**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Shelach 5775**

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**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**A Defender of the Poor**

Rav Yom Tov Lipman Heller, the Tosfos Yom Tov, was born in Bavaria in 1579, and learned in the Yeshivah of the Maharal of Prague. It was the Maharal who encouraged him to write his landmark commentary on Mishnayos.

When the Tosfos Yom Tov was 18 years old, he was appointed to be a Dayan in the city of Prague, and then later on he became the Rav of Prague. He attempted to stop the corruption of the wealthy Jews who were unfairly putting the burden of paying the taxes on the poor people, but the wealthy businessmen sought revenge for this.

They reported the Tosfos Yom Tov to the church and falsely claimed that he had slandered Christianity, and he was promptly imprisoned in Vienna on the order of the Roman Emperor Ferdinand II, who would not tolerate any other religious beliefs. Despite the courageous and valiant defenses against the charges, the church convicted the Tosfos Yom Tov and sentenced him to death.

One day, the Tosfos Yom Tov’s son Shmuel was learning Torah under a tree in the forest when his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of an animal chasing its victim. He looked up and saw a large angry bull charging toward a young woman who was wrapped in a red shawl. The woman was so frightened she froze in her place. The young man jumped up, raced over to the woman, and grabbed her red shawl and threw it at the bull, saving her from the bull's horns while the bull thrashed and tore at the red cloth.

The woman was overcome with shock and Shmuel offered to escort her home. He was very surprised when he saw the woman’s upscale house and to learn that she was a Baroness. Her husband offered to pay Shmuel a nice reward but he refused to accept any money.

The Baron said to him, “I am very grateful to you for saving my wife’s life. If you ever need a favor, please don't hesitate to approach me, and I will be happy to help you, just as you were helpful to my wife.”

Shmuel considered the Baron’s promise and told him that his father was falsely imprisoned in jail and was sentenced to death, and asked if there was anything he could do to help.

The Baron, who had influence with the emperor, made immediate arrangements for the Tosfos Yom Tov to be released! It was due to this miraculous incident that the Tosfos Yom Tov was saved, and those people who had slandered him died shortly thereafter and so did their children

*Reprinted from the Parshas Nasso 5775 edition of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Kippah Quandary**

**By** [**Ross Hirschmann**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48865932.html)

**My landmark dilemma: Do I wear a kippah to the job interview or not?**



I have a confession: I wear a kippah. And not just in synagogue either. All the time. Even in social situations. I didn't used to. In fact, for the first 36 years of my life I *only* wore one in synagogue. And even that was a rarity.

The phenomenon of the switch from "no kippah" to "everyday kippah" is most indelibly recorded by the reactions you get from friends, family and co-workers. These reactions range from "Why are you wearing that? Is it some kind of Jewish holiday again?" to "He's such a fanatic!" to "He wears it to hide his bald spot!" (I only wish I had thought of that when my bald spot first appeared 15 years ago!)

But my favorite and most subtle reaction came from a colleague whose eyes would dart back and forth between my kippah and me about 50 times during a 5-minute conversation.

A landmark dilemma of newfound "kippahedness" comes when confronting your first new work situation wearing the "traditional Hebraic skullcap," as one co-worker deemed it. This involves meeting with someone outside your current company and thus, outside of the group who saw your slow transition from secular guy to religious guy, and who asked all the questions about your new practices and actually seemed interested in the answers. Now you are venturing beyond the safe zone, out into the final frontier.

For me, this "first contact" came while interviewing for a new job. What made it even more difficult was that it was a job I actually wanted! In other words, there was a lot at stake professionally. So, now I had to make a choice. One does not have to wear a kippah to work if it will prejudice his position in a negative way. So, I had an "out" if I wanted one. But should I take the out?

To kippah or not to kippah? That was the question.

Whenever I have these deep, moral questions, I always consult my wife. She's not just smarter and cuter than I am, she's a whole lot wiser. As usual, she had a brilliantly insightful response. "Well," she said, "if you're afraid that your new prospective boss may not like Jews or religious people in general, it's better to find out in the interview stage, rather than after you're working for them."

And with that, the decision was made. I would kippah.

**Testing the Field**

I arrived at the interview a few minutes early and went to the men's room to check my wardrobe. I looked pretty much the same as I had in all my other job interviews. Except for the circular addition atop my head. My kippah was clean and tasteful (I wouldn't be caught in public without a *tasteful* kippah!), but it was also a statement. A BIG statement. So standing there in the restroom, I hesitated for a moment and thought, "You can still take it off."

