**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas shelach 5776**

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**Shabtai the “Nasty”**

**Butcher of Zlotchov**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Some 150 years ago in the Ukrainian city of Zlotchov the holy Rabbi and all the elders there were imprisoned, sentenced to death and were to be executed in a few days.

The name of the Rabbi was not given in the story but what was given is that his arrest was the last in a long series of difficulties he suffered since assuming his post.

In addition to the hunger, poverty and anti-Semitism that was the plight of all Ukrainian Jewry and the many troubles, sleepless nights and hectic days that are the plight of all Rabbis he had to suffer Shabtai the butcher.

First let's explain how and why the Rabbi was sitting in jail then we'll explain who Shabtai was. Czarist Russia was perhaps the most fanatically religious country that ever existed. The entire populace; every man woman and child without exception, including the king and all royalty was Russian Orthodox. The clergy had total control of the minds, souls and bodies of everyone except the Jews.

The stubborn Jews were the bone in the throat of the Church. No one succeeded in convincing this stiff necked people to accept the religion of the country. But Czar Nicolas thought he was different.

He instituted a cruel policy of kidnapping Jewish youth into the army where he reasoned that they could be re-educated. Bands of evil 'grabbers' (Chapers in Yiddish), most often Jews who knew the 'territory', would enter Jewish villages and towns and simply 'grab' children, often under the age of ten and 'sell' them to the army despite the wailing of their heartbroken parents. These children would often never be seen again and their parents were helpless to do anything about it.

But when a group of these 'grabbers' entered the town of Zlotchov it was different. Somehow as these invaders were forcing their way into a three story building a number of large, heavy objects got thrown off its roof onto their heads killing and wounding several of them and scaring away the rest.

But there was a price.

The next day a battalion of police invaded the town, arrested the Rabbi, put him in jail and threatened him with death if the identity of the murderers was not divulged.

The poor Rabbi! Everyone was heartbroken! He had suffered so much and now this.

All the Jews made a meeting to discuss what to do, but without the Rabbi there was no order or progress, in the confusion someone quipped quietly to the person standing next to him (but, unfortunately, loud enough for others to hear), "At least if the Rabbi gets killed he'll finally be rid of Shabtai!" Everyone around the joker smiled instinctively but then angrily told him to shut up.

Who was this Shabtai the butcher?

Shabtai was a huge, loudmouthed, coarse, fellow who also happened to be the town butcher and the richest Jew in Zlotchov. He lived in a mansion-like house and, despite his coarse nature, was also a shrewd businessman and a born politician who, because of his money and mouth, always had a group of followers that, together with him, transformed the Rabbi's life into hell on earth.

It seems that the Rabbi once reprimanded him about something, Shabtai got insulted and war was declared. He began scoffing and ridiculing the Rabbi loudly in public, often in his face: "the Rabbi's a snob, the Rabbi is nosey, the Rabbi is too short, too fat, too old, too bossy, too lenient, to strict, too weak, too inexperienced, selfish, stingy, cruel etc. etc. And so it was day after day without respite.

But suddenly, miraculously the Rabbi's luck changed, or so it seemed, for the better. One morning after the prayers Shabtai announced that Zlotchov was not for him and he was moving to the larger city of Brod.

The Rabbi couldn't believe his ears but when he saw ten wagons roll up to Shabtai's mansion, load them with everything in his house and then drive off into the horizon toward Brod, he said a prayer of thanks and was happy; G-d answered his prayers! Could it really be? Shabtai was gone!! Finally he would be rid of this uncouth troublemaker it was too good to be true!

Then, a few months later MORE good news: his holy teacher and mentor Rebbi Moshe Lev of Sassov was going to be his guest for Shabbat! What an honor! What a blessing!!

Little did he know that this was to become the biggest disappointment in his life!! It happened like this. When Shabbat arrived and a hundred people were seated around his table partaking of the Shabbat meal and listening to the Rebbe's holy words suddenly, entered none other than Shabtai the butcher with his two sons.

The Rabbi looked in horror as the Rebbe told those on either side of him to move, turned to Shabtai and asked him to be seated and, from then on the Rebbe gave the three intruders his undivided attention! He made sure they had wine, fish, meat and everything else they wanted and only then did he ask their permission to continue speaking.

