**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas bechukosai 5774**

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**The Role of a Rebbetzin**

**An Interview with Rebbetzin Esther Reisman**

**By** [**Surie Gottlieb**](http://www.jewishpress.com/author/surie-gottlieb/)

[](http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/the-role-of-a-rebbetzin-an-interview-with-rebbetzin-esther-reisman/2014/05/02/)  
**Photo of the Agudath Israel of Madison (Rabbi Reisman’s Shul)**

Webster’s Dictionary defines the word “rebbetzin” as the wife of a rabbi. While that is certainly true, for many it is just one of the ways in which they define themselves.

The Jewish Press recently had the opportunity to speak with Rebbetzin Esther Reisman on this very topic.

**SG:** Your shul is known as “Rabbi Reisman’s Shul.” Was your husband its founder?

**Rebbetzin Reisman:** Agudas Israel of Madison Zichron Chaim Zvi – yes it’s a long name! – began out of a basement minyan for bachurim in Rabbi Ashkenazi’s shul. My husband, Rabbi Reisman, davened with the boys as a quasi-rav and after some of the bachurim married, they wished to have their own official place. My husband was asked to be the rav and quarters were rented on Ocean Avenue.



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**

A number of years later, the lot on Avenue S and East 22nd Street was purchased and a building built. Rabbi Reisman has much satisfaction that the shul is not just a place for davening, but a makom Torah, a place that is conducive for people to come and learn. In fact, at one point there was talk of expanding the shul but Rabbi Reisman felt that would be necessary only if more space was needed specifically for learning.

**How much of an active role do you take in running the shul?**

I must say that while I admire those rebbetzins who take an active role in their congregation, I am mostly behind the scenes! I don’t attend shul on a regular basis as on Shabbos I care for my grandchildren and prepare for our Shabbos guests. My main contribution to the shul is taking care of the Rav! I do participate in a ladies community shiur, giving lectures on a rotating basis with Rebbetzin Mirel Klor and others. These shiurim take place at the Sephardic shul across the street from ours. A beautiful part of these lectures is that it unites a diverse group of women who attend, some walking over from quite a distance.

I’m also involved in organizing a yearly Rebbetzin’s Conference led by the Task Force for Children and Families at Risk. This annual event is a meeting of rebbetzins and mental health professionals with a goal of educating rebbetzins on how to respond effectively to domestic violence in our community. The Task Force initiated these gatherings some twenty years ago in order to help us deal with issues such as depression, anxiety, divorce and trauma in our communities. Many rebbetzins are first responders to difficult situations and must be trained to recognize instances where professional intervention is required.

**Can you share with us some of your family history?**

I’m a child of Holocaust survivors. My parents have had a great influence on who I am today. My father, R’ Yaakov Spitzer, comes from Hungary. My father was a very close disciple of HaRav Michoel Ber Weissmandel zt”l. R’ Weissmandel was heartbroken at the lack of response and support for his brilliant and daring efforts to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Despite his great pain, he rebuilt a family and yeshiva. He instilled a strong sense of mission and idealism in his beloved talmidim. Every generation has historic opportunities that are either utilized or lost. I always wonder how history will look back at our generation and evaluate our role in history.

**And your mother?**

My mother, Mrs. Faigy Spitzer, nee Gross, is from Krenitz, near Krakow, Poland. Her grandfather was a wealthy Radomsker chasid who was able to remain totally immersed in learning. During the war the family fled to Siberia. Eventually they wound up in Samarkand, then Paris before finally coming to the United States. Once here, my grandfather became a maggid shir in the Bobover Beis Medrash in Brooklyn.

While I was growing up, my parents spoke a lot about the fact that nothing was left after the war – their families had lost everything. They imbued in us a perspective that property and possessions are temporary. Nothing is permanent except for Torah and ma’assim tovim, our good deeds.

