**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Balak 5771**

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**Story #710**

**The Kiss and the Smile**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

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 Kivi Bernhard relates[square-bracketed explanations are the editor’s]:

 "It was 1982, and this was now my second Rosh Hashana that I would be traveling from South Africa as a teenage yeshiva student to spend with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Before I departed from Johannesburg, my father Rabbi Nachman Bernhard, [one of South Africa’s most important rabbis, a former guest-speaker at Ascent, and] who was a very close confidant of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, pulled me aside at the airport and shared the following with me:

**An Opportunity to Glean Gems of Judaism**

 “There are many rabbis, rabbeim, teachers, sages and mentors the world over. But Kivi, a Rebbe is an entirely different thing altogether. As you go now to be at the Rebbe for the Yomim Tovim [High Holidays] you have the opportunity to observe what a Jew is in its essence. Watch the Rebbe intently and study the details. You will glean gems of Judaism.”

 My father had given me a mission, not just an instruction, and I was now on my way. His words were almost prophetic, as the following small but profound encounter took place while I was privileged to be nearby the Rebbe.

**The Tradition of Distributing Lekach**

 There is a well-known tradition amongst Jews to share honey cake with one another the days before Rosh Hashana to induce a sentiment of sweetness as we head into the days of judgment. The day before Rosh Hashana [and before Yom Kippur] the Rebbe would distribute lekach [honey cake] and a short blessing for success, to many thousands of people for hours on end.

 For me, as a visitor to Crown Heights (the Rebbe’s headquarters), Brooklyn, this was a major opportunity to have some private time with the Rebbe, and I made sure to be there early and assume my place in line. I found myself behind a very nice man who was clearly of Sefardi tradition. We spoke awhile and he shared with me that he was a Yemenite Jew living in Brooklyn who made an effort to see the Rebbe of Lubavitch whenever possible. We stood on line for about an hour before finding ourselves in the Rebbe’s chambers about to receive lekach and a blessing from him.

**The Sefardi Custom of Kissing**

**The Hand of a Great Torah Sage**

 My new friend was now up and stood in front of the Rebbe. In keeping with his Sefardi tradition, he instinctively sought to take the Rebbe’s hand to kiss it (a well known practice among many Sefardi Jews when greeting a great Torah sage and personality).

 Suddenly however, my friend withdrew in response to verbal and some light physical pressure that was suddenly thrust on him from some of the young organizers that were helping out the Rebbe.

 They felt they were doing the Rebbe a big favor by zealously discouraging anything that was not in keeping with the Chabad tradition. Even though there were many occasions where Sefardi leaders and Jews did in fact kiss the Rebbe’s hand, it was not a custom of Chabad and might be seen as inappropriate amongst the passionate followers of the Rebbe.

**The Rebbe Extended His Right Hand**

 The Rebbe was clearly frustrated by this misplaced display of righteous fervor and the following fascinating and penetrating lesson unfolded. As this Sfardi man responded to the pressure and retracted his hands that had reached out to kiss the hand of the Rebbe (in an effort to simply behave like everyone else), the Rebbe engaged him with a penetrating look and said, “Nu?” The Rebbe himself then extended his right hand back to the man, who then took it and kissed it.

 The Rebbe then smiled at him, while all around registered what the Rebbe had just taught us. It was not only about the Rebbe insuring that another human being should not be embarrassed, but it was a critical message to validate the importance and bona-fide of a minhag klal Yisroel (established custom of the Jewish people), even though not the personal custom of the Rebbe or Chabad.

 This is why you see the Rebbe looking at the gentleman so intently while kissing his hand. The Rebbe wanted him to practice his tradition as a Sefardi Jew and to do so with joy, with passion and with completeness. A Jewish custom and tradition is a holy thing.



**Kivi Bernhard watching closely while awaiting his turn.**

 Through this encounter I had, the Rebbe certainly taught me, at least, that as we love our fellow Jews and draw them near, we must respect other Jewish traditions and practices, clearly understanding that they are not to become subject to our own personal interpretation or cultural whim and wham.

 My father was absolutely right: the essence of the Rebbe served to show us who we are as Jews, not just what to do as Jews.

**Seventeenth Yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

 Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an email received from the Avner Institute <Rebbebook@Gmail.com>.

 Connection: Seasonal - Seventeenth yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, may his merit and his prayers continue to protect us.

Biographical note: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (11 Nissan 1902 - 3 Tammuz 1994), became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, passed away in Brooklyn on 10 Shvat1950. He is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Jewish leader of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and

scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

 Rabbi Kivi Bernhard grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, and today is based in Atlanta, Georgia, A passionate Orthodox Jew, he has made that rare cross over into the eye of high profile corporate echelons across the globe, and does so with an extraordinary Jewish pride that has in fact become his signature. In 2010 was recognized by Meetings Magazine as a top ten platform speaker in the USA.

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Kivi Bernhard now

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed* [*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)[*ascent@ascentofsafed.com*](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000QjG0:001Di0iB00002fPy&count=1303909652&randid=994478574&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=994478574##)

**Golf for Life**

 Items that always seem to be available at garage and yard sales throughout the summer, or at any other time of year, are golf clubs. Whether the avid adolescent golfer is away at college or beyond, or Dad never really took to the new pastime, or Mom has perfected her stroke and game to the point where she needs better clubs, golf clubs can easily be purchased for the neophyte golfer.

 In keeping with the Baal Shem Tov's teaching that we can learn something to enhance our lives spiritually from everything we see and hear, even if you've only tried your skill with clubs and balls at the local mini-golf, there's a lot that can be learned from this mellow sport.

