**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Bamidbar/Shavuous 5772**

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**Saved by the Coffee Cups**

 Many years ago there lived in Tunis a worthy Jew named Matzliach. He was a great lover of Torah, though not an outstanding Torah scholar. He was not very rich, but generous in his charity contributions, and he was a G‑d-fearing man.

Matzliach the Antique Dealer, as he was known, for he was a dealer in old wares and antiques, was well respected in the community.

**Staying Up All Night on Shavuos**

**To Recite Tikkun and Study torah**

He was particularly praised for his special custom in connection with Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah. Every year he would invite ten Torah scholars to his home on the first night of Shavuot, for whom he prepared a fine feast. After the feast they would all recite tikkun and study Torah all night, in honor of the great festival that celebrates the Jewish people’s receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It all started many years before, when Matzliach learned for the first time about the origin of the Jewish custom to stay awake on the first night of Shavuot. He was greatly surprised to learn that on the night before that great day when G‑d was to give the Torah to the Jewish people, they did not stay awake. Indeed, they slept soundly, so that when G‑d descended on the mountain early in the morning to give the Torah to His chosen people, they were not there!

So G‑d let loose thunder and lightning, which woke them up and sent them hurrying to the mountain.

Not that the people were not eager to receive the Torah. On the contrary, they had been counting the days—forty-nine days, seven full weeks—from the day after they departed from Egypt, eagerly awaiting the great day when the Torah would be given to them. Yet the night before that great event, when one would have expected them to be too excited even to think of sleep, they slept more soundly than ever! Did they want to be well rested, refreshed and wide awake for the great moment of the divine revelation?

Be that as it may, it was a letdown. And so it became the custom of Jews everywhere to make up for it and stay awake the night of Shavuot, and in this way “correct” the wrong impression. This is what tikkun means—“correction.”

**His Example Influenced the Whole Community**

Well, Matzliach and his guests certainly observed this custom in a fine way, and it impressed and inspired the whole community. There was not a Jew in Tunisia who did not stay up that night. Old and young gathered in the synagogues to recite tikkun and learn Torah all night, and special refreshments were served to help keep them awake.

There came a time, however, when Shavuot approached and Matzliach found himself in a difficult situation. Business had not been good, and Matzliach simply had no money, not only for his usual feast, but not even for the needs of his own family in the way of food and wine for the festival. Sadly he told his wife, Mazal, about his predicament, and she was greatly distressed.

“It is not so much our own need that distresses me,” the good woman explained, “but the fact that you cannot keep your fine custom. It is sad to think about it.”

**Wife Offers Her Precious Earrings**

“But what can we do?”

“Well, I still have my precious earrings,” Mazal said, taking them off from her ears. “Here, take them to the pawnbroker and get a loan till things will improve. You should be able to get enough for the festival meals and for your usual feast.”

“G‑d bless you,” Matzliach said gratefully. He took the earrings to the pawnbroker and obtained a tidy sum of money against them.

As he was walking home cheerfully, Matzliach met the venerable Rabbi Hai Tayeb, chief rabbi of Tunisia. Matzliach greeted the rabbi respectfully, and the rabbi returned the greeting, obviously pleased to have met him in the street.

“You saved me a trip,” the rabbi said. “I’m going around collecting for our poor, so they, too, can celebrate the festival of Shavuot with joy.”

Without hesitation, Matzliach put his hand in his pocket and gave the rabbi the money he had just received from the pawnbroker. The smile with which Matzliach gave the money pleased the rabbi no less than the donation itself.

“G‑d bless you to do many mitzvot and good deeds,” the saintly rabbi said, as they parted.

Slowly Matzliach continued his way homeward. “What am I going to tell my wife?” he wondered.

Suddenly he heard his name called. “Ya, Matzliach! You’re just the man I want!”

**A Royal Servant of the Bey (Ruler) of Tunis**

The caller was one of the royal servants of the Bey of Tunis.

“His Majesty sent me out to buy a set of antique coffee cups. I have no idea where to get them. But you are an antique dealer. Get them for me, and you will be amply rewarded,” the courtier said.

“I will try my best,” Matzliach promised. If there were such cups, Matzliach knew where to find them, and find them he did. The dealer Matzliach went to was pleased to get rid of them; he had had them too long, and despaired of ever selling them. Now he was pleased to sell them to Matzliach on credit, for he knew the Jewish antique dealer as a trustworthy man.

Walking through the marketplace, Matzliach met the courtier again, for he was shopping for other things. “Did you manage to find the right cups for me?” the courtier asked eagerly.

“Thanks to the One Above, I did.”

**The King Was Very Pleased**

The courtier took Matzliach with the cups to the royal court, and introduced him to the Bey.

The king was very pleased with the cups. “Just what I wanted,” he said. “I know that the Jews are now busy with preparations for their festival. I am pleased that you took time out to find me these lovely cups. By the way, how are you doing with your preparations for the festival?”

“The truth to tell, Your Majesty, I have not yet bought a thing.”

The king immediately ordered one of his servants to send to Matzliach’s house two sacks of fine flour, a jug of olive oil and two choice live lambs. Then he asked Matzliach what he owed him for the cups.

Matzliach told the king what he paid for them, and his usual commission.

“What? That’s all you paid for these precious cups?” the king said, much surprised. “Well, the ruler of Tunisia is not looking for bargains. You shall be paid their full value!”

Matzliach left the king’s palace with a very large sum of money. Walking briskly home, whom should he meet if not the chief rabbi, again.

“I can now afford to double my donation,” Matzliach said happily, as he handed the rabbi an amount equal to his first generous donation.