**Did your mother’s role differ from that of your own? How would you say the role of the frum woman has evolved?**

Though my father was busy with askanus, community work, my mother is a more private person. She always found joy and fulfillment in the routine of running a home. When I was growing up my mother’s life centered on raising the children. We lived very simply but had less pressure. We took daily walks, frequently strolling through the nearby Brooklyn Botanical Gardens.

Who has time for that nowadays? We hurried less and were less harried. Today children are bundled into car seats and ferried around town on errands. Women today are under much more pressure. They’re expected to work and have more social obligations as well. There are many opportunities to contribute to the community and to pursue varied interest. It is quite a challenge to have the right priorities. Yet, our primary role is to be there for our families. Each of us needs to find our own way and not lose sight of that which is most important. I love the flexibility of working part time, learning with friends, cooking, playing with my grandchildren and taking care of my family.

**You mention that you work part time. What is it that you do?**

I have the wonderful privilege of teaching at my alma mater. In fact, both my husband and I are privileged to teach in the very same schools we attended. I graduated BYA in ’78, was in seminary for one year, and then returned as a teacher. I’ve been there since; teaching 10th grade Chumash and 12th grade Jewish History. My husband attended Yeshiva Torah Voddath and, with the exception of one year at the Mir, has remained within the same hallowed halls. We are both extremely grateful for these opportunities. A wonderful benefit is that we get to peek in on our own grandchildren’s classes.

**Is there a specific person or incident that had the most impact on your life?**

Yes. Rebbetzin Zahava Braunstein, of blessed memory, was a cherished teacher and mentor. Her vibrant personality and idealism made Torah beloved to so many people. She was a most inspiring example of a fulfilled Jewish wife and mother. Rebbetzin Braunstein used her talents to motivate others to reach their potential in avodas Hashem. She was a role model to all of us by striking a most beautiful balance and using her gifts to teach others, yet never losing sight of her main priority – that of being a devoted wife and mother.

**Do you have a parting message for our readers?**

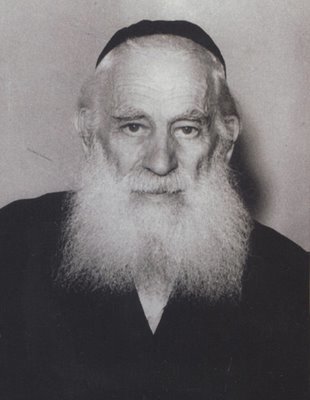
Each one of us can and should contribute to the community. One doesn’t necessarily need to take an active leadership role. But by the integrity of our choices, devotion to our families, consideration to neighbors, even subtle improvements to our personal tznius or growing in our bein adom l’chavaro and improving bein adom l’Makom – we set an example. We create an atmosphere. It’s the sum total of our choices that creates our community. We should attempt to reach higher levels, strive for greater accomplishments and not merely complete our obligations. Each one of us, in our own small way, creates ripples that affect our community.

*Reprinted from the May 2, 2014 edition of The Jewish Press (Magazine).*

**Parsha Potpourri**

**Sleeping Soundly**

**By Rabbi Ozer Alport**

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**The Ponovezher Rav, zt”l**

In the spring of 1943 Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, known as the Ponovezher Rav, established an orphanage in B'nei B'rak to absorb and care for the many orphaned children who had been rescued from the Holocaust and were sent to the Land of Israel. Unfortunately, with the first group of children scheduled to arrive on a Sunday, the Ponovezher Rav found himself without any linens or pillows for the children to sleep on due to the dire situation in Israel at that time. On Friday, with two days remaining until their arrival, Rabbi Kahaneman announced that he would be speaking on Shabbos afternoon in the largest synagogue in town.

He began his speech by citing the Talmud in Bava Metzia (62a), which discusses a case in which two people are lost in the desert with only one flask of water. If they split the water between them, both will die before they are able to reach the nearest settlement, but if one of them drinks it, he will be able to survive. Rebbi Akiva derives from our verse (Leviticus 25:36) that your life takes precedence over that of your friend, and therefore the one with the water should drink it all.

On the other hand, the Talmud (Kiddushin 20a) teaches that a person who acquires a Jewish servant in a sense acquires a master for himself, due to the Torah's requirement to equate the servant's standard of living to his owner's level of comfort.

Tosefos adds that sometimes even this is not sufficient, such as in a case when the owner possesses only one pillow. If he takes it for himself, he violates the Torah's requirement to give his slave equal treatment, and he therefore has no choice but to give his only pillow to his servant, leaving himself with nothing on which to sleep.

Rabbi Kahaneman noted that this ruling of Tosefos seems to contradict the teaching of Rebbi Akiva. Just as the person who is lost in the desert is permitted to drink all of the water due to the principle of "your life takes precedence," shouldn't this same reasoning allow the master to keep his sole pillow for himself?

The Ponovezher Rav explained that the two rulings are in fact compatible, as the requirement to give the pillow to the servant actually emanates from the Torah's concern for the primacy of the owner's well-being. If the master were to keep the pillow and lay down in comfort while observing his servant tossing and turning, his conscience would bother him so much that he wouldn't be able to enjoy the pillow and a good night's rest. Therefore, precisely in order to allow the master to be at peace with the arrangement, the Torah requires him to give the pillow to his servant for his own well-being so that he can sleep soundly through the night.

Similarly, the Ponovezher Rav continued, in only one day a large group of Jewish children would be arriving at the new orphanage in B'nei B'rak, which was completely lacking pillows and sheets on which they could sleep.

Questioning how any of those present could go home and enjoy a comfortable night's sleep now that they were aware of this situation, he advised them that for their own well-being, they should immediately donate the only pillows and linens in their possessions, a suggestion which was fulfilled by the inspired and touched listeners as soon as Shabbos was finished.

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

**Why Are Torah**

**Punishments So Harsh?**

**By Rabbi Yehuda Shurpin**

***Question:***

I know there is an infinite, loving G‑d. It's just that I can't get my head around a few things in the Torah, like death penalties for gays, wizards, and people who curse their parents. Even if these people have erred, couldn't they just be asked to stop or be punished with exile? That's why it's hard to believe that a G‑d who can make a billion galaxies and stars would want us to kill over different beliefs.

***Response:***

Before answering your question, it's worthwhile to note just how difficult it actually is to impose the death penalty in Jewish law.

First of all, circumstantial evidence won't cut it. You need two impeccable witnesses who had observed the person transgressing an act punishable by death. Next, these two witnesses had to have warned the person of the capital punishment he could receive for doing the prohibited act, even if he already knew. Finally, the person must have committed the transgression immediately after the warning. Any hesitation and the death penalty is off. The same applies to other forms of punishment.

To meet all of these conditions and incur the death penalty seems more like committing suicide then simply transgressing.

Nevertheless, the questions remains: As long as you are not hurting anyone else, sinning is your own private business. Why should you receive any sort of punishment? To get to the bottom of this, let's fly to the moon.

On December 24, 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 made history as the first astronauts to go into orbit around both sides of the moon and beam back pictures of the lunar landscape. The next day, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, discussed a lesson to be learned from the event.[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a1269629');)

Central Command trains the astronauts how to eat, sleep, dress, and behave in all areas of their life while on board. Deviations, they are told, can mean the waste of billions of dollars. Hearing that such large sums of government money are at stake, the astronauts take every detail of their instructions very seriously.

Moreover, astronaut compliance has nothing to do with how much, if at all, they understand the benefits of the instructions, or the damage caused by not complying. Only the experts on the ground, who spent years researching the issues, know all the specific details. Therefore, the astronauts follow orders without question, even if they don't know the entire reasoning behind everything, because they understand that there are dire consequences for themselves and their team members.

Neither does an astronaut say, "Look, I'm only one of three—which makes me the minority. So if I don't do everything correctly, it's not going to make such a difference." Rather, he knows that any one miscalculation on his part endangers not only himself, but the other two astronauts as well.

Like a flight manual, the Torah guides and instructs us for a safe mission through life. In it, G‑d warns us of the 365 don'ts (the negative commandments) that can derail us and jeopardize our life mission. We don't always know why certain actions are more damaging and dangerous than others, and therefore carry a more severe punishment. But Mission Control does. So we listen.

Moreover, our decisions impact not only ourselves, but our friends, family, community, and the entire world. Actually, the entire idea can be found in a Midrash, composed long before anyone dreamed of space travel:

Moses exclaimed, "One person sins, and You are angry at the entire community?"[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a1269629');)

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai taught a parable for this, of people sitting in a boat. One of them took a drill and began drilling underneath his seat.

"What are you doing?" demanded his friends.

"What concern is it of yours?" he responded. "Am I not drilling under my own seat?"

They said to him: "Yes, but the waters will come up and drown the entire boat."[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a1269629');)

The Mishnah states, "Why was the human being created alone? ... To teach you that every person must say: For me the world was created."[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a1269629');) This world, as well as all of the spiritual realms leading to it, was created for each and every person individually. As Maimonides teaches, "A person should always view himself and the entire world as if it is exactly balanced. If he does one mitzvah, he is meritorious, for he has weighed himself and the entire world to the side of merit, and he has caused for himself and for all, salvation and redemption."[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a1269629');)

Taking all this into account, let's look back at our situation: We're talking about a very stable, Torah-directed society—evidenced by the fact that there is a Bet Din that has the power to enforce Jewish law. We are talking about a community where people know the difference between right and wrong and only very rarely does someone step out of those boundaries. One person comes along and decides to do something totally outrageous, despite a warning from two witnesses and right in front of them, knowing exactly what he is doing and what will happen to him for doing it. Basically, drilling a hole in a watertight boat for every and any sin to enter.

Truthfully, I doubt that such cases occurred too often. Rabbi Akiva was of the opinion that a court that issues a death sentence once in 70 years is a murderous court. But the message is there: Don't imagine you're an island to yourself. Think twice before sinning. The entire world depends on you.

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| **FOOTNOTES** | |
| [1.](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm#footnoteRef1a1269629#footnoteRef1a1269629) | Sichot Kodesh 5729 - Vol. 1, p. 252; Vol. 2, pp. 341-f, 341-v, 413. |
| [2.](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm#footnoteRef2a1269629#footnoteRef2a1269629) | Bamidbar, 16:22. |
| [3.](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm#footnoteRef3a1269629#footnoteRef3a1269629) | Vayikra Rabba 4:6. |
| [4.](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm#footnoteRef4a1269629#footnoteRef4a1269629) | Sanhedrin, 4:5. |
| [5.](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1269629/jewish/Why-Are-Torah-Punishments-So-Harsh.htm#footnoteRef5a1269629#footnoteRef5a1269629) | Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4. |

[By Yehuda Shurpin](http://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Yehuda-Shurpin.htm)

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**A Kiddush Hashem**

**In Minnesota**

"I am writing to tell you of an incident which happened to me on a wildly snowy Thursday afternoon. On my way home from work in Mendota Heights, my car had already gotten stuck several times.

“As I reached the unplowed streets of Cottage Grove, I knew I would be getting stuck again. I approached the 80th Street and East Point Douglas intersection, which is very busy.

“When the light turned red and the wheels lost their traction, I sat there spinning my wheels as many cars and even snow plows went around me without stopping.

“All of a sudden, a white passenger van pulled alongside me and several young men dressed in black fedora hats and long overcoats jumped out of the van. Without the benefit of mittens or boots, they selflessly began pushing my car until I got moving again. And it took several of them to push to keep my vehicle moving!

“The van and passengers went on to follow me to my destination. I was very touched and unable to thank them, because I knew if I stopped again, that I would get stuck again.

“I am making the assumption that these young heroes are Yeshiva school students due to their distinctive, formal clothing. The school is doing a very good job teaching the students about basic decency and courtesy. They cheerfully waved at me as I pulled away, trying to shake the snow out of their now wet shoes.

“They had put themselves at risk dodging other cars that probably couldn’t have fully stopped in that slop. I admire their courage and compassion. What a tribute to the school’s work and their families!"

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone. (A Letter to the Editor from Ann M. Mattson of Cottage Grove, Minnesota that was published Wednesday, April 29, '09 in the* [*South Washington County Bulletin.*](http://www.swcbulletin.com/articles/index.cfm?id=12440&section=Opinion)

**The Power of a Simple**

**Jew in the Holy Land**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolten**

The Fourth Rebbe of Chabad, Rebbe Shmuel once was visited by a Chassid (one of his followers) that had just returned from the land of Israel.

The Chassid was disappointed from the trip. He had expected to see unusually holy Jews there with great spiritual powers as it is written in many holy books. But he didn't notice anything special; in fact the Jews in the Holy Land looked just the same as Jews everywhere else!

The Rebbe smiled and said, "Here is a story I heard from my father (the Third Chabad Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedik) that might change your mind.

"Once in a small village near Jerusalem lived a very simple Jew. This fellow was so plain that, although he could read Hebrew, he didn't understand much and basically had no idea what was written even in the Siddur (prayer book).

"His desire to serve G-d was genuine but when he opened that prayer book he got so confused that he never really knew if he was saying the correct thing and it made him miserable.

"So every Sunday, he would begin the week by traveling a few hours to Jerusalem to a certain Rabbi friend of his who would put markers in his Siddur that would organize the prayers of entire week (although the prayers were almost the same every day). And on the Holidays, when the prayers were more difficult, he would stay with the Rabbi in Jerusalem thus ending his prayer problem.

"The only exception was in the rainy (winter) months beginning with the month of MarCheshvan. Then, because the roads were muddy and travel was often almost impossible, he had no choice but to make it to the Rabbi before the rainy season and have him mark off a few months weeks at a time.

"Well, it so happened that one year after the Rabbi had given him his 'rainy-months instructions, the rains delayed in coming and he decided to return to Jerusalem again while the roads were still dry.

"He thought he would give his Rabbi a pleasant surprise, but when he arrived he was shocked to see that all the stores were closed and the streets were empty!

"'Gevalt!' he thought to himself 'Could it be that I made a mistake and today is Shabbat!!?' He emptied his pockets, got off his wagon (so as not to carry or drive, which are both forbidden) and walked as fast as he could to the house of the Rabbi, and when he wasn't to be found there he ran desperately to the synagogue.

"It was just as he thought! The Synagogue was full to the brim!! It must be Shabbat! He ran to the front of the Shul where the Rabbi sat, fell to one knee and almost crying and blurted out in a whisper.

"'Is today is Shabbat? Why are the streets empty? Why is everyone here in Shul? I mean, I cooked this morning, and drove the horses and did tens of forbidden things!!! What can I do now??? Rabbi, believe me, I didn't know!!' He looked at the Rabbi with beseeching eyes. He would have broken out crying but he didn't want to miss the Rabbi's reply.

"'No, no!' Said the Rabbi with a smile. 'It's not Shabbat. Look, no one here has Shabbat garments on. Today is a fast day.'

"'What?' exclaimed the simple Jew in surprise as he stood to his full height and held his head in his hands, 'A fast day? Oy! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you put it in my Siddur? Oy! Oy!! I ate already!!!'

"'No no, don't worry!' the Rabbi quietly assured him again, 'Don't get excited. You haven't done any sin, don't worry my friend. Today the Rabbis of Jerusalem declared a day of fasting and prayer in the synagogues of Jerusalem because the rain hasn't come. If you want just take a book of Psalms and ….'

"'What?!' Exclaimed the Jew as his eyes opened wide in amazement, 'you're fasting because there is no rain!? What in the world do you have to fast for!?'

"'Because' explained the Rabbi patiently, surprised at the man's simplicity, 'If there is no rain there is a danger of famine and drought, people's lives are endangered.'

"'I understand that' Said the Jew, 'but why fast and cry?'

"'Well,' replied the Rabbi patiently, 'What do YOU think we should do? Have you got a better way to bring rain?'

"'Certainly,'" he answered. 'When I want rain I just go out in the field behind my house and say 'Father I need rain',,,,, and the rain comes'.

"'Oh Yes?' said the Rabbi not believing his ears 'Well, if you can do that…. very good then!! So do it here also!' The Rabbi was sure the man was imagining things.

"'Sure!' the simple Jew answered shaking his head obediently. He stood, went out the door, into the yard of the Synagogue, stood, raised his eyes to the heavens, and said, 'Father! Can it be that Your children in Your Holy city will go hungry? Don't You see that they need rain?!! Please send …… rain!!'

"Immediately the sky filled with clouds and rain began pouring down in torrents.

"You see" concluded the Rebbe Shmuel to the traveler, "You simply don't understand anything about souls, especially those who live in the Holy Land!"

Reprinted from last week’s email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.

**The Sages in the**

**Princess’s Chamber**

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| Photo: Ali Taylor |
| Photo: Ali Taylor |

At the time when the Roman armies conquered and ruled the Land of Israel, they set forth three new decrees. Their intentions were specifically to target and destroy Jewish identity. The decrees were that no one can: keep Shabbat (Saturday) sacred; circumcise their sons; or keep the laws of family purity.

They realized that if these decrees would be successfully enforced, this would destroy the Jewish people as a nation and assure their assimilation.

The sage Rabbi Reuven, deeply concerned with the situation, decided to take action. He had his hair cut in the same style as the Roman officials (which normally is forbidden), and then took a seat among officials participating in their discussions.

When these new decrees came up for discussion, he inquired, “Why should we make the Jews work an extra day (Saturday)? Another day of work creates commerce, and brings wealth and strength to them.” So, accepting the logic of his argument, they nullified the decree. Continuing to play on their prejudice and misconception, he added rhetorically, “Doesn’t circumcision weaken the body? Why should we strengthen our enemy?” This decree was likewise nullified.

He then used a similar argument: “Why are we seeking to multiply their numbers by forcing cohabitation even during the menstrual period?” They nullified the third decree as well.

The news spread quickly, and caused much relief and joy to the Jewish people. However, unfortunately, this joy was short-lived, for the Roman officials realized that this new official that no one really recognized engaged only in discussions concerning the Jewish people, encouraging arguments to nullify their decrees. They came to the conclusion that he must have been an imposter, a Jew who had the gall to disguise himself and fool them. Immediately they reinstated the decrees, with no more discussions to be held on this matter.

The sages of Israel had no other choice but to petition the emperor. However, now that the Roman officers were enraged at their audacity, this meant that the petitioners would be in danger of being penalized and harmed, even before having the opportunity of reaching the emperor and presenting their petition. They therefore chose to send as their messenger the great sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, for he was sustained by miracles for the 13 years that he fled the officials and was hiding in a cave. Perhaps in his merit another miracle would occur and the Jewish people would be spared. The custom was to send two petitioners, so they sent Rabbi Eliezer bar Rabbi Yosei to accompany him.

As they were entering Rome, an evil spirit greeted Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and inquired of him, “Should I join you?” Rabbi Shimon was pained, saying, “Why should the salvation of the Jews people come from this spirit and not from an angel?” but on the other hand he rejoiced, saying, “Wherever the salvation will come from, it is welcomed.” He then instructed the spirit to go ahead of them. The spirit entered the emperor’s daughter’s body, and she became demented. The only clear words that she said were “Bring the sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, that he may pray on my behalf.”

When he arrived at the palace, he was immediately taken to the princess’s room. He then instructed the spirit to leave her unharmed. In appreciation of having his daughter saved, the emperor offered to bring Rabbi Shimon into the private treasury room and grant him his any wish. Rabbi Shimon looked around until he saw the document bearing these decrees; he took the document and ripped it up, thereby nullifying the decrees.

We see to what great extent our sages went in order to preserve the commandment of *brit milah*.

Reprinted from a recent issue of Chabad.Org Magazine and based on the *(Talmud, Meilah 17a–b)*

**Weekly Chasidic Story #859**

**A Memorable Lag**

**B'Omer Bonfire**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000pHG0:001Imxw800001qC8&count=1389104003&randid=1957232658&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1957232658##)

Aryeh was standing in front of three judges in an Israel military court. His crime: leaving his post without permission and, what was considered a much more serious matter, he did so in order to go to the tomb of **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai** in Meron at a time when the area was infested with violent Arab Muslim bands. Indeed, this was only a few weeks after the new State of Israel had been declared in May 1948 and the War initiated by the Arabs of the surrounding countries in retaliation was at its fiercest.

"What can you say in your defense?" the judges probed. "You endangered your whole unit by abandoning your post, and you could have been killed at the same time!"

"But I had to," protested Aryeh. "I owed it to Rabbi Shimon!" Whereupon he launched into his story:

"During the *Shoah* (Holocaust), at a certain point, I managed to join a troop of partisans. I participated with them in many operations against the Nazi enemy. Once, we were commanded to approach a house which served as headquarters to a small group of Nazi officers. We got there undetected and quickly observed that the house was built over pillars and below the house, right in the middle, were a few barrels of tar.

"'All we need is one volunteer to get there and though a single match we'll get a spectacular fireworks!' said our commander.

"I immediately lifted my hand, but so did a couple of other boys in the group.

"'We have to select only one of you. So let's have each one tell us why you think that you are best suited to do the job.'

"When my turn came, I explained that tonight is Lag b'Omer according to the Jewish calendar, and on it we celebrate the day of the passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai , which is also the day that ended the epidemic that killed Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples. I told them about Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochba who fought against the Roman Empire just like we are fighting against the Nazis, and how the combined merit of Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Akiva will protect us.

"'Tonight, we Jews have a custom to light bonfires, and this is exactly what I intend to do,' I exclaimed excitedly, 'to grill up these Nazi officers!'  
"Well, I was unanimously selected for the operation and, thank G-d, it was a complete success. By the time I ran back into the forest, the Nazi beasts were cooking in the midst of the most formidable bonfire that I ever saw.

"Everyone cheered. Then the partisans told me: 'When you go to Israel, be sure to go to Rabbi Shimon's tomb and tell him how our unit honored his celebration by lighting a special bonfire in his memory on Lag b'Omer.'

"Now, tell me: Could I possibly be so near Rabbi Shimon's tomb and not fulfill this mission from the *Shoah* and thank the great sage who covered our operation against the Nazis with his merit?"

Source: Submitted by Eliyahu Ellman, who received it from… who received it from…etc. etc. who received it from a "Rav Serloi" a few years ago.

Biographical note: **Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai**, one of the most important sages in Jewish history, lived over 1800 years ago. Teachings in his name abound throughout the Mishnah, Gemarah, and Midrashim, while the Zohar, the primary source text of Kabbalah, is built around Rabbi Shimon's revelations to his inner circle of disciples. During the hours before his passing, on Lag b'Omer, he disclosed the "most sublime" secrets of Torah, in order to ensure that the day would always be an occasion for great joy, untouched by sadness because of the Omer period and mourning for him. The seminal importance of the Zohar in Jewish thought and the annual pilgrimage to Meron on Lag b"Omer are testimonies to his success.

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