**Hold that Club Firmly with Both Hands**

 "Hold the club firmly with both hands," a seasoned golf expert will tell any newcomer to the game. Applied to Jewish living, this means that our approach to Torah and mitzvot (commandments) has to be firm, not wishy-washy or laissez faire. In addition, Torah teaches that "the right hand brings closer and the left hand pushes away." This means that our "hands-on" approach to Judaism has to include bringing that which is beneficial and positive into our lives while pushing away that which can be harmful or negative to Jewish living.

 In real golf (as opposed to miniature golf) you must complete all 18 holes as established by the course. Similarly, a set course has been established for us by the Torah, beginning with our daily routine and encompassing our entire lives.

**Train Ourselves to Thank G-d for**

**Giving Us Another Day of Life**

 When we get up in the morning, we train ourselves that our first conscious thought is to thank G-d for giving us another day of life. Throughout the day we have a sequence of activities and mitzvot that we fulfill up until the time we go to bed, following the declaration that we forgive all those who might have knowingly or unknowingly wronged us, after which we entrust our soul to G-d's safekeeping. Just as our day is ordered and sequential, so is our week, month, year, and entire the Jewish life-cycle.

 To truly hone our living skills (unlike when we putter around on a mini-golf course, where we can dodge the rules) we must follow the established progression of the Torah. And though the mitzvot are "written in stone" (at least the Ten Commandments, to be exact), Judaism allows for, acknowledges and even encourages individual expression and personal preferences within the established guidelines.

 Any golfer worth his tee will inform you that one of the main guidelines of the game is to keep your eye on the ball. In the big golf game of life, the ball is the goal. As long as we keep our eyes on the goal and know where we're going, it's hard to get off track.

**Our Goal is the Geula (Redemption)**

 Jewish teachings explain that our goal is the Geula (Redemption), at which time Moshiach will lead the Jewish people out of exile. No one knows which tiny mitzva-tap on the ball of exile will gently drop us into the final hole (perhaps numbered 18 for "chai-life," for with the Redemption we will experience life as G-d truly intended it to be). It might be your kind word, his extra charity, her heartfelt prayer, or my Shabbat candles. If we all try our best, very soon, we will get the ultimate hole in one.

Reprinted from this week’s issue of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

**Love of the Land**

**Room for Everyone**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 We pray daily for the return of all Jews to Eretz Yisrael. Is there really room in this country for so many people?

 The same question was put to Rabbi Chanina by a heathen skeptic who scoffed at the claim made by the Sages that millions of Jews once lived in just a portion of the Holy Land that appeared to him too small to hold so many. Eretz Yisrael, explained the Sage, is compared by the Prophet Yirmiyahu to a deer.

 When the skin of a deer is removed from its carcass it is impossible to once again have it envelop the deer’s flesh. Similarly, when Jews live in Eretz Yisrael the land expands to absorb them, but when they are in exile it contracts.

 The answer then is yes, there is room in Eretz Yisrael for every Jew.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Ohrnet, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine on the Internet (*[*www.ohr.edu*](http://www.ohr.edu)*).*

**Getting There**

**By Yanki Tauber**

 One day, a visitor arrived at the home of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch. The visitor was an old friend of Rabbi DovBer’s, who had studied with him in their youth.

 With great interest he observed the behavior of his former study partner, who had since become a follower of the founder of Chassidism, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, and had assumed the leadership of the chassidic community upon the latter’s passing.

**Amazed by the Large Amount**

**Of Time that Rabbi DovBer**

**Devoted to Praying**

 The visitor was particularly struck by the amount of time that the chassidic master devoted to his prayers. He himself was no stranger to reflective prayer: when he and Rabbi DovBer had studied together, they had pored over the mystical teachings of the Kabbalists, and would pray with the prescribed meditations, or *kavanot*, outlined in the writings of Kabbalah. But never in his experience had prayer warranted such long hours.

 “I don’t understand,” he said to Rabbi DovBer. “I, too, pray with all the *kavanot* of the mystics. But still, my prayers do not take nearly as much time as yours do.”

**The Visitor was A Dedicated Torah Scholar**

 Rabbi DovBer’s visitor was a dedicated scholar. His wife ran the family business so that he could devote all his time to Torah study. Only once a year was he forced to break from his studies for a few weeks: his wife would give him a list of the merchandise she needed, and he would travel to the fair in Leipzig to wheel and deal.

 “Listen,” said Rabbi DovBer to his visitor, “I have an idea for you. Why must you waste precious weeks of study every year? This year, sit at home. Envision the journey to Leipzig in your mind’s eye: picture every station along the way, every crossroads, every wayside inn. Then, imagine that you are at the fair, making your rounds at the booths. Call to mind the merchants that you deal with, reinvent the usual haggling and bargaining that follows. Now, load your imaginary purchases upon your imaginary cart and make the return journey. The entire operation should not take more than a couple of hours, and then you can return to your beloved books!”

**“But, I Need the Merchandise”**

 “That is all fine and well,” replied Rabbi DovBer’s friend, “but there remains one slight problem: I need the merchandise.”

 “The same is true with prayer and its *kavanot*,” said Rabbi DovBer. “To envision a particular attribute of G‑d in its prescribed section of the prayers, or to refer to a certain nuance of emotion in your heart at a particular passage, is all fine and well. But you see, I need the merchandise .

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Coat Merry-Go-Round**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 One of the beautiful features of religious communal life in Israel is the service provided by the used clothes centers popularly known as gemachim (GEMilAt CHassadim). These centers receive used clothes from local contributors and foreign charitable organizations and distribute them to needy families, or offer them for sale at token prices and then apply the income to other charitable projects.

 In their haste to clear their homes of long-unused clothes families sometimes mistakenly place an item that is currently in use into the packages they bring to centers. A woman recently called the Kiryat Mattersdorf, Jerusalem branch of the “Beged Yad Leyad” network of used clothes centers to report that she had mistakenly included her young daughter’s coat in the package she had brought there.