The Rabbi wanted to cry, to scream out, to ask permission to throw Shabtai out, but before he could, something happened that almost made him faint. Shabtai turned to the Rebbe and in his typical gruff voice announced that now that he had moved to Brod he decided he didn't like it there and was considering moving back to Zlotchov. but he wanted the Rebbe's blessing for success before making a move.

Immediately the Rebbe became serious, took Shabtai's hand in his and said endearingly, "My friend, I advise you to return to Zlotchov" and then proceeded to bless him with success and riches in this world and the next.

The Rabbi was crushed. It couldn't be that his Rebbe was doing this! He certainly knew who this man was and he knew how much trouble he was makingso why was he blessing him?! And why didn't he at least tell him to stop terrorizing the Rabbi of Zlotchov?!

Shabtai just thanked the Rebbe, told his sons they were leaving, shot a sneering look at the Rabbi and left. And as soon as he did the Rebbe called our Rabbi, whispered something in his ear about Shabtai and Zlatchov needing each other and assured him that everything would be alright.

But it wasn't.

Shabtai moved back to Zlotchov, re-opened his butcher store, and in no time was back to making the poor Rabbi's life unbearable. Then, a month later the Rabbi was imprisoned.

That is why people chuckled when the fellow at the meeting said, "At least in heaven the Rabbi will be free from Shabtai."

But it wasn't funny. The days were ticking by. In just two days he and the elders would be executed. Three scaffolds had been built in the town square and it seemed there was no hope. The Jews all flocked to the Synagogue to read Psalms and pray to the Almighty for mercy, they needed a big miracle.

The sun shone brightly that morning in a cloudless blue sky. Already at sunrise several tens of people were milling around in the town square, inspecting the gallows from all sides and trying to talk with the police who were standing like statues there making sure no one came too close. By the time nine o'clock arrived the square was filled with almost one thousand bloodthirsty spectators waiting for the first of the doomed to be brought out.

But then someone came running and yelled some sort of news. He was all out of breath and it was hard to understand him at first but finally the message got out, "The Rabbi and the elders they all got released! They found the murderer!"

Was it true? Was it a miracle? The townspeople were disappointed that the Jews got free but on the other hand there would be entertainment someone was going to be hung.

Sure enough; at ten o'clock the real murderer was brought out with a cloth bag over his head, led up to the gallows and unceremoniously hung. But were there more? The crowd was impatient. The chief of police then got up on the gallows and announced. "That's it! There was only one. He gave a full detailed confession and. Well that's it! Now go home."

The next day one of the older members came into the synagogue as everyone was trying to figure out who the hooded man was and announced. The murderer was "Shabtai the Butcher!"

"What?!" Everyone said almost in unison. "Yep, it was him alright. He appeared in the police station and confessed. I heard the whole story from the chief. He said Shabtai told them that he really hated the Rabbi but couldn't let him die for a crime he didn't commit. He said that when he saw the 'Chapers' came to grab children he saw red, went up on the tallest building and threw the heaviest things he could find their heads. He didn't want them to get his sons. Then to prove his confession, that he did it all alone, he asked to be shown the heavy objects that killed the men and proceeded to lift them one at a time over his head and throw them quite a distance. He was the murderer for sure!"

So it ended up that Shabtai was a hero! He murdered the kidnappers, saved the children and even gave his life to save his sworn enemy the Rabbi.

But a few days later a frightening thing happened. Three young men appeared in town, went to the Rabbi's house and asked him if it was true that someone had been hung for what they did!!

It seems that they had been visiting in the town when the kidnappers invaded and being young and strong, decided to go up on that roof, throw rocks at them and kill them. Then they ran away and hid in the forest till now and weren't even aware that the Rabbi and the elders had been taken prisoner or that Shabtai had been killed in their place.

Now the Rabbi understood why his Rebbe told Shabtai to stay and why he whispered to him, "you'll see that Zlotchov needs Shabtai".

Shabtai was even more than a hero, he was a saint!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shelach 5776 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**An Egg that is Laid…**

Every Friday I prepare hard boiled eggs for the day seudah as I usually do, sometimes ordinary hard boiled eggs, sometimes eggs that I place in a bag and let cook overnight and they turn out brown.

This time when I began preparing the eggs, my little daughter approached and asked if I could make brown eggs this time, and I gladly agreed. However, my five-year-old son protested and asked that I make regular eggs…

I did not understand why he protested when he likes them both ways. To avoid an argument, I suggested to my son that I would one egg regular, white, in the refrigerator and the rest I would put into a bag to turn brown. He was pleased with the compromise and everything was fine.

On Shabbos morning my neighbor knocked on the door of my house, and said that he forgot to prepare eggs for Shabbos and asked if we had an extra one for him. I responded, gladly, but when he saw that the eggs were in a bag turning brown he changed his mind because he had a stringency upon himself regarding this.

I apologized when suddenly my five-year-old son asked me, “Why did you tell him that you only have eggs in a bag? You have one white egg in the refrigerator! Give him mine!!!” The boy himself went to the refrigerator and gave the egg to the neighbor who was quite pleased.

Reprinted from the Parshas Beha’aloscha 5776 email of Tiv Hakehillah.

**The Emunah and Bitachon**

**Of Reb Gad’l Eisner**

Reb Gad'l Eisner zt"l, the renowned mashgiach of Yeshivas Gur, suffered immensely during the Holocaust. He went through Auschwitz, but throughout this terrible ordeal he remained strong in his emunah.

He would often tell his students the tests he endured and how he remained strong with his emunah. One student asked him, "How did you remain faithful to our emunah even during these terrible times, and even after losing your only daughter at the hands of the reshaim?"

Reb Gad'l explained: "During the Holocaust, Hashem was very concealed; it was extremely hard to find Him. This is the reason so many people fell from their emunah. But I knew that Hashem was always with me, and therefore I never lost hope."

To demonstrate his point, Reb Gad'l took a bottle cap off the table, hid it in his hands, and asked the student, "If someone would come into this room, and seek the cap, will he find it?"

"No," the student replied, because it was concealed in his hand. Reb Gad'l explained that during the Holocaust, Hashem's presence was so concealed, that even those who looked for Him, had a hard time finding Him. That is the reason so many people fell from their emunah.

"Now I have another question for you," Reb Gad'l said. "If someone knows that I am holding the cap in my hands, would he search for it?"

The student replied that he wouldn’t search for it, because he knows where it is. Reb Gad'l explained that throughout the hardships of the war, he knew that Hashem was always with him and therefore his emunah remained strong. If he would search for Hashem, he may not have found Him, but he didn’t need to search for Hashem, because he knew that Hashem was always there.

Reb Gad'l gave his student another analogy, "If someone lost a diamond that is worth billions in a dark room, will he stop searching for it because it is dark and it is hard to find? Of course not! He will crawl on his hands and knees and scan the floor, until he finds it.

Similarly, when darkness covered the earth during the Holocaust, and it was hard to find Hashem, I knew that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was there. So I continued searching for Him, despite the difficulties and hardships."

Bitachon for all worries and concerns, people should remember that they have a Father in heaven that cares for them. He bestowed His kindness on them until now, and He will continue to do so. This is bitachon. When one has bitachon, he will be enveloped within Hashem's kindness, and good things will certainly happen to him.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Beha’alotcha email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts of Rabbi Elimelech Biderman as compiled by Rabbi Boruch Twersky.*

**Story #969**

**Chasidic Love for**

**The Land of Israel**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=00012Vk0:001NQa96000030i7&count=1466601850&randid=2063881177&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=2063881177)

At the expense of great travail and even life itself, many chasidic scholars and leaders sought to support The Land. Some even 'made *aliyah*' (moved to Israel) during the country's most tumultuous periods, while those who lived abroad dedicated their lives to raising funds for Jewish settlements within the Holy Land. Overall, the Land of Israel has always captured the heart of chasidism with an enduring love and enthusiasm.

Chasidic annals offer up quite a number of incredulous stories highlighting the holiness inherent in The Land.

**1)** One time a chasid came from Jerusalem to visit Lubavitch (a small town now in Smolensk Oblast, Russia, which served as the Chabad movement's headquarters for over a century). The third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (known as the *Tzemach Tzedek*), came to greet him wearing his Shabbat clothes out of respect for the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

**2)** A wealthy Jew from Ruzhin (Russia) once travelled to the Land of Israel for a visit. Upon his return, he sought an audience with the Rebbe of Ruzhin and complained that he didn't find the Holy Land to be an especially attractive place.

