**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Emor 5771**

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**Chassidic Story #701**

**Your Pain is My Pain**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000S700:001DjzSD00000j4E&count=1304429340&randid=1281758178&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1281758178##)

 Before Passover 5640 (1880), two chasidim arrived in Lubavitch, to consult with the Rebbe Maharash. The first chasid, Michoel-Aharon Pisarevsky, though not very knowledgeable in Torah and Chasidic teachings, had a kind heart and was always concerned for others. The second chasid, Leib Posen, was a wealthy chasid from Vitebsk, who gave tzedakah and occupied himself with other deeds of kindness, but all within a certain limit.

 When Michoel-Aharon entered for his private audience with the Rebbe, the first subject he mentioned was the situation of his friend Nachman Zeltzer. He described the family's poor financial state and the children who were of marriageable age, and then pleaded for mercy on his friend's behalf.

 The Rebbe gave his blessing that G-d should help him, Michoel-Aharon boldly begged the Rebbe that the blessing be a firm commitment. Only after that did he describe his own dire situation. The Rebbe responded, "It seems you're even worse off than Reb Nachman!" Michoel-Aharon answered, "About myself, I know I don't deserve anything better, so it is forbidden to complain; I have to be satisfied with what I have."

 The Rebbe covered his eyes, sat in Divine meditation for a short while and then said, "It is said that if one prays for his fellow Jew, his own prayers are answered first. May the Al-mighty grant you good fortune!" Not long after, both Nachman and Michoel-Aharon became wildly successful in their businesses and very wealthy.

 When the second chasid, Leib Posen, entered the Rebbe’s room, he spoke at length about his personal matters, relating his situation and asked for a blessing. Afterwards, he sighed and then reported the situation of his friend, the admirable chasid, Rabbi Shmuel Brin. The latter, despite being a very active and successful businessman, studied daily and in-depth a portion of Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat (advanced Jewish monetary laws) and Chasidic thought. Lately, though, his business had not been doing well, and also he had been cheated by swindlers, causing him to fall deeply into debt.

 Reb Leib related Reb Shmuel's misfortunes and concluded, "Of course, it is all from Heaven, but he still is to be pitied." The Rebbe again covered his eyes and sank deep in thought, but did not reply.

 Soon afterwards, a fire broke out on the street where Posen's storage houses stood, causing him to lose tens of thousands of rubles, a major fortune. At the same time, another fire burned his shop, causing him additional loss.

 As soon as he could he traveled to the Rebbe, and upon attaining private audience began crying profusely, telling the Rebbe of his great losses. Looking at him piercingly, the Rebbe said, "When tragedy befell Shmuel Brin and left him penniless, you accepted it calmly; but now, when it has come to your merchandise, you cry bitter tears. Your 'he' and your 'I' are two separate things."

 Reb Leib took his leave of the Rebbe. Standing outdoors, he now understood that his hardships had come about because of his attitude towards his friend Shmuel. After wandering around for two days in a daze, not knowing what to do, he returned to the Rebbe's room and asked to be guided on a path of tshuvah (repentance, improvement), and took upon himself to give more priority to the welfare of another.

 The Rebbe Maharash quoted the Baal Shem Tov that when one passes judgment on a fellow Jew, whether positive or negative, he is simultaneously passing judgment on himself. For example, if one says that another deserves punishment from Heaven for what he has done, he is causing charges to be pressed against himself, while one who shares in the anguish of a friend is compensated.

 The Rebbe then instructed him to lend Shmuel Brin three thousand rubles, and for himself he should proceed to Moscow to buy merchandise for his shop. The Rebbe blessed him and he returned home, ready to do as instructed.

 However, upon arriving at R. Shmuel Brin's home, he found out that his friend had traveled to Lubavitch. Although he was anxious to travel to Moscow for his own purchases, he was afraid to deviate from the exact order of the Rebbe's instructions. Finally, on Shabbat eve, when he entered the shul, he saw Shmuel, who was in a joyous mood and surrounded by chasidim, listening excitedly to what he was saying.

 Leib felt envious of him, for despite his losses, he looked like the happiest man. The gabbai quieted everyone and Rabbi Shmuel reviewed aloud the Chasidic discourse he had heard from the Rebbe during his recent visit. The following day, he reviewed it publicly another two times.

 Shortly after Shabbat ended, Leib Posen hurried to Brin's house to give him the money. Warmly welcoming him, Rabbi Shmuel tried to raise his friend's spirits by explaining the folk saying, 'after a fire one prospers.' Leib was moved by the way Shmuel was able to console him, when he himself had suffered recently from great financial loss as well.

 Brin then told him of his initial feelings of despair when he had found out about the calamity that had befallen him. However, not long after, a special messenger came to him with a message from the Rebbe, telling him that he knows of his circumstances but does not agree with the way he is responding to the situation.

 Shmuel continued, "I traveled to Lubavitch and received instructions to buy

readymade rafts, and a blessing for good resale and a side income as well. Following these instructions, I traveled to Riga to arrange the order of some good-quality rafts.

 On the trip returning home, I met a Jew looking for a knowledgeable arbitrator to settle a dispute between two businessmen. I agreed and after successfully sorting out the matter, I was paid handsomely.

 "How will you pay those who will deliver the rafts?" Leib asked. Shmuel reassured him that he has the Rebbe's blessing so certainly G-d will help.

 Not knowing how to properly broach the topic, Posen blurted out, "Don't worry about the money! I've brought you a nice sum for that. I am prepared to lend you three thousand rubles!"

 But then, much to his surprise, his friend refused to accept it. Leib then told him the whole story. Shmuel Brin calmly answered, "You have done what the Rebbe has told you to do, and our sages assure us that G-d considers a good intention [unable to be completed through no fault of the doer] as if it were actually done. Nevertheless, I am not accepting the money."

 That same Saturday night Leib Posen traveled to Lubavitch, and when he was able to speak to the Rebbe, complained about Shmuel Brin's refusal, and left the bundle of rubles on the table. Early Monday morning, the Rebbe's attendant arrived at Brin’s house in Vitebsk with a sealed envelope and a written note from the Rebbe: "I am sending you three thousand rubles until after selling the rafts. May you be blessed with success!"

 Rabbi Shmuel accepted the money, bought and sold the rafts, and earned a large profit. At the same time, Leib Posen traveled to Moscow where the merchants agreed to give him merchandise on credit. Moreover, he won thousands of rubles in a lottery and on the advice of the Rebbe, bought and sold flax for an enormous profit. These four chasidim continued to enjoy much success and remained wealthy throughout their life.

 Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a passage in Lma'an Yishme'u #49, <avreicheilubavitch@gmail.com>, translated from HaTamim vol. 7, p. 103.

 Connection: Seasonal 177th anniversary of the birth of the Rebbe Maharash.

 Biographic note: Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn (2 Iyar 1834 -13 Tishrei 1882), the fourth Lubavitch Rebbe, known as "the Rebbe Maharash," was the seventh and youngest son of his predecessor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, "the Tsemach Tsedek.

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**The Freeman Files**

**Is It Okay to Celebrate**

**Bin Laden’s Death?**

**By Tzvi Freeman**

**Question:**

 Is it inappropriate to be celebrating the death of Osama Bin Laden? Is that a Jewish value?

**Response:**

 You've asked what I could only call a very Jewish question. For one thing, it's so typically Jewish to feel guilty about rejoicing. Aside from that, the wisdom of our sages on this topic runs deep and thick. When do you know a wisdom is deep? When at first glance it seems full of contradiction.

 Let's start with Solomon the Wise, who writes, "When the wicked perish, there is joyful song."[1]

 Sounds pretty unequivocal. Until you find another statement of the same author, in the same book: "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not exult, lest the L-rd see and be displeased, and turn His wrath away from him."[2]

 The Talmud mirrors the tension. We find: "When the wicked perish from the world, good comes to the world, as the verse states, 'When the wicked perish, there is joyful song.'"[3]

 While in the same volume, the Talmud has already told us, "When the Egyptians were drowning in the Sea of Reeds, the angels wanted to sing. G-d said to them, 'The work of My hands is drowning in the sea, and you want to sing?'"[4]

 We aren't the first to note these paradoxes and more. Now is not the time to list every resolution suggested. Instead, let's get straight to the heart of the matter:

 What is so terrible, after all, about celebrating the death of a wicked evildoer? Why would you even think it decrepit to rejoice that a man who himself rejoiced over the demise of thousands of others, and connived ingeniously to bring destruction and terror across the globe, should now be removed from it? Is it so horrible to feel happy that the world has just become a better, safer and happier place?

 No, it's not. That's perfectly legit. On the contrary, someone who is not celebrating at this time is apparently not so concerned by the presence of evil upon our lovely planet.

 Those who are outraged by evil are carrying now smiles upon their face. The apathetic don't give a hoot.

 If so, when Pharaoh and his henchmen, who had enslaved our people for generations mistreating them with the utmost cruelty, drowning our babies and beating workers to death when they were finally being drowned in the sea, why would not G-d Himself rejoice?

 Simple: Because they are "the work of My hands." For this, they are magnificent. And a terrible loss.

 As another prophet put it, "As I live, says the L-rd G-d, I do not wish for the

death of the wicked, but for the wicked to repent of his way so that he may live."[5]

 For the same reason, Solomon tells you not to rejoice over the fall of your enemy. If that's the reason you are celebrating because he is your enemy, that you have been vindicated in a personal battle then how are you better than him? His wickedness was self-serving, as is your joy.

 But to rejoice over the diminishment of evil in the world, that we have done something of our part to clean up the mess, that there has been justice what could be more noble?

 That, after all, was the sin of Bin Laden: He recognized G-d. He was a deeply religious man those who knew him call him "saintly." He prayed to G-d five times a day and thanked Him for each of his nefarious achievements.

 The sin of Bin Laden was to refuse to recognize the divine image within every human being, to deny the value G-d Himself places upon "the work of My hands." To Bin Laden, this world was an ugly, dark place, constructed only so that it could be obliterated in some final apocalypse, and he was ready to help it on its way. With that sin, all his worship and religiosity was rendered decrepit evil.

 So there's the irony of it all, the depth and beauty that lies in the tension of our Torah: If we celebrate that Bin Laden was shot and killed, we are stooping to his realm of depravation. Yet if we don't celebrate the elimination of evil, we demonstrate that we simply don't care.

 We are not angels. An angel, when it sings, is filled with nothing but song. An angel, when it cries, is drowned in its own tears. We are human beings. We can sing joyfully and mourn both at once. We can hate the evil of a person, while appreciating that he is still the work of G-d's hands. In this way, the human being, not the angel, is the perfect vessel for the wisdom of Torah.

