**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Nasso 5773**

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**Don’t Kick Me Off**

**The Ladder**

**By David Bibi**

 When I was a young boy, each Shabbat morning we would go to the Synagogue, stop at our grandmothers home for Kiddush and lunch, come back home and change and go out to the football field to play ball. Well we really didn’t have a football field; it was actually the street on East Seventh between R and S [in Flatbush] which we transformed depending on the game to be played into a punch ball court utilizing sewer covers as the bases, into a hockey rink with garbage cans as the goals or the aforementioned football field where catching a ball between parked cars was in bounds.

**The Signal to Change and Run to Shul**

 It wasn’t just kids playing. There were teens, parents and the occasional grandparent, and we played until we saw the people walking back to the Synagogue for Mincha. With that signal we ran up to change and ran to Kenis or Shul.

 Inevitably though at some point during the game, a group of young boys walking to Mirrer Yeshiva would stop and watch us obviously puzzled at the sight of some boys with yalmakas on their heads playing ball on Shabbat.

 I can still hear them chanting aloud, “goyim, goyim, goyim” as they passed by. But to us, they were akin to aliens from outer space. Who were they to call us goyim? We knew we were “observant” Jews and paid no heed.

 Keep in mind that those days proceeded the days of whether you held by the eruv or not, or whether ball playing was permitted or not. In those days there was no eruv to argue about. And today few if any of those who joined us would even think of playing in front of their own homes. No eruv means no carrying. We were wrong. But we thought we were religious.

 The rabbis at the time didn’t come out and tell us that we would burn in hell for playing ball. They didn’t chastise us in public. What they did do was work their magic by drawings us in. Rabbi Jack Mevorach got us to cut the games short by bribing us to class with bats, balls and tickets. We were taught that if we were going to play, we might as well play basketball in the yard within an eruv.

**What Really Counts is Where**

**One is Heading Spiritually**

 My Rabbi, Asher Abittan z’sl always taught me, it’s not where a person is on his ladder of spirituality that counts as much as which way a person is heading. Had we been ridiculed as sinners by our own, I shudder to think how many would have fallen off the ladder never to return.

 Last week we began the book of Devarim which the world named the Book of Numbers as this first portion tells of the counting of the people. But the census is not a simple count. Moses is requested “Naso et rosh beney Yisrael”, to lift up the heads of the children of Israel.

 The Midrash tells us that G-d was asking Moses himself to personally go out and have each person come before him to raise them up and show them how important they were, each as an individual, unique and worthy of an entire world. There is no better gift one can give than the gift of self-confidence.

**At Some Point Our**

**Paths Diverged**

 I often wonder about the many other communities of Jews who came to America at the same time as our community came here. They disappeared while we held strong and have grown, ken yirbu, in numbers, observance and strength. We had holy grandparents and they had holy grandparents. Yet at some point our paths diverged. One group ascended the spiritual ladder while the other descended and at some point jumped off intermarrying and cutting themselves off from the Jewish people forever.

 The Rabbi would say that the mistake of some in that generation was in giving over to their children the idea that religion was a burden. They would bemoan the fact that Shabbat observance forced them to lose a job or that Kashrut was too expensive. The children of those complainers did what any normal person would do. They removed the yoke of that burden.

 In our community religion was treated as a gift, a delight and something that we could enjoy together. Nobody complained that it was a burden. We didn’t do everything we should have and we did do things we shouldn’t have, but the focus was on the victories and successes. A child beginning to walk is praised for each step and not criticized for failing to run a marathon.

**Two Fascinating Stories Heard**

**Last Month in Florida**

 While in Florida last month for Passover, I heard many stories from people about their connections. I would like to tell you two of them.

 In both cases, the men telling me the story are today leaders of the community, observant with observant children and grandchildren and bound to Torah.

 Like so many of us, they too grew up playing ball in the streets, taking their cheese to Vic’s pizzeria in Bradley Beach, eating fried knishes at the sandbar, pancakes at Perkins and thinking that a tuna salad sandwich at the Blue Swan Diner was fine. They went to nightclubs and did whatever boys being boys do. At the same time, they put on Tefilin every morning, came to Synagogue every Shabbat, did not work, drive or turn on lights on Shabbat, never ate pork or shellfish, said a blessing every time they ate and thought they were religious. To protect their identities, I have changed a couple of unimportant facts.

 “I was just getting married. My father was as poor as they come with no business for me to go into. Nor did he have connections to get me a job. I got my real estate license and began working as a salesperson renting out apartments. It wasn’t easy. After two years I was making $10,000 a year which in 1970 when median income was $7000 looked pretty good.