“Rabbi, your blessing was fulfilled,” Matzliach said, and told him how G‑d was kind to him.

“Thank G‑d, we both did very well today,” the rabbi said. “Have a happy Yom Tov.”

And a happy festival it was indeed for Matzliach and his good wife Mazal. And what made them happiest of all was that this year, too, they were able to observe their custom of celebrating tikkun-night as ever before.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Long Way Home**

**(Part One)**

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

Historically, a great calamity befell the Jewish people during this period. Namely, 24,000 students of Rebbi Akiva died during Sefiras HaOmer because they did not treat each other with respect. (See, Yevamos 72b) Therefore, this is a special time of the year to work on ourselves.

**Forced to Spend Much Time in the Hospital**

Rav Boruch Yadler has worked for several years for the organization "Yad L'Achim," an organization which works tirelessly to help bring Jews closer. Unfortunately, Rav Boruch was not well for many years of his life, and he therefore was forced to spend much time in hospitals. During one of his hospital stays, Rav Boruch noticed that there was a man in the bed next to him "Yechiel Kruger (not his real name)," whose children regularly visited.

Rav noticed that the man's children were seemed to be very fine, respectful, attentive to his needs, as well as being religiously observant. One evening, when the room was quiet and the last of the day's visitors had gone, Rav Boruch remarked to Mr. Kruger, "I've been working with children of all ages for years, and I can tell that your children are very special. How did you raise them that way?"

Mr. Kruger was surprised and pleased at the sudden compliment, although it was not the first time he'd been so complimented. He smiled sheepishly. "I've been very fortunate. Hashem has been very good to me. Years ago I wouldn't have imagined that my children would grow up this way."

"Oh, really?" said Rav Boruch sensing a story. "Yes," said Mr. Kruger. "I've noticed that you like stories, so you might find this one interesting." Yechiel Kruger then told his amazing story: He had been living in an anti-religious, atheistic kibbutz, sponsored by Shomer Hatzair, in northern Israel. Shabbos had no sanctity on the kibbutz, except as a day off from work.

**A Leisurely Shabbos Drive to Jerusalem**

One Shabbos afternoon Yechiel, or Chiki as he was called, took a leisurely drive to see the sights in Jerusalem. The ride was uneventful until he got into the heart of Jerusalem's Geulah neighborhood. Suddenly his jeep was pelted with stones, and youngsters were yelling, "Shabbos! Shabbos!" Chiki had no idea what they were yelling about. When another stone hit his car, he jumped out to chase the boy who had thrown that last rock.

But as he got out of his jeep, a well-dressed man came over to him and calmly took him aside. "I see you're not from around here, so perhaps you don't understand what these people want from you," he said. "Leave your car here - they won't harm it - and come with me." The man was very gentle and courteous and he put his arm around the young driver as they walked. The man, Rav Shapira, the rav of a local shul, invited Chiki into his home.

**An Explanation of the Laws of Shabbos**

After the initial pleasantries of introduction, Rav Shapira began explaining some of the laws of Shabbos. Without justifying their actions, he tried as best he could to explain how strongly the rock throwers felt about violations of Shabbos in their midst. And then the rav added, "It's almost nightfall, stay with us until after Shabbos." Chiki agreed and in the course of the evening, the two became friends and exchanged addresses. Rav Shapira assured Chiki that he would stay in contact with him.

Within six weeks, Rav Shapira (the one who befriended Chiki when he mistakenly drove into the religious neighborhood on Shabbos) made his first visit to the kibbutz. Rav Shapira looked up Chiki Kruger and his family. Chiki was surprised that the rav had made such a long trip just to see him and invited him to stay for a meal. Rav Shapira explained that because of kashrus laws he could not eat there, although he agreed to have a cup of tea. Chiki and his wife and the rav chatted amiably for a while.

Mrs. Kruger was interested in continuing the conversation, for she was more religiously inclined than her husband. Although totally non-observant, she had an interest in Yiddishkeit (Judaism) and asked many questions about halachah (Jewish law) and customs that she had not been taught in her irreligious upbringing. Rav Shapira realized that the woman was searching to bring meaning into her life.

The more he spoke to Mrs. Kruger, the more he became convinced that there was a spark of 'Yiddishkeit that was waiting to be fanned into a fire of faith. Rav Shapira only question was whether he could kindle it. When Rav Shapira was about to leave and was invited to return, he knew that the spark of Judaism would eventually ignite.

**Speaking About the Purpose of Life**

Within three weeks, Rav Shapira came back. Once again he and the young couple spoke about the purpose of life, the basic tenets of Judaism, and the possibility of leaving this particular kibbutz for a religious one. "If you are a socialist," said Rav Shapira, "be a religious socialist."

The Krugers couldn't see themselves moving from their comfortable surroundings, especially since they lacked the funds for such a move. However, just a day or two after one of Rav Shapira's visits, Mrs. Kruger received a letter stating that her request for restitution from Germany would be granted.

The Wiedergutmachung Agency had helped her file a claim for damage to her family's property and for valuables lost during the Holocaust years. Now that her claim had been processed she would be getting a stipend every month. With their new-found fortune, the Krugers, who were becoming increasingly disenchanted with the emptiness of their life on the non-religious kibbutz, decided that indeed the time had come for a change.

**Beginning to Enjoy a Happy and Fulfilling Life**

With the help of Rav Shapira they resettled on a religious kibbutz. On the first Shabbos there, one of the Kruger children put on the light and caused an uproar, but they soon became accustomed to the religious rules and regulations and to their new and friendly surroundings. They began to enjoy a happy and fulfilling life.

