**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Balak 5774**

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**A Slice of Life**

**Go Home David!**

**By Dr. David Nesenoff**



I had been a Conservative rabbi for 20 years, but each of us has our moment, or moments, when we evaluate life and ponder our purpose, when we ask ourselves those big questions: What do I really want to do? What is important to me? What will I accomplish in my future?

The Land of Israel was on my mind. My wife Nancy and I had recently returned from there and I wanted to do something for Israel. I decided to make video snippets of Jews talking about Israel. I would ask people, "Any comments on Israel?" And they would say how much they like the spirituality, or the falafel, or the archeology or the beaches. I would put these snippets on the Internet and the whole world would see that Israel is a beautiful place. All the ills and ill-wills against Israel would be readjusted.

**Broadcasting Prayer Services**

**To American Jewish Soldiers**

At the time, my website, RabbiLIVE.com was being used to broadcast prayer services for American Jewish soldiers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and on aircraft carriers... I figured I would post my Israel falafel videos there.

My son, Adam Natan, had a website of his own for teenagers to learn about and discuss Jewish topics. He is quite a remarkable young man. He had gone to Washington and streamed on his website the entire AIPAC pro-Israel conference by himself.

In May, Adam called up the White House and requested to attend the President's Chanuka celebration the following December. They asked him if he was confused. "Do you mean the upcoming Jewish heritage celebration?"

"Yes, the upcoming Jewish heritage celebration," he answered. The White House media office provided press credentials for Adam, his friend Daniel Landau and me.

**Driving to Washington to**

**Celebrate Jewish Heritage Month**

I drove to Washington to celebrate Jewish Heritage Month with two teenagers and the president. Maybe this would be a good place to find Jews to ask my "Any comments on Israel?" question.

On May 27, 2010, we attended President Obama's press conference in the East Room of the White House. The topic was the oil leak in the Gulf. After the press conference, we had an hour before the Jewish heritage celebration. We decided to leave the grounds of the White House for a little walk. As we headed for the gate, I noticed Helen Thomas walking toward us. I mentioned to the boys that she is one of the most famous reporters in the world. She had covered 10 U.S. presidents at the White House.

She was a journalist for 60 years, and I was a journalist for 60 seconds; I figured it was time we met. So we stopped and exchanged pleasantries. Although my cameras were in the White House, I had my small Flip video camera on me and I started filming. She looked directly into the lens and gave some rather gracious advice about journalism.

**“Any Comments on Israel”**

I was waiting until later in the day to shoot my Israel question at the guests of the Jewish celebration, but something made me fire one round a little early. "Any comments on Israel?"

Hashgacha pratit, Divine providence. The ultimate Creator of this story, and all stories, placed in my camera the snippet to aid my dear Israel and change my life. "Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine," she said.

I asked her, "Where should they go?"

"Home!"

"Where's home?" I asked.

"Poland and Germany."

Back home to Poland and Germany. I wish I could go back to my grandparents' town of Drobnin, where on a Friday evening the smell of challah no doubt permeated the town, and candles twinkled in the window of every home. But not one shtetl, not one candle, not one Jew is there. They're all gone. The anti-Semites erased them.

I wanted to post the video immediately on my website. But even if you are a billionaire CEO you need a 15-year-old to figure out how to put something on a website. I needed my son to post the video, and unfortunately he was tied up with final exams and Driver's Ed. An entire week went by, and the video remained in my camera.

**That Week Israel was in the Spotlight**

Divine providence. Something happened that week that brought Israel into the spotlight. On May 31, 2010, Israeli soldiers boarded a flotilla of boats that were bent on defying the Gaza Strip security blockade. The "peace activists" on one of the boats attached the Israelis with metal rods and knives. Several of the activists were shot.

The whole world was against Israel. Helen Thomas stood in the White House, near the president, in front of the international press corps, and said, "It was a deliberate massacre by Israel against peace activists on the high seas."

That night my son had some time. We posted the video at around 2 a.m. Friday morning. We forwarded it to some people, including Jewish blogger Jeff Dunetz.

After Shabbat I turned on the computer to see if anyone had looked at the video. There were over 700,000 views. By Sunday it was over a million.

At a time when the events of the flotilla fueled the foggy views of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic people, my video cleared the air. Helen Thomas resigned. She was banished from the White House; her name was removed from various awards throughout the country.

**Every Media Outlet in the**

**World was Converging on Me**

Every media outlet in the world converged on me. I received thousands of threatening hate emails as well. Law enforcement and private agencies got involved. Everyone wanted to know about the guy behind the camera.