But then I realized that not wearing my kippah would be an even bigger statement. A statement about denial of who I am. A Jew. A religious Jew. So for me, going in without a kippah would be a statement that I am less-than-fully committed to those ideas around which I base my life. So, in I went – tasteful kippah and all.

The man who greeted me smiled and shook my hand. No eyes darting from my kippah to me, no jaw hanging down to the ground like in the cartoons. Just a nice "hello."

Early in the interview, he asked me, "What are you passionate about?"

"In business or in life in general?" I asked.

"Life in general," he replied.

I thought for a split second. Should I be really honest? Should I tell him what truly animates and motivates me in life? Or should I just give him the stock corporate answer that "a job well done and sacrifice for the company is what makes me tick"?

I opted for the former. I figured what the heck, he's already seen the kippah. Might as well be honest. Just go for it.

"My passions are G-d, family, community, and work. In that order."

I tried to soften the blow. "Probably not what a manager wants to hear! But don't misunderstand me. I work hard and take my job seriously. But it's a matter of priorities."

I looked for his response; any sign of shock or noticeable disappointment. I saw none. He simply smiled and continued the interview.

We really clicked and the rest of the interview went great. But I couldn't help wondering what he thought of my answer to that first question. At the end of the interview, he asked me if I had any questions for him.

"Just one," I said. "What are *you* passionate about in life?"

(When I later told my friends that I asked him that, they were as shocked as if I had asked him whether he wore boxers or briefs.)

"Well," he said smiling. "It's funny. As I listened to you answering that question, I felt as if I was hearing myself answer it."

I got the job shortly thereafter.

**Taking a Stand**

In the end, going to the interview with a kippah, and answering the questions in an honest-but-not-politically-correct way, was not a heroic act. My in-laws who survived the Nazi concentration camps, my father who flew over 50 combat missions during World War Two – they are the true heroes.

Still, what I did made a bold statement. I took a stand for something I believe in. It became clear to me that if I am only a religious Jew in private, then what, if anything, am I really? If I never take a stand on anything, then I really stand for nothing. Indeed, maybe because my kippah and my words evidenced that I *did* stand for something, I stood out from the other candidates and got the job.

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

**A Most Evil Poritz**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

In the days of the Third leader of Chabad, the Tzemach Tzedik (Rabbi Menachem Mendel 1789 –1866), the lands in Russia were controlled by the 'nobility'.

The town of Lubavitch happened to be under the jurisdiction of a particularly savage one; a 'Poritz' (Baron) that from time to time revealed a sadistic pleasure for inventing decrees on 'his' serfs… especially the Jewish ones.

The decrees would come like lighting on a clear day sometimes because he needed money, sometimes from boredom but most often from pure cruelty.

Of course all his serfs, Jew and gentile alike, hated and feared him and secretly hoped that he die and leave them alone permanently (although the other

Nobles weren't much better). But to even dream that he have a change of heart and treat them more kindly was out of the question.

Once it so happened that Poritz came out with a new or decree that was so severe that the gentiles went to the Chabad Chassidim and asked them to request their leader, the Tzemach Tzedik, to do something to help.

But as the Chassidim were preparing to visit the Rebbe, one of the Rebbe's most faithful Chassidim received a message from the Rebbe to come see him.

The Chassid entered the Rebbe's room and stood in awe before him waiting for the Rebbe to speak.

"Go to the Poritz ….. and tell him, in my name, 'It's time you changed!'"

The Chassid looked with disbelief at the Rebbe. Suddenly he felt faint. It was difficult for him to breathe, his knees began knocking and he felt dizzy.

Perhaps he had heard incorrectly. But no! It was no mistake!! Just the thought of the Poritz was overwhelming! The man was simply not human! To actually visit him would be suicide! Worse!!

"But Rebbe! How can …? That is…. There are guards… with dogs! … and more at the castle door!!!! I'll be killed before I ….!!!!"

But he knew that the Rebbe never made a mistake.

"Don't worry" The Tzemach Tzedik continued, "I will teach you special 'Name' (a Cabbalistic word) that will protect you from all evil. You have absolutely nothing to worry about.

The Rebbe taught the Chassid how to pronounce this word, what to think when he said it and finally, when he was sure that the Chassid knew it, told him to set off as soon as possible.