**My Future Father-in-Law Offered**

**Me a “Great Opportunity”**

 “My future father-in-law sat me down and told me he had an opportunity for me. He owned two stores in Old Orchard, Maine. My future brother-in-law was running one of the stores and would return home after 14 straight weeks of work from Memorial Day through Labor Day with a check for $70,000. I remember thinking that I was earning $200 a week while he was earning 25 times as much.

 “My father-in-law suggested that I take the second store. It might not earn as much but I could expect at least $50,000 over the season and I could still work in real estate for the other nine months. I was so appreciative of the offer. He then turned to me and said, “You realize, you’ll need to work on Saturday”?

 “I said that I would have a manager on Saturday and be there the other six days, every hour of the day. He told me that it didn’t work like that. Managers couldn’t be trusted and Saturday was the busiest day and I would need to be there. He told me that I wouldn’t need to touch money or write. I just would need to be there.

 **“Even Rabbis Work on**

**Shabbat and Get Paid”**

 “And what’s the big deal’, he continued. ‘Even Rabbis work on Shabbat and get paid. If they can do it, why can’t you? It’s 14 weeks and you can have your Shabbat the rest of the year.’ I thanked him for the opportunity and told him I couldn’t accept. And I wonder still today where did I have the strength to refuse?"

 Another told me about his girlfriend. “She was Jewish and grew up in a completely secular home. She had no concept of Halacha and over dinner one night in some Manhattan restaurant we discussed our future. I explained that if she could accept Shabbat and Kashrut, we could get married. She promised she would try and we decided to see if she could simply avoid opening and closing the television and lights and driving on Shabbat.

 If she could do that for six weeks, then we would take the next step. For two weeks she managed. On the third Saturday night when I called her, I heard hesitancy in her voice. She admitted she opened the TV and started asking what the point was in restricting electricity.

**“When I Heard the Tone**

**In the Question…”**

 I was in love and thought I would spend the rest of my life with this girl. She was everything I thought I wanted, but when I heard the tone in the question, I realized then and there that she could never be the mother of my children and we had no future. In my mind, I was a "religious" Jew and couldn't imagine the possibility of giving that up. It would be treason.”

 Some might call it hypocrisy. We as a community were eating in non-kosher restaurants, going to clubs and worse. Yet we called ourselves observant or religious.

 But therein lays the success. In name, we were observant. In title, we were religious. Within the community no one called us sinners. With title comes responsibility and because we kept out title, we kept our responsibilities. We had lines in the sand we couldn’t or wouldn’t cross because crossing those lines would turn us into sinners.

 Had we lost that title, then all the responsibilities would have disappeared with them. As ridiculous it might sound to some of us today if instead of being lauded for bringing our cheese to Vics, we were ridiculed for eating there, most would have stopped bringing the cheese and instead of ascending the ladder we would have dropped off of it. If I’m a sinner, I might as well be a sinner.

**It Takes a Great Expert**

**To Offer Rebuke**

 Many will point to the commandment hocheyach tochiyach et amitecha – to rebuke our friends. But my Rabbi would caution us that it takes a great expert to offer rebuke. Rebuke given the wrong way can more likely turn a person away rather than bring them back.

 We talk about tolerance. This great Rabbi who we remember tolerated this and that great Rabbi who we remember tolerated that. But it’s much more than what we refer to as tolerating. It’s looking at a glass half full rather than a class half empty. It’s respecting people for what they are doing rather than demeaning them for what they are not. It’s about drawing close rather than pushing away.

 We cannot forget Jacob’s ladder. It is a spiritual ladder which ascends to heaven itself. Some of us by virtue of birth were born on one rung and some on another. It’s easy for those above to look down upon those below. But who are we to judge. Instead we should offer everyone on that ladder encouragement. “Hold on tight”, we should say. “You’re doing great”, we should remind them. “Reach up for the next level”, we should cheer.

**Avoid Destroying a**

**World with a Kick**

 It’s too easy for the one above to step on the hands of the one below forcing him to fall and be lost forever. Just as one can save a world by saving a person, one can destroy a world by kicking one off that ladder. And none of us wants to be guilty of that.

 So the next time you see someone doing something wrong. Think twice before you criticize. And teach your kids the same. We all want to grow. We all want to get better. And obviously we want the same for all of those around us. But let us not forget that the goal is for all of us to climb higher without losing any in the process.