Sources: See Maharsha on Sanhedrin 39b; Midrash Shmuel 4:22.

FOOTNOTES

1.Proverbs 11:10. 2.Proverbs 24:17â€“18. 3.Sanhedrin 113b. 4.Sanhedrin 39b. 5.Ezekiel 33:11.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Freeman Files.*

When Evil Falls:

Is it proper to celebrate

Osama Bin Laden's death?

**By Mrs. Lori Palatnik**

 As soon as I heard the news that Osama Bin Laden had been killed, I posted this wonderful news on my Facebook page as I waited to hear President Obama’s live announcement.

 I immediately received many “likes” and comments of celebration. But one of my “friends” posted his displeasure that we were celebrating the death of someone. He quoted that when the sea engulfed and killed the Egyptians, God quieted the angels and told them not to cheer their death, that this was not something to celebrate.

 Indeed, when the sea miraculously split, the seabed turned dry and the Jewish people walked safely to the other side. They then turned to watch the death of their enemy, as the now muddy seabed caught the Egyptian horses and chariot wheels.

 The Jewish people broke into song, called “The Song of the Sea.” Miriam, with musical instruments, took the Jewish women aside and danced and sang in praise of God. And we are told that in heaven, the angels also broke into song. But the Almighty chastised the angels and said, “How can you sing when my people are dying?” (Talmud Sanhedrin, 39b)

 The Almighty chastised the angels and said, “How can you sing when my people are dying?”

 Several questions arise. Why would God tell the angels not to celebrate and yet allow the Jews to sing? And God’s people were dying because He himself killed them!

 What God is saying to the angels is that this is not a happy day for Him. He did not create the Egyptians for evil, but they *chose* evil, and now evil had to be wiped out. But the Jewish people had suffered at the hand of the Egyptians and they not only had the right to celebrate, they *must* celebrate.

 The Shabbat before Purim is called *Parshat Zachor*, the Torah portion where we “remember.” What is it that we are recalling each year? Amalek, the arch enemy of the Jewish people who attacked us in the desert, and whose descendents rise in each generation to try and destroy us. Remembering Amalek fulfills one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah.

 But why would we forget? Because there is a part of us that wants to rationalize evil away, and not to accept that it actually exists. We give it political reasoning or economic rationalization. But the Torah tells us that it *does* exist, we must not close our eyes to it, and we are to do everything that we can to eradicate it from the world.

 We recently sang *“V’hi sh'amda”* from our haggadahs:

 *For not just one alone has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us; and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand!"*

 Mr. Yisrael Yitzhak Cohen, a special Jew who lives in Toronto and who we had the privilege of living near for many years, is a survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau. He told us dramatic and horrific stories of what he experienced. He shared with us that when the Nazis tortured them in the camps they would point their guns and shout, “Sing Jews, sing.” And “V’hi shamda” is what they sang.

 As the Nazis left the camp, killing every Jew they could find on the way out, Mr. Cohen, barely a skeleton, laid down among the corpses and feigned to be dead. When the Nazis were gone, he and a friend stumbled into the kitchen, found some flour and water and began to bake it into something they could eat. As they sat on the floor waiting to remove the matzah, American soldiers entered the room. They were liberated on Passover Sheni, 29 days after Seder night.

 Mr. Cohen was a man who knew evil when he saw it, and would never forget. When our second son, Moshe, was born, we asked Mr. Cohen to honor us as the sandek, to hold our son as he entered the covenant.

 In havdalah we celebrate the ability to distinguish between light and darkness. In life we must know what is good and what is evil. Yes, we are commanded to remember that there is evil in the world, and not only are we *allowed* to celebrate when it is destroyed, we *must*.

 As King Solomon wrote:

 To every thing there is a season… A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance … A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. ~Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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It's Never Too Late

**By Diane Faber Veitzer**

After 15 years of dating for marriage, I hit the jackpot in a most unexpected way.

[*Read the author's account of her dating experiences, written three years prior.*](http://www.aish.com/ci/w/Confessions_of_an_SJF.html)

 I started bidding in the Simchat Torah auction years ago, when I was a young professional woman earning good money. But this year, after a career change, I didn't have any income, so I bid more cautiously and didn't win anything.

At the end of the auction, the shul president said, "We have four *hagbas*, $200 each. First four hands."

 Perhaps instinctively, my hand went up. *Hagba* is a unique mitzvah where the Torah is lifted high, open to the portion which has just been read aloud, and shown it to the community. Even if I didn't have much money, $200 for *hagba* was too good a deal to turn down. In an instant, it was mine.

 The rest of the day was consumed with trying to determine who should be the recipient of the *hagba* honor. I wanted it to go to someone who would find the experience of lifting the Torah meaningful, and who also was not participating in the bidding. I wanted the honor to go to someone who would be uniquely touched by it.

 As the day passed with no good idea, I asked a few women for suggestions. One of them pointed to a man I'd never met, who was sitting across the shul alone, and said, "That guy." I went to the rabbi and said, "I bought the *hagba* honor, and I'd like it to go to that guy." I described him, and I went home.

**Really Big Sign**

 The next day, I got a call from the man who performed the *hagba*. He wanted to take me out for coffee to say thank you. "You really don't have to do that," I explained. But he insisted. A few days later, we sat in a coffee house reviewing the story of what happened and the next thing we knew, we were making plans to see each other again. I was up all night with my mind racing.

 It turns out that this gentleman had recently decided to explore seriously the idea of getting married, and had spent the High Holidays praying about it. "If You want me to get married," he implored, "You're going to have to give me a Really Big Sign."

 Already overscheduled with personal and family obligations, he knew he wasn't going to be able to make the time-consuming effort of networking and dating many different women. At the Simchat Torah auction, his 10-year-old son had been urging him to bid on various honors. He told his son: "If G-d wants us to have an honor, He'll bring it to us."

 Already overscheduled, he wasn't going to network and date different women.

 As they were leaving the Simchat Torah celebration, the *gabbai* (organizer) approached him to say that he had the honor of *hagba*. "You must be mistaken," he responded. "No, someone bought it for you." They told him my name, but he'd never heard it before. He was so certain it wasn't for him that he went to the rabbi to confirm it. Ultimately, he reluctantly agreed to accept, so as not to hurt the feelings of the mystery donor.

 As he stood holding the Torah in the air, he looked up at the eternal text scrolled all the way back to its starting point. He read "In the beginning, G-d created the heaven and the earth," and he thought, "G-d is renewing the world today. G-d created this moment and this situation. There is a reason that this unknown person gave me *hagba*. I don't know what the reason is, but I know there is a reason." Hence, the coffee date he so insisted on.

**Musician without an Instrument**

 I know that most people will not believe that we both suspected, after one coffee date, that G-d Himself had made the match and that we would wind up together forever, but that is indeed how it happened. And five months later, we were married under the tallis I bought with great hope... so many years ago.

 When I called the woman who had said "that guy" to tell her the good news, she thought I had misdialed. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said. It turns out that with all the singing and shouting on Simchat Torah, she hadn't actually heard what I asked, and she didn't even know that I had won a *hagba* or that I was trying to give it away. She thought I said something completely different, and when she said "that guy," she was responding to what she thought I was saying.

 "I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

 It turns out that my (now-) husband had been living two blocks away, and it's amazing that we'd never met. There in the coffee shop, we discovered many objective reasons why we're a terrific match -- similar upbringings, similar educational backgrounds, similar paths to Jewish observance, the same rabbi and community, less than two years apart in age. Some people say we look alike; others say that we seem like an old married couple. Even our stuff fits together: I had an idle baby grand piano and he was a jazz pianist without an instrument, for example.

 And there are moments when I feel that G-d is winking at me, like when I hear my husband in another room mindlessly humming my favorite melody, or when we each use the same obscure word in conversation (recently, "fisticuffs").

 But we still might not have ever met or married, if my husband had not been open to the idea that when he lifted the Torah for *hagba*, that the words actually meant something to him -- i.e., that it could be a Really Big Sign. Or if we had not both been open to the possibility that just maybe, whatever life presents you with *is* actually the answers to your prayers.

**Kind and Generous**

On our wedding day, I saw that G-d had indeed heard every detail of my prayers, when my friends surrounded my husband and joined him as he kneeled before me to sing *Aishes Chayil,* King Solomon's praise of Jewish women. They who have known me for so many years, and seen me standing alone at their weddings, their children's brises and bar mitzvahs, and their shivas, encircled my husband and me, sang along with him, and embraced him as a brother.

 In my more than 15 years of seriously dating for marriage, I had a pretty general idea of what I was looking for in a man. Like other women, I wanted a man of good character, who was kind and generous, but also smart and accomplished. In my vision, I was the first great love of his life, and he was mine, and together we would build a beautiful family. It seemed like I met just about every man in America who'd never been married. I saw a lot of finely tailored suits, and learned a lot about how smart and accomplished they all were, but I didn't see a lot of the kind and generous part.

 Through all the lonely years, I had clung to the belief that G-d makes a match for every person.

 When I met my husband for the first time at the coffee shop, he wasn't wearing a suit and didn't look anything like anyone I'd dated before. But in our conversation, I heard him say three things in passing which really struck me.

 The first was that when his family needed better health insurance, he had back-burnered a "creative" career and taken a less glamorous "day job."

 The second was that when his son's teacher suggested he would benefit from being read to, he read him the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which took more than a year.

 The third was that when his wife became ill, he did absolutely everything on earth possible to help her get well, even though it financially devastated the family.

 When asked how married life is, I always say the same thing: I feel like I woke up from an endless nightmare, in which I was growing older and had no husband or family, only to find that I do have a loving husband and a beautiful family.

 My life changed completely in an instant, from the time (and the manner in which) I wake up, to the books I read, to the decor of the house, what is in the refrigerator, and how I make decisions (i.e., in conjunction with another person!). And most of the time it feels completely familiar, and gloriously happy.

 Through all the lonely years, I had clung to the belief that G-d makes a match for every person. How wonderful to be proved right! It truly is never too late.

 Our marriage works because the qualities I saw in my husband on that first coffee date are his true nature. He is willing to do the hard thing rather than the comfortable thing. He sticks through with a task until it is completed. And he is willing to do anything for his family, no matter what the cost. He is now the chief operating officer of the "less glamorous day job," and I'm on Book 4 in my own reading aloud to the kids -- of the Harry Potter series.

 And to think it was all possible because I raised my hand on Simchat Torah. For 200 bucks, a pretty good deal.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Aish.com*

**Longevity:**

**Remembering My Father**

**By Aviva Ravel**

 On a hot summer afternoon my two younger sisters and I sat licking ice-cream cones on our front stoop on Clark Street, while our parents occupied two kitchen chairs alongside us. Old Mr. Jacob Malamud, leaning heavily on his cane, hobbled by slowly on his spindly bowlegs and nodded politely in our direction. He was so bent over, his torso from the waist up was almost parallel to the sidewalk.

 The translucent fine skin stretched tightly over his sharp cheekbones, the narrow slightly slanted eyes, and the bald oval head, all gave him the appearance of a leprechaun. Every day he made the laborious trip to Irving’s corner store to buy a Pepsi and a piece of cake.

 “It’s not healthy food,” our mother commented as she started another darn on a sock that had already been darned from toe to heel. She took pride in reading the leaflets from the clinic that instructed mothers on the benefits of wholesome foods.

 Our father set *Der Tog* on his knees, slipped a Turret between his lips, took a long puff and exhaled with undisguised pleasure. “Pepsi, cake and cigarettes never hurt anybody,” he said, grinning. He never paid attention to our mother who insisted that smoke was bad for the heart.

 “Is it true that Mr. Malamud is 150 years old?” Helen, the youngest, asked.

 “No one can live that long,” I said.

 “Our father came back with, “He can even be older.”

 “Impossible,” I said. “No one in my encyclopedia lived that long.”

 Our mother came to my defense. ”Even *Moishe Rabaynu* lived only to 120.”

 “Never mind *Moishe Rabaynu* and your encyclopedia. I know better,” he said, and told his story in the usual way, switching back and forth from English to Yiddish even in mid-sentence.

 “It is written in the secret books of the Kabbalah that when a person is born, the *shammes* of Heaven receives the information from the *Riboyno Shel Oylam* Himself. You may ask, what information? So I’ll tell you. Where the person will live, if he’ll have a family, how he’ll make a living, when he’ll die. The only information he doesn’t get is what kind of person he’ll be. A person can choose to be good or bad, that is left up to him. It is written, ‘If you choose good and not bad, you will be blessed with milk and honey.’”

 “I don’t like honey,” Helen said.

 “I’m never getting married,” I said. “I don’t care what’s written in the secret books.”

 “So go on with the story,” Bena said, and hugged her knees.

 “I’ll go on if people don’t interrupt.” He held our attention with his keen brown eyes, waited for total silence, and continued. “Anyway, the *shammes* has to have a good memory, because he gives the information to the bookkeeper. The bookkeeper writes it down in a ledger, like in a factory. Once it’s written, the person begins his life.”

 “In what language?” I asked. The note of skepticism in my voice was not lost on my father.

 “In Hebrew, like in the Torah,” he answered sharply. “What language do you think? Turkish? Any more *klotz kashes*?” There weren’t any, so he resumed. “You know, it is written in the Yom Kippur *machzor* that Heaven knows who will live and who will die before the year is over. But if a person promises from the heart to be good and change his bad ways, he is forgiven, and the *shammes* tells the bookkeeper to erase the old information.”

 I threw Bena a pertinent look. She had scribbled in my story notebook because I refused to take her downtown with my friends. Her eyes filled with tears. My arm went about her and I assured her that she’ll be forgiven if she doesn’t do it again. And Helen said she’ll always “do messages” for our mother from now on. When the others turned their pointed gaze in my direction, I reluctantly promised to hang up my clothes. Our father was pleased with the effect his story was having.

 “What does this have to do with Mr. Malamud?” our mother asked, holding her needle up and threading it. She looked younger when she wasn’t working in the factory.

 “Patience, I’m coming to it.” Again he waited for total silence before he continued. “Well, it happens that the *shammes* is very busy. Thousands of people are born in the world every day, and there are millions more praying to change the information in the books, so he can get mixed up. After all, he is only human.”

Our mother gave a little gush of laughter. “He should get an assistant.”

 “I’m telling the children a serious story so they should learn something, and you laugh?” our father said, peeved.

 “Go on, Daddy, tell the story,” Bena and Helen clamored, as did a few neighbors who had in the meantime gathered around our stoop. The growing audience delighted him. Placated, he went on. “Well, the day Jacob Malamud was born was a very busy day. It was on the first night of *slichos*, in the year that a great holy man, Nachman of Bratslav, was praying hard for his people. It was also a record day for births all over the world, so the *shammes* forgot to tell the bookkeeper that Jacob Malamud was born, and his name doesn’t appear on the books.”

 “You mean he can live forever?” I asked, incredulously.

 “It’s possible.”

 “Unless the *Riboyno Shel Oylam* calls in an accountant to check over the books,” our mother laughed.

 “Your mother is a real comedian,” our father retorted. “She should be on Jack Benny.” Our mother grinned, taking his remark as a compliment.

 Helen said, “I hope they forgot my name too, so I’ll live forever.”

 “Don’t say that,” our father said, shaking his forefinger. “Mr. Malamud is all alone in the world. His children, his family, everyone went before him. It’s a curse I don’t wish on no one.”

 With that our father tucked the newspaper under his arm, asked our mother for a glass of tea, and, with the hint of a bow to his rapt audience, went into the house. Our mother beamed at her children, collected her mending paraphernalia, and followed her husband. By now we had finished our ice cream and ran off to play before the day faded.

 Several years later, when Jacob Malamud went to meet his Maker, my father said, “Nu, the bookkeeper finally balanced the books.”

 Our father died at the age of 102. For years I assumed the heavenly *shammes* had forgotten to report his birth, and I took it for granted that he would live forever. So it came as an overwhelming shock when he left us. The *shammes* hadn’t made an error, and my father’s longevity was the decree of the Almighty after all.

Der Tog: “The Day”: Yiddish newspaper, 1914–1919 and 1922–1953; later merged with Der Morgen Zhurnal (The Morning Magazine)

Klotz kashes: foolish questions

Machzor: holiday prayer book

Shammes: beadle or sexton in a synagogue

Slichos: penitential hymns recited during the days preceding the High Holidays and through Yom Kippur, and on fast days.

Moishe Rabaynu: Moses, our teacher

Riboyno Shel Oylam: the A-mighty; L-rd of the world.

Aviva Ravel is a Canadian playwright whose plays are available at Playwrights Guild of Canada in Toronto. She has also published many short stories in magazines such as Journal of Canadian Literature, Viewpoints, and Moment.

Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine/

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Smoking Gun**

 It was during World War II in March, 1944. The winds of war blew across the Atlantic, drawing United States forces into ground battle. R' Leizer Cohen was then thirty-six years old, married with three children. So, when an official looking letter from the United States Army appeared in the mail one day, R' Leizer did not become alarmed. But he was curious. R' Leizer opened the letter, wondering what the Army could possibly want from him.

 When he read the contents, his face slowly lost its color until it matched the white paper in his hand. It was a draft notice! R' Leizer was overage, but the Army was understaffed. He was to report to the downtown Chicago address on Saturday morning. Anyone who failed to respond to the summons would be arrested. "On Shabbos?" R' Leizer whispered to himself. "There are no Jews downtown." But there was no getting out of it.

 And this was just the beginning! How could he keep Shabbos— let alone observe all the mitzvos—if he was drafted into the army? Despite his misgivings, R' Leizer gathered his belongings that Friday afternoon to spend Shabbos in a downtown hotel. He brought along Shabbos provisions—candles, wine, challah, a siddur and a chumash, etc.

 After his lonely Friday night meal, R' Leizer took out his chumash to review the weekly Torah portion, parashas Vayakhel. He reached the verse "Lo sevaaru aish b'chol moslwosaichem b'yom haSlinbhos—do not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Shabbus day (Shmos 35:3)."

 For some reason, R' Leizer's mind refused to leave that verse. "Do not kindle a fire..." he kept repeating to himself. R' Leizer's eyes soon closed, but his mind still dwelled on the verse even in his dreams. "Do not kindle a fire..."

 R' Leizer awoke the next morning, his heart heavy with dread. After davening alone in his hotel room, he joined thousands of people in the induction center waiting to be examined by the Army doctors. It was a long day. R' Leizer was examined by doctor after doctor. For the first time in his life, he wished he wasn't in the best of health, but he passed each examination with flying colors.

 Late in the afternoon, R' Leizer was seated opposite an obviously Jewish psychiatrist.  After some routine questioning, R' Leizer voiced his concern about joining the Army. "Doctor, I'm an Orthodox Jew, and I'm very worried about how I'm going to be able to observe the Sabbath and all the other commandments in the Army. And who's going to take care of my wife and three children?"

 R' Leizer waited for a response, but the doctor just shrugged, unmoved. R' Leizer watched him reach into his pocket to pull out a cigarette. As the match flared in the doctor's hand, the words of the chumash from the night before flashed through R' Leizer's mind. "Do not kindle a fire..." "Doctor, you look Jewish. Why are you smoking on Shabbos?" R' Leizer admonished him. The doctor rolled his eyes. "Listen, it's been a long day— will you give me a break?"

 But R' Leizer did not relent. He continued to expound on the prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbos, that it was absolutely forbidden, and how could a Jew dare to do such a thing? As R' Leizer ranted on, the doctor furiously scribbled a few notes on the file in front of him. "Here," he said, interrupting R' Leizer mid-sentence. "Take this to the doctor in the next room."

 The next doctor also appeared Jewish. R' Leizer handed him the file and sat down. The doctor looked down at the note, then peered up at the man seated opposite him "Your name?" he began. R' Leizer responded dutifully to each question until this doctor, too, took out a cigarette and lit up.

 The verse flashed again in R' Leizer's mind. "Do not kindle a fire..." R' Leizer couldn't hold himself back. "Doctor, you look Jewish. Why do you smoke on Shabbos?" The doctor looked up suddenly from the file and stared at R' Leizer "What?" he asked, incredulous. "Why do you smoke on Shabbos?" R' Leizer repeated. "Don't you know it's forbidden?" The doctor shook his head in disbelief.

 "Oh, boy! You're too nervous for the United States Armed Forces. We don't need guys like you. Go home." Relieved, R' Leizer left the army induction center. He was so excited that he ran over four miles back home, where he told everyone about the miracle he had experienced. He went on to raise his family which continues to light up the world with mitzvos and chessed ... without of course ever "lighting up" on Shabbos!

 We read about the holiness of Shabbos in this week's Torah portion Parshas Emor.  When describing the Yomim Tovim (holidays) the Torah begins with the holiest holiday: Shabbos.  Although it is difficult for us to measure in such a way, the commentator the Chasam Soifer writes that there is more holiness in one minute of Shabbos than in all the Yomim Tovim combined!   Hashem tells us this week:  "For six days labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any work; it is a Shabbos for Hashem in all your dwelling places."