The Rebbe told him: "There was once a wealthy Jew who married off all his daughters to Torah scholars. However, he couldn't find a suitable groom for his oldest one and married her off to a simple tailor. Before her wedding, he told her to adorn herself to look pleasing for her soon-to-be husband. She said: 'For the tailor, I am attractive enough as I am.' So it is with the Land of Israel," said the Rebbe. "For those capable of appreciating her lofty degree of holiness, she is sufficiently adorned. However, for those immersed in materiality, she appears to them like any other land."

**3)** A similar story revolved around a Polish chasid who traveled to The Land and made his home in Jerusalem. After a period of time, he found he couldn't adjust to the conditions life in that city required, and he decided to make his way back to Poland. Before his departure, he wanted to first take leave from the *tzadik*, Rabbi Simcha-Bunim of Varki, who lived in Jerusalem. Upon hearing his reasons for wanting to leave, the tzadik groaned from the depths of his heart and said: "I feel a great deal of pity for you. Apparently, you were not pleasing to Jerusalem. If only this been the case, you would have found Jerusalem pleasing as well."

The Rebbe's words penetrated deeply on the Polish chasid and he decided to remain.

**4)** Shortly after the well-publicized *aliyah* of the *tzadik*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitepsk, who brought along with him a large contingent of chasidim, one chasid approached him and related the following: "I thought that by making *aliyah*, it would become easier to serve G-d. However, it is even more difficult now than it was while living outside of the Holy Land."

Rabbi Menachem Mendel answered: "Here you are mistaken. For you see, while you were living abroad, your divine service was tainted by pride. And because there was a vested interest in this service, you didn't feel the difficulties involved. But now that you are in the Holy Land, you have been brought automatically to a sense of self-nullification. You now therefore sense the lack of your own personal service as a direct result of being stripped of vested interests, and you suddenly feel the difficulty involved."

**5**) Upon the founding of Kfar Chabad Village outside of Tel Aviv, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (the Rebbe Rayatz), sent a special epistle to the Chassidim there. Among the ideas he mentioned was the following: "Divine Providence has brought you to 'A land upon which the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year' (Deut. 11:12). You are residing in the King's palace at every moment."

**6)** Rabbi Yehoshua from Kotna once traveled to the Land of Israel, and took in all the holiest sites amidst their destruction and desolation. When he returned, the inhabitants of his city arranged a large banquet in his honor, and asked him to describe his impressions. "As you are all well aware," Rabbi Yehoshua sighed, "the country still lies in desolation. However, there is one thing which is as fresh and vibrant as it was all the way back in the times of the Second Temple..." All those present strained to catch what the Rabbi would say next. "â€¦And that is unwarranted hatred. Alas, it is still in existence in full force."

In this regard, Rabbi Shneur-Zalman (the founder of Chabad Chassidut) issued a strict warning to be especially wary of unwarranted hatred in the Holy Land, as ever since the Second Temple's destruction, a spiritual impression had been left on the land, generating a tendency toward this destructive force.

***Source*:** Based on an article in Living Jewish #437, which was translated & adapted from *Sichat HaShevuah, Darchei HaChassidut*.

***Connection*:** Weekly Reading of *Shelach* - the love of The Land and its opposite.

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**One Good Deed Leads to Another…and Sometimes a Wedding**

**By Akiva Males**

As we drove back to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania from the wedding, my wife, Layala, and I felt giddy. On that November afternoon in 2015, we had attended the wedding of Margot and Josh in New York. Weddings are always uplifting, but this one was extra special. The relationship we share with Margot and Josh is unique, even though we met them for the first time at their wedding. Let me explain.

The night before Pesach of 2015, I had completed the search for *chametz* at my home, and as the rabbi of Kesher Israel Congregation (KI) in Harrisburg, was about to perform *bedikat chametz* there as well. My father, who was visiting for Pesach, decided to accompany me and we set off to KI, flashlights in hand.

After we inspected the chapel and main sanctuary, my father suggested we check a rarely used coatroom. Upon entering the room, my father pointed his flashlight at a backpack resting on a high shelf and asked me if I knew its owner. The knapsack held a digital camera, a small volume of *Mishnayot*, and several postcards sent from a “Margot Reinstein” to a “Josh Botwinick.” I left the backpack in the shul office, figuring I’d return it after Pesach. We went home and resumed preparations for the holiday.

When things calmed down after *yom tov*, I began thinking about reuniting that backpack with its owner. I assumed it belonged to Josh—after all, the postcards were mailed to him at Camp Stone in Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania. Each summer, a large group of campers from that camp stops at KI to *daven* and enjoy a catered dinner.

Josh must have been a counselor who accompanied his campers to KI the previous summer, and accidentally left his backpack behind. However, I only had Margot’s address on the postcard. The easiest way to reunite Josh and his knapsack was to mail it to Margot. I dropped the knapsack—along with an explanatory note—off at the post office, and forgot about it.

Several weeks later, I received a phone call from Margot, who could barely contain her excitement. She thanked me for sending the backpack, and told me there was more to the story. I apologized for not having noticed the knapsack sooner. That’s when Margot told me that she and Josh really appreciated the fact that it took three years for the bag to be found. (Turns out, the backpack had actually been on the shelf that long before I noticed it!)

Margot went on to share the most amazing chain of events. She and Josh had been dating one another while they were college undergraduates. For various reasons, they decided to break up right after the summer Josh had forgotten his backpack at KI. They went on to pursue their education and lost touch with one another. They began dating other people.

Then the knapsack arrived at Margot’s home. After reading my note, Margot contacted Josh for the first time in three years, and asked if he wanted to get together so she could return his backpack. Margot told me they met, spent a long time catching up, and had been dating steadily ever since.

Both she and Josh agreed that they had not been ready to get back together until then, and that nothing would have developed had Josh’s bag been found and returned to her at an earlier date. Margot told me that they had a strong feeling that a wedding was in their future—and if that should happen, I would definitely receive a*berachah* under their *chuppah*.

I listened in amazement, and wished them the clarity I knew they were praying for.

A few months later, Layala and I received a phone call from a just-engaged Margot and Josh who were bubbling with excitement. We were thrilled to wish them “mazal tov.” Of course, we responded in the affirmative when the wedding invitation arrived. And so there I was, a few months later, standing under Josh and Margot’s *chuppah*reciting the sixth of the *sheva berachot*. It felt surreal.

Could G-d have found a way to reunite Margot and Josh without our involvement? Of course, but we feel so privileged to have acted as His agents. While we’ll never know why G-d chose us to play a role in this wonderful story, one thought does come to mind.

[](https://www.ou.org/jewish_action/files/wedding-margot-josh-lasting-impressions-e1465559389245.jpg)

In *Pirkei Avot* (4:2) our Sages teach us, “*Mitzvah goreret mitzvah*”—one good deed leads to another. The commentaries explain that G-d blesses those who engage in good deeds with the ability to engage in even more. This story began with *bedikat chametz*, continued with *hashavat aveidah* and ended up with a radiant couple standing together under a*chuppah*. Who can predict what might result from any mitzvah we choose to perform?

*Rabbi Akiva Males served as rabbi of Kesher Israel Congregation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania from 2007 to 2016. Beginning in the summer of 2016, he will serve as rabbi of the Young Israel of Memphis.*

*Reprinted from the Summer 5776/2016 edition of Jewish Action, the Magazine of the Orthodox Union.*

**Thoughts that Count**

And we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes (Num. 13:2)

This statement was in itself one of the sins that the spies committed. They should not have concerned themselves with how they appeared to others. It was not enough that they felt as if they were as small as grasshoppers, they felt obliged to add that the giants agreed with them. *(Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk)*

*Reprinted from the Shelach 5775/2015 edition of “L’Chaim Weekly).*

**Middos**

**A Lesson from a Polish Prisoner**

**In a Brutal Siberian Prison**

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, zt”l, comments that it is important for us to always retain a focus on who we are, from whom we have descended, what we represent, and our future legacy. We must constantly infuse in our minds and in the minds of our children that we, the Jewish people, have a glorious past.