The Chassid returned home (for what he hoped would not be the last time) told his wife he would be gone for a day or so, kissed his children and set off in the direction of the Poritz's castle.

After an hour he began to see the huge building looming in the distance through the forest trees and mist and a cold fear filled his soul. His only hope was to muster up courage but as he came closer it didn't help. So he thought of the Rebbe's face and although he was still frightened he continued walking.

Suddenly he got a glimpse of the guards with their dogs. Thank G-d they were far away and he was downwind so the dogs didn't smell him. He stepped behind a tree, peeked out and said the 'name' the Rebbe taught him.

They came closer and closer, the dogs sniffing the ground before them. But they passed some fifty yards away and didn't notice him at all.

Nevertheless he wasn't taking any chances. He waited till they were sufficiently distant and again preceded to the castle, trying to be as quiet and quick as possible, saying the name over and over as he went and as he reached the steps before the massive castle door he said it with even more fervor.

Standing there at attention were two huge guards armed with spears and swords, each with a huge fierce dog at his side.

But strangely the guards suddenly turned to one another and began a lively conversation while the dogs just lay there panting as though they sensed nothing.

The Chassid stepped gingerly by them, pushed the door open and entered. There sitting on a plush chair, drinking a glass of vodka with a smoking cigar dangling from his fingertips and one foot on the table sat the dreaded Poritz.

He turned toward the door to see who entered.

"What the….! Who are you!! How did you get into my CASTLE?!!" He screamed with fury and disbelief as he rose to his feet and put his hand on the handle of his gun in his belt. But the Chassid, already accustomed to miracles, calmly straightened himself and said,

"My Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedik of Lubavitch, sent me. He told me to tell you that…." he cleared his throat and spoke slowly and clearly,

"It is time for you to change!"

It was as though someone threw a bucket of cold

water on the Poritz. He took one step back and his body shook as though awakened from a dream.

He lowered his head for an instant, then looked up deeply into the eyes of the Chassid and said ….. "Yes".

The Chassid, realizing his mission was complete, turned on his heels, again saying the 'name' the Rebbe had given him and walked quietly out the door past the guards and out of the Castle grounds.

Interestingly the instant he didn't need the name, it simply slipped his mind and no matter how he tried he could not remember even one letter of it!

Several months later a rumor had it that the Poritz went on a hunting excursion alone and his horse returned a few days later without him! A search was made with no results. All trace of him had been lost as though the ground had swallowed him up.

But the Chassid knew that it must have been because of the Rebbe's message to him. Probably a punishment for the suffering he had caused to other.

Months afterward a disheveled, long-haired beggar appeared in the town of Lubavitch from nowhere, sat in the shul (synagogue), opened a book of Psalms and didn't leave.

Someone got the idea of asking him if perhaps he knew the Poretz and what happened to him. The beggar answered that in fact he did know.

He was none other than … the evil Poritz himself! He told his story:

He had been born into a Jewish family but somewhere down the line had fallen into the hands of the Church and once in their clutches he not only changed his religion but transformed into a sworn anti-Semite. In time he rose in power and riches until he was virtually a king.

But when he heard the message the Chassid gave him it awakened his Jewish soul and he changed totally, like a man awakening from a dream!

When the elder Chassidim saw what happened they discussed it with the other followers of the Rebbe and decided to appeared as a group before the Rebbe and demand that he do the same miracle for them.

"If the Rebbe has the ability to completely change the stone-heart of the Poritz… then, please, do the same with us! Open our hearts as well so we really have true love and fear of the Creator!!!"

The Rebbe heard their request and replied:

"When a shepherd tends his flocks he can't personally run after every animal that strays a bit. That would deplete all his energy. Rather he whistles and throws small stones or sends his dogs so they will return on their own. But if occasionally one sheep happens to fall into a deep pit then the shepherd has no other choice than to do the job himself. That is what I did with the Poritz.’