*Reprinted from last week’s email from Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**“Maybe After All**

**G-d Does Exists?”**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 The late 1700s were difficult times for Orthodox Judaism in Europe and Russia. Myriads of Jews were being lured away from the Torah and it’s commandments by atheistic ‘enlightened’ Jews who presented an alternative: art, philosophy, assimilation and unrestrained fun in France and Germany.

 Then one of the outstanding Torah figures of all time; Rabbi Eliahu ‘the Genius (Gaon) of Vilna’ decided to take action.

 He chose ten (in another version 'tens') of his most brilliant and talented pupils to visit the universities and salons of Berlin, absorb the new ideas there and then use them to defeat this insidious force once and for all.

**Only Two Did Not Get Ensnared**

 But they all seriously underestimated the enemy and the results were disastrous; all of them, save two, became so enamored of the free spirit they found there that they joined the ‘maskilim’ and abandoned Judaism completely.

 The two exceptions that did not leave Judaism were one Rabbi Pinchas (who wrote a book called Sefer HaBrit) and Rabbi Moshe Mizlish who fled Germany and became a devoted Chassid of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Chabad (the enlightenment movement had little success among the Chassidim).

**Our Story is About Rabbi Shlomo Faigen**

 Nothing is known of the fates of the others, except for one. His name was Rabbi Shlomo Faigen and our story is about him.

 The experience in Berlin awakened in him a desire to leave Judaism as well, but something told him not to give in. After all, he was an accomplished Talmudic scholar and had a bright future before him in the Orthodox world and …. Maybe G-d does exist and the Torah is true!

So he lived in a limbo world of doubt and indecision.

 He settled in Germany and made a living as a businessman; buying large quantities of goods in Leipzig and selling elsewhere. And eventually in his travels he passed through the city of Liozne home of the Chabad Chassidim and their leader Rabbi Shneur Zalman (where his friend Moshe Mizlish was).

 Here, unlike the cold academic atmosphere of Vilna where he originated, the spirit was warm and alive. The Rebbe gave deep, intimate discourses to his followers who, besides being awesome scholars and G-d fearing Jews had an interesting ‘custom’; Occasionally they would make informal meetings called 'farbringens' where they would sit together, drink vodka, sing Chassidic songs ('nigunim') and speak about love of G-d, the Torah and every being.

**Called in by the Rebbe**

**For a Special Mission**

 He felt his soul opening to a new world of joy and meaning, maybe here he could ignore his urges and doubts? One day the Rebbe called him to his office and gave him a mission.

 "Shlomo, you used to be a businessman, right? Well, if you ever decide to do business again and return to Leipzig please stop in the city of Karlin on the way and say hello to the great Rabbi Shlomo there for me."

 Sure enough a week later our hero suddenly had an urge to make a business trip to replenish his funds. He packed his bags, got the Rebbe's blessing and on the way he stopped at Karlin to see the Karlin Rebbe.

 He arrived at the Synagogue, told one of the Chassidim there he had a greeting to deliver from the Rebbe of Chabad and was given a chair in the hall near the Rebbe of Karlin’s door to sit and wait until the Rebbe invited him in.

**Suddenly the Strangest**

**Thing Happened**

 He sat there alone for five or ten minutes in silence when suddenly the strangest thing happened.

 From within the Rebbe's room he heard pacing. Someone in there was racing back and forth in frenzy. Chairs were being pushed aside and things fell to the ground. Suddenly the door opened, it was the holy Rebbe Shlomo, eyes almost bolting out of their sockets. He stared wildly at the young man shook his head slowly up and down and said,

 "Maybe after all G-d does exist?"

 He abruptly pulled his head back, slammed the door shut and resumed his furious pacing back and forth like a madman until again the door burst open and the Rebbe again stared out and said:

 "Perhaps it's true?" Perhaps there really is G-d?"

 As if it wasn't enough, the scene repeated itself yet a third time,

 "Maybe after all G-d exists?"

 The young man didn't really understand what was going on but he realized that he couldn't take much more of this. He stood up, brushed himself off and left, completely forgetting the incident.

**The Rebbe Noticed a Strange**

**Scoffing Smile on Shlomo’s Lips**

 One evening a few weeks later, after he returned to Liozne, the Rebbe of Chabad was explaining some mystical aspects of washing one's hands before eating when he noticed a strange scoffing smile on young Shlomo's lips and he commented

 "He has a worm eating at his soul".

 A few days later Shlomo abruptly left.