 She could not afford to buy a new coat and when informed by the center’s director that it was virtually impossible to locate her daughter’s coat in the mountains of clothes to be sorted, the distraught lady put in a request to buy a used girl’s coat if one turned up in the sorting process.

 It wasn’t long before such a coat became available and reached its happy customer. Then came another call from this lady to the director, laughingly informing her that the coat she received was exactly the one she had mistakenly given away!

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Ohrnet, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine on the Internet (www.ohr.edu).*

**Exile or Redemption is Determined by the Soul**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 This week’s Torah portion stars two evil anti-Semites; the king of Moav, Balak and the Midionite master of curses, Bilamwho, despite their hatred for each other were willing to unite in order to destroy the Jews (a la the U.N. today).

 And it almost worked. But for some unexplainable reason every time they tried, the greatest blessings possible came out; Moshiach.

 That’s right; the clearest and most optimistic prophesies regarding the Messiah came from the foul mouth of Bilam. The Rambam even quotes him as a basis of several criterion of Messiah.

**Moshiach will Bring World Peace,**

**Harmony, Prosperity, Blessing and Joy**

 According to Judaism, Moshiach is the goal of creation. He will bring world peace, harmony, prosperity, blessing and joy by inspiring all Jews to live according to the Torah (Seven Noahide Commandments for the gentiles). Exactly the opposite of everything that Bilam stood for.

 Why was Bilam chosen to prophesize his coming?

 In order to understand this here are two stories.

 The first is about Holy Rebbe of Kloisenberg; Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstram during the Holocaust.

 Rabbi Halberstram lost his wife, all his eleven children and over 250 members of his family to the Nazis but miraculously he was not killed. In fact he not only survived the camps, throughout the ocean of torture, disease and death he against all odds, remained a beacon of light and optimism for all those around him.

 One of those who he inspired was a Jew named Rabbi Aba Halperin. He too survived the holocaust and lived to tell the world how he personally saw the Rebbe save thousands of Jews from certain death.

 He and the Rebbe were two of a work force of 3,000 Jews that the Germans took from the death camp Birkinauin 1944 to clean the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. The work was backbreaking, almost non-stop and they were guarded closely lest they try to rest. Escape was out of the question.

**Forcing the Jewish Prisoners**

**To March in Lines of Three**

 Then, early one blisteringly hot summer morning, the Germans told all the workers to line up in rows of three and begin marching; they had to move fast.

 The Russians were closing in on Warsaw and the Germans didn't want to leave behind any evidence for them.

 The heat was unbearable, the Jews could barely stand no less walk but it made no difference to the Germans. Making progress and marching in line were their only interests. They had enough ammo and cold cruelty to kill everyone. Dogs and Nazis were barking everywhere.

**Anyone Who Stepped Out of Line**

**Was Immediately Shot to Death**

 Anyone that stepped out of line, even one step, was immediately shot. It was especially awful when they passed a river or a brook. The thirst was so intense that the sight of water simply drove some people crazy and, unable to hold themselves back, instinctively made a move toward the water and were instantly riddled with bullets before everyone.

 The Rebbe ordered all those around him to pass the word to all the Jews that no one was to step out of line for any reason and promised that there would be water.

**The Complaints and Thirst Became Unbearable**

 But when the second morning of marching arrived and water didn't arrive, the complaints, moaning and thirst became unbearable. Everyone felt it was better to die quickly from a gunshot then slowly and painfully from thirst. It was simply impossible to not to break ranks.

 The Rebbe said to pass the word that if everyone stays in line he promises that in the evening he personally will provide water for each and every Jew.

 Near sunset the Nazis told everyone to lie down in the road to sleep. It was impossible to march at night because it would be too easy for people to escape in the darkness, but there was no water.

 The people that the Rebbe told to spread the word came to him and demanded the miracle. "Where is the water?! People are dying! You said that we would have water!!'

 The Rebbe answered, "Each of you has a spoon, right? (the Germans gave each Jew a crude spoon to eat the 'soup' when apportioned). "Tell each person to take his spoon and dig in the ground where he is and they will find water."

 The road was totally dry surrounded by open fields and there was no trace of water as far as the eye could see. It was totally impossible that there would be water in this wasteland.

**Everyone’s Spoons Filled with Water**

 But each person lay on their sides, took out their spoons and lifelessly scraped the dirt where they were, and lo and behold, a miracle!! Each one found water! Everyone’s spoons filled with water! They were saved!

 Years later in Israel when the Rebbe spoke at the grand opening of the Kloisenburg Synagogue in Tel Aviv he told this story and then pointed to Rabbi Aba Halperin and added to the crowd, "And if you don't believe me you can ask Rabbi Aba - he was there." (Shaa Tova weekly magazine #309).

 The second story is about the first Prime Minister of Israel, Dovid Ben Gurion. In the true Zionist spirit he was an avowed atheist and had as little to do with Torah and its commandments as possible.

**A Story About David Ben Gurion**

 But once Rabbi Menachem Porush met with the Lubavitcher Rebbe and told him the following story.

 “Often, I had opportunities to discuss various topics with the founder of the modern State of Israel, Prime Minister [David] Ben Gurion. Having fought the many battles and survived the countless political deadlocks that had been necessary for the nascent nation to emerge, Ben Gurion was a fascinating person to speak to, his perspective of historical events unlike any other. During one of those conversations, I asked him:

**We Did Not Have Enough Guns**

 "Which would you say was the most difficult moment for you as a leader and politician, throughout your entire career?’

 “He immediately answered, ‘When we announced the establishment of the state of Israel, in the midst of chaotic battles waged on several fronts, we did not have the most vital of military equipment, guns,’

 "After endless agony, we were finally able to obtain a miniscule cache of guns, procured from a reluctant Russia. Incapable of supplying all the troops with proper artillery, I had to make a tortuous choice which of our valiant comrades, all contributing their entire energies to a venerable cause, should receive the goods.