*Reprinted from the Pashas Nasso email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**A Rabbi Explains What It’s Like to Work**

**Inside a Maximum-Security Prison**

**By Menachem Posner**

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| The maximum-security prison houses as many as 2,500 inmates, including 34 on death row.The Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, where Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Perlstein has served as a chaplain since 2013 and as a volunteer since 2008. It houses as many as 2,500 inmates, including 34 on death row. |

*With his bright-orange beard and black-velvet kipah, Rabbi Avrohom YitzchokPerlstein, 33, is immediately recognizable among the staff and inmates at the Oregon State Penitentiary in the state capital of Salem, where has served as a chaplain since 2013 and as a volunteer since 2008.*

*The maximum-security prison houses as many as 2,500 inmates, including 34 on death row. Perlstein, co-director of the Chabad Jewish Center of Salem, Ore., describes some of his work both inside and outside the facility, and how Oregon works hard to affect change in those behind bars.*

**Q:** How did you originally get involved in prison chaplaincy, and what are your duties?

**A:** I began volunteering here as part of a release program that helped people along their way out of prison as they struggle to find their place in free society. When a chaplaincy position opened up here, people who had gotten to know me as a volunteer suggested that I apply. I joined two fellow chaplains, one of whom is Buddhist and the other Christian.

**Q:** What does a typical day of a prison chaplain look like?

**A:** For the most part, I spend a lot of time talking to people one-on-one. Since I am Jewish—and most of them are not—I don’t conjure up any negative associations some people may have with their personal experiences with organized religion. As a Chabad rabbi, I try to help them incorporate the principles of the Seven Noahide Laws into their lives.



*Perlstein, 33, spends a lot of time talking to people one-on-one. He also caters to their religious needs, including those in “special housing”: on death row and in mental-health facilities.*

A lot of what I try to impart is the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s [Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory] view of the world as a garden full of potential that we can make flourish with our actions. I try to help them stop living with guilt and allow themselves to live life in a positive way.

Of course, I also cater to their religious needs, including those in “special housing”: on death row and in mental-health facilities.

On death row, people have been waiting to die for over 20 years. They face death every day, and they need a human touch, someone to reach out to them as one human to another. In mental-health units, religion is often a difficult topic since it becomes maximized in the context of their illness. So I generally leave it alone and simply try to bring comfort to the human behind the glass.

**Q:** Do you always communicate through glass?

**A:** In special housing, yes, through glass or bars.

**Q:** Have you ever been afraid in the course of your work there?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Why not?

**A:** No one has ever threatened me. The bottom line is that many people here may have done something very wrong, but they are not essentially bad individuals. The way you treat them is how they treat you. If you walk around with a chip on your shoulder, that will be a problem. But when you show that you care, staff and adults in custody realize you are there to help. Who would want to start up with a chaplain who cares to help them? Obviously, I’m cognizant of the environment I’m in and don’t have my head in the sand, but this has been my experience.

**Q:** What kind of training did you receive to prepare for this kind of work?

**A:** There is the standard training every employee has here to become familiar with the universe of the Department of Corrections. But, believe it or not, the best training I got was my time in *yeshivah*. The ideals we learn in Chassidismabout personal responsibly to make the world a better place and the understanding that each person is a part of G-d are the ideals that I try to share. I simply try to take what I was given—caring teachers and a deep sense of community—and bring it here.

**Q:** I’ve heard that Oregon is a leader in how the prison system is run. In your opinion, how so?

**A:** Oregon has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the nation, approximately 28 percent. This is largely attributed to a multipronged effort to help people in the penal system gain accountability, dignity and skills that they can take with them when they leave.

As soon as they come in, they spend several weeks at intake, where they are tested to determine where they are socially, emotionally and educationally. A program is then tailored for each person to maximize his or her potential. Some people will be sent get a GED [General Educational Development], while others will go for an associate’s degree. One inmate might require help learning parenting or communication skills, while another might need help battling an addiction.

From the second they walk in, the system is focused on helping them walk out with something better.

On a cultural level, there is a movement to help them re-establish their personal dignity. For example, we don’t refer to the people here as “inmates” or “prisoners,” but as “adults in custody.” This helps them develop and maintain their dignity and stature as individuals with intrinsic self-worth.



The Perlstein family

**Q:** Prisons are often called breeding grounds for radical Islamic groups. Have you found that to be true?

**A:** Here in Oregon, I do not think that is the case. In fact, Muslims get a bad rap because people are so scared of them. The Muslim chaplains whom I know both here and in other states work very hard to counter hatred. They are very outspoken in their opposition to radicalism, and their voices are heard. Our main Islamic volunteer here is a very loving person who decries violence of any kind.

**Q:** Do you keep in touch with people once they are on the outside?

**A:** The Jewish ones, yes. In general, we try to connect people on their way out with community stakeholders who can help them acclimate to the outside world. For the Jewish people, I am that stakeholder, and there are a number of individuals I still keep in contact with, both in the state and beyond.

