’s not “helpful to our civilization.”

 Peters, who wrote “Endless War: Middle Eastern Islam vs. Western Civilization,” was asked to explain why he felt American-Israeli friendship appears to have been derailed so dramatically. “The answer is two words,” he said. “President Obama.”

 “Obama’s treatment of [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu [during their recent meeting in Washington] was disgraceful and shameful,” Peters told FoxNews. “We treat our enemies with greater courtesy! In addition, it was counter-productive – because this vendetta on the part of the White House against Israel - all it does is encourage the Palestinians and their Arab backers to make ever wilder demands that Israel cannot possibly fulfill. This is not a peace process; this is something about a chip on the President’s shoulder.”

 Peters says that Obama’s approach is “absolutely” a departure from past American policy. “It all started with Obama’s Cairo speech,” he said, “where Obama attempted to appease radical Muslims in the Middle East, cold-shouldered Israel, and raised Palestinian expectations that he’d take care of Israel and that the Palestinians would get their revenge. Secondly, in the past, under Presidents Clinton and Bush, there were face-to-face negotiations; the Palestinians were offered one deal after another, and it was always – always! - the Palestinians who walked away.”

**Obama Refuses to Recognize the Basic Equation**

The American animosity towards Israel “is not about housing in Jerusalem or anything else,” Peters emphasized. “We need to back up and get a little wide-angle picture and recognize the fundamental issue in play here: Israel wants to live in peace with its neighbors, and its neighbors want Israel destroyed. The President refuses to understand that.”

 “It’s become a credo of the left-wing that Israel is always the oppressor,” Peters continued, “and that the Palestinian terrorists are freedom fighters, etc. … Obama’s mother is extremely left, his university chums are on the left, he spent 20 years with the Rev. Wright – all of their doctrines say that the Palestinians are wonderful and that the Israelis are basically Nazis... I think that the President has gotten that by osmosis… This is our first anti-Israeli President; it’s bewildering and astonishing.”

 Peters said that Israel is not perfect: “This is not a question of giving in to everything that Israel wants; Israel screws up too. But [American policy must] be a balanced approach that takes into account that Israel, for all its many faults is the only rule of law, democracy and respecter of human rights in the entire Middle East; they are part of our civilization. To turn away from Israel as we are doing is not going to help our diplomacy; it is going to hurt our civilization.”

*Reprinted from the Arutz Sheva email on news concerning Israel*

**Obama: Passover Teaches Hope; Palin: Next**

**Year in Jerusalem**

**By Malka Fleisher**

 Despite staggeringly low approval ratings in Israel and international attention for his administration's staunch opposition to Jewish growth in Judea, Samaria, and eastern Jerusalem, US President Barack Obama held his third Passover seder on Monday.

 A statement signed by President Obama said the story of the miraculous redemption of the Jewish people from under the lash of Egyptian slavery is a lesson in fighting suffering, discrimination, and oppression.

 "In retelling this story from generation to generation, we are reminded of our ongoing responsibility to fight against all forms of suffering and discrimination," Obama wrote, saying "wherever we live, there is oppression to be fought and freedom to be won."

 Obama also said the seder encourages hope "that we can repair this world."

 Just a week ago, however, Obama [**reportedly snubbed**](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/136708) Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu when the Israeli leader was in Washington. According to reports, Obama excused himself from a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in order to have dinner with his wife Michelle -- a dinner to which the Netanyahus were not invited.

 Prime Minister Netanyahu also recently endured a [**long tirade by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton**](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/136488), who chastised the prime minister for embarrassing US Vice President Joe Biden by allowing the announcement of a new building plan in Jerusalem during Biden's visit to Israel.

**“Next Year in the White House!'**

 Obama's first seder took place on the campaign trail, in the basement of a hotel in Pennsylvania with three of his Jewish staffers, according to the *New York Times*. At the conclusion, Obama implored "Next Year in the White House!" a play on the traditional prayer of seder night, "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

 Since then, Obama has attended two seders as President.

 Monday night's seder was attended by daughters Malia and Sasha, who took part in the customary search for the *afikoman*, the "dessert" piece of matzah at the end of the meal, often hidden by children who barter for a prize in exchange for it.

**Message from Palin**

 Yet President Obama was not the only significant American politician to issue a Passover message. Republican rival Sarah Palin had a powerful message for Passover celebrants. Often touted by activists and pundits as pro-Israel, Palin directly addressed the Jewish people, and offered her solidarity with Israelis:

 Tonight Jewish families all over the world will gather to celebrate Passover, the story of Exodus and the freedom of the Jewish people from bondage. This holiday reminds us of the sacrifices that are still being made for freedom – the U.S. troops who are away from their families so that we can be with ours, and the Israeli people, who struggle for peace with their neighbors even as they face the threat of war.