 “Each commander, many of them close friends of mine, vying for his men, had his own reasoning why it was imperative that the guns be directed to them. My friends from the Galilee, locked in battle over strategic enemy positions, while outnumbered and understaffed, came to me and cried, 'While you sit here in safety, our best young men are falling, lacking the most basic weapons. Give us guns, so we can protect this land, or all will be lost.'

**Hagana Feared Losing**

**Control of Central Israel**

 "From Central Command in Tel Aviv, endeavoring to withhold hostile forces from completely overrunning the heart of the country, came the besieged Hagana leaders, who demanded, 'We must have more equipment; the majority of our civilian population are under incessant fire, and without stocking our depleted stockpiles, we will be compelled to surrender.'

 "Harassed and fatigued, the generals from the Negev arrived next, pleading for every morsel of warfare they could receive, 'If you don't supply us with adequate arms, we will be powerless against the armies invading the South, putting at risk all of the inhabitants of the land.'

**An Appeal to Save Jerusalem**

 "Finally, following these groups, a contingency appeared, representing the gallant but beleaguered soldiers defending the ancient capital, Jerusalem. Heads drooping on their tattered uniforms and shoulders slouching under the heavy weight of battle, they lifted their weary eyes and simply said, 'You must replenish our empty storehouses if we are to continue guarding our holy city. Although there may not be many Jews in the city, it is crucial to the future of the nation that it remain in our hands; for Jerusalem is the essential spirit and central organism of our people, and Israel having lost Jerusalem would be like a body without a head.'

**Allowed Emotional Instincts to**

**Overide Strategic Concerns**

 "I was faced with a moral quandary, and this was the toughest decision in my life; how can one make such a choice? Who is to decide which region is more vital and which people best deserve to live? His anguish inconceivable, a leader is forced to make such a judgment of one man over another. In the end, unable to reach a logical compromise, I allowed my emotional instincts to override strategic concerns; the argument about Jerusalem's centrality in Jewish religion and history prevailed, and I handed over the weapons to those guarding the city.’

 “Concluding this tale before the Rebbe, who had listened attentively to every detail, I observed how deeply moved, and even pleasantly shocked he seemed; apparently, finding it hard to believe Ben Gurion had behaved that way. Still coming to terms with the story and visibly impressed, he asked me with great feeling to repeat the entire incident.

 “At the end of the second time the Rebbe said:

 "This is a tremendous achievement, an incredible merit. I marvel how Ben Gurion acquired the great merit to make such a monumental decision."(Ascent of Safed, Story #709)

**Exile and Redemption is Not**

**Dependent on Where Our Bodies Are**

 Now we can answer our questions. Exile and redemption do not depend on where our bodies are but rather where our souls are. A Jew can be in a death-march like the Kloisenberger Rebbe and be in the redemption. Or in Israel like Ben Gurion, and be in Exile.

 It all depended on their free choice to be connected to the truth or not.

 And often what brings us to this choice is hardship.

 That is why the evil Bilam was the one who advertised Moshiach; because often only from the deepest darkness comes the greatest light. That’s what happened to Ben Gurionin our story; just as the Kloisenberger Rebbe brought water from arid land.

 One more good deed, word or even thought can transform all the darkness to light and reveal...**Moshiach NOW!**

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

**A Never Ending Story**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

 With Divine intervention ensuring that Balak the King of Moav would be governed by Murphy’s Law, everything that could go wrong for him went wrong.

 Balak, the King of Moav saw that the Jewish nation was camped near his land and he became frightened. He employed the greatest sorcerer of the generation, Bilaam, to curse the Children of Israel, but alas, Hashem ensured that all potential curses were turned into blessings. In one of the early attempts to curse the Jews, Bilaam erected seven altars with sacrifices. He set out to accomplish his mission but he failed. Instead of cursing the Jews, Bilaam blessed them and longed for their eternal fortune.

**Unable to Curse a People that G-d Has Not Cursed**

 “He declaimed his parable and said ­ ‘From Aram, Balak, king of Moab, led me, from the mountains of the east, 'Come curse Jacob for me, come bring anger upon Israel.' How can I curse? ­ G-d has not cursed. How can I anger? G-d is not angry. For from its origins, I see it rock-like, and from hills do I see it. Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations. Who has counted the dust of Jacob or numbered a quarter of Israel? May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!’" (Numbers 23:6-10)

 Though I am no expert in sorcerer’s spells or Bilaamic blessings, the juxtaposition is difficult to comprehend. Why did Bilaam suddenly ask to die the death of the upright after extolling the uniqueness of his adversaries, the Israelites? If he gave them blessings, why didn’t he ask to live in the bounty of their goodness?

 Last year my son was in fourth grade and had to do a report on President Abraham Lincoln. He did a fine job recounting his log-cabin childhood, his early career as an attorney, and his tumultuous presidency. He detailed the difficult period of the Civil War and Lincoln’s bold stance in signing the Emancipation Proclamation.

 I looked over his report and frankly, I was quite impressed — until I reached the last sentence. It read: “Abraham Lincoln died on Friday morning, April 15, 1865, and was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, outside Springfield, Illinois.”

**How Can You Ignore How Lincoln Died?**

 “Zvi,” I exclaimed, “Abraham Lincoln died on Friday morning?” I rhetorically reiterated, stressing the passivity of the underreported, yet most traumatic event. “Died?” I repeated. “He was shot to death! In fact, Lincoln was assassinated! In fact,” I added, “he was the first President to be assassinated! How can you ignore that significant part of his life in your report?”

 Zvi looked at me quizzically. “My report was on ‘the Life of Abraham Lincoln. Who cares how he died? He died!” Bilaam understood that death, too, is an integral part of life. Our attitude toward death is part of our larger attitude toward life. And the way we leave this world is part of a greater outlook of how we aspire to live our lives.