Chiki, now sitting up in his hospital bed, ended by saying, "It was the pleasantness and diligence of Rav Shapira that persuaded us in the end. Right from the first day we met in Jerusalem, Rav Shapira never talked down to me. He understood my background and never held it against me. Instead, his warmth and genuine concern led our family back to the ways of our ancestors. Eventually we left kibbutz life and settled in Jerusalem, where my children attended wonderful schools."

Rav Boruch Yadler who was now also sitting up in his bed shook his head to and fro. "It's a beautiful story," he said, "with a very nice ending. Rav Shapira was exceptionally nice to you. But, in my experience, I have come to realize that not every non-religious person gets the opportunity to become religious and then go on to have such wonderful children. I get the feeling that there was something more, something unique that made you deserve this exceptional gift from Hashem."

Chiki knew that Rav Yadler was right. At first, he had not planned to mention the other part of the story because it was a personal matter. But everyone seemed to tell Rav Yadler everything, so he decided to tell him the rest. Rav Yadler would probably find a way to make good use of the story. Chiki smiled and told another story from an even earlier period in his life.

"Well, maybe Hashem was watching us for another reason, too. You see, I was one of the 'Yaldei Teheran,' the refugee children gathered from the concentration camp survivors who were transported through the Balkans and Turkey on the way to Teheran…" To be continued.

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

**Rabbi Gurevitz and Keeping Shabbos in Siberia**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

The following is a story I just heard from Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Gurevitz who teaches in the Chabad Yeshiva in Migdal HaEmek.

Communism was supposed to be the solution to all problems of mankind and Stalin was its Messiah. He was revered as the 'Sun to the Nations' and the "Father and provider of Russia."

But, in fact Communism was an empty oppressive system that had no place for the human soul or spirit. Even 'potential' dissenters were jailed, exiled or murdered and it is estimated by some that 'Father Stalin' was responsible for the deaths of some fifty MILLION of his own people.

One of those people was almost Rabbi Gurevitz

He was arrested for being a Chassid, an anti-revolutionary and a suspected capitalist and sentenced, after a ten minute trial, to seven years in Siberia.

He was caught off guard. Not that he didn't know that the police were after him; the police were after EVERYONE either actually or potentially. The saying in Russia was there are two types of people; those that are in jail and those that are going to be. And as a follower of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, he was already in trouble.

**Commitment to Jewish Children**

**Was Tantamount to Treason**

The Rebbe was prepared to do anything and risk everything in order to educate Jewish children, which was tantamount to treason. But getting caught and imprisoned in those days in Russia was sort of like death: everyone knows it's going to happen but no one really believes it will.

But now he was headed for a concentration, or rather re-education, camp in Siberia.

Most people did not last long in these camps but as a Chassid, our hero decided to be as positive and happy as possible and as often as possible.

He was shown his dismal barracks and assured that he would be assigned work and would prove to be a productive citizen instead of a parasitical traitor. When they asked him if he had a skill he remembered what he had been told by friends: if you don't say you are skilled they'll put you to hard labor and you won't last long. So he said he was a tailor.

**Certainly More of a Tailor than Stalin**

Now the fact is that he was not a tailor but his mother had a sewing machine and he had watched her work a few times so he was sort-of a tailor. Anyway, he was certainly more of a tailor than Stalin was the Father of Mankind.

So they took him to a huge factory where they made wallets for the soldiers, sat him down before a sewing machine, gave him several large, neatly stacked piles of leather cut to various sizes, showed him a finished product, explained to him how to put it together, and left him.

The only problem was that it was Shabbat.

And one of the many things Jews are NOT allowed to do on Shabbat is …. sew (it's one of the 39 forbidden 'father' transgressions). He sat in the chair and looked at the sewing machine like it was a big germ. It was even forbidden by the Rabbis to touch it! What could he do?

He thought and prayed for an answer. If he didn't work it could mean… the worst! But breaking the Shabbat was out of the question! What could he do!? Suddenly it dawned on him that sitting there and doing nothing was also out of the question; everyone else was furiously busy and he stuck out like a sore thumb so, before the foreman noticed his 'sin' he got up and went to the toilet…. for a half an hour.

Then he walked around a bit, then sat down at the sewing machine, rubbed his hands and stretched for a few minutes as though he was about to start work and then … he went to the bathroom again. But this time on his way there he noticed a room filled with beds. It was the room where everyone took a rest brake in the afternoon. So when he left the toilet for the second time he walked straight to that room, got into a bed, put the blanket over him and, hoping that no one saw him, didn't move.

**Suffering Under a Blanket in**

**The Middle of the Hot Summer**

Here there was another problem; it was in the middle of the summer! It was blazing hot outside, the factory made it hotter and the blanket he was under was a heavy duty winter special! So he was really suffering and it was hard to breath. But at least he was honoring the Shabbat.

So, the entire day he lay there like a corpse and didn't dare move. His only hope was that they did not notice his absence. And his hope came true…. Almost.

In fact, they did not notice that he was gone but they did notice that next to his name on the daily production list was written a big zero.

The next day he was summoned and escorted by two huge soldiers to appear before a board of judges for sentencing. He stood trembling before the mean looking officials and then, to his surprise, one of the judges began speaking to him in Yiddish. "What are you doing such stupid things for? You could get ten more years for not working! Why don't you work for mother Russia?"

"It was Shabbos, your honor! I couldn't work on Shabbos!" was his answer.

**“You Could Get Killed for Refusing to Work!”**

"But it was permissible! To save your life it's permissible! I know the law. You could get killed for refusing to work!"

"Could be, your honor but I'm not working on Shabbos. I'm sorry, but I'm not looking for leniencies. I'm a Jew and Jews don't work on Shabbos."