 Years passed. Rebbe Shneur Zalman passed away while fleeing the advancing armies of Napoleon and was buried in a small town called Haditch while Shlomo succumbed to his doubts, changed his religion and name and disappeared.

 Years passed. As fate would have it, the Czar decided to build a new cross-country highway that the Chassidim discovered was to run through the very resting place of the Rebbe in Haditch. What could they do? To move the Rebbe was out the question. Their only chance was to appeal to the Minister of Transportation.

**The Minister of Transportation**

**Was None Other than Shlomo**

 But after a thorough investigation they discovered that the Minister of Transportation was none other than …. Shlomo (now Stephan) the apostate! He had risen in the political spectrum until he was chosen to be a high Minister in the Czar's government with massive headquarters in St. Petersburg It was one in a million that he would help them …… but he was the only straw to clutch at.

 Rabbi Moshe Valinker, who had befriended Shlomo in the old days, was chosen and several days later he was sitting in the ornate waiting room outside the Minister's office.

 His name was called. He was escorted into the Minister's office. The minister was sitting at his desk elegantly dressed, clean shaven with a well groomed mustache. "What do you want?" He said coldly and officially.

 Rav Moshe leaned forward and told the story of the Rebbe's passing and the problem of the proposed highway.

 "Aha!" Said the Minister. "Yes, I understand. You want me to divert the road, do you? Well, there is something I want from you as well."

 He rang a small bell on his desk, a secretary entered with a serving tray covered with a silver cover. Rab Moshe was afraid that the Minister would ask him to eat not-kosher food.

**Waited for the Secretary to Leave**

 But the Minister waited for the secretary to leave, opened the cover and revealed a bottle of vodka, two cups and two small plates of herring and pickles.

 He looked at Rab Moshe warmly and said. "The words I heard at the home of the Karliner Rebbe 'Maybe there is a G-d after all' echo in my head constantly and they make me long for the days I spent by your Rebbe. Please, do me a favor. Let us make a Farbringen like in the old days."

 He then took out a large map, obviously that of the new road, erased the line that went through Haditch where the Rebbe’s grave was, and moved it so it went around the town. Then poured two cups and said, "Nu, Rab Moshe, make a le'chaim."

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

**A Slice of Life**

**Finding our Heritage**

**By Kirk Douglas**

*Editor’s Note: At Los Angeles' Synagogue for the Performing Arts, Kirk Douglas delivered the following talk:*

 When I was a poor kid growing up in Amsterdam, New York, I was pretty good in cheder, so the Jews of our community thought they would do a wonderful thing and collect enough money to send me to a yeshiva to become a rabbi. It scared me, because I didn't want to become a rabbi. I wanted to be an actor. I had to work hard to get out of it.

 But it took me a long time to learn that you didn't have to be a rabbi to be a Jew.

 You see, when I was fourteen, I got frightened by the story of Abraham and Isaac: G-d orders Abraham to go up on the mountain and sacrifice his son, Isaac.

 I remember the picture in my Hebrew school book.

**That Frightened Little Boy**

**Looked an Awful Lot Like Me**

 Abraham with a long beard; one outstretched hand holding a large knife, and the other -- a frightened little boy. And that kid looked an awful lot like me. A hovering angel was having a hard time restraining Abraham.

 How could the angel convince Abraham that G-d was only testing him? That picture stayed in my mind for a long time as I drifted away from Judaism.

 I grew up, went to college, but my Judaism stayed stuck in a fourteen year-old boy's Hebrew school book.

 It has been pointed out to me that no rational adult would make a business decision based on what they knew when they were fourteen. You wouldn't decide who to marry based on what you knew about love and relationships when you were fourteen. But many of us seem satisfied to dismiss religion based on what we learned at fourteen, and I was one of those people.

**“I Was Always Proud to Be a Jew”**

 Of course, I was always proud to be a Jew, even though it would have been easier for me not to be.

 Although I felt drawn to the mystery of Judaism, other aspects pushed me away: What did I have in common with those black-hatted bearded men with their long peyot?

 But as time went on and I got older, I began to change.

 The catalyst was my son Michael. One day he asked me: "Dad, where did my grandfather come from?"

 That question startled me. I wasn't sure. I knew he came from Russia, from some place called Mogilev.

 And then Michael asked another question: "Where did your grandfather come from?"

 I suddenly realized how little I knew about my background.

 Anyone who could tell me was long dead. I had no ancestors. This thought depressed me. It haunted me. I had no ancestors! Can a man know who he truly is, if he doesn't know who his ancestors were?

**Inspired by the Marc Chagall Lithographs**

 I was lying in my room pondering this question for the umpteenth time, when I happened to look up over my bed. There on the wall hangs my collection of Chagall lithographs, his Bible series. And then it hit me.

Here were my ancestors!

 And what a famous group -- Moses, Abraham, Jacob, and so many others! I began to read about them, and the more I read, the happier I felt.

 I was very grateful to Chagall for reminding me what an incredible lineage I had. Then I found out that Chagall, a Russian Jew, came from Vitebsk, a town not far from my parents' hometown of Mogilev, in White Russia.

 The more I studied Jewish history, the more it fascinated me.

 How did we survive?

 Lost in different parts of the world, among strange cultures -- constantly persecuted. But our tormentors rose and fell, and we still hung on. The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, all are long gone yet we remain, despite all the persecution.

**“We Should Thank Those Pious Black-Hatted,**

**Bearded Jews with Their Long Peyot for**

**Keeping Judaism Alive for So Long**

 And that is when I started to think that we should thank those pious, black-hatted, bearded Jews with their long peyot -- for keeping Judaism alive for so long.

 They understood something very deep that we more secular types never learned or forgot if we did. G-d gave us the Torah -- and that made us the conscience of the world.

 Throughout my life, when I was moving farther and farther from Judaism, I always clung to a single thread -- Yom Kippur. On that one day I fasted. I might be shooting it out with Burt Lancaster or John Wayne, or battling Laurence Olivier and his `Romans,' but I always fasted.

 Two years ago, I went with my son Eric, who is a stand-up comedian, to the Yom Kippur service at the Comedy Club on Sunset Boulevard. This year, I spent Yom Kippur at a synagogue in Paris.

 On one of my recent trips to Israel I took a walk through the Western Wall tunnel along the foundations of the Temple Mount, which takes you deep underneath the Moslem Quarter.

 As I slowly walked along, following my guide, I let my fingers caress the huge stones that enclose the Mount where the Temple once stood. And then we stopped. My guide spoke softly: "This is rock of Mount Moriah."

 I looked at this rough stone. "Mount Moriah?" I asked. "You mean..." She finished it for me. "Yes, this is where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed."

 The picture from my Hebrew school book flashed into my mind.

 But it no longer frightened me.

**The Lesson of Mount Moriah**

 I had learned that Abraham lived at a time when sacrificing your son to idols was common practice.

 The lesson of Mount Moriah was that G-d does not want human sacrifice. It was very quiet in the tunnel, dimly lit, cool.

 My guide's voice was barely above a whisper. "This is where it all started." I couldn't speak. She was right. This place represented the beginning of my doubts. And at long last, the end of them. Here, in the dark tunnel, touching the rock of Mount Moriah, I grew up.

 I felt that I had come home. And yet I knew that my journey is not over. I still have a long way to go. Judaism is a lifetime of learning and I've just started. I hope it's not too late. If G-d is patient, maybe He'll give me enough time to learn the things I need to know to understand what it is that makes us Jews the conscience of the world.

*Reprinted from the archives of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY – Issue #371 (Parshas Nasso 5755/1995.)*

**Thoughts that Count**

 Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "Thus shall you bless the children of Israel" (Numbers 6:23)

 Why does the portion of the Priestly Blessing follow that of the Nazarite? To teach us that just as the Nazir abstains from wine, so must the priest abstain before blessing the Jewish people.

*(Talmud, Taanit)*

 This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon... their charge shall be under the supervision of Itamar, son of Aaron the priest (Numbers 4:28)

 The name "Gershon" is derived from the word meaning "to expel," alluding to the expulsion of evil.

 "Itamar" is related to the word for speech, alluding to words of Torah. The juxtaposition of the two names teaches that speaking words of Torah severs evil from good and expels it.

*(Ohr HaTorah)*

*Reprinted from Issue 371 of “L’Chaim,” (Parshas Nasso 5755/1995.)*

My Interfaith Marriage

**By** [**Harold Berman**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48867652.html)

We fell in love. It didn’t matter that I was a New York Jew and she was a devout Christian who grew up on a farm.

 “If Gayle were interested in converting, then you’d have a chance. But as things stand now, it won’t work.” I walked out of the rabbi’s office, asking myself what I should do next.

 *It won’t work.*

 The rabbi’s three awful partin*g words were the only answer that came to me.*

 *It won’t work.*



**Harold Berman in the Air Force**

**Seemingly No Way Out**

 They replayed in my mind over and over. A dead end. No way out. My world – at least the one I had known for the past 11 years – seemed to be crashing down around me.

 This wasn’t supposed to happen. When I first met Gayle, I never would have imagined I’d be meeting with an Orthodox rabbi, asking him how I might become an observant Jew and raise a Jewish child. I was the one who went to synagogue twice a year, some years anyway. Lobster was one of my favorite foods.

 thought religion was something that was supposed to bring people together, not get in the way of a relationship. Sure, being Jewish was important to me. But what did that have to do with who I marry? If Gayle wasn’t Jewish, so what?

 Ok, so she was more than simply “not Jewish.” When we met, Gayle was quite the [devout Christian](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/A_Simple_Twist_of_Faith.html), a full-time Christian in fact. As the Minister of Music for a Texas mega-church, she stood in front of thousands of congregants every Sunday morning, and spent most of her waking hours during the week rehearsing the church’s 12 choirs and musical groups.

**Some Good Mutual Friends**

**Insisted on Setting Us Up**

 We fell in love, and suddenly it didn’t matter that I grew up in New York and she grew up on a farm near Peoria.

 She wouldn’t have gone out with me, except that some good mutual friends insisted on setting us up. Before we met, devout Christian that she was, she wasn’t planning on spending her life with a Jew.

 But we fell in love, and suddenly it didn’t matter that I grew up in New York and she grew up on a farm near Peoria. It didn’t matter that she was passionately committed to the church while I had a lukewarm relationship with Judaism. We were in love, and love conquers all, right?

 I sat on a bench outside the synagogue, trying to collect my thoughts. My mind drifted to our courtship those many years ago. As a favor to her, I had sung in her church choir one Sunday morning. While waiting just outside the church’s sanctuary for the service to begin, a friend of mine in the choir leaned over and said, “So tell me, what’s a nice Jewish boy like you doing in a place like this?” At the time, I laughed – almost uncontrollably.

**Now It Was More of a**

**Challenge than a Joke**

 Now it seemed more of a challenge than a joke.

 *Past is past,* I thought. There has to be a way around this. We have a young son. We decided we’d raise him as a Jew. Gayle’s not quite the devout Christian she used to be. At the church, she’s been connecting more and more to the music and less and less to the religion. And she was more than willing to raise our son Jewish. She just wasn’t sure she wanted to convert, that’s all.

 I sat on that bench a long time, thinking about all the other [intermarried](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48969651.html) couples I knew. Some were very happily married, deeply in love. And yet – there was almost always an unspoken chasm, a place in the deepest part of one’s soul where Jew could not follow non-Jew, and vice versa. My mind turned to a woman in Gayle’s church, married to a Jew. They loved each other very much. But the chasm was there, nonetheless. One day, she had confided to Gayle that there were times she found it hard that he couldn’t fully share in something that was such a deep part of her.

**Putting the Blame on G-d**

 I stood up and took a few steps from the bench, now a bit defiant. *Ok, G-d*, I thought. *This is Your fault. I was doing just fine, when I felt this kind of tap on the shoulder, nudging me to connect with You, pushing me to learn more about Judaism, putting me in certain situations where neither I, nor Gayle for that matter, felt satisfied in a less traditional setting where we might have fit in as an intermarried family.*

 *You’re the One who brought Orthodox Jews in my path, just at the time we were in the midst of adopting our son. You’re the One who put the idea in Gayle’s mind that we’d raise our son Jewish even as she continued directing the music for a church.*

“*For 11 years, I had no need for any of this. Why now? G-d, You got us into this mess. You need to get us out of it!*

 And He did.

 I had already been going to classes at [Aish](http://www.aish.com/) for a year, which happened to be just down the street from the synagogue whose rabbi had made things sound hopeless. Discovering the beauty and depth of Torah at those classes was part of the tap on the shoulder I had felt. Another part was meeting the several now-grown children of intermarried parents who attended those same classes, who felt like they were not fully in either camp, and had come to Aish to figure out where they belonged. Not what I wanted for our son, I had thought.

**Changes Can Happen “In the Blink of an Eye”**

 After my rant at G-d, I suddenly remembered something that Rabbi Turtletaub, one of the Aish rabbis, had said to me nearly six months before. That had been when the chasm had started to widen, when our hours of talking had gotten us far but not far enough, and we needed to find someone who might help us figure it all out.

 Rabbi Turtletaub met with each of us together, and then privately. He told me about other intermarried families he’d counseled, and how when the Jewish spouse became observant and the Christian spouse remained Christian, things often didn’t turn out so well. I had told him he wasn’t giving us much hope.



**Top: Harold and Gayle at the first wedding ceremony.**

**Bottom: The couple at their chuppah.**

 To my surprise, he insisted I shouldn’t give up hope at all. That after meeting Gayle, he had sensed something. And that, as the Jewish sages say, everything can change “in the blink of an eye.”

 I snapped out of my reverie and looked back at the bench. In the blink of an eye? Was I really going to wake up tomorrow and find everything changed? Yeah, right. Miracles might happen to other people – but to me? I remained skeptical. But a part of me silently hoped.

**An Inspiration from the Story of Joseph**

 A couple of months later, G-d tapped me on the shoulder again with the same message. Ever since the rabbi had told me “it won’t work,” I had stayed away from his synagogue. Then one Shabbat morning, for some reason, I felt I wanted to go. The Torah portion was from the story of Joseph. And sitting among hundreds of people, the rabbi’s words seemed tailored just for me.

 The rabbi described how, when Joseph is taken from jail, his prisoner clothes are exchanged for a new uniform, representing his dramatic change of status. The Torah describes Joseph being taken from his prison cell, where just a few moments before he seemed destined to reside permanently, by saying he was “rushed” to Pharaoh.

 Often, the rabbi explained, things are happening behind the scenes that aren’t apparent to us. And then – all of a sudden – things are “rushed,” things turn around completely. Joseph’s story shows us that no matter what things looked like yesterday, today can be different.

**I Just Knew Everything Was**

**Going to Turn Out OK**

 I thought to myself involuntarily, *Yes, Joseph’s whole world transformed, as Rabbi Turtletaub would say, ‘in the blink of an eye.’* And at that moment, I let go. I just knew. Everything was going to turn out ok. I didn’t know exactly how. But it didn’t matter how, because it would. I was sure of it.

 And things did start to change. Maybe not quite in the blink of an eye. But like pieces of a puzzle, everything started to come together. We started to go to an Orthodox synagogue together on Shabbat, just to see what it would be like. And there we found the most amazing people who met us where we were with warmth and kindness, and gently challenged us to reach higher.

 And miracles really did start to happen. We traveled to Israel with our son, who had become a sponge for all things Jewish. Now 4 ½ and still a pre-writer, he scribbled a “prayer” on a piece of paper and gently placed it in the crevices of the Western Wall. “What did you pray for,” I asked.

 In a voice full of confidence, he said, “I prayed that everyone should know that [Hashem is One](http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/Hear_O_Israel.html), and that there should be peace over Jerusalem.”

 The tap on the shoulder had become a warm embrace.

 There’s more to the story, much more. Enough to fill a book, which in fact we did. Our full journey, with all of the twists and turns, tears and laughter, heartbreak and triumph is set forth in our recently released book, *Doublelife: One Family, Two Faiths and a Journey of Hope*.

**Today We are a Jewish Family…**

**By Design and By Destiny**

 Today, we are a Jewish family – not by fate, but by choice, by design and by destiny.

 And although we can’t include the details of our entire journey here, the conclusion is not in doubt. Little by little, we continued to learn and grow and move closer to Judaism and to each other.

 Gayle and I drew inspiration from the stories we read of ministers, priests and others who had traveled from great spiritual distances to become Orthodox Jews. Gayle began to learn Hebrew and take classes at the Orthodox synagogue, which was becoming her spiritual home. One day, she realized that her only attachment to the church was performing music there. And so she stopped working at the church and found other outlets for her music.

**The More We Learned,**

**the More We Grew**

 And then one day, Gayle made the decision that she no longer wanted simply to do Jewish things, but to hear the call of Sinai, to be part of the Jewish people. And so she began to study intensively with a compassionate and caring rabbi. We moved to an Orthodox community where we could walk to synagogue on Shabbat. We continued to learn. And the more we learned, the more we grew. The more we embraced Judaism, the more it embraced us. “It won’t work” no longer applied to who we had become.

 And then one October Sunday morning, the moment finally arrived. Gayle emerged from the [mikveh](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/Mayim_Bialik_Mikvah_Connoisseur.html), and emerged as Avigail Shira bat Avraham.