Sitting at the computer in my son's room with the soccer ball wallpaper and the little desk, I was overwhelmed. I thought that this would be a good time for some Divine providence. The phone rang. It was Ari Fleischer, former president Bush's White House press secretary. He said that I should have a definitive message. It was important that I know what message I wanted to deliver to the world.

My son came home from school, and I told him that Ari Fleischer had called. My son said, "I know; I told him to call you." (Who is this kid?)

My son said, "You can speak to anyone in the world; who do you want me to call for advice to find out what our message is?" I thought for a moment and said one name. Sure enough, within minutes, my son handed me the phone to speak with Elie Wiesel.

**Asking Elie Wiesel What**

**My Message Should Be**

As per Ari's counsel, I asked, "Professor Wiesel, what is my message?" He said that he had read in the newspaper that I attend services at Chabad each morning, and he suggested that I should find out what the Rebbe would have wanted me to say.

I couldn't figure out what I was more confused and amazed about. The fact that Elie Wiesel was advising me to find out what the Lubavitcher Rebbe would have me say, or that Elie Wiesel was reading about where I pray.

I called my local Chabad rabbi, Chaim Grossbaum, and told him that Elie Wiesel had advised me to find out what the Rebbe would want me to say. "Okay, let's find out," he said without any hesitation.

We contacted Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, an emissary of the Rebbe, a renowned individual who has great knowledge of the Rebbe's teachings, and also has terrific insight into world politics and media. We asked him what he thought the Rebbe's message would be in this situation.

**The Difference Between**

**A Friend and One’s Child**

"If you have a friend and you don't see him for a little while, he is still your friend. But if you don't see him for 50 years, you can't be sure if he is still your friend," Rabbi Shemtov said. "If your child goes away for a little while, he is still your child; and if your child goes away for months or even years, he is still your child. And if, G-d forbid, you don't see your child for 50 years, he is still your child.

"We are not the friends of Israel. We are the Children of Israel. We were away for a few hundred years in Egypt, or a thousand years in Persia, Spain, or North America. We were away for a few years in Auschwitz. But we are still the Children of Israel.

"Israel and the Children of Israel are one. It doesn't matter where or when you are born and live, what language you speak or what century or era you come from; we are always the Children of Israel. We and Israel exist because of each other; G-d gave the Land to us. The Jew walking on the street in New York, whether or not he even knows or cares about Israel, is alive because of Israel, and Israel exists because of him."

**The Children of Israel and**

**The Land of Israel are One**

Two days later, I was on CNN's "Reliable Sources" with Howard Kurtz. I can't remember what he asked me, but I know the answer was that the Children of Israel and the Land of Israel are one, and that is what Helen Thomas and those who want to delegitimize Israel are denying.

I was asked to be the keynote speaker at Yale University's inaugural symposium on global anti-Semitism. The chairman of the symposium, Professor Charles Asher Small explained to the audience of professors from all over the world why I was the keynote speaker.

He said that he never watches television, but one day he was visiting his parents, and they happened to have on CNN's Reliable Sources. He heard me say that "the Children of Israel and the Land of Israel are one. They only exist because of each other; it is G-d-given." He said those words caused him to ask me to speak. He said those words needed to be heard at Yale University by all the assembled.

**Listening to Helen Thomas**

Helen Thomas said, "Go home," and I did. After being a Conservative rabbi for over 20 years, I traveled home to my roots. And so did my family. My son Adam studied at Chabad's Mayanot Yeshiva in Jerusalem, and he is currently studying at the Rabbinical College of America in New Jersey. On Sukkot he built sukkas in Guatemala; on Passover he conducted a Seder for Jews deep inside Cuba.

My daughter Shira studied at Machon Chana Women's Institute and then Beth Rivkah Seminary, both in Crown Heights. An accomplished dancer, she teaches dance to the daughters of the Rebbe's emissaries over the Internet. My wife and I are very proud of our children.

I not only went home; I went to hundreds of homes. I have spoken at hundreds of Chabad Houses throughout the world. I have been inspired and I have, thank G-d, inspired others as well. Each time I tell my story, I offer my conclusions about how to fight anti-Semitism. I tell my audiences that the way to fight anti-Jewish is by doing Jewish. Do Torah. Do Mitzvot. Do Shabbat. Do kosher. I know this is what the Rebbe would have wanted me to say.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY. Adapted from an article in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter.*

**Midrash and Talmud**

**The Wonder of G-d’s World**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

What a wonderful world the Almighty has created! The magnificent blue sky; the golden sun that shines its warmth and its health upon us; the great mountains that tower up to the Heavens, their snowcapped peaks glistening; the lovely lakes and lush green fields – all these things attest to the majesty and grandeur of the Holy One Blessed Be He.