 From this verse we learn many aspects about Shabbos.  Shabbos is called a "convocation" which means "gathering."  From here we learn the importance on Shabbos to spend time with family members with whom we may be too busy during the week to spend time.  From the fact that the verse mentions "in all your dwelling places" we see the importance on Shabbos to be at home and not seek entertainment out in the world. By being with our families at home on Shabbos, we Jews have been able to maintain a strong family unit throughout the centuries.  This is only one of the benefits of keeping Shabbos properly.

 Let us all therefore be inspired to make Shabbos "a day of complete rest..."

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

**Holier than Thou**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

 One of the most disheartening episodes that occurred during the 40-year desert sojourn is recorded in this week's parsha. A man quarreled with a fellow Jew and left the dispute in a rage. He reacted by blaspheming Hashem. This abhorrent behavior was so aberrant that no one even knew what the punishment was!

 So Hashem reviewed the grievous penalty for the deplorable act. As in any society, the ultimate act of treason was met with a capitol sentence. The Torah declared a death penalty. But curiously enough, Hashem does not leave it at that. When the Torah reveals the penalty for the heinous act of blasphemy, it continues:

 "And one who blasphemes the name of Hashem shall be put to death…And if a man inflicts a mortal wound in his fellow man, he shall be put to death. If he inflicts damage then restitution shall be paid. The value of an eye for the loss of an eye, the value of a break for a break the value of a tooth for the loss of a tooth. And one who wounds an animal must be made to pay. (Leviticus 24:15-21)

 Shouldn't blasphemy be in a league of it own? Surely the act of affronting G-d Almighty can not be equated with attacking human beings. And surely it has no place next to the laws of injurious action towards animals! Why, then is juxtaposed together?

 Rabbi Y'honasan Eibeschutz one of Jewry's most influential leaders during the early 1700s, was away from his home for one Yom Kippur and was forced to spend that holy day in a small town. Without revealing his identity as Chief Rabbi of Prague, Hamburg, and Altoona, he entered a synagogue that evening and surveyed the room, looking for a suitable place to sit and pray.

 Toward the center of the synagogue, his eyes fell upon a man who was swaying fervently, tears swelling in his eyes. "How encouraging," thought the Rabbi, "I will sit next to him. His prayers will surely inspire me."

 It was to be. The man cried softly as he prayed, tears flowed down his face. "I am but dust in my life, Oh Lord," wept the man. "Surely in death!" The sincerity was indisputable. Reb Y'honasan finished the prayers that evening, inspired. The next morning he took his seat next to the man, who, once again, poured out his heart to G-d, declaring his insignificance and vacuity of merit.

During the congregation's reading of the Torah, something amazing happened. A man from the front of the synagogue was called for the third aliyah, one of the most honorable aliyos for an Israelite, and suddenly Rabbi Eibeschutz's neighbor charged the podium!

 "Him!" shouted the man. "You give him shlishi?!" The shul went silent. Reb Y'honasan stared in disbelief. "Why I know how to learn three times as much as he! I give more charity than he and I have a more illustrious family! Why on earth would you give him an aliyah over me?"

 With that the man stormed back from the bimah toward his seat.

 Rabbi Eibeschutz could not believe what he saw and was forced to approach the man. "I don't understand," he began. "Minutes ago you were crying about how insignificant and unworthy you are and now you are clamoring to get the honor of that man's aliyah?"

 Disgusted the man snapped back. "What are you talking about? Compared to Hashem I am truly a nothing." Then he pointed to the bimah and sneered, "But not compared to him!"

 Perhaps the Torah reiterates the laws of damaging mortal and animals in direct conjunction with His directives toward blasphemy. Often people are very wary of the honor they afford their spiritual guides, mentors and institutions. More so are they indignant about the reverence and esteem afforded their Creator. Mortal feelings, property and posessions are often trampled upon even harmed even by those who seem to have utmost respect for the immortal.

 This week the Torah, in the portion that declares the enormity of blasphemy, does not forget to mention the iniquity of striking someone less than Omnipotent. It links the anthropomorphic blaspheming of G-d to the crime of physical damage toward those created in His image. It puts them one next to each other. Because all of Hashem's creations deserve respect.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting.*

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Emor 5770**

**Story #648**

**A Suddenly**

**Inaccessible Shortcut**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 This story occurred on the 7th of Adar, the yahrzeit of Moshe Rabbeinu, which fell on a Shabbat that year. Two students from one of the Lubavitcher yeshivas in Israel decided to go to Meron in order to spend the Shabbat near the resting place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

 It was a clear and chilly Friday. The two students came to Meron a few hours before the beginning of Shabbat and began making preparations; they found a place to sleep and arranged their personal belongings. Then they went for a long walk in the Meron Mountains.

**Enjoying the Majestic Serenity**

**Of the Mountains of Galilee**

 They enjoyed the majestic serenity over these mountains of the Galilee. The clear fresh air and the knowledge that they were walking on the same paths used by the holy ancestors of the Jewish people gave them a feeling of being spiritually uplifted. They lost all concept of time, and only when they heard the faint sound of the Shabbat siren in the village of Meron, heralding the arrival of Queen Shabbat, did they realize that they had to return to their hostel immediately before the entrance of Shabbat.

 In ten minutes' time the Shabbat candles were to be lit and they were still so far away. How would they have time to have a shower, change clothes and prepare themselves for Shabbat?

 They immediately began to run as fast as they could on the road leading to their place of lodging. However, it was too far away and they understood that they had little chance of getting there on time.

 While running, one of the boys pointed at a small path, winding its way to the top of the mountain. Look, he said to his friend, we have already walked on that path. It is a short-cut that will bring us straight to the hostel.

 His friend immediately agreed, and instead of running on the road, they turned onto the small path that was winding its way between the bushes on the mountain. They ran as fast as they could, but they soon came to an abrupt stop, unable to continue.

 An enormous black dog stood there blocking their way, and there was no sign that it would allow them to pass. The boys had no time for persuasion and turned to the right side of the path in order to pass the dog and continue on their way. However, the dog also moved to their right and did not allow them to pass. Then they tried to pass him on the left but the same thing happened: he blocked their way again.

**Trying Futilely to Pass the Dog**

 The students knew that Shabbat was to start within the next few minutes and decided to pass the dog, come what may. They decided to try and pass him quickly but to their horror the huge dog stood up on its hind legs and opened its mouth in such a frightening way that they ran straight back to the main road leading to Meron, convinced that they had no other choice.

 In the middle of the difficult and strenuous run they noticed a woman standing at the bus stop. Next to her, on the ground, there were two big suitcases. When the boys reached her, she said very excitedly, It is so good that you came. Please could you help me carry my suitcases to the hostel? Afterwards I shall tell you about a miracle that does not occur every day.

 The boys took the cases on their backs without asking any questions and ran as fast as they could to the hostel. They participated in the Shabbat prayers with devotion and joy of heart. Despite the long run they felt an inner peace and were happy that they had come to Meron for Shabbat. It would have been better if they had made more proper preparations for Shabbat, but on the other hand they had performed a great mitzvah by helping the woman with her suitcases.

**Arriving in Time to Light the Shabbat Candles**

 She had arrived at the hostel in time to light the Shabbat candles.

 The following day they met the woman whom they had assisted. She asked them to be seated and began to relate her story:

 “For a long time I wished to go to the holy site of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in order to pray there. When the 7th of Adar approached, I decided to go to Meron. I packed whatever I needed for the weekend in two suitcases. They were too heavy for me

to carry all the way from the bus stop to the lodging in Meron, but I was sure that somebody would be willing to help me. I arrived at Meron an hour and a half before

Shabbat, but to my great surprise I was the only one who got off the bus as this stop.

 “I stood on the road, waiting for somebody to come. As time went by, I began to be more and more worried. When I heard the Shabbat siren, I realized that my chances of arriving there on time were very slim. Where would I spend my Shabbat?

 “I started to pray to G-d and ask for help. I cried and begged. I brought Shabbat candles with me in my suitcase, but I did not bring any matches. During all my life I have been very conscientious about lighting the Shabbat candles - and now, near the resting place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, I was to lose this dear mitzvah? I beseeched G-d for help to perform this commandment.

 “Suddenly I saw how both of you came running on the road in my direction. I was so happy. Within a few moments you would reach the bus stop and you would certainly be willing to help me with my suitcases.

**Praying to G-d for a Miracle**

 “To my great dismay, I saw that suddenly you turned onto a side path and began to go up the mountain. I prayed to G-d that He should perform a miracle. You were so very close to the spot where I was waiting. I prayed to G-d that he should send an angel from above who would make you turn into my direction -- and suddenly I saw that huge black dog standing in your way!

 “You can surely understand how anxious I was when I saw how you tried to pass the dog! I prayed fervently to G-d that you should be unable to walk around him -- and at that very moment he stood up on his hind legs to his full size. I then saw how you returned to the main road until you reached the place where I was waiting!

 “I am sure that because of my strong wish to light the Shabbat candles - not for my sake but for the sake of G-d - I had the privilege to see how my prayers were fulfilled in such a wondrous way!”

The above story is DEDICATED for:a FAIR judgment for Sholom Mordechai HaLevy Rubashkin (see justiceforshalom.org)

 [Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Chassidic Gems, by Tuvia Litzman, who heard this story from the two yeshiva students ] Connection: Seasonal Lag bOmer / Meron

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**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Tell a Friend**

 Hashem commands us this week saying: *"You shall count for yourselves... seven weeks, they shall be complete."* (Vayikra 23:15) This is the mitzvah of *Sefiras HaOmer* ­- the counting of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos, the period in which we currently find ourselves.

 The Sages have taught us that the time of *Sefiras HaOmer* is a time of special spiritual importance. Specifically, the Sages tell us that this is a time to work on our character. This is hinted to in the gematria - numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word *"Omer"* which is 49, which is also the numerical value of *"midah"* - character.

 Historically, a great calamity befell the Jewish people during this period. Namely, 24,000 students of Rebbi Akiva died during *Sefiras HaOmer* because they did not treat each other with respect. (See, Yevamos 72b) Therefore, this is a special time of the year to work on ourselves. Let us focus this week on one aspect of character which tends to play a very important role in our relationships with others; the issue of money.

 The Sages tell us that one of the three ways we can really know someone is by the way he deals with money, (drinking and anger are the other two ways.) (Medrash Tanchuma, Warsaw, Korach 12:2)

**“Don’t Mix Business with Pleasure”**

 There is a common expression, *"don't mix business with pleasure."* Unfortunately, many of us have found this expression to be a good general rule. Experience is the best teacher. Money has a tendency to bring out the worst in people. Therefore, we have to be very careful in our money dealings so as not to wrong others.

 Quite simply, if we borrow money, we should pay it back timely. If we buy something (especially from an individual), we should pay for it promptly and completely. If we damage another's property, we should pay the damage. One who follows these general guidelines will avoid problems in his relationships with others. The following story can inspire us in this area of character development.