**Q:** How does this jibe with your work as co-director of Chabad of Salem?

**A:** The truth is that Chabad has benefited from it. We are a small community with very limited resources. Having a steady source of income for our family has allowed my wife and co-director, Fruma Ita, and me to concentrate our efforts and funding on programming without having to worry about the mortgage—a huge blessing in our lives and a boon for Chabad here.

It’s a challenge to find time for everything, and programming took a hit in the beginning, but it has allowed us to leap forward. I just work different hours. For example, yesterday I was in prison all day, came home to have dinner with a state senator who is Jewish and then went to a *shivah* house of mourning, where I had arranged prayer services with a *minyan* [the quorum of 10 Jewish men needed for public prayer].

I see my work here in prison as an extension of my mission as a Chabad rabbi. I’m really doing the same thing I do on the outside, sharing Torah and Judaism with others.

Sure, I’m busy, but I’m busy making the world a kinder, more G-dly place for all of His children.

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

**Rochelle Shoretz, Whose Cancer Battle Inspired Her Activism, Dies at 42**

**By** [**Gabrielle Birkner**](http://www.jta.org/author/gabrielle-birkner/)

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rochelle Shoretz was fond of saying, “There are no problems, only solutions.”

Her approach to life was not to dwell on bad news, but to channel the energy that friends described as boundless into somehow making things better. It’s what drove her to establish the national cancer organization[Sharsheret](http://www.sharsheret.org/) after she was first diagnosed with breast cancer at age 28.

On Sunday, Shoretz died of complications from the disease at her home in Teaneck, New Jersey. She was 42.

At the time of her initial diagnosis, she was an attorney and the mother of two young boys. While others might have been compelled to save their strength, Rochie, as friends and family called her, shared hers. She launched Sharsheret in 2001 while she was still undergoing chemotherapy.



**Rochelle Shoretz, founder and executive director of Sharsheret.**

**(photo credit:SHARSHERET)**

“When I was diagnosed, there were a lot of offers to help with meals and transport my kids, but I really wanted to speak to another young mom who was going to have to explain to her kids that she was going to lose her hair to chemo,” Shoretz [told JTA in 2003](http://www.jta.org/2003/08/03/life-religion/features/jewish-group-helps-breast-cancer-victims), describing Sharsheret’s origins.

The Teaneck-based nonprofit provides educational and support services to young Jewish women living with breast cancer and ovarian cancer — or are at heightened risks for those diseases, as many Jews of Ashkenazi descent are. One in 40 Ashkenazi Jews, both men and women, carry genetic mutations that increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, according to Sharsheret.

Shoretz beat cancer the first time around, but by 2009 the disease had returned and spread. Still, she pressed forward in her work and in her personal endeavors, participating in triathlons and half-marathons, even climbing Machu Picchu in Peru.

She was a doer, her colleagues said, realizing — especially after her cancer came back — that she had no time to waste.

“But at the same time, she would emphasize the need to literally block out time to think, to make sure what we are doing is right and everyone who connected to Sharsheret is important, is a link in the chain,” said Elana Silber, Sharsheret’s director of operations, eulogizing Shoretz at her funeral on Monday.

Sharsheret means “chain” in Hebrew. Shoretz was an Orthodox Jew.

Today, the organization Shoretz founded runs programs nationwide and has an annual budget of about $2.25 million, 16 staff members, and offices in Teaneck and Hollywood, Florida, Silber said. Sharsheret receives support from individual donors, family foundations and the pharmaceutical industry, and was recently awarded a $1.8 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control to increase access to its programming.

Sharsheret maintains a large peer network comprising Jewish women across the denominational spectrum; runs a genetics hotline for individuals and families to discuss their cancer risk; hosts webinars on topics ranging from clinical trials to managing relationships as a cancer survivor; and has programs for different cohorts, including parents of young children and women living with advanced metastatic breast cancer or recurrent ovarian cancer.

Silber said Sharsheret will continue the work that was so important to its founder.

“Rochelle was superhuman in so many ways — brilliant, visionary, motivating, passionate and compassionate,” Silber told JTA. “She was a hero for women and families, and everyone who came in touch with Rochie came in touch with the human side of her as well.”

Shoretz always had just the right words to express her gratitude, those who knew her said, and was able to find humor in even the darkest places. As a close friend, Deborah Leipzig, said, “We talked a lot about cancer, a lot about loss, and we laughed the entire time we were together.”