**A Former Yeshiva Boy Became an Army General**

 A neighbor of mine was a former Yeshiva boy back in the early 1920’s in one of America’s first yeshivas. Time and circumstances eroded both his practice and belief. He had joined the army and rose to the rank of a General. He and his wife often ate in our sukkah and we became quite friendly. When he was diagnosed with a fatal illness, he asked me to perform his funeral service in the right time. I agreed only if he would be buried in accordance with the halacha. And though in his life he disregarded the daily practices of an observant Jew, in death, he forewent burial in his his army uniform and instead chose traditional tachrichim (shrouds) and a talis.

 When one sees the ultimate spiritual eternity of the Jew, he realizes that death is just a portal to a greater world, Olam HaBah. Bilaam declared that we are a nation that dwells in solitude, and that our ways in life are not compatible with those nations who outnumber us. It is after he comprehended our eternity that he beseeched the Almighty with the haunting bequest, “May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!"

 The Chofetz Chaim, however, added a very cogent caveat: In asking for the death of the righteous, Bilaam understood that there is more to the legacy of life than life itself. And so, Bilaam wanted to live his perverted life as a hedonistic heretic, yet he wanted to die the death of the righteous. “Truth be told,” says the Chofetz Chaim, “our mission is not only to die the death of the upright, but to live the life of the upright as well.” Because if you want to sleep the sleep, you first have to walk the walk

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Shabbos Candle Lighting.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Indian Summer**

 In this week's portion Balak, we read about the attempts of the evil Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. When Bilaam opens his mouth intending to curse the Jewish people, Hashem causes Bilaam instead to utter praises of the Jewish people. In Bilaam's first "blessing" he says about the nation of Yisroel, "Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations." (Bamidbar 23,9)

 Liora and her brother, Ayal, filled their back packs with essentials, and took off from their native Israel for India. They traveled from one tourist attraction to the next, then split up to follow separate trails. Ayal stumbled upon [Arachim's](http://www.arachimusa.org/) Bayit Yehudi hostel. He enjoyed the hospitality and listened to some fascinating lectures. Drawn to the extensive library, he discovered new concepts that changed his life completely. There at the Bayit Yehudi in India, Ayal opted for a life of Torah and mitzvos.

**Liora Becomes Entranced**

**By a Charismatic Guru**

 In contrast, Liora wandered further afield. In the 'holy city' of Varanasi, she came across a cult headed by a charismatic guru. He spoke eloquently of the brotherhood of all mankind, the spirit of the cosmos, and efficient exploitation of the earth's resources. She was entranced, and thoroughly won over.

 When Ayal learned of Liora's new affiliation, he tried to extricate her from the cult, but her attraction to her new mentors was too strong. As a last resort, Ayal suggested that they both return to Israel for a visit with their parents. He made a condition with her: she must agree to attend an Arachim lecture together with him.

 Liora had no qualms; she agreed readily, fully confident that nothing could cut her off from her new source of inspiration. The cult was her whole life; nothing could take its place. Brother and sister flew back home. Together, they set out for an evening with Arachim. Together they sat in the hall, waiting for the speaker to appear - but in vain.

 After a considerable delay, an Arachim staff member mounted the podium and announced that the evening's lecturer was unwell. So that the audience not leave entirely empty-handed, he read to them a short summary of Jewish law concerning lost property. He explained the Torah requires someone who finds a lost object to assume responsibility for it, and to make a reasonable effort to locate the owner. He also described how a finder must ascertain that the claimant is truly the owner by asking for simanim, identifying marks or characteristics, to prove that this watch or book really does belong to him.

**Was the Entire Trip Home for Nothing?**

 Liora was unimpressed, to say the least. The lecture that was meant to open new horizons had put her to sleep. Ayal was devastated. The entire trip home was for nothing! How would he ever get his sister away from the cult? He nudged Liora to wake her up, and, with a heavy heart, trudged out of the hall to head for home.

 Liora had dozed during the lecture, but the Guardian of Israel sleeps not.... Liora flew back to her cult in India. Ayal enrolled in a yeshiva for baalei teshuva in Jerusalem. It was only a short while later that Ayal was suddenly called out of the beis hamidrash at his yeshiva. A visitor was waiting to see him. He turned to the room where his mystery guest was waiting, opened the door, and was dumbfounded to find his sister Liora!

 She greeted him with a wide smile. "What are you doing here?" he asked with a wide grin. Her answer left him even more mystified. "I want to enroll in a school for baalos teshuva," she replied.

**“What Made You Change Your Mind?”**

 "You?" asked Ayal, delighted, but incredulous. "What happened? What made you change your mind about your 'wonderful' cult and its guru!"

 Liora told him the full story. Once back in India, she had gone straight back to the cult. One day, the guru asked her to accompany him somewhere. As the two of them were walking along the alleyways of Varanasi, the guru bent down and picked up a fat wallet that someone had obviously just dropped. He opened it and found it full of bills and documents. With a smile of satisfaction, he tucked it into his pocket.

 Liora was speechless. Some tourist had just lost a considerable sum of money, a driver's license, and other valuable documents. His name, address, and other personal details were all there in black and white. It would be a simple matter to find him by contacting through the police or local embassy of the country he hailed from. Why did her guru just take it for himself? Wasn't that like stealing?

**A “Pious” Defense for His Theft**

 In reply, the guru embarked on a long lecture of about the unity of the universe, the brotherhood of all men, and the dynamics by which the "energy of the cosmos" had "transferred resources" from the former owner of the wallet to himself. The two of them were actually one soul, divided between two bodies, he explained. The wallet had been lost so that the money would reach its "rightful destination."

 Liora recalled the Arachim speaker and his presentation of the Torah laws that apply in such a case. The sharp contrast between philosophy perverted by greed and loyalty to the truth brought her back to her senses. She opted for the truth, and booked a ticket back home. Her mind was made up; her choice was Torah, and Torah alone. Another Jewish soul, wandering far afield, had found its way home.

*Reprinted from this week’s Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Balak 5770**

**Story #656**

**Transcending Conflict**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

*DEDICATED for a FAIR judgment for Sholom Mordechai HaLevy Rubashkin*

 Rabbi Menachem Porush was an Agudat Yisrael representative in the first Knesset in 1948. He maintained that post for nearly 35 years, through ten different Knessets. Just one month before he passed away in February 2010, at age 93, he related in an interview the following episode, which took place during that first Knesset term.

 Almost as soon as the state of Israel launched on 14th of May, 1948, the disputes

started. One was particularly virulent: the state had decreed compulsory education until

a certain age, and refused to recognize that the Ashkenazi-Haredi Yiddish-speaking elementary schools fulfilled this requirement, complaining that they spent insufficient time in secular subjects such as math and English, history and geography.

 The religious school administrators insisted that their students learned the required amount of material in these subjects, just they were able to do it in compressed amounts of time. The face-to-face discussions, phone conversations and written correspondence became increasingly heated on both sides. Neither would budge or even consider budging.

 At that point, Rabbi Porush was about to embark on a visit to the USA. Just before he departed, he received a private phone call from another prominent Jerusalemite, Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva of Brisk:

 “Rabbi Porush, as you know, this dispute about the schools has the potential to tear this young country apart. When you are in New York, you must go see the Lubavitcher Rebbe [Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneershon, 1880-1950].”

 The Brisker Rav wants me to go the Lubavitcher Rebbe on his behalf? I interrupted, astonished. [Brisk is among the leading yeshivas of the Lithuanian Jews, who are considered to be the opposite of Chassidim, especially Lubavitch Chassidim -editor.].

 “Yes! Go to him and tell him he must instruct Shazar to license our Yiddish-speaking “schools.

 At that time, explained Rabbi Porush, Zalman Shazar was the minister of Education. And since he came from a Lubavitcher family in Russia, the Brisker Rav hoped that the Lubavitcher Rebbe could have influence over him.

 So, when Rabbi Porush reached New York, he made an appointment to see the Rayatz of Lubavitch. The Rebbe's secretary escorted the politically important visitor into the Rebbe's office, and said, “Here is Rabbi Porush, from Israel.”

 Rabbi Porush reports in the interview how it was difficult for the Rayatz to talk at that time in his life, an indirect result of the torture he had endured from the Communist

prison guards and interrogators, yet he still came up with a snappy response.

 For Porush there are many perushim (interpretations). It can mean Porush of Agudat Yisrael, Porush of National Religious Party, or Porush of Naturei Karta. Which sort of Porush are you?

 Now, Rabbi Porush could have answered simply by revealing his Agudat Yisrael affiliation, but he chose a more intimate response. I am the son of the Porush who was the very first person to visit the Rebbe in Riga [capital of Latvia, the Rayatz's first stop upon being deported from Russia in 1927].

 In that case, said the Rebbe with a wide smile, Sholom Aleichem. Welcome.

 Rabbi Porush promptly explained to the Rebbe about his mission from the Brisker Rav. The Rebbe Rayatz was visibly astonished. The Brisker Rav sent you to me? To me? Really? Each time Rabbi Porush said yes; or nodded his head.

 The Rebbe thought deeply for a few moments. Well, then, when you return to the Land, please go to Mr. Shazar and tell him that I said he should fulfill the request of the

Brisker Rav. Also tell him I said that Mr. Shneur Zalman Shazar-Rubashov should not shame the Lubavitch Shazar-Rubashov family in Russia. And G-d Almighty should bless him.

 Rabbi Porush tells that after returning home to Jerusalem, he immediately set out for the Knesset, which at that time was in Tel Aviv, to speak to Shazar. When he found him, David Ben-Gurion, the Prime Minister, was also in the room.

 When Rabbi Porush finished telling Shazar what the Rayatz had told him to say, Shazar excitedly called over to Ben-Gurion. “Porush comes with a message from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Brooklyn.”

 “Really!” exclaimed Ben-Gurion. “You saw the Lubavitcher Rebbe? You were in his court? He actually sent a request to Shazar!”

 And that, concluded Rabbi Porush his story, was the end of the conflict! Minister of Education Shazar, with the tacit approval of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, recognized every haredi religious school and yeshiva in the country. No more arguments no more discussions. And all because of the tremendous respect they had for the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe.

 Inspired by the weekly JEM (Jewish Educational Media) video, the one this year for this week, in which falls Yud-Beit Tammuz, the anniversary of the miraculous liberation in 1927 (age 47) of the Rebbe Rayatz.

 Connection: Seasonal - 12 Tammuz is both the birthday and the anniversary of the miraculous liberation in 1927 of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn in 1927 (age 47) from Russian prison, Communist torture and Siberian exile. .

 Biographic Note: Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (12 Tammuz 1880-10 Shvat 1950), known as the Rebbe Rayatz, was the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, from 1920 to 1950. He established a network of Jewish educational institutions and Chassidim that was the single most significant factor for the preservation of Judaism during the dread reign of the communist Soviets. In 1940 he moved to the USA, established Chabad world-wide headquarters in Brooklyn and launched the global campaign to renew and spread Judaism in all languages and in every corner of the world, the campaign continued and expanded so remarkably successfully by his son-in-law and successor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

 Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959), known as the Brisker Rav like his father and grandfather, was a son of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk. He was the rabbi in Brisk and rosh yeshiva (dean) of its yeshiva until WWII. He fled the Holocaust and moved to Israel, where he re-established the Brisk Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

 Yerachmiel Tilles is co-founder and associate director of Ascent-of-Safed, and chief editor of this website (and of KabbalaOnline.org). He has hundreds of published stories to his credit, and many have been translated into other languages. He tells them live at Ascent Institute in Safat nearly every Saturday night.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed* [www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) ascent@ascentsafed.com

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**What Has G-d Wrought?**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

“*Like this time it will be said to Jacob and Israel, ‘What has G-d wrought?*’” (Bemidbar 23:23)

 On May 24 1844 Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph message in history. What phrase from our perashah did he use? The text of Morse’s historical message was the English translation of a verse in Parashat Balak. Bilaam said, “Mah pa’al Kel,” which in English means, “What hath G-d wrought (made)?” An appropriate message for the inventor of the telegraph to convey, in recognizing the true Source of his inventing prowess (Rabbi Ozer Alport).

 The telegraph was the beginning of today’s communication explosion. What followed was the telephone, cell phones, fax machines, e-mails, texting, internet, etc. As Samuel Morse recognized, all of this is truly a miracle from Hashem. A person can send a message to China in less than five seconds. If it is true that this is a G-d sent power, let us use it the right way: in purity and for good things only.

**The Importance of**

**Having a Strong Desire**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

 As we read the story of Bil'am and how he wanted to curse the Jewish people, we can't help but be amazed at his determination. He first asked Hashem whether he could go with Balak's messengers, and Hashem told him no. Then he asked again, and although this time he was given permission, still his donkey stopped three times until the angel revealed himself that he was sent to prevent Bil'am from going. He still proceeded to try to curse the Jews, and every time he attempted it, it came out as a blessing but he still didn't give up.

 From here we see the rule that if a person has a real will to do something, he will ultimately reach his goal. Bil'am persevered and would have succeeded had Hashem not turned his curses into blessings. Nothing stands in the way of a strong will. The reason we are not accomplishing what we want is that we don't want them strongly enough. This applies to business, to doing certain projects, and most certainly to spiritual endeavors. It is up to us to intensify our wills to accomplish. The stronger the will, the more we will succeed. Let's work on developing a strong desire for spiritual growth and we'll be amazed at the positive changes we will experience!

**Red Light, Green Lights**

**By Rabbi Raymond Beyda**

 In all societies, people are taught to behave in a manner that will contribute to the well-being of all members of the group. Rules are formulated in order to achieve the goal called the “common good.” For example, most civilized areas of the world have accepted rules of the road. In America we keep to the right (except to pass), while in Great Britain cars are driven on the left of the road.

 Some criteria cross all borders and are universally accepted. For reasons unknown to us today, red has come to stand for a negative. Don’t Walk, Stop, and No Smoking signs are red all over the globe. Green, on the other hand, represents freedom to move forward.

 The signs we confront in our times on our shrinking planet have eliminated the barrier of language and replaced words with universally understandable symbols. Washing instructions on garments, warnings of potentially dangerous ingredients in a package, and road signs all have pictures rather than words to get the message across. People living in our advanced, sophisticated world have no excuse to violate accepted policies based on a lack of knowledge. The signs are there for all to see and to follow.

**Life is Subject to**

**Requirements and Restrictions**

 Our behavior in all areas of life is subject to requirements and restrictions. The source of the guidelines is the Torah. We must follow the rules both to avoid negative consequences and in order to function properly and achieve happiness. The signs may not be posted on the road, but they are posted in our Holy Book for all to see.

 Ignorance of the law is no excuse. When we stood in the desert 3300 years ago, each of us accepted responsibility for the behavior and well-being of all others. Learning to read the signs and then adhering to their instructions is the responsibility of each individual for the benefit of all. Passing a red light is not only dangerous to those who violate the law, but to all others who may cross their path. (Excerpted from the book “One Minute With Yourself” by Rabbi Raymond Beyda and printed by Sephardic Press.)

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

**Passionless Relationships**

**By Rabbi Elazar Meisels**

***Dear Rabbi Meisels:***

 *My partner and I study* parshas hashavuah*, and we're about to come to the incident of Pinchas and Zimri. I don't expect that my partner will agree that it was okay to kill Zimri for his offensive act, but I'd love to offer him an explanation for the* halachah *of* "Kanoim Pog'im Bo" *that will not automatically be rejected. Any ideas?*

 *Baruch*

 **Dear Baruch:**

 Without question, this is a very difficult idea for a secular Jew to assimilate, inasmuch as the idea of someone deserving to die for intermarrying is abhorrent in modern culture, but I'll share with you an idea that may help you make a more convincing case.

**Unable to Withstand the Pressures of**

**The Evil Inclination for Idol Worship**

 The *Gemara* [Sanhedrin 64a] tells us that during the time of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, Ezra and the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* realized that we were not capable of withstanding the pressures of the *yetzer harah* for *avodah zarah*. Therefore, they *davened* that it be removed so that we no longer crave idol worship, nor can we even fathom what drove people to behave in such a manner. Absent this initiative, we could have been destroyed as a nation, for we would have all eventually been ensnared by this powerful and destructive hedonistic drive.

 The commentators wonder why this wasn't done earlier, especially since so many great Jews fell prey to it, thus wreaking havoc on the nation. Why didn't they nullify *avodah zarah* already in the days when King Menasheh succumbed to it, causing the destruction of the first *Beis Hamikdash*?

**The Downside to Abolishing**

**This Yetzer Hora**

 R' Simchah Bunim of Peshischah zt"l explained that while there was a clear benefit in abolishing this *yetzer harah*, there was a significant downside as well.

 This is because the drive to worship *avodah zarah* stemmed from a deep desire to connect with something greater than the person. Ideally, this would be the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Occasionally, however, a person would fail to complete his theological journey and wind up connecting with an artificial deity that offered a quasi-spiritual experience but ultimately never satisfied the person's desire, leaving him in search of ever-greater thrills.