True, we have suffered persecution and misery, but we are still here, and our persecutors are not. They have been replaced with our present tormentors, but that is all a part of Hashem’s Divine Plan.

When we connect with our past, we should be filled with pride in filling the role that Hashem has chosen for us. Rav Galinsky relates a powerful story which left a lasting impression on him, and taught him a powerful lesson about how one can endure even under the most trying situations.

The episode took place in a Siberian slave labor camp where Rav Galinsky and so many others suffered unbearable pain and misery. After a full day’s work, the men would trudge back to their barracks to lay down on their wooden bunks and attempt to fall asleep.

Every night at approximately 2:00 AM, one of the Polish prisoners would arise from his ‘bed’ and remove a bag that was hidden underneath it. He would quickly take out what appeared to be some kind of a uniform, put it on, view himself in the mirror, and then quickly take it off, return it to the bag, and go back to sleep. This went on every night.

While Rav Galinsky was used to strange things occurring in prison, this man’s actions were very puzzling. Sleep was very important to the prisoner’s well-being. To force himself to arise in the middle of the night just to put on a suit seemed irrational. There had to be an explanation that would shed light on this man’s strange behavior.

One day, when they were alone, Rav Galinsky asked the man to explain what he was doing, and asked, “Why do you arise in the middle of the night to put on your suit and view yourself in the mirror? Do you not value your sleep?”

` The man replied, “Yes, Rabbi, my sleep is very important to me, but so are my sanity and dignity. Prior to being taken captive by our Russian tormentors, I was a distinguished general in the Polish army. I had the respect of thousands of soldiers. Suddenly, our army was vanquished and I became a prisoner. In my opinion, the degradation and mistreatment they subject us to is a greater danger than the physical blows they deal to us on an almost constant basis.

At all costs, I had to prevent them from getting into my mind and destroying it. Therefore, every night when everybody is fast asleep, I risk removing my general’s uniform which I was able to keep with me. I put on the uniform and look in the mirror, and for two minutes, I see before my eyes my true self, my prior position, and my status. I do not see a broken down, frail prisoner. I see a general in the Polish army! This is how I am able to maintain my sanity.”

Rav Galinsky says that this idea applies to us as well. We— the Jewish people— are the descendants of a noble lineage with a compelling legacy for the future. If we visualize ourselves in our true uniforms, a uniform which exemplifies the Jewish essence and spirit, we will be able to transcend the society in which we live!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Be’Halosocha 5776 email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Rabbi Takes Second**

**Place in ‘Chopped’**

**By Reuvena Leah Grodnitzkyh**

Chabad.Org

He wore a winning smile the entire time, even though he didn’t come away with first place and the $10,000 cash prize.

Rabbi Hanoch Hecht, 31, co-director of Chabad Dutchess-Rhinebeck Jewish Center in Upstate New York with his wife, Tzivie, recently participated as a contestant on the popular Food Network show “Chopped.”

In an episode titled “Leap of Faith,” he competed alongside three other clerics—a priest, a pastor and a nun—to prepare an appetizer, entree and dessert using secret basket ingredients revealed at the beginning of each round. The rounds were timed in increments of 20 minutes, 30 minutes and another 30 minutes, respectively.

The show (Season 28, Episode 13) aired on June 21 and will be rebroadcast on the Food Network. It’s also available on demand.

“The experience was phenomenal,” said Hecht, who had never seen the program prior to his involvement. “The producers were very accommodating and sensitive to my needs and requirements.”

Unlike the three other competitors, Hecht’s culinary participation was contingent on adherence to the Jewish dietary laws of kashrut. In fact, it was these laws that brought him to the show in the first place. From the time he moved to Rhinebeck 10 years ago, Hecht has served as a guest lecturer at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in Hyde Park, N.Y., teaching students the biblical, rabbinic and practical aspects of kosher cooking for their futures as chefs, bakers and other related careers in the food industry.

Even though Hecht’s lectures only teach about food rather than actually prepare it, it was one of the CIA’s professional chefs that nominated him to appear on the popular “Chopped” program.

“I’ve always enjoyed cooking, but I’m by no means professional,” says the rabbi. “So before I appeared on the show, some of the chefs at CIA coached me and gave me lessons, sort of as a way of reciprocating the favor for my lecturing during these past years.”