 After the fall of the Evil Communist Russian regime in the 1990's, hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews were finally able to leave the big prison formally known as the Soviet Union. Most of these Jews made their way to Eretz Yisroel. Deprived of even a basic Jewish education, many of these Jews sadly did not know even the *"aleph-beis"* of Judaism.

**Reb Laibel – An Elderly Jew**

 One such Jew was the elderly Reb Laibel, who left behind his native Russia to arrive in Eretz Yisroel in the 1990's. Even though Reb Laibel did not have much of a background in Judaism, the Jewish spark within his heart still burned bright, and he strongly desired to be more observant. Little by little, Reb Laibel began learning more and more about Judiaism. After a remarkably short time, Reb Laibel was learning Torah and praying the statutory three prayers a day.

 Reb Laibel was generally a happy person. However, one incident from his younger years weighed heavily on his shoulders. Knowing that he was to give a reckoning of all his deeds in the Supreme Court in heaven above, Reb Laibel wished correct his past misdeeds.

 Several years previous, Reb Laibel wrote a letter to the Russian government in which he accused another Jew of wrongdoing. Due to Reb Laibel's incriminatory letter, the other Jew was fined 20,000 rubbles, which was a tremendous amount at the time.

 Now, several years later Reb Laibel regretted his behavior. Although there may have been reason to believe that the Russian police had manipulated him, Reb Laibel still believed that he was to blame. Reb Laibel wanted to do *teshuvah* - to correct his ways.

 However, after so many years he doubted he could find the Jew he had incriminated. Perhaps that Jew was no longer alive. Finding his heirs would be difficult. Reb Laibel did not despair. He prayed that Hashem should help him somehow resolve this issue which weighed so heavily upon his soul.

**Rushing to Get Advices From His Rabbi**

 Reb Laibel hurried to his Rabbi, Reb Shmuel Trebish, of blessed memory, to ask him what to do. After some talking, Reb Laibel asked his Rav to write him a note. Reb Laibel asked that Rav Trebish write in the letter that Reb Laibel had sincerely done all that he could to find the man whom he had wronged. Reb Laibel said then that he wanted to be buried with the later, so that he would have something to show at his trial in heaven.

 Rav Trebish later determined that perhaps this letter would not be enough to protect Reb Laibel in the next world. Therefore Rav Trebish told Reb Laibel that he was calling together other Rabonim to consider this issue over the coming 10 days.

 Before the 10 days were up, Reb Laibel returned to his Rav with incredible news... *Reb Laibel had rectified his wrong!* Rav Trebish listened intently as Reb Laibel retold the amazing events of the previous couple of days.

 Earlier in the week, Reb Laibel had gone to the doctor for a routine check-up. Reb Laibel was not familiar with the way of doctors' offices, so he showed up at 6:30 a.m. and knocked on the door. The office was of course empty at the time. So, Reb Laibel found some shelter under a bus stop and waited.

**Meeting Someone from Chernowitz**

 Soon, another Russian immigrant happened to sit down next to Reb Laibel. The two quickly found themselves in a conversation. It became apparent that the two men both came from Chernowitz, in the former Soviet Union.

 Reb Laibel chanced it and asked the man if he knew the family of the man Reb Laibel had wronged so many years ago. Amazing, the Russian immigrant was a son-in-law of the man Reb Laibel had reported to the Russian authorities. Unfortunately, the man himself had passed away. However, Reb Laibel was able to get the names of his heirs.

 Thankfully, Reb Laibel had some money in a savings bank in Chernowitz. So, the heirs were able to go to the bank and withdraw their equal portions. Reb Laibel had only asked that the heirs send receipts of the money they had withdrawn from the bank account in Chernowitz.

 Later, Reb Laibel instructed Rav Trebish that he wanted to be buried with those receipts. Soon after, Reb Laibel closed his eyes for the last time and returned his soul to its Maker. The Chevrah Kadisha (burial society) dutifully fulfilled the wishes of the deceased and Reb Laibel was buried with the bank receipts in hand. (Heard from Reb Yosef Chaim Greenwald)

 How many people do we owe money to? How many people are upset with us over money issues? Let us all use the *Sefirah* days to improve our character for the better, especially in the area of our dealings with money. Good Shabbos Everyone.

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

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**Displaying with Pride**

**His Pink Slip “Medals”**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Say to the Kohanim he sons of Aharon and you shall say to them.*” (Vayikra 21:1)

 The Torah goes at length to list all the laws that pertain only to Kohanim. Rashi mentions that the Torah uses a redundant wording: “Say and you shall say,” to caution adults with regard to the young. The Torah is teaching us that adult Kohanim must ensure that young Kohanim who are not bar Misvah yet should practice the laws of the Kohanim. Of course we know that how you tell your kids is the key to success. We, not only Kohanim, must always give positive reinforcement to the children.

 Rabbi Finkleman (Living the Perashah) tells a great story. An acquaintance told Rabbi Feifer that he knew a man who had very unusual succah decorations. This man, living in America in the early 1900’s, had a hard time earning a living, because it took a long time to find a steady job. For many months he would start a new job on Monday, only to be fired on the following Monday for not having reported to work on Saturday. He did not let this get him down; every time he was fired he came home in good spirits.

 With Succot approaching, he and his children built an old-fashioned succah, using heavy boards for the walls and slats of wood for the sechach. When the last piece of sechach was laid, the man said to his children, “And now we’ll decorate the succah with beautiful decorations.” The man went into his house and, with his wife at his side, emerged a few minutes later with a small box.

 As his curious children stood around him, he opened the box to reveal a pile of small slips of paper. “Children,” he said, “in America when a person is fired from his job, he gets a pink slip of paper telling him so. The papers in this box are all the pink slips I got here in America from factories that fired me for keeping Shabbat. To me each pink slip is a medal I earned for loving Hashem and His holy Shabbat. I can think of nothing better to use for succah decorations. Come children, help Mommy and me hang up our medals and make our succah beautiful!”

**The Importance of Being Sensitive to the**

**Feelings of Even a Sinner**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

"*And they placed him in jail*." (Vayikra 24:12)

 The son of Shelomit bat Dibri blasphemed the Name of Hashem throughout the camp of the Israelites and was brought before Moshe. Moshe and the Children of Israel, awaiting further instruction from Hashem, were left to their own reasoning in dealing with him. Rashi relates that they placed him in a different cell than the mekoshesh - the one who desecrated Shabbat - who happened to be incarcerated at the same time.

 The mekoshesh was awaiting his punishment - death. The fate of the mekallel - the one who cursed Hashem - was not yet to be decided. Had they been put together, the mekallel would have assumed that his penalty was also death, which was not yet certain. This undoubtedly would prompt the mekallel to feel a degree of anguish. To avoid this unnecessary suffering, B'nei Yisrael decided to keep the two sinners separated.

**Unsure of the Penalty for**

**One Who Curses Hashem**

 The Da'at Zekenim notes that the Children of Israel were unsure if the one who cursed Hashem was even worthy of death. Their reasoning was such: One who curses his parents receives capital punishment. B'nei Yisrael inferred that, naturally, cursing Hashem is worse. Perhaps his sin is so great that he would not be allowed any chance of atonement in this world and therefore his punishment should remain totally in the hands of Hashem. If the mekallel was deemed so despicable as to deserve a fate worse than death, why did the Children of Israel go out of their way to insure that he should not wrongly assume that he was on death row?

 The Children of Israel were setting an example for us. We must be sensitive, to the greatest degree, of everyone's feelings and needs. True, the mekallel was wicked and immoral and deserved the greatest punishment possible. Nevertheless, the Israelites had the responsibility to uphold his human dignity and avoid causing him any undue pain.

 The lesson for us is obvious. Even if our neighbor is base and corrupt, we cannot hurt him or his feelings unnecessarily. How much more so must we be responsive and sympathetic to the needs and feelings of friends and family?

 The message of the days of the omer is not merely one of abstinence from pleasure, but one of caring for our fellow man. The twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiba died in this time period because they, in some slight way, did not respect each other as people of their stature should have. The Torah requires and expects us to act towards everyone with the greatest amount of compassion and love imaginable. By putting in every extra effort in this time of sefirat ha'omer, we will be well on our way to preparing ourselves for Shabuot and accepting the Torah.

*Reprinted from this week’s Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin email.*

**The Great Miracle of the Volcano Shutdown**

 A universal crisis, millions of people stranded, billions of dollars lost, and one volcanic eruption in Iceland causes chaos across the European continent. Within all these tumult, one Jew merits a smile of loveliness from the Creator of the World, as if whispering to him - My son, the whole world was not created except for you כל העולם לא נברא אלא בשבילי.

 The story begins with a young Yeshiva student, an 18 year old Yerushalmi, that came down with a fulminate hepatic failure and was mortally ill.

**Sent with Little Hope to Brussels for a Transplant**

 With little hope of receiving a liver transplant in Israel, Rav Firer sought to send the boy on an emergency trip to Brussels, the world center of liver transplants. The only problem however, is that Brussels under no circumstances transplants non-EU patients. This is done in order to save the scanty supply of livers for Europeans. Nevertheless, Rabbi Firer decided to send him to Brussels despite the full knowledge of negligible chance of receiving a liver.

 The young Yeshiva student had no choice but to add his name to the long waiting list for a liver transplant. In the meantime, he tried to maintain his learning despite the illness, consciously aware that it might takes weeks, months, or even years until he would be able to be given a new liver. Many patients were on the waiting list, and his name was somewhere on the bottom. And when his turn would finally arrive, it must completely match his blood type of the donor and other medical criteria. If it’s not a perfect match, he would need to continue waiting … for a miracle.

 However, רבות מחשבות בלב איש ועצת ה’ היא תקום Many thoughts in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of Hashem shall stand. Hashem had a different plan for this young yeshiva student and Hashem’s loyal servants produced avalanches of hot ash, rock and gas on Europe, causing Europe to completely transforming its skies into a no-fly zone. No one could leave and no one could enter the self-imposed siege in the European zone skies. It was during this time that the young religious Yerushalmi man staying in the capital of Belgium was sitting in the yeshiva learning Torah.

**A Donor Dies in Belgium**

 During the course of the shut down of airspace above Europe, a person died in a hospital in the capital of Belgium. He had agreed a person to donate his liver to anyone that might need it. Astonishingly, a liver that was a perfect match for our young Yeshiva student.

 Health authorities in Belgium began searching the waiting list for those needing a liver transplant. But ‘unfortunately’, not even one patient was able to fly into Belgium for the very needed healthy liver transplant because of the chaol due to the volcanic eruption in Iceland.

 As they examined further down the waiting list, the Belgian medical authorities came to the name of the young yeshiva student. However it was not offered to the boy due to his lack of citizenship. As the clock closed in on the deadline for time in which the liver’s lifespan for transplanting, the precious healthy liver cannot be wasted and must be swiftly replaced with a diseased liver, it was realized that one else was able to arrive in Belgium for the transplant except for this young Yerushalmi.

 With the clear Divine Intervention, this budding talmid chacham received the liver and is now recovering from surgery.

**The Doctor’s Shocking Revelation**

 The enormity of this miracle was even greater after the successful liver transplant. The doctors declared that the young yeshiva student’s liver was very deteriorated and diseased and it was only a matter of just a few more days before his liver would have stopped functioning completely. The doctors unanimously believe that if this young man had to continue waiting for the liver transplant according to the normal sequence of events that were only disrupted by the volcanic eruption, he would have been long dead.

*Reprinted from the April 27th edition of the Matzav.com website.*

**Understanding the Concept**

**Of “Ain Od Milvado”**

 A rabbi, educator and counselor advised us that he teaches people who are down, dejected and even depressed about the value of thinking and reminding themselves about three essential life-enriching words--”Ain Od Milvado!” -- There is no One but Hashem -- Hashem is the Source of Everything, and he is a Maitiv -- so that the situations that a person encounters and the people he must meet are all Divinely Ordained -- and for a purpose.

 No one has been left to his fortune or to the elements; no one has been forgotten about or rejected. Rather, if one acts in accordance with the Torah as explained by his Rav or Posek, he is fulfilling his purpose in this world, even if it may be different than what is perceived as the normal, usual or ordinary lifestyle. In truth, no two people--even husband and wife -- have the same experiences.

 Every person in his own unique way is under Hashem’s watchful eye. We are never alone, for in the 120 years we are in this world –t here is our Father in Heaven who looks down upon us with cherish and endearment -- who may simply be asking or reminding us to acknowledge His guiding presence.

 In difficult times, when it is hardest to feel it, is when we daven -- strengthening our ties and asking our Father for the Yeshuos we know only He can grant. Over the next day, as we daven for R’Sholem Mordechai Rubashkin, let us feel the “Ain Od Milvado” penetrate through us, as we understand that we are to unite in our Emunah -- and hope that we will bring the Yeshuos for him and his family (and for ourselves -- as we are all one) that Only He can lovingly shower upon us.

*Reprinted from the Hakhel Email Community Awareness Bulletin of 27 Iyar 5770/April 27, 2010*

**Japanese Scapegoated Indonesia's Jews in WW2**

**By Gil Ronen**

 Indonesia's Jewish population numbered about 3,000 during World War Two, out of a total population of 68 million – yet the Japanese occupiers blamed this small group for an economic crisis and sent its members to forced labor camps.

 Studies on the plight of Indonesia's Jews under the Japanese occupation were presented Tuesday at the ninth annual convention on Asian Studies at Haifa University. According to Prof. Rotem Kovner of the Asian Studies Program, the Jewish population in Indonesia (then known as the Netherlands East Indies) on the eve of Japan's invasion was about equally divided between Jews of European descent and Jews of Iraqi descent. When the Japanese took over, the European Jews were placed in concentration camps along with all other Europeans, but Iraqi Jews remained free, as did Jews who were citizens of neutral countries or countries allied with Japan.

**The Tiny Scapegoat**

 In mid-1943, however, things changed: a deep economic crisis broke out in Indonesia. “The Japanese, who wanted to calm the local populace, began uttering vague promises of independence and simultaneously looked for a scapegoat,” Kovner explained. “Despite the Jewish population's tiny size, it was chosen for this role.”

 It was at this point that anti-Semitic propaganda began to be spread in Indonesia. Jews were blamed for the economic woes, having supposedly taken over natural resources. Other familiar European anti-Semitic claims were rehashed for the Indonesian populace.

 Dr. Ran Shauli noted that while Japan persecuted Chinese and other minorities in the other countries they conquered, Indonesia was unique in that no ethnic group was persecuted – except for the Jews.

 Jews in Indonesia now number an estimated twenty (20) individuals, out of a total population of about 230 million. US President Barack Hussein Obama spent four years of his childhood in that country.

*Reprinted from Arutz Sheva (Israel National News.com)*

**An Update on Efforts to Help**

**Reb Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin**



**Rabbi Sholom Rubashkin**

**Dear Friend,**

 Thank you for signing the Justice For Sholom Petition. Your expression of concern and request that Sholom be treated fairly was joined by many major Jewish organizations from all across the spectrum, including the ADL, Simon Weisenthal Center and representatives from major Chassidic, Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative organisations. Please G-d, the incredible unity among Jews worldwide will bring many open and revealed blessings for the Rubashkin family and all of Israel.

 By signing this petition you fulfilled the greatest Mitzvah in the Torah "To Love your Fellow Jew as yourself".

 As we stand on the eve of sentencing, your prayers (and extra Mitzvos) for a just outcome for Sholom, his wife and 10 children would be most appreciated: Sholom Mordechai HaLevi Ben Rivkah.

 Our sages teach us, One Mitvoh Leads to another.: Sholom who was known for his incredible generosity is now destitute. Hundreds of stories of his discreet generosity have emerged. One such, told by a young boy who witnessed Sholom coming out of the bank with 10,000 in Cash. He encountered a worried individual and asked for the reason of his concern. When he learned that this poor man was marrying off his daughter and did not have a penny to his name, Sholom, without any fanfare took the 10k in cash and put it in this mans pocket and walked away.

**A Selfless Person Who Has Helped**

**Thousands of Jews and Non-Jews in Need**

 Although Sholom has made mistakes and used poor judgement, he is anything but what the government has portrayed him to be. He is a selfless person who has helped thousands and thousands of Jews and non-Jews in need.

 Sholom has a long legal fight ahead of him (with trumped up state charges as well to face). His wife and children -including a severely autistic child- are destitute.

 Please consider making a donation to help this family. You can do so by texting JUSTICE followed by a space and the amount you want to give to 27138 (E.g. Text JUSTICE 18 to 27138) or by sending an email with a pledge amount to [donate@justiceforsholom.org](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1272465716) You can also visit justiceforsholom.org/donate for other donation methods. Any amount is appreciated and necessary.

**The Plight of Other Jews in U.S. Prisons**

 The Justice for Sholom Committee would also like to bring to your attention the plight of the many thousands of Jews - and their families - in prison in the US, and the ALEPH Institute that caters to their needs.

 There are over four thousand Jewish men and women in American prisons all across this country. Many times there are very few Jewish inmates in an individual prison and it can be very difficult if not impossible to observe Torah and mitzvot . To lift up the spirits of a Jew in prison is fulfilling "Love your fellow Jew as yourself" on the highest level.

 In one aspect, there is no worse situation that a human being can be in than prison. When one loses his or her freedom it is even worse than being sick because in prison you lose all control of your own life. A person may be in prison for committing a crime and may deserve to be there but we still have to show them love and help them to mend their ways and return to society as law abiding and contributing members of society.

 The Aleph Institute has been working with and assisting Jewish prisoners for close to thirty years all over the United States.

 Every day, over 25,000 American Jews are punished with overwhelming and unbearable challenges due to no crime of their own. They are the wives, husbands, parents and children of individuals in prison. When a family member is in prison, the remaining family is confronted with momentous challenges. They face a confusing judicial system, financial ruin, embarrassment and total despair.

**The Ones Who Suffer the Most are the Children**

 The ones that suffer the most are the children. These innocent souls need financial support, emotional support and guidance. They need to feel that there is normalcy in their little lives. In most cases the children of incarcerated parents suffer deeply. They feel loneliness, depression, insecurity, guilt and severance from their incarcerated parent. Such inconsistency puts these children at a much higher risk of being involved with the criminal justice system as adults. It is imperative that we help and support them while they are still young.

 How can one describe the heartbreak of a child who sits by the phone and waits for her father to call with his allotted 15 minutes to say goodnight? Can we understand a child’s painful realization that he can not ask for a bicycle so that he can ride with his friends, due to the family’s lack of money to pay the bills? Imagine the feelings that rush through a child’s head as she watches her friend’s parents cheerfully meet their daughter after school, while she will have to wait for her heart broken mother or grandmother to pick her up after work. What is the holiday experience for a child whose parent is in prison? The usual joyful and life altering moments of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Sweet 16s, graduations, and weddings become lacking in ways that seem impossible to overcome.

**The Families Desperately Need Our Help**

 This short insight does not do true justice to the pain, suffering and disintegration that these families continually experience. These families need guidance, financial and emotional support. These families desperately need our help.

 Please visit www.alephinstitute.org and/or email [Rivky@aleph-institute.org](http://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1272465716)

 Please consider getting involved, lending an ear or a hand to a fellow Jew in prison and/or his/her family left behind.

 Maimonides teaches us that we ought to to look at the world as though it's on a scale that's perfectly balanced between good and bad. And, one extra Mitzvah (my mitzvah!) can tip the scale and usher in the era of redemption!

 May we all merit the ultimate redemption speedily in our days.

[**The Human Side of the Story**](http://ohr.edu/yhiy.php?seriesid=17&archive=1)

**Double Strength**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 When the previous Slonimer Rebbe encouraged a relative of his from America to study in Cracow, Poland under the founder of the Beit Yaakov movement, Sara Schenirer, he sent along a letter with this important message:

 "When the Prophet Eliyahu before his passing gave his disciple Elisha an opportunity to make a request, the latter asked for double the spiritual power of his master. The rationale for such a seemingly exorbitant request was that while Eliyahu was alive his extraordinary saintliness was sufficient to influence his generation. His departure would leave the world at a lower level, which would make it necessary for Elisha to have double his strength.

 You are teaching girls in Cracow how to deal with what Poland has to offer. The girl bringing this letter needs to be armed with much more in order to stand up to what America 'has to offer'."

 That girl eventually returned to America, married a distinguished educator and gave birth to Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, *zatzal*, who influenced a whole generation

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

**It Once Happened**

**A True Kindness**

**To the Nifter**

 On Lag B'Omer it is customary for children to go out into the fields and play with bows and arrows. For adults, there is a custom of visiting the local cemetery on Lag B'Omer. In the town of Homil, every year on this day, all the Jews would pay their respects to the dearly departed: parents, Chasidim, Torah scholars and other beloved members of the community.

 The Chevra Kadisha, or Burial Society, would also make its annual visit to the cemetery on the afternoon of Lag B'Omer. Notebook in hand, its members would make the rounds of all the graves and check on the condition of the tombstones. Anything requiring repair was duly noted.

 Towards evening, their inspection over, the members of the Chevra Kadisha would gather together for a communal seuda (festive meal). It was always an inspirational event, dedicated to furthering the observance of "acts of true kindness" (as Jewish burial practices are called, as the dead cannot be expected to reciprocate).

**Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac of Homil**

 It was also customary for the famous Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac of Homil (1770 - 1857, one of the greatest early Chabad Chasidim) to participate in the gathering, joining the Chevra Kadisha in their celebration. Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, one of the greatest followers of the early Chabad leaders, would make a "l'chaim" and deliver some appropriate words of Torah.

 Before he arrived, however, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac would always conduct his own pilgrimage to visit the grave-sites of his predecessors. Year after year he would follow the same schedule, until one time, something most unusual occurred.

 That Lag B'Omer it was already growing late when Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac began his rounds, accompanied by the cemetery caretaker. The setting sun elongated his shadow, accentuating his long white beard. At each grave the Rabbi whispered something audible only to him before moving on to the next one.

**Notices a New Marble Monument**

 At the very end of the cemetery, in the newer section where the most recently deceased were interred, the rabbi paused in front of an obviously new marble monument. Bending down, he read the inscription to make sure it was the one he was looking for before nodding his head slightly.

 "Quickly!" he suddenly turned and called to the caretaker. "Go back to town and bring an ax. A strong one, with a heavy blade." The caretaker did as he was told, and few minutes later he was back.

 "Now I want you to obliterate everything it says here," the rabbi instructed him. "Take off all the words of praise, all the flowery eulogies and tributes. Leave nothing but the name of the deceased and the date he died."

 The caretaker hesitated, frozen in place. But Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac was insistent. "Please, just do what I tell you," he implored him.

 With trembling hands the caretaker lifted the ax and demolished the engraving, erasing the litany of good deeds the deceased had accomplished during his lifetime. When the deed was done, a look of satisfaction could be seen on the face of the rabbi. "Good," he told the astounded caretaker. "Now I can attend the seuda with the Chevra Kadisha."

 The news of what had happened quickly spread throughout Homil. Indeed, the rumor reached the ears of the members of the Burial Society even before Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac arrived at their celebration.

 "Thank G-d I was able to do an act of kindness for a Jewish soul," the rabbi announced as he walked in the door. It was obvious from the way everyone was looking at him that they were completely mystified by his behavior.

 The rabbi sat down and made a blessing over a glass of spirits. "L'chaim - to life!" he wished the assemblage before launching into an explanation:

 "A few weeks ago," he began, "a simple Jew passed away in Homil. His funeral was small and unassuming. Only a few members of his family were present, plus representatives of the Chevra Kadisha. Like many others, despite the fact that he wasn't particularly learned or saintly, he was a warmhearted Jew who had many mitzvot to his credit. On the other hand, he also occasionally faltered like everyone else. In other words, he was your average Jew.

**An Uproar in the Heavenly Court**

 "After he died, his soul went up to the Heavenly Court, where his good deeds and bad deeds came under intense scrutiny. The judgment was about to be issued when, all of a sudden, an angel stood up holding a glistening white marble tablet. It was the tombstone that the deceased's children had erected over his final resting place.

 "It seems that the man's children had decided to bestow upon their father - or upon themselves - a number of undeserved honors. The lengthy inscription described a lifetime of devoutness and piety, which, in reality, was only a fabrication. The Heavenly Court was disturbed by this miscarriage of justice.

 "Today I did a very great favor for the soul of the departed," the rabbi concluded. "When I erased all of the undeserved words of praise, the Heavenly Court ruled that the man's soul could now receive the true reward it was legitimately entitled to."

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

**Torah Education:**

**Saving Lives!!**

 There is a remarkable story, one which brings to life the reason why our great rabbi Rav Ovadia Yossef shlit"a devotes himself tirelessly to the pure education, why this issue remains at the very top of his agenda, and why he fights the sacred battle to increase and more fully establish its operation.

 The story occurred during World War II, when Europe was drowning in a deluge of blood, fire and smoke and the Jews were locked inside ghettos and sent to be destroyed. Various organizations involved themselves in saving whatever lives they could. Groups of youngsters were sent outside the borders, and they crossed through countries and oceans until their arrival in England, which was then fighting for its life.

 Enemy aircraft and missiles brought widespread destruction, life became a nightmare and desperation rose. The German intrusion, it seemed, was imminent, and the Prime Minister guaranteed the people "blood, sweat and tears."

 The young refugees were taken by various organizations, both Jewish and otherwise. The Jewish organizations included both Torah observant groups as well as those bereft of any connection to the Jewish religion and heritage.

 The religious organization that dealt with the absorption of refugees organized for them a camp with counselors, teachers and educators, plus a kitchen and "camp mother." Obviously, all this required a lot of funding.

 Other children needed adopting families, all at a time when inflation rose to the sky and unemployment abounded. Donations gradually subsided, as many donors went bankrupt and others simply could not part with their wealth out of fear of what may come.

**Rabbi Abramski is Updated**

**On the Grim Situation**

 The organizers gathered in the home of the rabbi and head of the rabbinical court of London, Rav Yehezkel Abramski zs"l, to report on the grim situation. "Rabbi, the money has been depleted, and we are compelled to cease the operation. The youth will have to be given over to other groups, where they will at least receive food and shelter but without a Torah education. We have no choice."

 The rabbi asked, "There is no other source of funding? None at all?!"

 They shook their heads. They had already turned to everyone, they tried everything. They had heard of Lord something-or-other, a.Jew by birth who had lost all ties to Judaism. He observed nothing other than the day of his parents' passing, when he would go to Bet Kenesset to recite kaddish. Despite his immense wealth, they did noteven bother to approach him. He was as far away from religion as east is from west.

 Right there and then, the rabbi telephoned the wealthy man and scheduled a meeting.

**A Matter of Life and Death**



**Rabbi Yechezkel Abramski**

 "I come for a matter of life and death," the rabbi said as he sat opposite the man. He proceeded to tell him about the organization. The man sat and listened until the rabbi finished, and replied, "I already support life-saving operations. I provide funding for the Red Cross and other similar organizations.

 “Forgive me, rabbi, but this institute is not involved in saving lives. The youngsters were saved once they left the burning continent. Here, in England, their lives are secure, and it makes no difference to me where they receive their education."

 "Judaism maintains that Torah education is also considered saving lives," responded the rabbi. "Detachment from the fountains of Torah and observance of missvot is equivalent to the loss of life!"

 "I'm sorry, but the rabbi has gone a little far afield," claimed the man. "I don’t know what you mean exactly when you say 'saving lives.'" He stood up, and the interview came to an end. The rabbi left empty-handed.

 On Friday night, at 11:00 PM, the phone rang in the wealthy man's residence. Shabbat was for him like a weekday, and so he picked up the phone. "Hello?"

 The voice coming from the other end was familiar: "This is Rabbi Abramski, the chief rabbi of London. I am calling you on Shabbat eve, because saving lives overrides Shabbat, and educating children towards Torah and missvot constitutes saving lives. Is this clear enough an indication that I am speaking here of saving lives?"

 The man was startled. "How much money does the rabbi need?"

 The rabbi told him the amount, an enormous fortune, and after Shabbat the lord came to his house with the money. The operation continued, and lives were saved as the youngsters were given a Torah education.

*Reprinted from this week’s Aram Soba Newsletter for Parasha Emor.*

**PERASHAT EMOR**

 **“For Your Favor” (23:11)**

**As Heard From Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

 The acts which cause us to become *more aware of Hashem* are acts that gain for us Hashem’s favor. The waiving of the Omer before Hashem is intended for the purpose of declaring that Hashem bestowed the grain, and that the grain is a miraculous substance, which elicits our amazement and admiration.

 If we respond properly to this declaration, and we recognize the wondrous process of the growth of the grain and we perceive the vastness of the miracles which the grain performs when we ingest it, the grain thereby becomes the great demonstration of Hashem’s infinite wisdom and power and kindliness. When men learn these lessons they thus fulfill the purpose for which they were created, and thus they deserve Hashem’s favor.

 The intention of gaining Hashem’s favor should be emphasized and should be kept in mind while doing any Mitzvah and even any ordinary act. But “A man’s food is more difficult (meaning: more miraculous) that the rending of the Sea of Suf” (Pesachim 118A).

 The sunlight travels 93 million miles to aid the plant-chlorophyll to convert the carbon dioxide of the air into starch. The sun evaporates the surface of the sea and the vapor rises to the clouds, where the winds sweep the clouds inland to be condensed and to fall as rain to nourish the grain.

 Every grain kernel possesses some millions of bits of information recorded on the helix of the DNA molecule with instructions how to produce the plant and how the plant should function to produce the grain. As the materials from the atmosphere and from the soil pass into the plant and are processed, thousands of complicated steps must be performed in precise sequence so that the final result is achieved. But the truth of the intricacy of the production of food is vastly more complicated and purposeful than men will ever know.

**A Declaration of Our Endless Gratitude**

 The waiving of the Omer is a declaration of our endless gratitude and wonderment and admiration for the work of him that “gives bread to all flesh, for his kindliness is everlasting” (Tehillim 136:25). Hashem created these miracles of Kindliness *in order that men should recognize Him*. Therefore the waiving of the Omer to aggrandize and praise the gift of food is certainly deserving of Hashem’s favor. “And he shall waive the Omer …for your favor.”

 Thus the appreciation of food is a major means of gaining Hashem’s favor. That is the reason that Birkat Hamazon is the sole blessing that is unanimously recognized as an original Torah obligation (based on the verse in Devarim 8:10).

*Quoted from “A Kingdom of Cohanim” by Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l.*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Friends of Yeshiva Gedolah Bais Yisroel.*

**Talking Points - Parshas Emor**

**Real Leadership**

**By Rabbi Elazar Meisels**

 "The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren, upon whose head the anointment oil was poured... shall not leave his head unshorn and shall not rend his garments. He shall not approach any dead person; he shall not defile himself to his father or his mother.'" 21:10-11

 To his father or his mother - This verse speaks about a Kohen Gadol (High Priest), who is not allowed to contaminate himself by attending the burial of anybody, including his own parents. The only exception is a one who has nobody to attend his burial. This stands in contrast to a common Kohen, who may contaminate himself for his seven close relatives as delineated in the previous verses.

 To his father or his mother - The Levite tribe (which includes the Kohanim) earned its exalted status by virtue of their actions protesting and fighting the perpetrators and participants in the sin of the Golden Calf. Doing so required unusual fealty to G-d and a willingness to overlook love for one's relatives, for they were required to execute all who participated, even their own parents if they were guilty of such. This loyalty earned them the right and distinction to act as G-d's messengers for eternity, and the mandate to avoid contamination, even if caused by a parent. By overcoming their natural bonds in the episode of the Golden Calf, they merited to be raised above them for eternity. - Ahavas Yonasan

**What Differentiates a High Priest?**

 Why is a High Priest different from the rest of the priests in that he may not contaminate himself for any of his relatives? What could possibly be wrong with doing so? A leader of the people must recognize that as leader, he is personally responsible for each and every individual and must never experience deeper feelings for one over the other.

 This means that he may not even love his own family more than others, for doing so compromises his status as leader. Had the Torah asked the High Priest to avoid contamination for others, but allowed him to contaminate himself for his own family, his role as leader would have been diminished.

 Instead, the Torah insisted that he contaminate himself for no one, not even his own wife, children, siblings, or parents. It is said of Rabbi Dovid Lelover zt"l that he once remarked in anguish, "How can people consider me a leader of the generation when I still love my own children slightly more than I do all others?"

*Reprinted from this week’s Mentor Talk, published by Partners in Torah*

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller Z"L # 33**

**Why keep the Torah?**



**Rabbi Avigdor Miller**

This email is transcribed from questions that were posed to Harav Miller by the audience at the Thursday night lectures. To listen to the audio of this Q & A please dial: 732-534-8868

|  |
| --- |
| **QUESTION:** |

 Isn't it good enough just to be a good person? Why must we follow the Torah?

|  |
| --- |
| **ANSWER:** |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

 And the answer is, why must you keep traffic laws? Isn't it good enough to be a good person? How many good people go through red lights? How many good people have killed innocent persons by driving drunk?

 Good intentions are not enough to be a good person. A man must be bound by a code. And if he is choosing a code, he might as well take the very best code there is.

 There is no such thing as a good person without Torah. A good person can be a mercy killer, he kills his old mother because he can not see her suffer. A good person can be a selfish man, who thinks he is doing good, when in reality he is only helping himself, because he is blinded by his own desires.

 We have to know that nobody is able to live with standards that he himself creates. You see 50 years ago the reformers, the reform Jews, had certain standards that they considered good, moral, and today they are changed entirely. So whatever people consider as standards in one generation can change in another generation.

 It's only those who live by the eternal standard of Torah, who remain good forever and ever.

This email is transcribed from questions that were posed to Harav Miller by the audience at the Thursday night lectures. To listen to the audio of this Q & A

please dial: 732-534-8868

*Reprinted from the this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Z’L”*

**Parshat Emor & Lag B'Omer**

**A 1948 Miracle in Yerushalayim**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This week's Torah portion contains 64 commandments and one of them is the longest in The Book. It's called 'Counting the Omer' and it takes 49 days; namely counting aloud with a blessing, each of the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot.

 The most significant of these 49 days is the 33rd when, on that date some 1800 years ago, a great Jew named Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai (a.k.a. RaShBi) passed away. It is a day of rejoicing and to this day hundreds of thousands of Jews visit his grave in the northern Israeli town of Meron (this coming Saturday night) to light a huge bonfire and rejoice in song and dance. In fact the entire land of Israel is dotted with tens of thousands of such fires and rejoicing in his honor.

 The reason for all this is that Rashbi wrote the mystical book "The Zohar", which describes the soul of Judaism and in which G-d is quoted as saying, will bring Moshiach; world peace and universal prosperity.

 At first glance all this is not so clear.

Why is the Zohar so Important?

 First, how can the Zohar be so important? After all, it's only a book! How can it bring such total benefit to all mankind?

 Second, what type of commandment is counting days?

 Third, what is the connection to the 33rd day of the Omer with the death of this great man?

 Fourth, why do people rejoice on the day he DIED, and why bonfires?

 And most important, what does this mean to us today?

 To understand this here is a story I just read (Iton HaMvaser, K'hilot #62 pg. 12)

 In May of 1948, shortly after Israel declared statehood, the Jordanian army surrounded the Old City of Jerusalem with their best trained, best armed forces and sealed it hermetically for several weeks. Several futile attempts were made by the fledgling Israeli army to break the siege but they all failed tragically and after a while the Jews of the Old City of Jerusalem were suffering from hunger and thirst.

**Only a Few Hundred Jewish**

**Soldiers to Defent the Old City**

 Only a few hundred Jewish soldiers with light weapons were defending the city and everyone knew that at any moment the Jordanian high command would give the word, Jerusalem would fall into their hands and all its inhabitants would be massacred (as had happened in Kfar Etzion a few weeks earlier).

 Nothing stood between the enemy and total victory.....almost.

 Miraculously the few attempts the Arabs made failed. For instance just a few days before Lag B'Omer they sent an expeditionary force of two tanks followed by several tens of soldiers to wreak havoc in the city.

 The small force of Jewish defenders with no anti-tank devices seemed helpless against this armored force rumbling unhindered through the streets until, suddenly, one of the Jewish soldiers bravely jumped from nowhere onto the first tank, lifted the hatch, which miraculously was unlocked, threw in a makeshift Molotov Cocktail and jumped off unharmed all under a hail of bullets. The tank crew made a hasty escape, the tank blew up blocking the road and the invaders retreated.

 But everyone knew it wouldn't last long. Every day another Jew died from the incessant Arab mortar fire and the Jordanians had the most modern and well organized army and weaponry including artillery of all the 6 or 7 Arab nations attacking Israel - and they were motivated!

 That Thursday (May 28th that year) would be Lag B'Omer when, almost 2,000 years ago, Rashbi revealed his deepest mystical secrets and declared it a day of rejoicing just before he passed away!

 They had to make a fire and rejoice....but how!?

 A fire at night (Jewish holidays begin at nightfall) would be suicide; it would draw enemy artillery and everyone would be killed! (Previously the Jordanians had not used extensive artillery on Jerusalem because they were certain it would soon be theirs. But a fire at night would be an invitation for target practice!)

 Then someone had an idea! In Jerusalem it is the custom to light Shabbat candles 40 minutes before nightfall; there was no reason they couldn't do the same with the Lag B'omer fire! They would light it early while it was still light outside and then they could rejoice a little and do it quietly so as not to draw attention.

**A Group of Thirty Chassidim**

**Show Up to Celebrate**

 About thirty Chassidim showed up. They bought bottles of oil, several bags of old rags and even a few pieces of wood for the fire and made a 'parade', singing quietly, fearing every step, from the Synagogue of the Chassidim until the yard before the Shul of the Perushim.

 There they quietly arranged their materials in a pile, lit the fire, held hands, formed a circle around the fire and resumed their stifled singing.

 But then, something happened. Suddenly they weren't afraid….only happy! They sang louder, began clapping their hands, smiling, dancing and jumping with the joy of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

 Before they knew it they were singing at the top of their lungs, drenched with sweat and dancing with their eyes closed. A half hour had passed! It was getting dark!

 Suddenly the enemy cannons opened up and fire and explosions woke them from their ecstasy. Never had they experienced such a barrage of artillery! Destruction was everywhere. The Jews scattered in all directions, obviously this was the attack on Jerusalem they had expected and dreaded. Each man ran to his home to his family.

 Buildings were falling; bombs were bursting with horrific destructive force. Close to a hundred Jews, rushed to the safest place they knew - the Synagogue! There G-d would save them!

**The Recital of Psalm 91**

 The one writing this true account, Rabbi Avraham Yonaton Gotlieb, recalls how one Rabbi, Zev Isenbach, stood at the podium and read Psalm 91, 91 times begging G-d for mercy and protection. And it worked!

 Suddenly another Jew, Rav Yosel Eichler, appeared in the Shul with a large bag on his shoulder and began distributing its contents, small loaves of bread dipped in oil, saying, "Don't forget that today is a holiday! This is for the joyous meal in honor of Rebbi Shimon!!"

 After over an hour the bombardment stopped. Not one person had been injured and it was totally silent! The dreaded Jordanian attack never came.

 Suddenly one of the Jewish soldiers who happened to be religious, ran in, waving his arms, with a wild, look screaming, "What did you do?! What did you do?! Are you crazy?! Are you all insane?! Did you light that fire and sing!? Was it you!?

 He calmed down and continued. "You don't know what happened! The Jordanians retreated!! They must have been much closer than we supposed but when they heard your singing and saw the fire they became afraid! They figured the only thing that would make you so happy was that reinforcements with new weapons must have arrived and were about to attack them! So they ran away! One of the Arabs told us!

**Saved by the Singing of the Lag B’Omer Celebrators**

 "That's why they fired all their cannons! Their commander ordered them to cover the retreat as they were pulling back to keep us away!! It was a miracle! A miracle from Rabbi Shimon!! If it wasn't for your singing they would have killed all of us for sure!"

 On Friday, the day after Lag B'omer, both chief Rabbis of Jerusalem; Rabbi Minzberg and Rabbi Chazan, raised white flags and entered the Jordanian camp with an offer to surrender Jerusalem. But only on certain conditions; that all the populace would be allowed to leave unharmed etc.

 Amazingly the Jordanians agreed to all the terms! It seems they were still under the effect of the Lag b'Omer scare and were happy they had not been attacked by the imaginary Jewish 'forces',

 This answers our questions. There is a well known saying that even a little light can dispel much darkness.

**Darkness is Really Not a True Entity**

 This is because darkness is really not a true entity; it is only the absence of light.

 The light in this case is the awareness that G-d is creating each of us constantly, and He does so for a reason. When a human is aware of this; namely how close and good G-d is, then there is meaning, purpose and even joy in every moment of life.

 And this 'light' dispels all darkness; fear, confusion, loneliness and despair caused by false egotism.

 This is the 'light' that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai brought us with his teachings in the 'Zohar'. And, as we saw in our story, it worked to dispel the Jordanian forces of darkness and destruction.

 That is the commandment of 'Counting the Omer'. In Hebrew the word for 'counting' (Spor) also means 'to shine' (Sapire) and according to the Zohar 'counting the 49 days' means to shine meaning and blessing into each of the 49 aspects of human nature.

 That is the connection between Rabbi Shimon and the 33rd day. According to Kabbalah this 33rd day(hod sh'b'hod) represents the ultimately lowest inner aspect of human nature (surrender and gratitude) which Rashbi aimed to illuminate.

 This is why fires are lit on this day; to illuminate, to inspire and enflame our souls with joy and meaning (as in our story) and to automatically dispel all darkness.

 And the lesson from all this to us today is, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe said many times, ours is the generation of Moshiach; the generation that will totally dispel all darkness through the light and meaning found in the Zohar).

 Soon the entire world; each and every human, will rejoice with true meaning in life.

 It all depends on us to be good examples and do even one more good deed, say one more word or even think one more good thought to bring….Moshiach NOW!

*Reprinted from this week’s email fromYeshiva*