Born on July 27, 1972, Shoretz grew up in Brooklyn. She graduated from Barnard College and Columbia Law School, and in 1999 served as a clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She received a Joshua Venture Group fellowship for Jewish social entrepreneurs and served on the organization’s board. She also held a seat on the Federal Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women.

Shoretz, who was divorced, is survived by teenage sons Shlomo and Dovid Mirsky; her mother, Sherry Tenenbaum; her father, Morris Shoretz; five sisters and two brothers. She was a stepdaughter of Jeffrey Tenenbaum and Carol Ann Finkelstein.

*Reprinted from the JTA (Jewish Telegraph Agency) article published in the June 1, 2015 edition of the Jerusalem Post.*

**Houston Synagogue Reeling From ‘Over $1 Million’ in Flooding Damages**

**By Eliezer Sherman**

[](http://www.algemeiner.com/2015/06/02/houston-synagogue-reeling-from-over-1-million-in-flooding-damages/seats/)

**There was "over $1 million" in damages from recent Houston flooding at the United Orthodox Synagogues in Willow Meadows, said the synagogue's president. Photo: Courtesy**

The United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston is still reeling from last week’s devastating floods in the Houston area, with “over $1 million in damages.”

The synagogue, which houses a community of more than 350 families, suffered extensive damage to its main sanctuary, which was refurbished following the last Houston floods in 2001, synagogue President Max Reichenthal told the Algemeiner on Tuesday.

About half of the families in the community live within walking distance of the synagogue, in Houston’s southwestern Willow Meadows area. Reichenthal estimated that about 50% of the homes damaged in the area belonged to Jewish families, who chose the location for proximity to the synagogue.

He said the flooding wrecked about 30,000-35,000 square feet in the United Orthodox Synagogues’ complex, with “upwards of a million dollars” in damages, especially within the sanctuary. He said extensive damage was caused to the community’s library of prayer books and Bibles.

“We had a perfect storm, that’s what happened,” said Reichenthal. “It’s a formula, there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Though he said last week’s damage “appears to be the worst” in the synagogue’s history, it was not the first time the community has been met with such devastation.

“The first time wasn’t quite as bad,” said Reichenthal. “The second time in [Tropical Storm] Allison in 2001 was very bad. We had just redone, actually, the synagogue, and added a wing that was higher up.”

Though the community must cope with sporadic flooding, it is not prepared to move, especially as so many families have chosen to reside nearby, said Reichenthal.

The synagogue, which last Tuesday night “held a minyan once the waters went down,” also houses the Goldberg Montessori School. The congregation, presided over by Rabbi Barry Gelman, is nearly 50 years old.

Reichenthal said one positive aspect of the flooding was its ability to galvanize the “unification of the Jewish community in Houston and really all over.”

“We’ve had outpouring from as far as Sacramento to New Jersey. We’ve had kids coming in to help repair and to help pull things out of homes. Our high school kids are working every day,” he said.

“The key is coming together to try to do as much as they can before the rebuilding. We’ll rebuild and we’ll be stronger and we’re hoping to get support from outside the community as well,” he said, adding his thanks to the Houston chapters of Kollel, Young Israel and Chabad for supplying meals and manpower.

At least 31 people were killed as a result of flooding in Texas and Oklahoma when a slow-moving storm covered a wide area between the two states, dumping incredible precipitation. In Houston alone, firefighters performed some 500 rescue operations. Initial estimates say the flooding in Houston caused about $45 million in damages.

“When bad things happen, Jewish people come together. People that never come together, come together. Is that a good thing? It’s good and bad,” said Reichethnal.

*Reprinted from the June 3, 2015 website of Matzav.com Originally printed in the Algemeiner*

**Remembering Moses Samuels, the Man Who Preserved Jewry in Myanmar**

**By** [**Jonathan Zalman**](http://tabletmag.com/author/jonathan-zalman/)

***The third-generation caretaker of the country’s only synagogue and Jewish cemetery has died***



*(Photo courtesy of the Burmese Jewish Community; Sammy Samuels)*

In July 2002, New York *Times* journalist Seth Mydans [introduced](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/23/world/yangon-journal-burmese-jew-shoulders-burden-of-his-heritage.html) the only synagogue in Myanmar, which is located in Yangon, as a “well-kept, high-domed building whose brightly lighted chamber seems poised to welcome hundreds of worshipers but is now filled mostly by their ghosts.”