 “Next year in Jerusalem” will be the refrain echoed by Jewish families as they finish their Seders tonight. It is a stark reminder that whatever the threats the Jewish people have faced, whatever the struggles, their connection to Jerusalem is ancient and unshakable. On this Passover holiday, our family sends our best wishes to all who are celebrating. Chag kasher V'Sameach. Happy Passover. And next year in Jerusalem.

*Reprinted from the Arutz Sheva email of news concerning Israel.*

**Parshat Shemini**

**Chaim Dyan Learns**

**An Important Lesson**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This week we read about the first day that the Holy Temple (called the 'Mishkan' and later the 'Bait HaMikdash') began to function. On this very powerful and holy day G-d was revealed and experienced in this world (in the 'Holy of Holies' room of the Mishkan) as He was at Mount Sinai!

 But in the end of this week's portion we read a tedious list of animals, birds and fish that are forbidden for Jews to eat!

 The word 'Torah' means 'teaching'; it's every word and idea comes to teach us invaluable lessons in life. What is the Torah teaching us here?

 To understand this here is a story I heard just a few days ago from a good friend of mine, Rabbi Chaim Dyan.

 The story takes place some 20 years ago just as the first Israeli-Lebanon war was winding down to an uncertain, one sided (our side) halt.

 Chaim Dyan, who lives in Kfar Chabad and was in the army at the time, received a phone call from his commanding officer that he must appear at his base near Haifa (called Bat Galim) at 8:30 the next morning....or else.

**The Challenge of Praying in the Morning**

 Chaim thought to himself: "The base is two hours away, the sun rises at 6:00. That means that tomorrow morning I'll have to pray alone, rush the prayers to make it there on time."

 He thought about it for a few more minutes and finally decided… no. That's no way to start the day and certainly no way to start an army stint. He would take his time, pray slowly and hope for the best. G-d will help!

 The next morning he woke at the crack of dawn, went to the Synagogue, took his time praying and finished at… seven. He had an hour and a half to get there. But he had to hitch a ride; public transportation would take two hours.

 'No problem!' He said to himself as he ran to the main road and stuck out his finger hoping for the best….."G-d will help!"

 But no one stopped. He tried switching fingers, then arms, then poses, but nothing helped. He was getting tired, aggravated, and pessimistic as car after car whizzed by. But he had to keep reminding himself, "Everything is from G-d, I must be positive! Positive thinking will change the situation. THINK GOOD and it will BE GOOD!

 And sure enough, as soon as he began to think 'good' a car pulled over, screeched to a stop and the door opened. But just as he was about to ask if he could get a ride, a soldier in an air force uniform got out, slammed the door behind him and the car drove off leaving a thin cloud of exhaust smoke and … another hitchhiker. The pilot, or whatever he was, stuck out his finger as well!

**A Chance to Ride in a Truck Carrying Crates of Oranges**

 But five minutes later, just as he was thinking all was lost, a huge truck loaded with massive crates filled with oranges pulled to a stop and the driver yelled out high up from his cabin, "One place!"

 "A truck! Oy!" Chaim thought to himself, "It will take a year to get to Haifa, but on the other hand it's better than nothing. And maybe there will be a miracle."

 But in the two seconds he was busy thinking, the other hitchhiker somehow managed to cut in front of him and slip up into the cabin of the truck! Chaim's anger instantly flared up. "I'll go up there, grab a hold of him and pull him out!! Why that…..!"

 He battled internally; should he do it? Should he get mad? Should he go up ….?

 But something inside of him told him to let it go… anger is like idolatry, G-d will take care of it, I'll see it was all for the best etc..… until the passenger door slammed shut, the truck rumbled off into the distance and he was alone.

 After another few minutes Chaim was really getting worried… what if no one stops!?

**An Ambulance Comes to a Halt**

 Suddenly sirens filled the air, an ambulance, sirens screaming, appeared as if from nowhere and screeched to a halt before him. It couldn't be offering him a ride, it's forbidden for ambulances to take riders. But the driver rolled down the passenger window and yelled "Hey soldier! You've got to help me! I got a soldier with shell-shock here, he's in bad shape and I need someone to talk to him non-stop to keep him awake. Can you do it?"

 "Listen, where are you going?" Chaim asked the driver. "I need to get to Bat Galim and I'm really late."

 "Jump in!" The driver yelled. "I'm going to the hospital in Haifa. I'll take you to Bat Galim. It's on my way! Just get in!"

 Chaim got in the back door, sat next to the soldier who was laying catatonic on his back, eyes bolt open eyeballs dancing wildly in their sockets, mouth open totally unable to utter a sound, as the ambulance jetted forward and gained speed, sirens howling.

 Chaim tried to get the soldier's attention so he talked about the weather. But it didn't seem to be working, the soldier was fading away, so he changed subjects, sports, news, but nothing worked till he talked about what he himself was interested in; Judaism.

 He talked about G-d, the Torah, the commandments, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, while gradually the soldier turned and silently stared at him, open-mouthed, occasionally convulsing or twitching wildly for a second or two but apparently hanging on his every word.

 The ambulance raced through red lights, around corners and swerved past traffic. Only once did it slow down to go around a huge traffic jam caused by a truck whose cargo had fallen off…. orange crates! It was the truck that had stopped for him!! Chaim looked briefly out the window and saw the air force soldier that had stolen his place standing helplessly in a sea of oranges on the road… It would be hours until anyone in that huge line would be able to give him a ride.

**Gets on the Last Bus from His Battalion**

 But the ambulance sped on and Chaim never stopped talking until it came to a screeching halt. The driver turned to Chaim and said. "Here it is! Bat Ganim! Thanks a million! I'll make it alone, its just a few minutes to the hospital! You did a great job."

 The ride took one half an hour! Chaim jumped out in time to catch the last bus in his battalion that was pulling out! It was a miracle. He made it! He made the last bus!"

 Several years later Chaim was walking down the streets of Tel Aviv when a religious fellow in his twenties stopped him, shook his hand and asked. "Tell me? A few years ago wasn't it you that talked to me in that ambulance? I was in shock and you talked to me? Wasn't it you?"

 When Chaim remembered and said yes the fellow hugged him and began crying like a baby. Sobbing aloud and hugging him for dear life.

**“You Save Me!”**

 "You saved me! You saved me!" He repeated, "And I remembered everything you said! Everything! It took me a while but I decided to learn about what you said. You know, about Judaism and the Rebbe, and now I'm a different person! You saved my life!"

 By not fighting for his place in the orange truck Chaim got much more than he could possibly dream of! He saved a life and got to his base on time as well.

 This answers our questions.

 Some religious people think that G-d has to be distant and miraculous and have nothing to do with nature while most non-religious people feel the opposite; they accept only nature and reject anything incomprehensible.

 But the fact is that G-d is both totally above AND totally involved in, each and every creation in and aspect of nature.

 This is called "Hashgacha Pratit" (detailed control) …. as we saw in our story. On one hand everything was natural; no cars stopped for Chaim Dyan, the air force soldier stole his place, the ambulance happened to pass by and happened to need him etc.

 But on the other hand, if we think about it we can see that G-d was intimately involved not only in the general picture but in every detail as well….. in order to have a 'happy' ending.

 This is what our Torah portion is telling us; the same G-d who is totally above all; that took us from Egypt and gave us the Torah with awesome miracles, actually cares which animals, birds and fish we eat!

**The Words of the Prophet Isaiah**

 And, in fact, if we take this seriously it is a preparation for one of the essential truths that Moshiach will reveal and teach us to feel. In the language of the prophet Isaiah (11:9) "The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d".

 Namely, that G-d controls, cares about and creates each detail of creation. And, even more important, He cares about what we do with it.

 Indeed, this revelation that 'G-d 'fills' the world' will be higher than even the one at Mount Sinai or in the Holy Temple when G-d was revealed only in one place and for a limited time.

 Moshiach will reveal the essence of G-d who is above even the spiritual (G-d is not spiritual, rather He CREATES the spiritual).

 It all depends on us, as we saw from the beginning of our Torah portion; that through our deeds "There will appear to you the glory of G-d." (9:6).

 It's up to us to reject the bad and do just one more good deed, say one more good word or even think one more good thought to see…. **Moshiach NOW!**

**Yedidya Levy Promotes a Greater Awareness of Shmiras Halashon**

**By Daniel Keren**

 One of the long-time members of the Ateret Torah community in Flatbush, Mr. Yedidya (Danny) Levy, has embarked on a major effort to promote a greater awareness of *Shmiras Halashon* and other teachings of the Chofetz Chaim. His project includes spearheading the translation and publication of some of the many works of the Chofetz Chaim, *zt”l*, that have until now not been readily accessible to English speaking Jews, and teaching a twice-a-week *shiur* on the Chofetz Chaim at Beth Shaul U Miriam (Avenue S & East 22nd Street).

 Interestingly enough these activities were an offshoot of his efforts to prepare interesting *divrei Torah* for his family’s *Shabbos* table. Mr. Levy told this writer that about 14 years ago he began the practice of speaking at the *Shabbos* table in an organized manner on parts of *Nach*. This effort required research and preparation and it evolved into printing English outlines of the *drashot* for his family and guests at the *Shabbos* table as a means of making the *drashot* more interesting.



**One of a series of books recently translated from the classic works**

**of the Chafetz Chayim by Mr. Yedidya (Danny) Levy of Flatbush.**

 About eight years ago, after completing his series of *divrei Torah* on *Mishlei*, Mr. Levy asked friends at Ateret Torah for suggestions on what new topic to speak on at his *Shabbos* table. A fellow *mispallel* – Mr. Leon Sutton, suggested studying the laws of *Shmiras Halashon*, guarding one’s speech (i.e. not slandering or belittling another Jew with nasty words or other types of communications such as negative facial expressions.) Shortly after these *Shabbos drashot* began, his daughter Mrs. Mazal Abady was diagnosed with cancer, and the idea crystallized into translating and publishing portions of the works of the Chofetz Chaim as a *zechus* for her *refuah shelaima*.

 With the strong support of his wife and family, Mr. Levy committed himself to the task of translating the Preface and Introduction to *Sefer Chofetz Chaim* which are the *halachos* of *Isur Lashon Hora* and *Rechilus*. With the help of Rabbi Daniel Aberbach, many hours were devoted to translating this work in a format that was accurate and rendered in a flowing, vernacular English that would be easily readable.

 This first volume was published in 2004 and included approbations from such respected community *rabbanim* as Rabbi Eliezer Harari (Ateret Torah), Rav David Lopian (Mikdash Melech), Rabbi David Cohen (Ohel Torah and rav of Beth Shaul U’Miriam) and Rabbi David Ozeirey (Yad Yosef). Subsequent volumes have the approbations of Rav Haim Benoliel, Rosh Yeshivat Mikdash Melech, Rav Eliezer Ginsburg, Rav of Agudath Israel Snif Zichron Shmuel, Rav Yosef Harari-Raful, Rosh Yeshivat Ateret Torah and Rabbi Mendel Kessin, Rosh Tiferet Ramchal Institute.

**Galut is a Kapparah for the Arrogance of Lashon Hara**

 In explaining the framework of the translation, Mr. Levy writes in a note: “The Chafetz Chayim teaches that *galut* is a *kapparah* for the arrogance of Lashon *Hara* and that *Lashon Hara* is a result of the baseless hatred that exists in society. Today it is obvious that the *galut* has gone on too long and is much too bitter. Learning the words of the Chafetz Chayim and practicing what we learn will demonstrate to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* our intense desire to end the *galut* and bring the *geulah* now.”

 *B’siyata D’shmaya*, the initial volume of translations began with a press run of 6,000 copies which were distributed free to the public, in *shuls* in the community, and in communities in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Lakewood, Los Angeles, Monsey, Passaic, Seattle, St. Louis, Johannesburg, London, Toronto and Yerushalayim.

**Subsequent Volumes Distributed by Feldheim Publishers**

 Following the successful distribution of the first volume of his translation, Mr. Levy made subsequent volumes of translations on the works of the Chafetz Chayim, which are being distributed by Feldheim Publishers online and through Judaica stores.

 With the intense help of a group of distinguished *Talmidei chachamim*, over the past eight years his group has published two volumes of *mussar*- *Sefer Shemiras Halashon* (2006), followed by four volumes of *halacha*- Sefer Chofetz Chaim (2008), Kuntres Zachor LeMiryam (2009), a combined volume of Chovat HaShemirah and Kevod Shamayim (emphasizing *middos)*, a combined volume of Sfat Tamim (people living beyond their means) and Tzipitah LeYeshuah (anticipating *Mashiach*) (2009), and a small *kuntres*, Ahavat Yisrael that was distributed free of charge to the public this past year before Rosh Hashana. Other *sefarim* now in progress include Sefer Nidchei Yisroel, Sefer Shem Olam with Kuntres Nefutzot Yisrael, and Sefer Ahavat Chessed.

 How does Mr. Levy find time to translate so many volumes when he is holding a full time job in Manhattan during the week? The answer is that he utilizes his commute time on the subway and bus, as well as generous portions of his lunch break and spare moments in the early morning and at night. Vacations are another golden opportunity to work on these translations.

 For more information or to learn of dedication opportunities for upcoming volumes please call Mr. Yedidya Levy (917) 846-4912 or email him at mazalelul@chafetzchayim.org.

*Reprinted from Pesach 2570 issue of The Jewish Connection*