Then, of course, there are the creatures that roam the face of this wonderful world. Each one, be he small or great, has a definite place on this earth and a specific reason for being.

What? You question this? Do you wonder at times what possible purpose some little insect might have for being? This is exactly the question that David HaMelech once asked. He, too, wondered about the need for a little spider in this world. He was soon to see, however, that there was a very good reason for her creation. Indeed, the answer was to save the life of the future King of Israel.

**David And Shaul**

Before David became king he was the greatest general in the army of Shaul HaMelech. No man fought more bravely, no soldier more courageously than the Sweet Singer of Israel.

One day, however, after returning from a great victory over the Pilishtim, David, Shaul and the returning armies were greeted by a joyous group who ran out to meet them with dances and songs. And to celebrate the victory, as they danced, they sang:

“Shaul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands.”

Shaul HaMelech was deeply insulted. The people considered David a better warrior than he! From that day on, his jealousy of the young David grew and grew until he decided that David posed a threat to the kingdom. He decided that David must die!

**David Flees**

David was forced to flee for his life and he escaped to the deserted Cave of Adullam. There he crept into the furthest, darkest corner and lay on his back weak and exhausted. Little did he know, however, that a spy for the king had seen him and at that very moment was hurrying to inform on him.

As David lay in the dark, damp cave, he saw a little spider crawling about. Even in his suffering and discomfort David did not stop reflecting upon the world and the Almighty.

“I wonder,” he thought, “why G-d created this ugly spider? What benefit does she offer the world that she should have merited being brought unto this earth?”

To his amazement, it was as if the spider had read his thoughts, for she said:

“Know you, David that nothing the Almighty ever made was created for naught.”

**To Help David**

“I know this, little spider,” replied David, “but I must confess that though there must be some reason for your spinning your countless webs, I cannot see it.”

“And yet there is, David. There is a very important reason as far as you are concerned.”

“What do you mean, little spider?”

“I mean that the Holy One, Blessed Be He has sent me to this cave to save you from the hands of Shaul.”

David could not refrain from laughing.

“The Almighty has sent you, little spider, to help me? Pardon me for doubting you but I need a great miracle now – lightning to strike the soldiers who pursue me – and not a little insect.”

“And yet,” insisted the spider, “you will see. I will be the one to save you.”

**The Web**

And so speaking, the spider crawled to the mouth of the cave and began to spin a web, cleverly and swiftly. David watched in fascination as the little spider spun her delicate threads. Little by little, the mouth of the cave began to be covered with the silky strands until soon it was completely covered.

Just then, David heard the tramp of many feet coming down the path leading to the cave.

“It is Shaul and his soldiers,” he cried in panic. “I must try to escape while there is yet time.”

“No, no,” cried the spider. “If you try to leave the cave you will surely be seen. You must stay here. Have faith and you will see that you will be saved.”

**Shaul Arrives**

David saw that he had no choice but to obey the advice of the spider and he lay huddled in fear as the soldiers reached the cave.

“The spy said that he saw David in the area of the cave. Let us enter and see if he is still inside.”

David shrank back, expecting the soldiers to enter momentarily. Suddenly, however, he heard the voice of Shaul HaMelech himself:

“No, it is impossible for David to have entered this cave. Behold the web that covers the entire mouth. Had David entered, he would surely have broken the web.”

To David’s amazed relief he heard the soldiers turn around and continue on their way.

“I am saved! I am saved, little spider,” he cried.

“Indeed, you are,” replied the little insect. “And do you know what it was that saved you?”

“Yes, yes. It was you and the magnificent web that you wove. Now I see what you meant. It is indeed true that the Almighty in His great wisdom created nothing for naught. All – even the tiniest insect has a reason for being and a place on earth.

*Reprinted from May 30, 2014 edition of The Jewish Press.*

**What I Learned from the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**By Rabbi Benjamin Blech**



**Out of the blue, the Rebbe summoned me. He wanted to send me on a challenging mission.**

Changing the course of Jewish history is a feat accomplished by but a few truly [remarkable giants](http://www.aish.com/rn/s/The_Greatness_of_Rabbi_Weinberg_ztl.html). To his hundreds of thousands of followers and to his admirers around the world, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, is considered to have been the most phenomenal Jewish personality of modern times. His “*shluchim*,” the messengers he appointed to serve Jews and Jewish communities in far-flung corners of the world desperately in need of spiritual guidance and the wherewithal to lead religiously observant lives, have helped immeasurably to revitalize post-Holocaust Jewry.