The temple is called Musmeah Yeshua, and “[lies](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/travel/08iht-travel9.3068059.html) nestled between Indian paint shops and Muslim traders on a small street near the city center.” The structure is nearly 120 years old, and at one point [had](http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/1.659206) 126 scrolls before World War II.

Nearby is a Jewish cemetery that’s becomes covered in lush vegetation, especially during monsoon season. Of the 600 tombs there, the oldest dates to 1876, “a time when Jewish merchants and traders in teak, cotton and rice were pouring into what was then Burma from Iraq, Iran, Europe and India.” And when the *Times* article was written in 2002, the most recent tomb dated to 1985, “when most of a population that once numbered more than 2,500 had already departed, many fleeing the Japanese during World War II and others leaving when their businesses were nationalized in the 1960s.”

But there are not many Jews left in Myanmar—in 2002 the *Times* estimated the number to be around 20. Yet for 35 years, Moses Samuels, who presided over the synagogue and the cemetery, like his father and grandfather before him, has made sure the Jewish population and spirit has remained a part of the Burmese cultural fabric, however small. Samuels died on Friday, May 29 after a battle with cancer. He was 65. He is survived by his wife, Nelly, daughters, Dina and Kaznah, and his son, Sammy, who released the following statement:

“For over 35 years he has been taken care [sic] of Yangon Synagogue and the Jewish community. And he made sure [of] keeping the Jewish Spirit alive in Myanmar. He is great person with very good heart. His legacy will continue to live in the hearts and minds of everyone who came across to know him. May Hashem [the Lord] bless his Soul.”

One of the more striking images of Moses Samuels, an Iraqi Jew, comes from Mydans’s[article](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/23/world/yangon-journal-burmese-jew-shoulders-burden-of-his-heritage.html), in which he describes the struggle to form a minyan, let alone house a rabbi:

It is rare that the synagogue gathers a minyan, the minimum of 10 male worshipers required for a service. On many Friday evenings, only two people come to observe the Sabbath — Moses and Sammy Samuels.

Because the father, whose family is from Iraq, cannot read Hebrew, it is the son — who studied for a year in Israel — who reads the prayers, his young voice speaking for all the generations of Jews who have lived and died here.

It is more than 30 years since the synagogue called Musmeah Yeshua — built in wood in 1854 and rebuilt in stone in 1896 — has had a rabbi.

About 10 years ago, Sammy and his father opened a tourism [company](http://www.myanmarshalom.com/home.html) called, Myanmar Shalom Travels. In 2006, AFP [wrote](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/travel/08iht-travel9.3068059.html) about their company in context:

Tourists used to flock to Myanmar, which is mostly Buddhist, but a repressive junta has led to a drastic fall in the number of visitors of any faith.

Members of the Jewish community are now taking steps to revive tourism to the site.

Moses Samuels and his son, Sammy Samuels, a graduate of Yeshiva University in New York, are among those who hope tourism will be a key to saving the community. Father and son have set up a travel company, Myanmar Shalom, which begins operating in November.

Now, Sammy Samuels—like his father before him, and his grandfather before him, and his great-grandfather before him— will continue to preserve Jewry in Myanmar.

In 2013, he [said](http://www.voanews.com/content/burma-synagogue-preserved-as-symbol-of-multireligious-past/1808760.html): “It is the main reason we stick here. We could have closed, we could have moved to other countries. I used to play around here, I had my bar mitzvah here, I had my Shabbat dinner here, I had, most importantly, my wedding here, and that was the first Chuppah in 27 years.”

*Reprinted from the June 2, 2015 email of Tablet Magazine.*

**Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages**

**The Importance of Joy**

A close student once observed his Rebbe, Rav Shlomo Freifeld, zt”l, putting on his Tefilin. After winding the Tefilin shel Yad around his arm, he stopped and closed his eyes, and was seemingly lost in thought. After a lengthy period of reflection, he continued and put on the Tefilin shel Rosh.

Later on, the student asked why he had delayed placing the Tefilin on his head.

Rav Shlomo related the story of the Gemara in Brachos, in which one Amorah asked of another why he was smiling, and he replied, “I am putting on Tefilin”.

Rav Shlomo explained, “The act of putting on Tefilin should fill the heart with joy. Today, I had difficulty feeling it, so I paused to reflect upon what was preventing me from feeling happy, and only once I felt the simcha shel mitzvah, the joy from the mitzvah, was I able to continue!” (The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Nasso 5775 edition of “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg*