**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Bamidbar 5773**

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**Yankel’s Unforgettable Carriage Ride to Lezinsk**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Yankel's magnificent carriage, pulled by four huge steeds, roared down the dirt road followed by a huge cloud of dust while Yankel, a rich, religious Jew, sat inside comfortably looking through the window at the Polish countryside sweeping by him, lit a fine long cigar and couldn't help feeling superior.

He blew out a stream of smoke which disappeared out the slightly opened window and thought dreamily to himself, "Rich, influential, successful and humble. Thank G-d! Where can you find such a combination? The other rich Jews….why they don't even believe in G-d! Heh! But not me! Why, I'm on my way to Lezinsk! To the Rebbe!! I bet those Chassidim never saw a carriage like this! But me, I could care less about what they think. That is humility!"

**Noticing an “Old Jew**

**Dressed in Raggedy Clothes”**

He leaned back to take another puff from his cigar when suddenly he noticed something outside. An old Jew dressed in raggedy clothes slowly dragging his way down the road side.

"Hey! Stop the carriage" he yelled as he pulled the string to ring the bell.

The driver stopped and in moments was bringing the wayfarer in. But when the 'old fellow' was finally seated opposite him and the wagon resumed rolling Yankel saw to his amazement that he was mistaken. This Jew on was no old man. He was no more that in his early thirties possibly in his late twenties.

"What!" He thought to himself, "A simple bum! A good for nothing! How could such a young able bodied fellow wear such rags? Had he no self esteem!? Probably he was just a lazy parasite that would rather take charity than work for a living."

**Couldn’t Control His Anger**

He considered stopping and throwing him out and maybe he should have because after a few moments of pregnant silence he couldn’t hold himself back and for the next two hours he poured out his anger on his unfortunate guest with biting short epithets and cynical comments.

When they reached Lezinsk the poor man slinked out of the carriage, said a weak 'thank you' and disappeared into the crowded street, while Yankel ordered his driver to take him to a hotel to wash and prepare himself for his meeting with the great, holy Tzadik Rebbe Elimelech completely forgetting the episode with the pauper.

A half-hour later he arrived in the Synagogue and, being a big donor, immediately was escorted to the front of the line of Chassidim waiting for an audience with the holy Rabbi. But just before he arrived at the front the first person in line, unaware that he was supposed to relinquish his place, opened the door and entered.

Yankel was a bit angered but comforted himself saying, "In another few seconds I'll be in."

**The Short Wait Stretches**

**Out in Two Hours**

But ten minutes passed, a half hour, then an hour …. then two! Obviously the one who entered was a very important person. Finally the door opened and Yankel almost fainted… it was the pauper he had cursed out just a few hours earlier. He apologized for taking so long and gave Yankel a strange look.

Suddenly Yankel felt ashamed and blurted out. "Listen, I'm sorry about how I treated you in the carriage and what I said, Okay?"

"No problem! I forgive you totally! Every word you said was correct." the pauper answered and Yankel entered the Rebbe's room.

His meeting with the Rebbe was short, he got the blessings and advice he asked for, left the room and in an hour he was in his fine carriage on his way home.

But things weren't the same.

When he went back to business and began buying and selling again he just couldn't seem to think straight and make the right choices. Loss followed loss and within a few months he was a pauper himself. His creditors confiscated his home and all his belongings. His wife and family moved to her parent's home and he, too embarrassed to live off his in-law’s mercy took to the road.

**Wandering Aimless from**

**Town to Town for Years**

For months, then years he wandered aimlessly from town to town, sleeping in Synagogues and alleyways and, with no other choice, living off charity. He suffered from cold in the winter, heat in the summer and constant hunger and shame. He prayed that no one would recognize him and most of the time wished he had never been born. When would it end??

But then, after fifteen years of hell on earth, suddenly it all turned around. He found a large sum of money on a deserted road, bought himself a new suit, washed up, began to make investments again and regained his fortune. It was as though he had been asleep all this time.

But his days of poverty and suffering haunted him like a nightmare. It was obviously an act of G-d but what was the meaning of it all?

**Then One Day the**

**Answer Dawned on Him**

Then one day it dawned on him…..... he would go to Rebbe Elimelech of Lezinsk and ask for an explanation.

But when he got to Lezinsk he found that he was too late… the Rebbe had passed away just weeks earlier! He asked around for advice and Someone suggested that he go to one of the Rebbe's disciples; Rebbe Dovid of Lelov. So Yankel made his way to Lelov, got in line to see Reb Dovid and after two hours of waiting entered and closed the door behind him.

The room was deafeningly silent. The Rebbe looked up and asked. "Can I help you?" and Yankel almost fainted.

"It's… it's you!" He exclaimed.

"Yes", the Rebbe answered "I'm the one you took in your carriage fifteen years ago! That is why you lost all your riches and suffered terribly."

"Because I shamed and insulted you!"

"Yes," The Rebbe answered. "And that is why you had to wait so long back then for me to come out from Rebbe Elimelech's room. When I entered before you, the Rebbe told me that it had been decreed in heaven that you should die. So we, Reb Elimelech and I, prayed and beseeched G-d for two hours to get your sentence rescinded. And we succeeded! Your sentence was changed from death to a life of poverty! So, you see, all that suffering was for your benefit…to save your life and to put true humility and joy in your soul."

"But if so" Yankel asked, "Why did it stop? Why G-d give me back my riches?"

"Ahh!" answered Reb Dovid with a smile "Because, after all, you did give me a ride in your carriage. And, not only that but the purpose of your suffering was to humble you and I’m sure you’ll admit that your new riches make you more humble than the suffering did. Now you really realize that you don’t deserve anything and all you have, even your very life is a gift from the Creator."

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

**President Obama Says “Teachings**

**From the Torah Lit the Way**

**Toward a More Perfect Union”**



President Barack Obama released a statement in honor of Jewish American Heritage Month, taking place throughout May, noting, “Jewish immigrants from all over the world wove new threads into our cultural fabric with rich traditions and indomitable faith, and their descendants pioneered incredible advances in science and the arts. Teachings from the Torah lit the way toward a more perfect Union, from women’s rights to workers’ rights to the end of segregation.”

“Jewish Americans continue to guide our country’s progress as scientists and teachers, public servants and private citizens, wise leaders and loving parents. We see their accomplishments in every neighborhood, and we see them abroad in our unbreakable bond with Israel that Jewish Americans helped forge. More than 350 years have passed since Jewish refugees first made landfall on American shores. We take this month to celebrate the progress that followed, and the bright future\e that lies ahead,” Obama continued.

“No matter who you are, where you come from, or what faith you practice, all of us have an equal share in America’s promise,” he added.

Obama is reportedly considering appointing Jewish candidates to high-level positions in his administration. Deputy National Security Adviser Mike Froman is being considered for the post of United States Trade Representative, and Chicago businesswoman and activist Penny Pritzker is in the running for commerce secretary, according to *Reuters.*

*Reprinted from the May 3, 2013 website of Matzav.com*

**An Improbable Journey**

**To Orthodoxy**

**By Jonathan Rosenblum**

**His Judaism was sterile.**

**Her Christianity, electric**

My first contact with Harold Berman was about seven years ago. I had written something about work I was then doing with intermarried families, in which the non-Jewish partner was in the process of converting, and he sent me a proposal for mentoring such couples.

It was the most thorough proposal of its kind that I had ever read — not surprising as Harold's position at the time as Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts involved writing lots of such proposals. Subsequently, I met Harold, his wife, Gayle, and their children, Micha and Ilana, on a family visit to Israel.

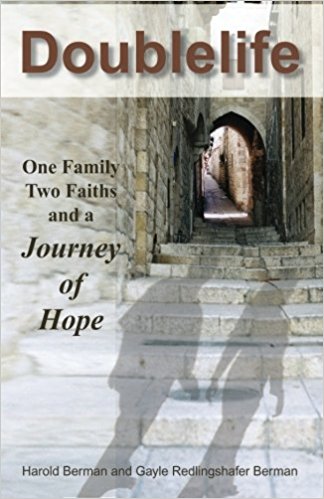
Not by accident did the Bermans turn their attention to intermarried couples. When they first met, Harold was a clarinetist with the U.S. Air Force band stationed in San Antonio, Texas and Gayle was the choral director of a Texas mega-church and former winner of the Metropolitan Opera Council Auditions. Music drew them together.

And the fact that Harold was Jewish and Gayle Christian did not seem like an insurmountable obstacle to marriage. Harold too often performed both as a vocalist and musician in churches. Neither wanted children, at that stage of their lives, and so the issue of what religion to raise children did not trouble them.

**A Gripping Account in the Form of Epistolary Exchanges**

"Doublelife: One Family, Two Faiths, and a Journey of Hope" is Harold and Gayle's gripping account, told in the form of epistolary exchanges, of their unlikely path to living as an Orthodox couple in Efrat, Israel.

Theirs is not the more typical story of the non-Jewish partner becoming enamored of Judaism and dragging the Jewish partner along towards observance kicking all the way. While Gayle took an ecumenical approach from the beginning -- fasting, for instance, the first Yom Kippur of their marriage -- she made clear that she was a believing Christian. For his part, Harold, despite his Reform upbringing, was equally clear that there would be no tree or other Christian symbols in the house.



**Tried Out Various Non-Traditional**

**Forms of Jewish Worship**

Harold already had more than passing familiarity with church services. But to introduce his wife to Judaism, the Bermans became regular participants in a variety of non-traditional forms of Jewish worship. They could not help noting, in almost every case, that their fellow worshippers seemed far less devout that those in Gayle's mega-church, and that the conversation both during and after services seemed to cover every topic but the L-rd. As a performer, Gayle was particularly sensitive when members of one Reform Temple treated the cantor's opening his mouth as a signal to begin jabbering.

But just as intermarriage ironically led to Harold looking more deeply into his Judaism than he otherwise might have done, so the very emptiness of most of the services they attended kept the Bermans pushing forward, as if following an intuition that there must be more to a 3,000-year-old religion that has commanded such loyalty from its adherents.

The decision to raise a child was the next spur to religious growth. Harold and Gayle agreed from the start to raise their children in only one religion and to make that religion Judaism, though they still did not know very much of what that entailed. Micha, whom they traveled to the Artic Circle to adopt, showed from the beginning a natural attraction to all things Jewish.

On a visit to the Western Wall, when he was only four, he told Harold the message he wanted to convey on his scribbled note pressed between the stones: "I asked that everyone in the world should know that G-D is one, and that there should be peace over Jerusalem."

But *Doublelife* is no fairy-tale. As Harold moves along the path towards full observance, Gayle expresses her anger that he is changing the terms of their marriage in midstream. (The same feelings are often expressed by Jewish partners when their spouse embrace observance, and no less an authority than Rabbi Elazar Shach, zt"l, used to tell the "returnee" partner to treat their spouse's reaction as fully legitimate.)

**Overcoming the Odds**

In addition to the long odds against any non-Jew making the full commitment required for Halachic conversion, Gayle faced a particularly difficult obstacle, a career that was at odds with a Torah-true lifestyle.

Not only did the Bermans make it all the way to full Torah lives, they are using their own experiences to help others. Harold is a regular blogger at a popular Israeli news site. In addition, Harold and Gayle are busy developing a web presence (www.j-journey.org) designed to assist couples in the same position they once were.

Anyone who knows an intermarried couple could do no better than to give them a copy of *Doublelife.*

*Reprinted from the May 1, 2013 email of JewishWorldReview.com*

**Listen To the Land**

**By Rabbi S. Rosenblatt**

Last week's portion speaks about land and its ownership. Which reminds me of a beautiful story:

Two wealthy Jewish men lived in a town in Eastern Europe. They were great friends, but one day they entered into a dispute over a small piece of land. Each one felt that it belonged to him and slowly, over time, the issue came between them.

For men as wealthy as they, it was such an insignificant piece of land, but each was insistent that it belonged to him, and the dispute grew more and more unpleasant. After a while, they no longer talked to each other, and eventually they became bitter enemies.

Although neither wished to do so, members of the community convinced them to go the rabbi and have him resolve the argument. Each one presented his case and the rabbi listened carefully.

Then the rabbi asked if he could go and see the land in question. When they got there, it was clear that the land was virtually worthless in relation to each of their portfolios.

The rabbi said that he could not decide who was right and in a case like this, the best thing was to ask the land itself. Both thought he was crazy as they watched him put his ear to the ground and listen carefully. He stood up nodding knowingly.

"The land has resolved this issue for us," he explained. Each was eager to hear. "The land told me," said the rabbi, "that you think it belongs to you and you think it belongs to you. The truth of the matter is, however, that one day soon, both of you will actually belong to it."

Perspective is so important in life. We can so easily become carried away on a tide of pettiness and lose all sense of our true priorities. Land is never more important than friendship, in the same way that money is never more important than a spouse, nor work more important than children.

It's a sobering thought that one day every one of us will 'belong' to the earth. With that in mind, ask yourself if those things which are frustrating you right now are really all that important. Business is not going well; your house is falling apart; people aren't respecting you. Will any of these things really matter in five, let alone 50 years? Life is too precious and too fleeting to waste on pettiness.

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

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**How Do You Start Teaching Children Derech Eretz?**

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

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People tell me all the time, what should you do with children that are not behaving? Should they hit? I'm not telling whether to hit or not, that's up to you, but whatever you do, you should **talk** to children. Don't think they don't listen. They say "It doesn't help". It **does** help. A child hears, you'll be surprised, he's hearing. He doesn't act like he's hearing but he's hearing.

Talk and talk, talk and talk, talk and talk, eventually you're going to accomplish something with him, don't give up, talk to children. Tell them no *machlokes*, no fighting, tell them about *Hashem*, tell them about *yetzias mitzrayim*, tell them about *matan torah*. Right now he's thinking about his toys, and his candy, don't worry about that, he's listening. You're putting a seed in the ground, at the moment nothing comes out. The time will come a tree will come out.  
 You're planting in the child's mind a seed. It's very important to talk to children, keep on talking. You don't have to yell at them, that's something else, you may yell sometimes too, but you must talk and talk and teach them all the principles, and you'll be surprised at the course of the years they're going to be affected by your words.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l.”*

**A Blast from the Past**

**A New York Detective's Tricky Beat in Israel**

**By Judith Miller**

TEL AVIV - Mordecai Dzikansky, a veteran New York Police Department detective [and an Orthodox Jew], had only recently taken up his post here in Israel in March 2003, when a shrapnel-packed bomb blew a bus to shreds in Haifa. Fifteen passengers, among them a 14-year-old American girl, were killed.



*Mordecai Dzikansky of the New York Police Department, wearing his badge on Friday in the streets of Jerusalem. Soon after a suicide bombing in March 2003 killed 15 people on a bus in Haifa, Israel, Detective Dzikansky was shown evidence hours before it reached the F.B.I. (Rina Castelnuovo for The New York Times)*

Blood from the dead and the 36 who were wounded was spread all along the street, and windows were shattered in buildings near where a Palestinian had detonated the powerful bomb.

In Jerusalem, an Israeli police officer faxed Detective Dzikansky a copy of a letter found near the suicide bomber's remains. The note, handwritten in Arabic and translated for the detective, praised the "glorious" 9/11 attack on the "two big buildings in New York."

Within hours, long before the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington saw the letter, a copy was on the desk of the New York police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly. Security at public places throughout the city was quietly reinforced, officials said. It was precisely the kind of information that Mr. Kelly wanted when he decided in 2002 to place his own detectives in police departments overseas. "Nothing compares to having one of our own working face to face with our counterparts abroad," he said.

**Effort is Meant to Learn About**

**The Evolution of Islamic Terrorism**

The department's overseas liaison program now has New York police officers working in seven cities from Montreal to Singapore. The effort is meant to produce significant information about the evolution of Islamic terrorism, how New York can prevent another attack, and should one occur, how it can best recover.

Officials say New York is negotiating to place an officer in Madrid, and for the first time is considering having a foreign police officer, an Egyptian, in the department's own intelligence division. "The program tries to ensure that the New York question gets asked in any counterterrorism investigation," said David Cohen, the department's deputy commissioner for intelligence, who before Mr. Kelly recruited him worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for 35 years.

**Presence of Overseas NYPD Officers**

**Has Strained Relations with the F.B.I.**

The role of the department's officers overseas, however ambitious and novel, is deliberately limited. Under agreements with their foreign counterparts, the detectives are not armed and cannot be directly involved in terror investigations or participate in enforcement actions. Still, their presence overseas has strained the department's often tense relations with the F.B.I.

In Israel, for instance, the bureau opposed creating the post for the department's detective, according to American and Israeli officials. At bottom, these officials say, the F.B.I. deeply resents New York's efforts to collect its own intelligence.

Ed Cogswell, an F.B.I. spokesman in Washington, said, "It's a problem for the U.S. government, which needs to have a unified voice in foreign countries; and it's important for the foreign government to know who the official representative of the U.S. government is."

The Police Foundation, a private organization, has financed the program, which officials say costs less than $700,000 a year in extra living and travel expenses to station seven officers abroad. In addition to Tel Aviv, Montreal and Singapore, the program has placed liaison officers in Toronto; London; Lyon, France; and, most recently, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

**Friction with Scotland Yard in London**

In some places the program has had a steep learning curve. In London, for instance, the New York Police Department's first liaison was quietly evicted from his office at Scotland Yard for sending New York delicate information about terrorism investigations without British authorization, officials said.

Since his arrival in Israel, Detective Dzikansky, 42, who has been an officer for 23 years and a homicide detective for 6 of those, has become an expert on suicide bombings. He has gone to Moscow and Istanbul to study attacks similar to the 17 in Israel that he has reviewed. He was also part of the New York Police Department team sent to Madrid in March 2004 after bombings of four trains killed 191 people. The city's team arrived within hours of the attack - and much to the fury of the F.B.I., before its own experts had arrived and without previous consultation, officials said.

**Valuable Lessons Learned**

**From Madrid Bombings**

Based on the reports filed from Madrid, Mr. Kelly said, "within 24 hours we had reconfigured the way we protect New York sites and subways." When the team reported that the bombers had used a van - parked several blocks from one of the train stations they attacked - as a command post, New York extended the security perimeter around potential targets during its own terror alerts and began searching cars and buildings where such bombs could be assembled.

"If our people weren't there, we would have had to wait months to get granular details like this and put them into effect," said Paul J. Browne, the deputy police commissioner and chief spokesman.

But Israel has provided the steadiest workload for study. The suicide bombing at a restaurant in Haifa in October 2003 that wounded 56 and killed 19, including 3 children and a baby, is a case in point.

Detective Dzikansky said he could not help thinking of his own three small children as he entered the devastated cafe and saw the charred children's bodies.

**Filed Report with Clinical Detachment on Bombing by Female Lawyer**

Lessons of the bombing for New York, listed in twin "overseas intelligence reports" filed hours later from the site, have a clinical detachment that Detective Dzikansky said he did not feel at the time. The Palestinian bomber, a 29-year-old lawyer, had calmly paid her bill, returned to a center table, and pulled the switch on her suicide vest. Because she was standing and other patrons were seated, the ball bearings, nails and other pieces of metal in her suicide vest, along with 10 pounds of explosives, radiated out at the diners' heads.

The metal detector a private security guard should have waved over her was found in another part of the restaurant. She had obviously not been checked, the detective said, perhaps because she was a woman, or attractive, or wearing Western clothes.

**Detective’s Persistence Has Won**

**Respect of His Israeli Colleagues**

Detective Dzikansky's persistence in popping up immediately at bombing sites, and his quick response to Israeli officials' requests for information about New York-based suspects, seem to have won him their trust and respect. This was not always true.

Discussions about what became Detective Dzikansky's assignment began at Kennedy Airport in May 2002 during an Israeli delegation's midnight fueling stop. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other senior officials were flying back to Israel in the wake of a suicide attack.

Mr. Cohen, New York's deputy commissioner for intelligence, had been scheduled to discuss the proposal with his Israeli counterpart later in the week, but had raced to the airport instead to chat with him and officially request such cooperation.

"Naturally we were suspicious at first," said Anat Granit, head of the Israeli National Police's International Relations Unit. "Was this Jewish guy being sent to spy on us?" she said. When several Israeli officials complained to the F.B.I., she said, they learned that the bureau was not keen on the idea either. "They told us: 'Don't worry,' " Ms. Granit said, " 'This will not happen. We will kill it.' "

Detective Dzikansky still has virtually no contact with his F.B.I. counterpart in Tel Aviv, who operates out of the American Embassy and declined to comment on his relationship with the New York Police Department.

But as the New York detective walks through the corridors of police headquarters in Jerusalem, home to Israel's 27,000 police officers, he is invariably greeted as Morty, in the Hebrew he now speaks fluently, with a quip and a smile.

**The Importance of Inspecting Bombing Sites Shortly after Attack**

Detective Dzikansky has concluded that inspecting bombing sites within an hour after an attack is invaluable. His reports list some of the major lessons to be learned by officers in New York: Take nothing for granted. Be wary of everything.

The pregnant woman may be carrying a bomb rather than a fetus; a bicycle or a baby stroller can transport explosives. The man in seemingly Hasidic garb may be a terrorist.

At Israeli headquarters, Detective Dzikansky and his Israeli colleague, Gil Kleiman, an American-born lawyer and former bomb squad member who is now an Israeli police spokesman, stop at a display of seemingly innocent objects that have been used with infinite creativity to hide bombs: a loaf of bread cut in half lengthwise, the sole of a woman's platform shoe, a cookie tin, a toothpaste tube, a Koran.

**The Need to Check Baby Carriages for Bombs**

"What New York cop would ordinarily insist on searching a baby carriage for bombs," Detective Dzikansky said, "or frisking a pregnant woman?"

The detective has recently helped arrange exchanges of value to both New York and Israel. Members of New York's bomb squad, for example, went to Israel a few weeks ago to train with their Israeli counterparts, whose dozen or so experts received 84,759 calls in 2003. And recently, leaders of Israel's police aviation unit, whose 33 pilots logged in 4,000 flight hours last year taking surveillance photos of everything from traffic snarls to terrorist attacks, visited New York and Dallas for orientation and training with the New York department, whose urban aviation group is considered the nation's oldest, largest, and best equipped.

"We're just starting to build skyscrapers, for instance," said Oded Shemla, commander of the Israeli police's aviation unit. "But we had never thought that our helicopters might not be able to land on them in an emergency because of smoke. Sept. 11 taught us that."

Detective Dzikansky has also become convinced that good security does, in fact, save lives.

**Lessons Learned from Istanbul Synagogue Bombings**

During his trip to Istanbul after twin suicide bombing attacks on synagogues, for instance, he noted that one of the synagogues that had augmented its external security by putting concrete blocks between the entry and the street after a suicide bombing attack in 1986 suffered far less damage than the other, which had not taken such steps.

He said he had, too, learned the value of what he calls an "enlisted community." Israeli detectives, he says, have 76,000 volunteers augmenting their numbers, part-time "eyes and ears" who provide tips on all kinds of suspicious activity.

**The Difference Between**

**Israel and New York Attitudes**

Given the bombing toll here, he said, Israelis cannot be too suspicious, just as a city like New York cannot be too much on guard. "Israeli police have an engaged community," he said, "constantly looking for where the next attack might happen."

"In New York, people prefer to think that the past is not prologue, that the threat is over," Detective Dzikansky said, pulling the beeper from his belt to check on the latest headlines. "The threat we face here and in New York is not going away any time soon."

*Reprinted from the May 15, 2005 edition of The New York Times. Mordecai Dzikansky is now retired from the NYPD. He was became the third Orthodox Jew to join the New York Police Department because until before he passed the civil service exams, those exams were only held on Shabbos and no exceptions were made for Sabbath observers, which is now the standard case for all civil service positions in the Big Apple. He is the author of a book of memoirs titled “Terrorist Cop.” To view a fascinating 48-minute video in which this son of a rabbi describes his 25-year police career, Google Torah Café – Terrorist Cop.*

**Symphony of Life**

**By** [**Rebekka B. Bodoff**](http://www.aish.com/authors/202983791.html)

I defined myself as a violinist.

Until a car accident shattered my arm.

Victor Hugo said “Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remains silent” For me, it was the language of my life.

At the age of three, I had my first pangs of jealousy, as my brother and sister marched off to their piano lessons. I, the baby, was left out. Perhaps foreshadowing my future life as an attorney, I demanded equity and fairness and insisted on attending piano lessons as well. So, every week, I marched along to Jovita’s house for piano lessons with my brother and sister.

**Introduced to the Passion**

**And Love of My Life**

Around the age of five, the local symphony orchestra put on a “petting zoo” program where kids could come and try all of the different orchestral instruments. I was introduced to what would become the passion and love of my life: the violin. I vowed, then and there, that I would learn that instrument.

When other kids were playing hide-and-go-seek, I was in my room playing Mozart.

Looking back, I don’t remember much of life before I had the violin. By age 8, I had decided my destiny: I would be a violinist. I played in youth orchestras and chamber groups. Summer camp was music camp. When the neighborhood kids were playing hide-and-go-seek and tag, I was in my bedroom practicing Mozart and Bach. It was my life. My passion. My identity.

**My First Standing Ovation as a Soloist**

It followed me into middle school and high school -- the steadfast dream. I’ll never forget my first standing ovation as a soloist, it happened at the end of 8th grade. My weekends, and most after school weekdays, were youth orchestra laden, as I trekked from one side of the state to the other. And then I went off to college, to pursue my music degree and professional career.

But on September 8, 2006, well into my 20s, in the proverbial blink of an eye, that all changed. I was leaving my teacher’s studio when another driver made a left turn into my car. And in that one instant, that one moment of impact, my life’s course was forever altered. Everything I had worked for my entire life came to a halt with that crash.

I remember little from the night of the accident. I had vague flashbacks of it for years. I would catch myself shudder as I drove past flashing lights and crushed metal on the sides of roads and highways. I’d find myself holding my breath anytime I passed an accident. Among my few shards of memories is one of the firemen saying, “Oh sweetheart, don’t look at that arm.”

**Screaming in the Ambulance – “I’m a Violinist!”**

And I remember looking. My right arm lay curled to my side, shaped like an s instead of a limb. I also remember the ambulance ride, screaming over and over, “I’m a violinist! I’m a violinist!” The pain was nothing compared to the reality that I couldn’t move my arm.

My right arm was shattered; the radius was mostly fragments of bone that eventually had to be cleaned out as they screwed rods into bone. One surgery. Two surgeries. Hand therapy. Three surgeries. Hand therapy. Four surgeries. But the pain continued, intensely.

I would go home after the surgeries, faced with the signs on my walls that read, “Every hour spent doing something else could be spent practicing,” and there I sat, bone ground into bone. My violin sat on the table, in its case that had been hand made in Italy. Some days I eyed it enviously; other days full of anger.

**Without the Violin, I had Nothing. I Was No One.**

The trauma of the accident manifested itself in many ways, not least of which seeing no reason to live for the first year or two after the accident. Without the violin, I had nothing. I was no one. The agony of loss of self was too much. I starved myself into numbness. Literally. Hunger was much easier to cope with than the ramifications of what had happened to my arm.

But there was this nagging part of me that wasn’t content with the endless trips to the emergency room. Life from the back of an ambulance had its own perspective, but deep down, I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was still a purpose for my life. One of the trips, electrolyte filled IV bags hooked up to my arm, and EKG leads running over my body, an older doctor came up to me and said, “I’ve been in emergency medicine for 20 years and I’ve never seen blood work like this. I have no idea why your heart is beating.”

**No Cure for a Shattered Heart**

And frankly, I didn’t understand it either. For years I had told my mother that they could put your bones back together with screws and rods but there was no fixative for a shattered heart. Yet, mine kept on beating, despite my lack of nourishment and lack of hope. There was a flicker of G-d’s presence in that moment. *Why was my heart still beating?* There was that nagging feeling again, a [higher purpose](http://www.aish.com/sp/f/48964356.html)? So, I checked myself into treatment.

I forced myself to keep [moving forward](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48906767.html), to begin anew and search for the bigger picture. I learned to nourish myself body and soul. I went to law school and began exploring my Jewish roots. I was simultaneously studying the model penal code and kashrut laws; the constitution and the Jewish art of prayer.

**Most Daily Activities**

**Were Extremely Painful**

It became apparent that I would never again have the finesse and artistry to pursue my career. After my sixth surgery the pain was still intense. Most daily activities would bring tears to my eyes; petting my dogs would make me cry out in pain. Going through pages of discovery at the firm where I was clerking was agonizing.

Five years after the accident, I agreed to a final surgery: a wrist fusion that meant a bone graft of all of the tiny bones in my hand into one solid bone and a plate screwed from my middle finger down the length of my radius. I would never again be able to move my wrist. My ability to play would no longer be bound up in the loss of artistry in my music; I was giving up the physical capability to draw a bow across the strings.

**The Night Before the Surgery**

The night before the surgery my mother flew into town to be with me. She curled up in my bed and I went and got my violin out for one last farewell. For the first time in five years, it wasn’t about the nuance that my music lacked or the audible deficiencies in tone production.

For the first time in my life, it wasn’t about trying to play the Tchaikovsky or the Sibelius. In that moment, it was about true love lost and parting. For three hours, I relived the past 20 years of my life, and listened to my mother’s quiet sobs from behind my bedroom wall.

I played for three hours, listening to my mother’s quiet sobs from behind my bedroom wall.

**Became a More Observant Jew**

The surgery was successful. I finished law school and two bars. I grew as an observant Jew and a fledgling attorney. I became a whole person. I was given a second chance to live and I started to see life differently. Being holed up in a practice room for 10 hours a day in order to perfect the next concerto or to out-practice the next violinist so I could get an eventual gig, was not a full life.

I was in love with the magic of the passion and artistry of music. I used to tell people that there was no feeling in the world like coming together with one hundred other people in symphonic unity. But my new clarity revealed a different form of connection, laughing and crying with genuine friends.

**A Different and Holier**

**Blueprint for Changing the World**

When I was a teenager I remember saying, “We’re going to change the world through beauty.” We quoted Thoreau like the Bible, “Most men live lives of quiet desperation.” Our antidote was music- aesthetic puzzle games.

Now I have a different [blueprint for change](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/My_Encounter_with_Hemingway.html) that gives me voice and advocacy. I have a life imbued with the holiness of [mitzvot](http://www.aish.com/ci/s/Sandy-Hook-A-Jewish-Antidote.html) and an ability to help perfect the world in ways that I believe are more profound than my music. My desires to perfect an art no longer drive me; looking back I view them as containing elements of self-absorption. Instead I look outside of myself at those around me and see who needs a babysitter or who needs a challah baked or what pro bono service I can offer. My contributions meaningfully and integrally impact people’s lives.

**The Benefits of Life**

**After the Accident**

Six and a half years after my accident I consider myself lucky; I feel more fully alive. I have friends in whose kitchens I bake fun experiments off of YouTube. I go on hikes and runs in the fresh evening air. I get down on the floor with my dogs and play with them, instead of having them lie at my feet while I practice. I know my nephews and my cousins as people instead of just names.

Some days I look longingly at the top of my bookcase where my violin sits, and I feel tears well in the corners of my eyes. But every day I wake up and thank G-d for giving me breath and new life. Every day, I bless G-d, the One Who frees the captive. And I feel it deep down in my heart, that freedom came to me through understanding, compassion, and purpose. I was given a second chance to transform my life into a living symphony.

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

**Mendel O’Malley**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

I heard this story from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Laibel Groner.

A woman from the Chabad-Lubavitch Community in Brooklyn was pulled over by a N.Y.C. traffic cop for some traffic violation. Standing outside her open car window and watching her search for her license and registration papers, the police officer caught sight of a picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in her open purse.

"Excuse me, maam," he asked, "are you one of the followers of this Rabbi?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Well, in that case I'm not giving you a ticket." He closed his ticket book and continued, "Do you know why? Because this Rabbi," he pointed to the picture she was now holding in her hand, "Did a very big miracle for me."

**The Grateful Woman**

**Asks to Hear the Story**

"Well," said the grateful woman, "since you aren't giving me the ticket, I have time to hear the story."

The policeman smiled and said, "It's my favorite story, but I haven't told it to many Jewish people, in fact I think that you are the first." The cars were whizzing by behind him and he had to raise his voice slightly.

"The story goes like this: I used to be in the police escort that once a week escorted the Rabbi to the Montefiore Cemetery (where the Rebbe's father-in-law and predecessor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, is interred). I got to know some of the young men who accompanied the Rebbe, and I learned a lot of things. They are very friendly people, which you probably already know, and we talked a lot while the Rabbi was inside praying.

**Will the Rebbe Help a Non-Jew?**

"Well, one day I saw that all the fellows there were really talking excitedly to each other so I asked them what happened. So they told me that the Rabbi does a lot of miracles for people, but today he did a miracle that was really something. I didn't even ask what was the miracle that they were talking about, I just asked them if the Rabbi helps non-Jews also.

"'Sure,' they said, 'The Rebbe helps anyone who asks. Why? Do you need something?' So I told him, this young fellow, that me and my wife had been married nine years with no children, and a week ago the doctors told us that we had no chance. We had spent a lot of money on treatments, seen all sorts of big professors, we were running around like crazy for the last six or seven years, and now they told us that they tried everything and there is no chance. You can't imagine how broken we were. My wife cries all the time and I started crying myself.

**Advises the Policeman How**

**To Ask the Rebbe for Help**

"So this young man tells me, 'Listen, the next time that you escort the Rebbe to the cemetery stand near the door of his car and when he gets out ask him for a blessing.' So that is just what I did. The next time I was in the escort I stood by his door and when he got out I said to him: 'Excuse me, Rabbi, do you only bless Jewish people or non-Jews too?'

"So the Rabbi looked at me like a good friend, it was really amazing, and said that he tries to help anyone he can. So I told him what the doctors said, and he said I should write down on a piece of paper my name and my father's name together with my wife's and her father's names and that he would pray for us.

“So I did it, my hands were shaking so much I almost couldn't write, but I did it and you know what? My wife became pregnant and nine months later she gave birth to a baby boy! The doctors went crazy, they couldn't figure it out, and when I told them that it was all the Rabbi's blessing they just scratched their heads and -- Wow! I felt like the champion of the world!

"But here comes the good part. Do you know what we called him? What name we gave our baby boy? Just guess! We called him Mendel after the Rabbi. At first my wife didn't like the name because its not an American name, but I said, No! We're calling him Mendel! Each time we say his name we'll remember that if it weren't for the Rabbi this boy would not be here.

"But when our parents heard the name they really objected. They said, 'With a name like that, all the kids will think he's a Jew or something and they will call him names and be cruel to him. Why make the kid suffer for no reason?' 'That's just what I want,' I said to them. '

“When he comes home and says that the other kids called him names and beat him up because he has a Jewish name, I'll tell him that I want him to learn from those other kids how *not* to behave. They hate the Jews for no reason, but you should love the Jews, you should help the Jews. You just tell them that without that Jewish Rabbi called Mendel you wouldn't be here at all, and then maybe they'll start thinking differently too!'

**It Once Happened**

**The Man Who Offered**

**To be Sold as a Slave**

Once upon a time, there lived in a village a fine Jewish family with five lively children. They could have been very happy, but unfortunately, they were very poor, and the day finally came when they lacked even a few crusts of bread in the house.

In desperation, the wife came to her husband and said, "Please, go into the city and try to find someone who will lend you some money to buy bread for the children."

"You know I have no relative or friend who can help me. Do you want me to go and beg on the street? Only G-d can help us."

The wife did not reply, but when the hungry children began to cry for food, she again approached her husband and said, "Please go to the city. There perhaps you will find some way of earning money, after all, G-d can always find some way to make a miracle."

So, the husband went to the city, and when he arrived there he uttered a prayer, "Master of the Universe, You provide for all the creatures of the earth, have You nothing for my poor hungry children? Please help me in my hour of need."

His tears must have broken through the Heavens, for a moment later a stranger approached him, and in a calm voice asked, "What is wrong? Why do you weep so?"

**Unburdened His Heavy Heart to the Kind Stranger**

The man unburdened his heavy heart to the kind stranger. "Don't despair. I can help you. Take me to the marketplace and sell me as a slave. With the money you get you will be able to purchase whatever you need."

The man was astonished at these words. "What are you suggesting?! How could I possibly accept such a sacrifice from you? Besides, who would believe that such a pauper as I would have such a fine slave?"

"Don't worry. We will exchange clothing. As for my sacrifice, don't worry about that either. I am a master builder, and I won't remain a slave for long. The only thing I ask is that you sell me only to the person I will point out to you and that you give me one gold coin of the coins you will receive for my sale."

**He Gives His “Former”**

**Master a Blessing**

So, they proceeded to the marketplace, the stranger dressed in the pauper's clothing. When a rich-looking coach drove up, the "slave" winked in his "master's" direction, indicating that this was the appropriate buyer. The sale was transacted, and the man offered his former "slave" the gold coin. He took it, but then returned it, saying, "Keep this coin for good luck, and G-d bless you and your family with health, wealth, and much joy from you dear children."

The husband returned home to a joyous welcome, laden with all sorts of food and clothing that the family had all but forgotten existed.

Meanwhile, the slave was brought to the royal palace as a special gift for the king. When the king inquired what particular job he was best at, he replied, "I am a master builder."

The king was overjoyed at his reply, for at that time, the king was involved in planning a magnificent new palace, but an architect had not yet been engaged. The slave was given the job of constructing the new edifice. The royal storehouses of gold and silver were made available to the slave as well as the permission to hire as many workers as necessary to complete the job.

**Promises His New Slave**

**A Handsome Reward**

"If you complete the construction to my satisfaction within six months, I will reward you handsomely, as well as giving you your freedom," promised the king.

That very evening, the slave, who was Elijah the Prophet, prayed to G-d that His angels descend and build the palace for the king. His prayer was answered, and that same night the palace stood in all its magnificence and glory.

When the king arose and beheld this miracle, he couldn't believe his eyes. He rushed out to inspect every corner of his new palace, stroll through its wondrous gardens, and marvel at the elegantly furnished suites. Returning to his old residence, the king immediately sent for his slave, but there was no trace of him.

**Haunted by Thoughts of**

**What Befell His Benefactor**

The Jew had prospered through the sale of his "slave," but the thought of what had become of his benefactor haunted him every day. He was filled with guilt for having allowed the kind man to sacrifice himself for him.

Then, one day, as he walked through the market, he saw the man coming towards him. He rushed up to him and embraced him warmly. "How have you been, my dear friend? I was so worried about you all this time!"

The man smiled, "I told you I wouldn't be a slave for long," and he recounted how he had been given to the king and had built a new palace for him and had become a free man once more.

Then Elijah blessed the man again and reminded him to always be kind to the poor, love his fellow man, and walk humbly before G-d. "If you do this and instruct your children in this way, your wealth will not leave you or your children for many generations." And just as the man was about to thank him, he seemed to melt into the surrounding crowd and disappear.

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