 Today, there is no chasm, not even a hint of one. Today, we are a Jewish family – not by fate, but by choice, by design and by destiny.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com Harold Berman is the co-author of “*[*Doublelife: One Family, Two Faiths and a Journey of Hope*](http://www.amazon.com/Doublelife-Family-Faiths-Journey-Hope/dp/061572115X/friendsofaishat)*,” the first true-life account of “an intermarriage gone Jewish.” (available on* [*Amazon*](http://www.amazon.com/Doublelife-Family-Faiths-Journey-Hope/dp/061572115X/friendsofaishat) *and at* [*http://www.doublelifejourney.com*](http://www.doublelifejourney.com)*)*

**This Week in Jewish History**

Sivan 3

**David “Mickey” Marcus**

 Yahrtzeit of David "Mickey" Marcus (1902-1948), an American Jew who volunteered to fight for the Israeli army in the 1948 War of Independence.



**Colonel David Marcus**

 Marcus was a tough Brooklyn street kid who attended West Point and then law school. In World War II, Marcus rose to the rank of Colonel in the U.S. Army, where he helped draw up surrender terms for Italy and Germany. While serving in the occupation government in Berlin, he was responsible for clearing out the Nazi death camps, and then as chief of the War Crimes Division, where he helped arrange the Nuremberg trials.

**Volunteered to Help Defend Jewish Settlements in the Land of Israel**

 Seeing the Jewish suffering first-hand, Marcus became a committed Zionist, and in 1947 he volunteered to help secure the Jewish settlements which were under attack from hostile Arabs. Marcus designed a command structure for Israel's new army and wrote manuals to train it.

 His most famous achievement was ordering the construction of the "Burma Road," a winding mountainous path which allowed Jewish convoys to reach Jerusalem and relieve the Arab siege. Tragically, on the day that the war's cease-fire took effect, Marcus was mistakenly shot by a Jewish guard. His story became the subject of a movie, *Cast a Giant Shadow*, starring Kirk Douglas, John Wayne, Frank Sinatra and Yul Brynner.

**Love of the Land**

**The “Seven Species” – How They Represent Eretz Yisroel**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, Zt”l**

 “For the L-rd, your G-d, brings you to a good land a land of wheat and barley, of grape and fig and pomegranate; a land of oil-rich olive and sweet date.” (*Devarim* 8:7-8)

 This is how the Torah introduces the seven species of grain and fruit with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed. These species are mentioned in a number of places throughout Tanach. In many cases there is a comparison between them and our people to whom G-d gave this Land.

**Our Sages Saw Hints in**

**These Seven Species**

 Our Sages (*Mesechta Succah* 5b) even saw in these seven species hints to the various measurements of substance and time that play a crucial role in halachic matters.

 We pay special tribute to G-d after consuming any of these species by making a special blessing, different from the one we make after all other food and drink. Whether it is the *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals) we say after eating bread made from wheat or barley and their three sub-species, or the condensed version (*m’ein shalosh*) said after partaking of cake, wine or the rest of the species, we offer thanks to G-d not only for the food but also for the Land with which it is identified.

**Setting Apart the Land and People of**

**Israel from the Rest of the World**

 Regardless of whether these species grow in Eretz Yisrael or elsewhere, this special blessing is made simply because a species which is described in the Torah as one of the blessings of Eretz Yisrael sets it apart from everything else just as Torah sets the Land and the people apart from

the rest of the world.

 This is the ultimate expression of our people’s love of the Land.

*Reprinted from the Behar-Bechukosai email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

The Human Side of the Story

**Old Boots and New Ones**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**



**Rabbi Simcha Wasserman Rabbi Simcha Wasserman**

 Rabbi Simcha Wasserman was not only a great Torah educator and pioneer in Torah outreach, but also a bridge to the Torah legacy of pre-war Europe. He inspired his many disciples with stories about the Chafetz Chaim and his own great father, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, the Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshiva Baranovich who perished in the Holocaust.

 The following story about father and son is taken from “Reb Simcha Speaks” by Yaakov Branfman and Akiva Tatz (ArtScroll):

**Accompanying my Father to the Train Station**

 “Once my father *zt”l* had to travel from Baranovich and I was accompanying him to the station; we were walking together and I was carrying a small suitcase. He was wearing new boots that my mother had bought for him, which he had refused to wear until my mother gave away his very old and worn shoes to the girl who carried the water buckets through the snow, explaining to my father that the girl had no shoes and therefore needed them.

 ‘Only then had he agreed to wear the new ones. I could see that something was bothering him.

**Teaching His Son the Value of Time**

 ‘After a while he said, ‘These boots are bothering me.’ My father never spoke without a specific reason, so I knew that I was about to learn something. ‘What is bothering me is that they have laces, and I reckon that it is going to cost me half a minute a day to tie and untie them.’

 ‘He was teaching me the value of time.”

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