On the 20th anniversary of his death, a number of books have just recently appeared that describe in great detail the incredible scope of the Rebbe’s achievements. They make fascinating reading. But what I would wish to share with you is a personal experience that allowed me not only to recognize his greatness but to be granted an insight which changed my life.



**Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

The year was 1989. I had just been granted a sabbatical both from my congregation as well as my teaching position at Yeshiva University. My plan was to go to Israel, to learn and to write. I was totally unprepared for a call from the Lubavitch office telling me that the Rebbe wanted to meet with me privately to send me on a mission.

I had no previous relationship with Lubavitch. I couldn’t imagine what the Rebbe possibly had in mind for me. Perhaps, I thought, it was a case of mistaken identity. After all, I am clean-shaven, of knitted yarmulke headgear and modern garb, and hardly can be mistaken for a typical Hassid. “Are you sure you have the right number?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” they assured me, “we know everything about you. And the Rebbe does want to see you.”

So I went and what the Rebbe had in mind stunned me. It seemed far beyond my capabilities. But I was sufficiently in awe of his almost supernatural saintliness to agree without further question.

**“But are there religious Jews there?” The Rebbe just smiled, and then he added three words: “There will be.”**

I was to go, as per his instructions, to the Far East – to Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Bangkok and Tokyo. In all of these places his representatives would set up meeting places and arrange for people to come listen to me lecture on Jewish themes, to be educated and to be inspired.

I asked the obvious question. “But are there religious Jews there?” The Rebbe just smiled, and then he added three words: “There will be.”

What he taught me was the key to the entire success of his movement and his disciples. He explained to me that to be a good Jew means not only to have faith in G-d. At least as important is to have faith in fellow Jews.

We need to believe that within every Jew is a memory of that moment long ago at Sinai when the soul of every Jew was present and heard G-d give us the mission to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” We need to believe that the soul of [every Jew](http://www.aish.com/sp/ph/What-Is-a-Jew.html) feels its connection to the creator and craves to come closer to the Almighty, even more than the body desires physical sustenance. We need to believe that no Jew is ever lost if there is only someone who can help him find his way back to the inner longing of his *neshamah,* his soul.

**Being a good Jew means having faith in G-d – and faith in fellow Jews as well.**

In our generation there are more *baalei teshuvah*, returnees to Jewish tradition and observance, than at any other time in Jewish history. All because of those spiritual leaders whose faith in G-d was wedded to faith in those created in His image.

On a Mission

I went to all the places the Rebbe sent me. I was optimistic because the Rebbe told me it would be a mistake if I wasn’t. And thank G-d, because of my message – not because of me – I was successful in changing the lives of many who came to hear me and were searching for additional meaning in their lives.

When I returned I was given a message that the Rebbe wanted to see me once again. This time he wanted to give me a blessing. It was a moment I cherish to this day.

Part of the Rebbe’s greatness was that he did not judge me – or for that matter anyone else – by externals. He chose to judge people by their inner essence, by their spiritual connection to G-d, rather than by their outer appearance.

And that is a remarkable part of his legacy that all of us, whether we identify as his disciples or not, need to place in the forefront of our relationship with others. In a time of religious divisiveness that is all too often marked by hatred and unjustified animosity, we need to remind ourselves of the Torah’s profound truth that the Rebbe exemplified:

Every Jew, no matter how seemingly secular or far removed from G-d, has within him or her a spark of the Divine. All we need to do is to feed that flame and, like the bush in which G-d first appeared to Moses, it will burn so strongly with the fire of faith that it will never be consumed.

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

***Ask the Rabbi***

**How Do We Know**

**That G-d is Good?**

**Name@Withheld from Brooklyn, NY wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,

What biblical or philosophical proof is there that everything G-d does is for the good (gamzu l'tovah)?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Biblically, see the first chapter of Genesis, that all that G-d created was "very good." Thus, the entire world is good, even when we don't realize it. And Psalms 144 states: "G-d is good to all..." There are others.

Philosophically, the apparent existence of evil is in order to allow us free choice, to overcome evil and thus attain the ultimate good, which is the good of earning our reward, instead of having it handed to us for free.

Regarding our inability to understand suffering, imagine a little child at the dentist: All he knows is that the dentist is hurting him. Can the child understand that the dentist is actually a good man and is trying to save him from future pain? One day that child will thank the dentist.

This is a very short, condensed answer, and there is much more to be said on this subject.

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