The judges stared at him for a minute with no expression on their faces and then turned to one another and began whispering ccasionally throwing a glance at him.

Gurevitz was expecting the worst but he prayed for the best, maybe there would be a miracle although such things were almost non existent in Russia where life was worth nothing. He imagined that they were discussing how many years to add to his sentence or perhaps which was the worst work force to assign him to.

"Okay Gurevitz" said another of the Judges in Russian. "We have the storehouse where all the leather is stored. Do you understand?" Gurevitz shrugged his shoulders and shook his head yes as to say, what has this got to do with me?

"Well, that leather is a very valuable commodity and the Russian people…. Rather… we have not yet found a way to stop the leather there from disappearing. It seems that no matter who we put to guard the place …. Well…. It get's stolen and …. Well… the guard himself takes leather. Do you understand? Instead of guarding from thieves they themselves steal the leather!"

The Jewish judge continued. "Well, we see that you are a man of principle Comrade Gurevitz! If you are willing to risk your entire life for your principles, so probably you won't be so interested in stealing leather. Do you understand?"

**Declares He Never Stole Anything in His Life**

Gurevitz shook his head in agreement. "I never stole anything in my life" He said.

The judges all laughed "Hah hah!! Never? Haaa Haaa! Never stole?! That is what everyone here in this prison says! That is what all the previous guards said also! Ha haaa! But you are different, we SAW what you did. Now what do you say? With this new job you can keep your Shabbos too. Just make sure you keep the leather safe!"

Sure enough, for his remaining several years in Siberia he not only never had any problems with keeping Shabbat, but was also able to learn and observe the Torah and even help others to do so as well from his position as guard of the leather bank.

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

**Saved by a Prayer (Part Two):**

**One Jew's Miraculous Story.**

**By Sara Yoheved Rigler**

The SS guard came and escorted us into the factory. Klein said to me, “How can we accomplish what we want? The SS is right here! He’s watching our every move!”

I said to him, “I have a special prayer that I say in times of danger. And if we have in our minds that on Pesach we will try not to eat chametz, because we will be able to live on the potatoes, then we will succeed.”

“But what will we do about the SS guard?” Klein protested.

I answered that we will say my special prayer, and take the risk, and G-d will help us to succeed.” So we said the prayer, and went with the SS guard to the factory.

**Convinces the Guard to Leave the Factory**

When we arrived at the factory, I said to the SS guard, “You know our job is to remove the black soot from certain areas of the boiler. You are dressed in a nice clean uniform. You better get out of here, otherwise you are going to be so covered with soot that you will look like a chimney sweeper.” The guard was very pleased that I was so concerned about his appearance. When he left the room, we went to the room with the loose block and we removed the block. Klein climbed in through the opening and went down to the potato storage and started shoveling out potatoes.

**The SS Guard Returned Suddenly**

Suddenly the SS guard returned and asked, “Where is the other fellow?”

I said, “Can’t you hear him shoveling the soot? Don’t come in here because in a moment I am going to open the bottom of this pipe and you’re going to be as black as a chimneysweeper. I’ve warned you.” At once, the SS guard ran away.

We immediately took a wheelbarrow that we usually used to remove trash, and placed it under the funnel, and opened up the bottom of an underground pipe that we had discovered, and the potatoes tumbled into the wheelbarrow. From there we took the wheelbarrow to another underground pipe and hid them there. We made two trips with the wheelbarrow, which was quite a lot of potatoes. We returned to the camp without the SS guard suspecting anything. On Pesach, we ate our potatoes.

**Bright as Daylight**

When the American army approached the area of the factory, the Nazis ordered the inmates to evacuate. They delivered a speech in which they said that this would not be a Death March. They assured the inmates that they had done an excellent job in the factory and would receive special treatment. “Of course,” Alexander later remarked, “we never believed a word the SS said.”

When it was time to evacuate, the Germans lined up the prisoners in rows of five across, in order to easily notice escapees. Accompanying every fifth row was an SS guard with an automatic rifle. The Commander announced that if anyone tried to escape, they would find him and kill him on the spot.

Alexander and his friend Klein started walking. Klein asked him, “How will we escape this one?”

Alexander replied, “We will say the special prayer with real feeling, and G-d will help us.”

The march was accompanied by a wagon that carried some food and blankets. Fifteen prisoners — three rows of five — were needed to push this wagon. Every hour the shift of those pushing the wagon changed. Alexander noticed that while the guards were careful to count the prisoners in every marching row, they didn’t count the prisoners who pushed the wagon. And whenever they stopped to change the prisoners pushing the wagon, they allowed everyone to rest for ten minutes.

Although they were starved and exhausted, to their own amazement they ran with vigor.

**Midnight on a Dark, Moonless Night**

Around midnight on that dark, moonless night, it was Alexander’s and Klein’s turn to start pushing the wagon. They were resting in a ditch they had found. Alexander told Klein that they should lie down in the ditch and pretend to sleep. When the call came to start moving, they should remain in the ditch. If the Germans noticed that two men were missing and found them in the ditch, they could say they had fallen asleep. But Alexander assumed that the Germans would not notice so soon, and this would be their chance to escape.

They stayed in the ditch and kept reciting, over and over again, the special prayer. When they could no longer hear the sound of the men walking in the distance, they jumped up and started to run in the opposite direction. They took off their concentration camp uniforms, leaving on only their shirts, and ran. Although they were starved and exhausted, to their own amazement they ran with vigor.

Whenever they heard a vehicle approaching, they jumped off the highway and hid on the side of the road. After a while a car approached with such weak headlights that they barely had time to jump off the road into the embankment. The car stopped directly above them. Afraid that the occupants of the car had seen them and that they were about to be killed, Alexander fervently recited his special verse.

An SS captain and sergeant got out of the car. The sergeant said to the captain, “It’s impossible for the prisoners to have come this far, because they were tired and they would have had to run fast to cover this much distance. We must have passed them. They must be behind us somewhere.”

**Uses Flares to See in the Dark Night**

The captain replied, “Anyway, it’s so dark we can’t see a thing. We have some flares. Let’s shoot up some flares and make sure that as long as we’ve stopped here, that they’re not here.”

It was as bright as daylight. The SS men looked straight at us and said, “It looks like they’re not here.”

The sergeant took the flares out of the car and shot them off right above the two escapees. As Alexander related:

*It was as bright as daylight. I was saying the verse with all my might. The SS men looked straight at us and said, “It looks like they’re not here.” We had become invisible to them! The captain said, “All right, let’s go back to the car. Probably we passed them.”*

Alexander Ungar survived the war. His wife and three children perished. He immigrated to the United States in May, 1947, settling in Queens, New York. There he married and had two daughters and three grandchildren. He lived to the age of 91.

Judaism is not Harry Potter, and the verse was not a magical incantation. I do not presume to understand how the blessing of a holy person, carried on the recitation of certain words, could save a life. Nor do I understand why Alexander Ungar was saved while millions of others were not. But one thing is clear: Despite having lost almost his entire family in the Holocaust, Alexander Ungar remained a devout, believing Jew.



November 1997, 90th birthday party,

attended by most of the Ungar clan.

He concluded his unpublished memoirs with these words:

*When my daughter Oriana asks me how I can believe in G-d after the Holocaust, I answer, “How can I NOT believe in G-d after all the miracles I experienced?”*

*Reprinted from a recent email of Aish.com*

**The Father’s Advice to Carry**

**The Sack of Heavy Rocks**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Honor your father and your mother*.” (Shemot 20:12)

On the holiday of Shabuot, Israel received the Torah. The Ten Commandments are inscribed on two tablets, five on each. The first tablet contains laws regarding man’s relationship to Hashem, while the second refers to relationships among people. This shows us the significance that Hashem attaches to the honor He wants us to show parents, because Hashem included this commandment on the first tablet. When people honor their parents Hashem regards it as if they honored Him.

A great story (quoted in Tubecha Yabiu) illustrates this point. Once a Jewish person went to a faraway land in order to make a livelihood and bring it back home to his family. The man went with his father and the son was able to acquire gold and silver items that had great value. Finally the man decided to go back home, but his father stayed.

**Offers Strange Advice on How to Make**

**His Sack of Precious Items Easier to Carry**

The son packed his precious cargo in a sack and got ready to leave. The father noticed that the sack was very heavy so he advised his son to make it a little easier to carry. He told him that instead of carrying the whole load on one shoulder, he should balance it by placing another sack full of rocks on his other shoulder. If he had balance, it would be easier and he will arrive safely home.

The son asked no questions and did exactly as his father told him, and carried an extra sack of stones. However, people who saw him didn’t understand the purpose of the extra sack. When he explained what his father commanded, they still didn’t understand. If all he needed was balance, why the rocks? The balance could be accomplished by dividing the gold and silver into two sacks! The son ignored them and continued on his way.

Finally he boarded a ship to take him home. However, during the trip they ran into a terrible storm at sea. The crew did all they could to lighten the load to prevent the ship from sinking. Finally the captain gave the order that in order to save the lives of the all aboard each passenger must throw overboard one half of his cargo.

**In the Merit of Listening to His Father**

Each one must divide his property and throw half away. Now everyone realized the good fortune of the son. In the merit of listening to his father he was able to throw away a sack of rocks instead of half of his fortune. His father’s instructions didn’t seem to have any logic, but the son followed anyway.

Perhaps this is part of the reason why honoring parents were placed on the first tablet. There might be times that we should not question a parent in the same way that one would not question Hashem.

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Price of a Teardrop**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

A strange will came before the rabbi. It was the last will and testament of a woman who divided up her wealth among her children and grandchildren. What was puzzling was a line directing that ten thousand dollars should be awarded to one particular granddaughter above and beyond what the others would inherit.

This unexplained favoritism raised doubts about the reliability of the entire will. After some serious investigation the reason came to light.

A letter was found in which this grandmother emotionally described the night she sat together with all her grandchildren and told them what she experienced in the Holocaust and the suffering of the Jewish people during that period.

All her grandchildren listened attentively but one granddaughter actually wept. As a reward for those tears she was awarded a great inheritance by the grandmother who so appreciated her compassion.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**A New Home for an Endangered Yiddish Bookstore**

**By Joseph Berger**

However bleak is the prognosis for the language itself, the last secular Yiddish bookstore in New York City has survived a near-death experience and found a new home in the distinctly unfamiliar soil of Long Island City, Queens.

The 75-year-old shop, run by the nonprofit [Central Yiddish Cultural Organization](http://www.cycobooks.org/), faced extinction two years ago when its patron organization and landlord, the Atran Center for Jewish Culture, downsized and put its three floors on East 21st Street in Manhattan, including the bookstore’s space, on the market.

Since then, the CYCO store’s manager, Hy Wolfe, has been struggling to find an affordable new location, adrift in the wilderness like the people who eventually made Yiddish its lingua franca.

Now, Mr. Wolfe reports, he has secured a location in a seventh-floor loft near the Queens entrance of the Midtown Tunnel at 21st Street and Borden Avenue and has moved in over 50,000 books. His loft neighbors include a potter, a sculptor, a high-end furniture boutique and a party planner.



*(Andrea Mohin/The New York Times) Hy Wolfe, the manager of a 75-year-old bookstore run by the Central Yiddish Cultural Organization, at its new Long Island City location.*

**More than 150 Racks of Books Moved to New Location**

More than 150 racks of books on wheels were delivered by professional movers, including the felicitously named Samson Moving and Storage. But Mr. Wolfe, the 50ish son of Holocaust survivors who was raised in Brownsville, Brooklyn, when Yiddish was still commonly spoken there, said he transplanted many books from the racks to the shelves himself.

“Fifty thousand pounds of books I lifted,” he said, wording his sentence in a Yiddish syntax edged by weariness. “I could get people to help, but everyone has to get paid. Like a dog I was working.”

And pay others is not something Mr. Wolfe can easily do.

The store has laughably few sales. It is open by appointment only and those hours vary considerably. In one recent year it had 50 sales appointments and took in $11,220, which barely covered Mr. Wolfe’s annual salary.

**Hemingway’s “Der Alter un Der Yam”**

The shoppers include Yiddish students, Russian immigrants, collectors and Hasidim. They can find books not only by Yiddish writers but also classics like Ernest Hemingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea” in Yiddish (“[Der Alter un Der Yam](http://www.abebooks.com/Alter-Yam-Old-Man-Sea-Yiddish/5188994959/bd)“).

The move cost $50,000, paid by Atran. Half of the first year’s rent of $11,000 and other operating expenses were financed with private donations. Many donors learned of the store’s plight from [a 2010 article](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/25/nyregion/25about.html) in The New York Times.

Long Island City is not exactly Yiddish-speaking terrain. Actually, the only Yiddish quarters left in New York are neighborhoods where Hasidim live, while the number of secular Yiddish speakers is dwindling to relatively few.

But Mr. Wolfe thinks many connoisseurs of the language will make the trek to his industrial area because the Hunters Point Avenue subway station is just a few stops on the No. 7 train from Midtown.

**Offering Beautiful Views of Manhattan**

“We have beautiful views of Manhattan,” he said, offering an enticement.

All in all, he said, the ability to keep the store breathing “means the world to me.”

“The old Jews, the Holocaust survivors, survived for one reason: They were stubborn, they refused to die,” he said. “And I think I inherited that from my parents.”

*Reprinted from the May 22, 2012 edition of The New York Times.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Roman Senator**

Great was the plight of the Jews who lived under the rule of the Romans after the destruction of the Second Temple. The Roman government constantly persecuted the poor, defenseless, defeated people. Despite all of this, however, the Romans did not succeed in breaking the strong spirit of the Jewish nation.

At that time, the greatest Jewish leaders of that period were Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabban Gamliel. They went to Rome to plead for an easing of the cruel decrees against the innocent Jews. In the meantime, however, a decree had gone out to the effect that, within thirty days, no Jews were to be found in the whole Roman Empire. This meant nothing less than the end, G-d forbid, of the entire Jewish nation, for Rome then ruled over almost the entire known world! The Jews were doomed, for where could they hope to escape to in so short a time?

**One Exception to the Rule of Roman**

**Senators Being Idol Worshippers**

Like all their fellow Romans of that time, the Roman senators were idol-worshippers. There happened to be amongst them one notable exception, a man who believed in the one G-d. This particular senator was known to greatly admire the Jews, and counted many Jews amongst his closest friends and associates.

When word reached him of this terrible new decree against the Jews, he lost no time in hurrying to Rabban Gamliel to inform him about it. Rabban Gamliel and his colleagues were thrown into a state of despair! Rome ruled the world, and it was impossible for hundreds of thousands of men, women and children to suddenly find refuge in some far-off land!

"Don't worry," the senator comforted them. "Yours' is a great G-d and surely Your G-d will surely not forsake you. You still have thirty days before the decree can be put into effect, and G-d can bring about your salvation in a mere blink of an eye!"

The days and the weeks passed unremarkably, and there were but five days left before the decree against the Jews would become law. The senator and his wife worried constantly about the fate of their friends, but could not devise a plan of action to save them. One day they were sitting at home talking about the dreadful situation of the Jews, when the senator sadly remarked to his wife, "I feel so ashamed to be part of a people that can do such wicked things to the innocent and defenseless Jews."

**Wife Speaks in a Serious Tone**

His wife was silent for a while, then, in a serious tone she spoke slowly and deliberately, "Are you sure there is nothing that can be done to save our friends?"

"There is only way that they can be saved at this late stage. If a senator were to suddenly die, the decree would be annulled. For, as you know, according to Roman law, when a senator dies all laws passed within the past 30 days become null and void."

Five days later, on the thirtieth day, the senator and his wife were again sitting in their home discussing the decree against the Jews and what could possibly be done to help them.

"Today is the thirtieth and last day," the senator said to his wife in a tone of despair. "This is terrible! I wish I knew what to do to help them!"

**At Least One Man Left in Rome Who Possesses a Conscience**

"If you really mean what you are saying," said his wife, "there is something you can do. I know what I would do in your place to show the world that there is still at least one man left in Rome who possesses a conscience and a feeling of decency and respect for his fellow human beings." After she had uttered those momentous words, she cast a sad and poignant glance at the beautiful ring on her husband's finger.

The senator understood immediately what his wife meant. The center of this very special ring had a tiny hidden compartment. Inside this compartment was a fatal poison. Without further thought, the senator bid a sad farewell to his lifelong partner, put the ring to his lips and within seconds, death froze a smile of satisfaction on his noble face. Because of the supreme self-sacrifice of this noble friend, the decree against the Jews was immediately nullified.

When the Tannaim heard of the death of the Roman senator, they hurried to comfort his widow. They praised the nobility and greatness of her distinguished husband, who gave up his life in order to save the Jewish people. He had willingly made the ultimate sacrifice and no words could convey their gratitude.

"We would have been proud, indeed, to have counted your husband as one of our own," they concluded.

"You may now know that you have, in truth, every right to be proud of him, for he was in his beliefs, in every respect, one of you," the widow answered.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a Publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brookly. It was adapted from Talks and Tales.*

**The Revelation at Sinai**

**By Rabbi Isaac Jacobs**

 The dawn of the third day broke amid thunder and lightning that filled the air. Heavy clouds hung over the mountain, and the steadily growing sounds of the *Shofar* made the people shake and tremble with fear.

Moses led the children of Israel out of the camp and placed them at the foot of Mount Sinai, which was all covered by smoke and was quaking, for G-d had descended upon it in fire.

The sound of the *Shofar* grew louder, but suddenly all sounds ceased, and an absolute silence ensued; and then G-d proclaimed the Ten Commandments as follows:

**The First of the Commandments**

1. "I am the Lord your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

2. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any manner of likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them. For I the Lord your G-d am a jealous G-d, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments.

3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your G-d in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

4. "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your G-d. On it you shall not do any manner of work -- you, your son, your daughter, your man-servant, your maid-servant, your cattle, and your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it.

An Opportunity for Long Days Upon the Land

5. "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your G-d gives you.

6. "You shall not murder.

7. "You shall not commit adultery.

8. "You shall not steal.

9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maid-servant, his ox, his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad.org. “The Revelation at Sinai” was originally published in “Our Story” by the Kehot Publication Society in 1946-1948.*

**Chasidic Story #756**

**Thunder and Lightning**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

A few days before the festival of Shavuot, Rabbi Baruch of Medzibush went to pray at the resting place of his holy grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov.

One year, as was his custom, just a few days before the holy festival of Shavuot - the time of the receiving of the holy Torah - the Rebbe Reb Baruch, then living in Tulchin, traveled to Medzibush to pray at the holy resting place of his grandfather, the holy Baal Shem Tov, whose *yahrzeit* was on the holiday.

Reb Baruch completed his prayers at the Baal Shem Tov's gravesite, but he did not also pay a visit as he usually did to his brother, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim, the rabbi of Sudylkov for several decades and famous as the author of the *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, who then, at the end of his life, lived in Medzibuz. Instead, he returned directly home to spend Shavuot with his chasidim and his family.

Immediately after Shavuot, Reb Baruch again traveled to pray at the grave of the Baal Shem Tov. But this time, he did stop to visit his brother, Reb Moshe Chaim Ephraim.

**Questioning His Brother**

During their conversation, the *Baal HaDegel* asked his brother: "Tulchiner Rebbe, when you came to our grandfather's holy gravesite before the festival, why did you not call on me as usual? And why did you return again so soon after Yom Tov?"

Reb Baruch answered: "I was told from Above that if I so desired, I could receive the revelation of Torah on Shavuot with thunder and lightning, just as *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses our teacher) and the whole Jewish nation received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. This lightning and thunder was a physical revelation of G-dliness, and I wished to also experience it."

**Requesting a Grandfatherly Intercession in Heaven**

"And so," he continued, "before Shavuot, I went to the graveside and asked our holy grandfather to intercede in heaven so that I be granted the merit and the strength to receive the Torah in such a manner. When I returned to Tulchin, I did indeed receive the Torah on Shavuot with thunder and lightning. But afterwards, I soon found to my sorrow that I did not have the strength to bear such a revelation. Each Jew has his own unique strengths and abilities, unlike any other individual's, and mine, it seems, are in other areas, where I can serve the Creator to the best of my potential."

"So I returned and asked our grandfather to intercede again and have the revelation removed!"

Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of *Tzvi-Meir Cohn* posted on //baalshemtov.com, based on a story in "A Treasury of Chassidic Tales On the Festivals" by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin.

Biographical notes:

Rabbi Boruch of Mezhibuz [1753 - 18 Kislev, 1811] was the son of R. Yechiel Ashkenazi and Adel, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. He moved from Tulchin to assume the Chasidic leadership in Mezhibuz, the town of his holy grandfather. He was one of the pre-eminent Rebbes in the generation of the disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch and had thousands of Chassidim.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudylkov [1748 - 17 Iyar 1800 was the son of R. Yechiel Ashkenazi and Adel, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. He authored one of the first primers of Chasidic thought, Degel Machaneh Ephraim ("Banner of the Camp of Ephraim"), and thereafter was popularly known as "the Degel." His holy grandfather testified about him that he was a Talmudic genius. He served as the rabbi of Sudylkov for several decades, but then retired to Medzibuz, the town of the Besht, at the end of his life, where he passed away and is buried.

**The “Master of the Good Name”**

Rabbi Yisrael, the Baal Shem Tov ["master of the good Name"], a unique and seminal figure in Jewish history, revealed the Chassidic movement and his own identity as an exceptionally holy person, on his 36th birthday, 18 Elul 1734. He passed away on the festival of Shavuot in 1760. He wrote no books, although many claim to contain his teachings. One available in English is the excellent annotated translation of Tzava'at Harivash, published by Kehos. Also, translations from Sefer Baal Shem Tov and Kesser Shem Tov can be found on //baalshemtov.com.   
 Editor's note: Another version of this story reverses the roles of the two brothers.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Kabbalahonline, a project of the Ascent Institute in Safat, Israel.*

**Akiva Abramowitz of Flatbush Wins**

**Diaspora International Bible Contest**

**By Daniel Keren**

Akiva Abramowitz who will graduate from the Yeshiva of Flatbush Joel Braverman High School next month as his Class’s Salutatorian was the winner of this year’s Diaspora Hidon HaTanach (49th International Bible Contest for Jewish Youth) Competition and Runner-up in the International Hidon HaTanach Tournament that was held last month in *Yerushalayim*, Israel. It was the first time since 1984 that a non-Israeli competitor had finished so high in the International division which is usually dominated by Israeli contestants. The finals of the highly touted Bible Quiz were televised live in Israel.

**Born and Raised in Flatbush**

Akiva, 17, was born and raised in Flatbush and has attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush since elementary school. He was assisted in preparing for the prestigious international *Tanach* Competition by Rabbi Avner Taler, chairman of the *Tanach* Department of Yeshiva of Flatbush.

Rabbi Dr. Raymond Harari, principal of the Yeshiva of Flatbush Joel Braverman High School applauded Akiva’s achievement by declaring, “Akiva’s hard work, commitment to learning Torah and natural abilities enabled him to achieve this unique distinction.”

Contestants had the option to compete either in their native language or in Hebrew. Akiva opted to take his questions in Hebrew, the original language of the Bible as the Yeshiva of Flatbush has always made a point of teaching their students *Tanach* and other *Limudei Kodesh* subjects in Hebrew. As a result Akiva has long had a keener appreciation of the Biblical history of our people and is able to speak Hebrew fluently.



**Akiva Abramowitz of Flatbush with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin**

**Netanyahu at the 49th International Bible Contest for Jewish Youth.**

**Won National Bible Quiz Last Year**

His recent journey to the international Hidon HaTanach competitions began last year when he won the National Bible Contest in the United States Hebrew High School division that was conducted in Manhattan among the 15 – 20 high school finalists from across the United States. Akiva had advanced to this final round after having prevailed in three earlier regional tournaments that were held last year.

As a result of triumphing in the National Tanach Contest, Akiva had almost a year to prepare for this year’s International tournament in Jerusalem. In addition to Rabbi Taler’s assistance, he benefited from being able to access questions given to previous Yeshiva of Flatbush contestants who had made it to the international finals in *Yerushalayim*.

**Practicing a Few Hours a Day**

**For the International Tournament**

From the time he won the National Hidon HaTanach Championship last spring and knew he was going to the International finals last month in Israel, Akiva began practicing by studying the *Tanach* for an hour a day. As the international finals came closer that time period increased to two, than three and four hours a day.

His expenses for the International Tanach Contest finals were paid by the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund. Akiva was accompanied to the Holy Land by his proud mother and two younger brothers.

**Bible Competition Began with Written Questions**

The competition began with all 56 finalists taking written tests on various aspects of *Tanach* on the first day of the competition. As a result of his scores, he advanced to the finals of both the Diaspora Division and the International Competition. He had the third best score of all contestants on the written competition.

Akiva’s total points accumulated in the Diaspora competition helped him to win the Diaspora title in a tie with another Canadian competitor. Advancing to the international competition, the first round began with written questions plus a two-part question on a *pasuk* of *Tanach*. As a result of his correct answers he was moved to the top eight finalists and had to answer additional questions with a time limit of 60 seconds in which to respond.

**Quizzed by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu**

In the third round of competition for the International Hidon HaTanach Championships, Akiva and other contestants were quizzed by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu whose then 15-year-old son Avner Netanyahu had won the 2010 Israeli Bible Contest and finished in third place in that year’s International Hidon HaTanach competition.

As a result of his outstanding educational achievement, Akiva Abramowitz, has been awarded a full four-year scholarship including room and board at Machon Lev, a top-rated technology college in Israel. The Flatbush Jewish Journal joins all of Akiva’s family, friends, classmates, teachers and neighbors in congratulating the Yeshiva of Flatbush student on an outstanding performance in the International Bible Quiz and much success in all his future endeavors.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of the Flatbush Jewish Journal.*

**Receiving Our Precious Torah on Shavuoth**

**By Savta Kops**

The festival of *Shavuoth* is in *Sivan*, which was a crowning event

The Revelation took place on Mt. Sinai, before all eyes present.

It marked the greatest spiritual occurrence in our Jewish history

Receiving the Torah, the life of the Jewish nation, is no mystery.

Living the words of the Torah, gives you emotional security

The thoughts are gentle and soothing, creating a feeling of purity.

With inner peace your spiritual connection to Hashem allows you to see

The serenity and joy His world has to offer, is all yours, and all free.

Moshe, the receiver of the Torah, has 10 different names that we use

Yered was one because he “brought down” the Torah to the Jews.

Another was Cheber “to attach” us to the Torah, and obey the laws

That Hashem gave us and appreciate with significance, its cause.

On the festival of *Shavuoth* we decorate our synagogue with flowers

In memory of Mt. Sinai and the Revelation during those precious hours.

There were beautiful leaves, branches and flowers growing on the Mount

We remember with eternal memory to celebrate after the 49th *Sefira* count.

On the first day of *Shavuoth*, before the Torah reading, we recite

A most inspiring poem called *Akdamos*, a hymn of glory to sight.

The beauty to Hashem and His Torah with expressions of praise

And Israel’s unbounded love for it pending the ending of our days.

The second day of *Shavuoth*, traditionally, was the death of David our king

We continuously read all the beautiful hymns in *Tehillim* we say and sing.

David was the descended of the converted noble Moabite woman, and her fate

So we read the Book of Ruth understanding Hashem’s matching Boaz her mate.

*Reprinted from last year’s Shavuos edition of The Jewish Connection.*