**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas emor 5776**

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**The Weinberger Legacy**

Reb Mordechai Weinberger z"l lived in Montreal, Canada. (He was niftar just a few months ago.) His name used to be Greenfeld, but a superb act of ahavas Yisrael caused his name change.

We will tell his inspirational story here: Reb Mordechai's childhood friend was a bachur whose last name was Engel. They were together in the machanah pleitim, displaced persons camp, after the War, and they both applied for a Canadian visa.

The first requirement for a visa was a letter of good health from a doctor because no country in the world will agree to accept sick people. Reb Mordechai received his visa, but Engel couldn’t because he had typhus when he applied. When the boat was about to leave, Engel came to say goodbye to his friend, and began crying bitterly. "What will become of me? I will remain here forever. Even after I recuperate, no country will accept me, since I was once sick with typhus. What will be with me? Will I never be able to build a bayis neeman biYisrael?"

Reb Mordechai had rachmanus on his friend, and with supernatural strength, he gave him his visa. "Your name isn't Engel anymore. For now on, you will be called Greenfeld," he told him. "Go and save your life."

Reb Mordechai returned to the desolate transit camp. It took some time, but eventually, Reb Mordechai received another visa to Canada. Someone by the name of Weinberger had a visa to Canada, but he was niftar before he could use it, and Reb Mordechai received it. That is when Reb Mordechai's name was forever changed to Weinberger.

Hashem granted him success, and there was Torah and gedulah (wealth and Torah) on his table. Once, Reb Mordechai asked his Rebbe, the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz zy"a, whether he should go back to using his previous name, Greenfeld. The Rebbe replied, "Whenever someone says 'Reb Mordechai Weinberger' it creates a tumult in heaven, because it reminds heaven how you were moser nefesh for another Yid. Why should you want to lose this?"

*Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5776 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Biderman.*

**Cast Your Bread…#47**

**A Widow’s Salvation**



In 1913, a spacious building was constructed for the Chofetz Chaim’s yeshivah in Radin. The new accommodations helped to solve the problems of severe overcrowding, decreased the incidence of contagious disease, and greatly improved the standards of cuisine and hygiene. Above all, the level and intensity of Torah study greatly increased.

The primary donor for this new building was R’ Mordechai Tzafnas. Initially he wanted to finance the entire project, however, the Chofetz Chaim insisted that such a project had to be a combined effort, to allow others to share in the great merit.

R’ Mordechai therefore financed a complete wall of the yeshivah building for 3000 rubles, upon which an appropriate tribute was engraved. Shortly thereafter, WWI erupted in all its fury. R’ Mordechai died during the war, and all his vast wealth, invested in Russian banks, was gone. His widow was left with barely enough to eat and absolutely no source of income. Even worse, her eyesight failed, and she had no one to care for her.

When the Chofetz Chaim heard of the widow’s situation, he immediately sent for her. He acquired an apartment for Mrs. Tzafnas, situated close to the yeshivah. He provided for all her needs while allowing her to retain her dignity. The Chofetz Chaim’s sense of gratitude to her late husband would not allow him to leave her in such a state. When R’ Mordechai donated the 3000 rubles, he never realized that the wall he built would be the catalyst, years later, to save his widow. (Partners In Eternity)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5776 email of The Weekly Vort.*

**L’Maaseh A Tale to Remember**

**Baruch’s Promise to**

**The Chofetz Chaim**

Baruch was a young man learning in the Chofetz Chaim’s Yeshivah in Radin, where he excelled and became a Talmid Chacham. It reached a point where his parents felt he should leave the Yeshivah to come home and get married. Baruch went to the Chofetz Chaim’s house to say goodbye, and get a Brachah before he departed. After telling the Chofetz Chaim of his plans, the Chofetz Chaim gave him a stern look, and asked Baruch to promise that he would never be Mechalel Shabbos.

Baruch didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, since he was never Mechalel Shabbos in his life, but realized that maybe his Rebbe saw him do something once. He promised the Chofetz Chaim that he would never desecrate Shabbos, but the Chofetz Chaim kept his stern look, and extended his hand.

He said, “Shake my hand and guarantee me that you will never, under any circumstance be Mechalel Shabbos.” Now, Baruch felt like crying because obviously his Rebbe suspected him. Baruch shook the Chofetz Chaim’s hand and made the promise. He left feeling dejected instead of uplifted.

At home, Baruch met Rochel, got married and started building a family. They had four children. Baruch learned in the Kollel, and worked a few hours a week in the local grocery, and they somehow made ends meet.

Everything changed when war broke out, and Baruch and Rochel made the difficult decision to leave for America. This meant to change everything they had ever known in their life, and say goodbye to their family, not knowing if they would ever see them again.

They boarded the boat and came to America, and it was not long before they realized that the streets were not paved with gold, and it certainly wasn’t the land of opportunity, especially for someone Frum. Baruch got a job in the textile industry for a low wage, and he didn’t have time to learn much anymore since he was focusing on bringing home food for his family.

He became known as a reliable, hard worker and worked his way up in the company. Soon, The Great Depression set in, and his meager salary was cut, making things even more difficult. One day, Baruch came to work and received notice that his boss, Mr. Mark, wanted to see him. He had always been on good terms with his boss.

Mr. Mark told him, that the company was not doing as well in the poor economy and they would be forcing all employees to work seven days a week. He told Baruch that he understood that he was a religious Jew and that this would be hard on him, but he wanted Baruch to be one of the first to know.

Baruch finished work and made his way home at the end of the day and broke the terrible news to his wife. He refused to work on Shabbos and he would have to quit his job. He already knew many people who were out of work as it was, and looking to be off for Shabbos made it more difficult. Few people were able to start new jobs on Sunday, but were fired the next Sunday when they didn’t show up to work on Shabbos.

How was he going to find work? Slowly, their small meals became even smaller and most nights the children went to sleep starving. Day after day Baruch went on interviews, but with all the same result: no job unless you work on Shabbos.

One night, Baruch and Rochel made the horrible decision for Boruch to go to work on Shabbos, because they simply could not survive anymore. They rationalized that this was a case of Pikuach Nefesh because the children were suffering so much, and their very lives were likely at risk. The next morning, Baruch got on a train to go find a job where he would work on Shabbos.

Suddenly he burst into tears and his hands began to tremble. He had forgotten about his promise to the Chofetz Chaim! Baruch got off the train at the next stop, turned back the other way, and went home. Through tears, he told his wife of his promise, so many years earlier.

Rochel started to cry herself, and said how much she regretted the decision, saying that the suffering of the children affected her. They were sitting at the table thinking of what to do to somehow make ends meet, when there was a knock at the door. Baruch opened his door and was surprised to see Mr. Mark, his old boss standing there and asked if he could come in.

He said he came to apologize. Mr. Mark explained that he had a partner who didn’t like religious Jews very much. He said that the most important thing to a Jew is money, and if put under a little pressure, their religion would be tossed out the window. Mr. Mark disagreed, and they made a bet that they would pick one Jew in the company to test. They picked Baruch because he had grown in the company and he stood to lose more than others.

Mr. Mark said to Baruch: “You won the bet. You didn’t give in to the pressure and agree to work on Shabbos.” He then took out an envelope from his briefcase and gave it to Baruch. It contained a fortune of $1,000. He also gave Baruch a promotion and made him manager of his branch in the company. After Mr. Mark left, Baruch and Rochel cried tears of joy, astounded at how close they had come to being Mechalel Shabbos. Baruch attributed it all to his Rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim, and the hand shake from so many years ago. This is the power of influence that a Tzaddik can have!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Compilation of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Available by**

**Appointment Only**

**By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**

Mr. Zev Sukenik, a highly regarded philanthropist and genuine baal chessed living in Kew Gardens, New York, was once called by R’ Aharon Kotler for an appointment. R’ Aharon, at the time, was chairman of the Chinuch Atzmai organization, and in that capacity was visiting people to solicit funds for the Torah schools in Israel.

Mr. Sukenik immediately understood the nature of the call; he received many of them throughout the day. Yet he certainly didn’t want to trouble R’ Aharon to come to his office. Thus, when R’ Aharon asked when he could come to see him, Mr. Sukenik said, “Rosh Yeshiva, I’ll come to where you are. I don’t want you to trouble yourself.” And then, trying to convince the Rosh Yeshiva, he added, “Besides, the time that you would save by not coming here, you could use to make other calls.”

However, R’ Aharon wouldn’t hear of it. He insisted on being the one to come and once again he asked Mr. Sukenik when he would be available. Mr. Sukenik persisted in his attempt to dissuade R’ Aharon, but his efforts were to no avail.



Finally he said, “I have someone here in my office right now. Please give me your telephone number and I’ll get back to you to let you know when I’m available.”

R’ Aharon gave him the number and hung up the phone. As soon as Mr. Sukenik’s line cleared, he dialed the operator. He gave her the number which R’ Aharon had given him, had it traced to the address from where it came, and immediately took a taxi to where R’ Aharon was.

As he entered the room and walked towards the Rosh Yeshiva, he extended his hand, smiled and said, “I am the Mr. Sukenik you just called. I am now available.” (Around the Maggid’s Table)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5776 email of The Weekly Vort.*

**All Three Parents**

**By Rabbi Yakov Horowitz**

We were a blended family long before the term existed.

In 1963, my father, Reb Shloime Horowitz z"l, whose 53rd yahrtzeit is today, suddenly and tragically died at the age of 41, leaving my mother with three children, all under the age of five. In the summer of 1965, she married a second time, to a kind and wonderful man, Reb Shlomo Nutovic a"h. He had a son from a previous marriage, and Hashem subsequently blessed them with a daughter in 1966.

Over the next 46 years, until his passing in 2011, Abba (we never used "step-anything" in our family) and my mother raised three sets of children as one family - so much so that all five of us observed shiva together for Abba, and several months ago for my mother a"h when she passed away.

In [Blending Families](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001iwadmdyVM_ocIbpzsOhBZ6rUyzJAqQG67ysdR443EFp-wm7rHY--Kbfvum4FCEAHodgCfEnMRJX1AcWPCgfOT06UIEeDz9RFntneecWhpSQYInhrD5niC8D8jDqT71OdSF5uGezFRSmsc3Qus1VM4K-AbBsAE53yybSJq0tk1uXKBh63AwqWB_MpjC7JgZAkwTJhsLM7kCY7nDm8llW5BmljxhvhkisGorUBv4soCh7f26DG_tgfXzAj-Jj3X6QA6-AnbDN2L6LygbC4MTCRwCwkkG5QqbHp&c=yEnq8pCwjyxBPatONdnh_NndpPASif945iypILHjgc-CGfSBExIWiw==&ch=VIwonch_7DhFWY_ad9c-jwEo_nq4_G35uHKSe-syzI1950IAN3Gnig==), the five of us and our spouses did our best to capture the extraordinary environment of unity and respect that Abba and Mommy created in the stable and nurturing home they built, and in [One Foot in Front of the Other](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001iwadmdyVM_ocIbpzsOhBZ6rUyzJAqQG67ysdR443EFp-wm7rHY--Kbfvum4FCEAHodgCfEnMRJX1AcWPCgfOT06UIEeDz9RFntneecWhpSQYInhrD5niC8D8jDqT71OdSF5uGezFRSmsc3Qus1VM4K-AbBsAE53yybSJq0tk1uXKBh63AwqWB_MpjC7JgZAkwTJhsLM7kCY7nDm8llW5BmljxhvhkisGorUBv4soCh7f26DG_tgfXzAj-Jj3X6QA6-AnbDN2L6LygbC4MTCRwCwkkG5QqbHp&c=yEnq8pCwjyxBPatONdnh_NndpPASif945iypILHjgc-CGfSBExIWiw==&ch=VIwonch_7DhFWY_ad9c-jwEo_nq4_G35uHKSe-syzI1950IAN3Gnig==), my mother wrote of her life as a single parent as words of encouragement to others who find themselves in that situation.

For the past seven years, I've been writing a yahrtzeit-themed article on Rosh Chodesh Iyar as a zechus (merit) for my father's neshama (soul.)

This year, I would like to share an off-the-cuff comment from Abba that I mentioned at the end of the[eulogy I delivered at my mother's funeral](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001iwadmdyVM_ocIbpzsOhBZ6rUyzJAqQG67ysdR443EFp-wm7rHY--KSo1ZncrKQPFkep5ecpIJ1Du3cC9j3hwmJlv_HUcw2ua3f8Q7W6oUD5vQqUpf66kMKepXF7-8aWrUw8SfpXgJIRsPgGmlmXWhmp36IIjUWUqw98W-J-XayBbYDJr6tbXL6v1thkbPyk-rbDNei9VfZXR8t8TYYI0MCeLYqyKKFro2WJZ_3WPcoL7cAV18KVWYw==&c=yEnq8pCwjyxBPatONdnh_NndpPASif945iypILHjgc-CGfSBExIWiw==&ch=VIwonch_7DhFWY_ad9c-jwEo_nq4_G35uHKSe-syzI1950IAN3Gnig==) - that so perfectly captured the flavor of the home they created for us.

Abba's parents were buried in Bnei Brak, Israel, and he had informed us that he wished to be buried with them. So I was rather surprised when he called me about fifteen years ago, asking me to purchase a burial plot for him in the Tzeilimer section of Wellwood Cemetery where my father and maternal grandparents are buried and where my mother had already purchased a burial plot.

"Abba, I'll of course take care of it tomorrow," I responded, "But I assumed that you would want to be buried with your parents in Bnei Brak."

Abba responded, "Being that all the children live in this area, I don't want you to have to travel to Israel to visit my grave. And besides, the children should have all three parents buried together."

What was so interesting about that exchange was that Abba said it so casually and I heard it in the same vein. It was only after we hung up the phone that it struck me how remarkable it was that our parents were so selfless and respectful in raising us that the phrase "all three parents" just rang true.

Yesterday, when I went to my father's grave in honor of his yahrtzeit, there they were within 100 feet of each other - my three parents.

May their memories forever be blessed and may all three parents in Gan Eden(paradise) share the nachas (joy) of the beautiful family they raised.

These lines are written in loving memory of my father, Reb Shloime ben Reb Yakov Moshe Horowitz a"h, whose 53rd yahrtzeit is today, Rosh Chodesh Iyar. May the positive lessons learned from this essay be a zechus for his neshama.

*Reprinted from the May 9th email of CFJFL/Project YES.*

**Check Your Messages**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**

We thank Hashem every morning in the ברכות השחר-the Morning Blessings- for the soul He has given us. Every Jew has a piece of Hashem Himself inside of him. Our job in this world is to guard our pure soul and connect to Hashem the best that we can. Unfortunately, there are so many Jews who don't know what their purpose is; Hashem is not even a part of their vocabulary.

Our Loving Father wants more than anything to bring His children back to Him. He sends subtle messages to try to awaken them. Sometimes these messages seem painful; sometimes they don't make sense. However, if a person uses the message to improve, he will look back and see that it was all being done with love and compassion.

I know an oral surgeon who is a very kind man. Years back, he did not have much religion. He didn't even keep the basics, like Kashrut and Shabbat. One day, a rabbi came into his office with his son for a procedure. The surgeon, as usual, treated the boy as though he were his own child. He even adjusted the price to make it more affordable for the rabbi. The procedure was success, and the rabbi and his son thanked him and left.

A week later, the surgeon was in the middle of a procedure when, suddenly, a sharp blade from one of his instruments flew out and just missed his eye. The surgeon was very shaken up. His partner completed the surgery, while he went to sit down.

Just then, the rabbi came in with his son for a follow-up. The surgeon said, "I am so glad you are here, Rabbi. I want to tell you what just happened." After repeating the incident, he asked the Rabbi, "What should I do? I feel like Hashem just saved my eyesight. This could have been disastrous."

The Rabbi suggested that he start learning Torah once a week. They ended up having a weekly learning session. Now, years later, they are still learning, and the surgeon is religious. He loves going to shul, learning and doing Mitzvot. He took the subtle message from Hashem and came back to his Father.

A woman told me that when she was in her early thirties, she had no religion whatsoever. She was not married, but she did have her dream job in politics. She was chief of staff for a state senator and a political operative, playing a major role in the campaign of a candidate in the New York Mayoral election.

However, she did the unthinkable. She made a move that totally sabotaged her career. In an instant, she went from being on top to being blacklisted. Looking back at it now, she said, "It was so crazy. It made no sense why I did what I did. I knew it as risky. I knew the ramifications. I even knew that it wouldn't be worth it, even if it was a success. The only explanation could be that Hashem was influencing me."

When she got thrown out of politics, she didn't know where to put herself, and bounced around from job to job. She became depressed and didn't want to do anything for two whole years. At the age of 36, she found herself alone with nothing to look forward to. She said, "I hit rock bottom."

Then, one of her relatives started taking her to Torah classes. She met a Rebbitzen who suggested that she travel to Israel to learn more about Judaism. She attended a small seminary in Har Nof and returned one year later a different person-religious, modest, looking for a life of spirituality and a husband who she could grow with.

Baruch Hashem, just seven months after her return, she was engaged and married at the age of 38. She now has two children and couldn't be happier. Her new career involves helping people and giving them therapy. What put her in depression and changed the course of her life turned out to be, in her words, "her biggest blessing."

She could have thought, "Hashem, I have nothing in life other than this job, and now You are going to take that away from me?"

Hashem works in mysterious ways. Everything He does is always done with love, for our best interest.

*Reprinted from the May 10, 2016 email of Daily Emunah.*

**Getting Upset About**

**The Wrong Person**

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, HY”D, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Baranovitch Yeshiva, visited the United States in the latter part of the 1930s to raise funds for his yeshiva. Unfortunately, he made a greater impact on America than America made on his yeshiva, and the funds raised did not help much.

Reb Elchonon returned to a Poland clouded by the darkness of war to be with his students for the ensuing nightmare. The Nazis later murdered him together with his students in the Kovno Ghetto.

While he was in the United States, he was accompanied by young, enthusiastic students who felt privileged to help the great sage in his efforts. Once, a student brought him to visit a wealthy man who had a philanthropic reputation. The young man was confident that the meeting would prove successful. Unfortunately, the expectations proved fruitless, and Reb Elchonon and the student were shown to the door, empty-handed.



The young man left the house and sat down on the steps of the mansion utterly dejected. Reb Elchonon, who was quite tall, bent down to him, “Why are you so upset?” he asked softly.

“Upset? Why shouldn’t I be upset? This man has the ability to support your whole yeshiva for a year, and he sent us away as if he does not have the ability to give even a dime!”

Reb Elchonon smiled. “The Torah tells us that Moshe was told to choose Betzalel to build the Mishkan. Let us assume that Moshe went in the street and asked where he could find Betzalel. Moshe was told that Betzalel could be found in the Bais Medrash.

“So he went into the Bais Medrash and asked someone, ‘Are you Betzalel?’ The man said no. Should Moshe have been upset? Of course not! It’s not the man’s fault that he was not Betzalel! He was not born Betzalel and his job was obviously not to be Betzalel!

“Moshe went to another man. Are You Betzalel? Again the man said no! Should Moshe have been angry with him? Again, of course not!

“Well, my son,” continued Reb Elchonon, “You can’t be upset with him! He is just not the man that was chosen to help!”

**Comment:** All the interpersonal issues in the world would be non-issues if we just took Reb Elchonon’s wise life philosophy. Instead of getting all worked up over how people have fallen short in living up to our demands and expectations, we should realize that if they didn’t “deliver” perhaps, Hashem didn’t appoint them as the messengers for the job. In fact, we should pity them since it’s their loss! (Thanks to R’Mordechai Kamenetsky for the story)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5776 email of Reb Mendel Berlin’s Torah’s Sweets Weekly.*

**‘First Mikvah in West Africa’**

**Being Built by Rabbi in Nigeria**



An Israeli firm and a Chabad rabbi working in Nigeria are preparing to open the first known Jewish ritual bath, or mikvah, in West Africa.

An Israeli firm and a Chabad rabbi working in Nigeria are preparing to open the first known Jewish ritual bath, or mikvah, in West Africa.

[Rabbi] Yisroel Ozen, a prominent Chabad emissary based in Nigeria, is supervising the construction of a mikvah for women in the Nigerian capital of Abuja on land purchased for him by an Israeli firm operating in the country, the Israeli daily Maariv reported Tuesday.

Ozen said the mikvah is the only known one in West Africa, a claim that is also stated on a Hebrew and English language sign announcing the project in front of the construction site.

Ozen said Nigeria has “a thriving Israeli community that nonetheless lacks basic amenities.” He said that from the point of view of the halacha, Jewish religious law, “a community cannot exist without a mikvah because it’s the key to the continuity of the Jewish people.”

Some 1,200 Israelis live in Nigeria, according to the Maariv article.

Jewish law states that women should immerse themselves in the mikvah before marriage and at least once a month in a ceremony meant to purify them after menstruation.

Another mikvah is planned at a later stage for men, Maariv reported, and may be broadened after the opening this year to include a community center.

EMI Systems LTD, a security firm that is based in Abuja and is owned by the Israel-born businessman Eyal Mesika, ordered materials from Europe and the United States to build the mikvah. The article did not specify the cost of construction.

*The above article was released by the JTA (Jewish Telegraph Agency.)*

**It Once Happened**

**The Rabbi and**

**Shimshon the Bully**

In the ancient city of Aleppo, Syria there lived a Jew named Shimshon. He was well known as a bully and half-drunk most of the time.

In the marketplace he walked from stall to stall, placing groceries in his basket, and leaving without paying. If anyone dared ask for payment he glared at them or made menacing comments. If he really got angry, he would overturn the produce or grocery cart and even give the stall keeper a big wallop.

Word eventually got to the rabbi of the town, who called Shimshon in and severely rebuked him. Shimshon, feigning innocence, asked, "Did anyone complain to you about me?"

The rabbi had to admit that no specific complaint had yet been brought. But, of course, the people were too frightened to accuse him and start up with Shimshon.

One day an older woman brought beautiful fruits and vegetables to the market. Shimshon came up to her stall, choose several items and walked away.

"Stop, come back. You haven't paid me," yelled the woman.

Shimshon turned around, looked at her threateningly and shouted, "You'll keep quiet if you know what's good for you." Then he continued on his way.

The stall keepers nearby encouraged her to go to the rabbi, who was relieved that there was finally a charge against Shimshon. The rabbi immediately sent for the culprit.

"Did you take produce from this woman without paying?" the rabbi asked Shimshon.

"Who says I'm not going to pay her?" was Shimshon's insolent reply.

"Pay her immediately or return her goods," was the rabbi's stern response. "If this ever happens again you will also have to pay a heavy fine," the rabbi added.

Shimshon took out his money and silently paid the woman. But as he was leaving, the rabbi's attendant, Levi, overheard him muttering, "I'll get even with the rabbi!"

A few days later the rabbi was invited to a circumcision in a nearby village. Along the way, Levi kept a sharp look out. When he noticed a man hiding behind some shrubs in the distance he was certain it was Shimshon. He now told the rabbi of Shimshon's threat and urged him to turn back. Instead, the rabbi noted the time and told Levi to stop the carriage so they could say the afternoon prayers. He prayed intensely and longer than usual, then climbed back into the carriage and told Levi to drive full speed ahead.

In a matter of moments, Shimshon appeared in the middle of the road and stopped the carriage. Rushing over to the rabbi, Shimshon grabbed his hands, and with tears in his eyes begged forgiveness. The rabbi forgave him on the condition that he change his ways. Shimshon promised he would and they parted like best of friends.

Levi was amazed and puzzled. The rabbi explained what had just happened with a commentary from the Torah. "When Esau threatened Jacob's life, Rivkah, their mother, instructed Jacob, "When your heart is free from any anger that you harbor against your brother for the trouble he has caused you, then you will be sure that his anger has turned away from you."

"You see," the rabbi concluded, "I was very angry with Shimshon, but I prayed to G-d to help me free my heart from any anger against him, and to help him free his heart from anger and evil. When I felt I no longer had ill feelings toward him, but rather compassion and a strong desire to help him mend his ways, I was certain that his heart, too, was pure. That is what actually happened. Thus, our sages teach us: As water reflects a face, so does one heart respond to another!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Kedoshim 5776 edition of “L’Chaim Weekly,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**A Question of Getting**

**Another 40,000 Shekels**

It was the perfect apartment and the purchase was almost completed when, fueled by the deteriorating security situation, followed by the IDF incursion into Beit Jala, the shekel dropped steeply against the dollar. Aleksander Guravich – who had spent the better part of his week signing reams of paper at the bank, the mortgage broker, and a number of free loan societies – was suddenly obliged to come up with an additional forty thousand NIS. He didn't know where to turn.

Weaving his way through the narrow streets of Geulah on his way to the synagogue, he hardly glanced at the plastered notices glaring from the stone walls, proclaiming the names of the latest terrorism victims. His mind was elsewhere as he tossed a few coins into an outstretched palm. Numbers and figures spiraled and twisted around in his mind.

As he passed Stefansky's supermarket, a wave of wistfulness overcame him. The image of Simon rose in his mind, as he started reminiscing about his first years in the Holy Land, and how far he had come to date. Upon his arrival to Israel from the Soviet Union, the employment agency had assigned him to care for Simon Stefansky.

Aleksander had been surprised to learn that the elderly man – bent, frail and trembling; his stern old face like a withered pear – owned a veritable financial empire. That this wiry man with steel grey hair and suffering from dementia had once been a successful business tycoon was hard to imagine.

Simon's children, immersed in the business, were relieved when the care of their father went over to Aleksander. Simon, however, wasn't shy to express his own estimation of the caretaker. "You want to kill me," he remarked rather frequently. "You're here to finish me off."

There were days, rare occasions, when Simon enjoyed some lucid moments, times when the two of them would sit together on a park bench and make small talk with little difficulty. Mostly though, Simon sat quietly, as though deep in thought, sometimes muttering softly, his eyes roving along the walls and ceilings. Aleksander cooked for him, managed his household affairs and took care of all his need with warmth and devotion.

As Aleksander turned left into a narrow side street, the synagogue with the domed rooftop and arched entranceway came into view. Its white stones were bathed in the golden light of the afternoon sun. Once, at precisely such a time of day, when the same golden shafts of sunlight poured into the open windows of Simon's kitchen, Aleksander found the old man standing beside the cutlery drawer, pointing a kitchen knife at him.

"You want to kill me, that's why you're here," said the erstwhile business man.

"I'm here to care for you," Aleksander said, keeping his voice low. "Do you want me to leave?"

The old man said nothing.

"All right, then. I'll leave."

Simon dropped the knife, it fell with a clang. Then he wept.

"Who are you?" he asked after he'd calmed down.

"I'm Aleksander, your caretaker. Try to keep that in your memory."

"Don't make me believe that lie," he said.

Aleksander gently led Simon to the couch, fed him his dinner and tenderly put him to sleep.Aleksander sighed. Alzheimers, terrorists, financial crisis, it all merged together in his mind somehow.

"You ought to be thankful for all the good in your life," he chastised himself as he skipped up the stairs, taking them two at a time. "You have a family, you have health, you have an income, be grateful."

In those days, on a caretaker's salary, his income wouldn't have sufficed for the purchase of a home. His current profession as a chiropractor – though by no means a wealth amassing machine – improved his lifestyle, he had to admit. But his real wealth had come not from aligning vertebrae.

Good fortune had shined on him Only a short while ago, this prayer book had felt heavy in his hands. when he'd discovered his Jewish roots. The return to his heritage had connected him to G-d, to His Torah. In its holy tomes, Aleksander had unearthed luminous jewels the likes of which he hadn't encountered while traipsing through the quarries of Tibet-Indian and Chinese philosophy. For this newfound oasis, where truth and joy actually existed, he was profoundly thankful.

Aleksander fingered his prayer book. Only a short while ago – two or three years back – this prayer book had felt heavy in his hands. In fact the first time he'd entered this synagogue altogether was an experience that had engraved itself into his mind.

Standing behind Simon's wheelchair with his long dark hair caressing his shoulders, and the vibrant colors of his t-shirt screaming out from among the black-hatted, white-shirted congregants. He felt awkward and obtrusive and he wanted only to merge into the walls of the synagogue, to remain unnoticed.

And then a young man with laughing eyes with tefillin wrapped around his arm approached him.

"Why don't you come pray?"

The question was thrown at him with the nonchalance of a friend who wonders at his friend's hesitation before crossing the threshold of his home. The invitation pleased him; it was a gesture that made him feel welcome. Yet there was no denying the barricade that stood between him and the prayers.

"I don't know how…" he answered simply.

The lines on the man's forehead etched a little deeper. "So?" he said. His dancing, laughing eyes stood still for a moment, in thought. Then the corners of his mouth smiled again and he patted Aleksander on the back. "We'll teach you," he said.

And here he was, a few short years later. The synagogue was quickly filling up as more congregants unhooked themselves from their day's activities. The voice of the one leading the services rang out, "Ashrei…" Aleksander closed his eyes savoring the distinct tenor. He had been taught well. First the Shema, later the Amidah.

These kind people had appreciated him, looked beneath his exterior. In this synagogue he wasn't defined then as the Russian caretaker, just like the chiropractor wasn't his identity now. Here he always was Mr. Aleksander Guravich—a respected person all his own, a valuable member of society.

The prayers now concluded, the congregants dispersed, the dim hues of twilight filtered in through the large oval windows. Only Aleksander, immersed in conversation with his Creator, lingered still. "G-d," he murmured. "If you want me to buy the apartment so that my wife and I could have a place to live, so that we are able to raise our children…if this is Your will, help me, please. I have no one to turn to but You."

A feeling of peace settled over him like a winged dove. He'd handed his worries over to the Master Planner. It was time to go home, time to spend time with his family, time to wrap up the day in tranquility and harmony

When he entered his two-room apartment, the folding cots and cribs had already made their appearance across the dining room floor as it did every evening. The children freshly bathed and pajama clad clambered over him and giggled loudly as he tossed them playfully in the air. Elena, his wife, turned from the tiny kitchen sink and greeted her husband with a strange look. "You didn't tell me you spoke to them..." she said.

"Spoke to whom?"

Elena wiped her hands in her apron and hastened to undo the strings. Aleksander, realizing that something was afoot, said not a word as he followed her movements with his eyes. Then, from the single kitchen cabinet, Elena removed a small envelope.

"A loan, likely?" she asked with an expression of mingled rapture and curiosity.

Aleksander cast a quick glance at the sender's address. "Family Stefansky," it read.

"This just came by a private messenger service. Maybe half an hour ago. You did talk to them, didn't you?" queried his wife.

"Not in a year, I haven't," replied Aleksander. "Not since Simon passed away."

He turned the envelope over in his hands. A check slipped out. Under "Pay To" the name Aleksander Guravich was written in a neat scrawl. Amount: 40,000 shekels.

"A loan?" asked Simon's son when Aleksander phoned him. "No, why should we send you a loan?... A mistake? No, nothing of the sort... 4,000 instead of 40,000? Not at all.

"The litigation attorney recently finished reviewing our father's will. Our father, of late memory, wanted 40,000 shekels to go to you."

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