In the laws of kashrut, however, Hecht is certainly well-versed.

“Being on this show emphasized to me how no other religion requires both the ingredients and food preparation to be within certain guidelines,” he explains. “The other contestants didn’t have the same restrictions that I had. The experience helped me to appreciate even more the responsibility and reward of keeping kosher.”

Throughout the cooking contest, Hecht peppered his comments with Yiddish terms, and even sang some lines from “Hava Negila” and “Hevenu Shalom Aleichem.” Most challenging for him was the fact that since the show’s kitchen was not kosher, he could not taste any of the food, at several points asking the pastor to sample the condiment levels in his culinary creations.



His first course—a salmon stew appetizer that included raw white honey and Ezekiel bread, a product containing millet, spelt, barley and wheat—was well-received by the judges. His entree, a Lebanese-style lamb-and-rice dish, was more uneven, though a jalape*ñ*o-based relish called “the rabbi’s heat” (often served at Shabbat and holiday meals, says Hecht) proved a hit. His most successful item of the day was dessert; from scratch, he made rugelach with a fig, macadamia nut and *hamantash* filling (*hamantaschen* being a basket ingredient), alongside a rainbow carrot *tzimmes* and fresh whipped cream—all nondairy since meat was served beforehand.

On the show, Hecht described the competition as “fierce,” even though a great deal of congeniality was exhibited among the competitors, with Sister Sara Marks noting that “we all come from different faith backgrounds and different experiences, and yet we all have G‑d in common.”

The judges were chefs and restaurateurs Alex Guarnaschelli, Marc Murphy and Geoffrey Zakarian.

As for interacting with the show’s host—cookbook author and longtime “foodie” Ted Allen—the rabbi replies that he was impressed by his Yiddish vernacular, and that Allen was “very respectful to kashrut.”

**Home Cooking**

Growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y., as one of 10 children, Hecht enjoyed helping his mother in the kitchen.

“It was a way of staying in my mother’s good graces and a practical way to help her,” he says with a laugh, “though she may not have appreciated it as much as I did because I probably didn’t clean up the mess I made when I was ‘helping’ her.”

In his own home in Rhinebeck—two hours north of New York City along the Hudson River—Hecht participates in the cooking for Shabbat and the holidays. His wife, Tzivie, plans the menus, and he makes sure to whip up a dish or two himself.

“From a spiritual perspective, the more preparation we have for Shabbat or holidays, the higher that it will be elevated to holiness,” says Hecht.

The cooking styles of the couple, who have five children, tend to balance each other out: The rabbi likes a lot of spice, while Tzivie prepares milder foods.

“I enjoy cooking fish dishes the most,” offers Hecht. “Though specifically not gefilte fish—not that there’s anything wrong with gefilte.”

For Hecht, participating in “Chopped” was more about education, rather than competition.

“I never had a great desire to compete. Instead, I saw the show as an opportunity to discuss the laws of kosher with millions of viewers,” he explains. “Eating kosher is a fundamental part of being Jewish, so I hope that the show will debunk some myths about kosher food and inspire Jews to learn more about it.”

If the rabbi—who comes from a long line of rabbis—had garnered first place, he was planning to donate the money to a charity established by his grandfather: the nondenominational Toys for Hospitalized Children.

“I did win,” he says at the end of the show. “The fact that I got to compete, the fact that I represented kosher in a dignified manner . . . I hope I made a true *Kiddish Hashem*, a true sanctification of G‑d’s name. So from that perspective, I did win.”

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**Thoughts that Count**

And it shall be to you for fringes, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the L-rd (Num. 15:39)

Rabbi Meir explained: The Torah uses the singular "it" rather than the plural "them" because it is referring here to the Divine Presence: "Whoever fulfills the commandment of tzitzit is considered to be greeting G-d's countenance." The "blue thread" resembles the sea, which resembles grass, which resembles the sky, which should remind the wearer of the Throne of Glory. *(Jerusalem Talmud, Brachot)*

Making a sign to remind oneself to do something is always helpful and appropriate. A person shouldn't rely on memory alone, regardless of whether the obligation is physical or spiritual. *(Peninei Torah)*

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