 This led the establishment to introduce all sorts of artificial pleasures into the worship of their deity, hence, the decadence associated with paganism. At its root, idol worship emanated from a positive and healthy desire; the danger was when people began to accept substitutes for the real thing.

**Too Many Had Made**

**The Wrong Choice**

 When too many had made the wrong choice and concluded their search for a connection to the transcendental at *avodah zarah*, *Chazal* had no choice but to abolish this drive altogether. It was simply too risky to allow it continue; the rewards were not commensurate with the risks. The problem is that much like antibiotics which indiscriminately kill bacteria - good and bad alike - the abolishment of the drive to worship *avodah zarah* also meant that we lost the impetus to connect to something greater on a meaningful level. No longer would we passionately love Hashem nor crave a relationship with Him. Instead, our hearts went cold, and we were no longer capable of forging real relationships with Hashem.

 This is what lies at the root of our apathetic attitude toward most things Jewish, even the most passionate among us. We struggle to understand how it is possible to "love" Hashem. We struggle to find meaning in prayer and Torah study, two venues through which a healthy relationship with Hashem used to thrive, but which appear burdensome in light of our spiritual "disability." In modern society, it's considered virtuous to be accepting and tolerant of all paths. One is expected to pretend that there is no single truth and that all ideas are equally meritorious. Of course, any sane person knows that this is not the case at all.

**Not All “Doctors” Are Equally**

**Deserving of Respect**

 No one would claim that all who affix the title "doctor" to their names are equally deserving respect, when the list includes witch doctors, chiropractors, m.d.'s, d.o.'s and homeopathic healers. Regardless of how each group may feel about themselves, they aren't the same. No one would say that all engineers are equally qualified to supervise the construction of a building, even those with zero training in structural engineering. Yet, in so many areas, modern culture expects us to do just that when the subject is religion or morals.

 In previous times, people valued truth and were prepared to sacrifice their lives, jobs, well-being - even their children - for truth. Truth meant everything to them, and it burned in their hearts. They also had such a passionate relationship with Hashem that they could not countenance behavior that contradicted that. Thus, if a person like Pinchas would witness Zimri and Kosbi acting as they did, he would be moved to kill them, as opposed to looking away or pretending that their behavior was acceptable.

**Our Relationship with Hashem**

**In Not as Fervent as Before**

 That was then, but, nowadays, our relationship with Hashem is nowhere near as fervent, and if someone behaved as Pinchas did, he'd have a hard time convincing us that his motivation was a burning desire to defend the honor of Hashem. We would examine other aspects of his lifestyle, and his purity of intent would likely fall short of the mark.

 One who consistently shows up to *davening* late or talks in *shul* cannot possibly be a sincere zealot like Pinchas. One who speaks *lashon harah* with regularity cannot lay claim to extraordinary piety. We don't have the relationship with Hashem that justifies such zealousness, but once upon a time people did.

 This approach helps us understand why people like Pinchas acted as they did and were praised for it, while similar behavior in modern times might be considered unjustifiable.

*Reprinted from this week’s “Mentor Talk,” an email publication of Partners in Torah*

**Reflections on Wednesday’s Earthquake**

 In one of the most famous Tefillos known even to the uneducated, we chant that Hashem is a Kel Moleh Rachamim--that Hashem Himself is full of mercy.

 Moreover, since Hashem is also known as 'HaMakom' because He fills the world---it means that “the world” is filled with His mercy. It is therefore well within the realm of reason that this past Wednesday's 'minor' earthquakes in the United States and Canada were mercy-filled reminders to us that earthquakes -- and their quivering message -- are not limited to the 'rest of the world'--whether it be the Indian coast, China, Haiti or even

San Diego.

 A good alarm clock will remind you even after you 'snooze' to get up. A responsible person will arise with the gentle snooze-button reminder, without needing a foghorn or fire alarm to be awakened. Let us take action now --- and not wait until c'v' (G-d forbid) the noise gets (unnecessarily) louder.

**Drilling a Hole in Your Own Boat Cabin**

 The Medrash tells the story of a man who made a hole in the floor of his cabin in the boat, through which ocean water began to enter. The startled other passengers viewing the event excitedly asked him what he was doing and rushed to close up the hole. He told them to remain calm, as he had made the hole only in his cabin.

 The absurdity of his claim was remarkably clear for all to see, as they waded in water knee deep. Conversely, the actions of one person, whether it be the plugging of a hole surprisingly discovered in his own cabin, or the removal of the dangerous item from on the ship’s deck, can have a real and lasting effect on the others around him.

 Rabban Gamliel urged everyone to realize that others, whether consciously or subconsciously, notice your actions and learn from them. Just as we learn in Pirkei Avos that every person can be a ‘judge’ of others, we should also realize that every person is a‘melamed’, a teacher -- as he teaches and instructs by his words, by his Middos, and by his conduct and actions as well. So, as you improve yourself...get ready to improve the world along with you...all in your merit!

*Reprinted from the Hakhel Community Awareness Bulletin of June 24, 2010*

**A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

**Special Children**

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| **QUESTION:** |

How should the parents of a brain damaged child understand why they were chosen to have such a child?

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| --- |
| **ANSWER:** |

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And the answer is, everybody in life has a certain role. There are some people who are born, Chalila to die young. It's known in the Gemara, that certain persons, from the beginning are allotted only a short lifespan. Some children are born to die even before birth or at birth. Some die before birth. Everyone has his role in life. And there's a purpose, because each one fulfills a useful function. Now a brain damaged child, fulfills a function.

**An Opportunity for Parents of Normal**

**Children to Rejoice and Thank Hashem**

 First of all, all those persons who have normal children must utilize the opportunity to rejoice and thank Hashem . It's very important, otherwise you'll never understand what you have, if you're not able to use a contrast.

 If you have a normal child, you must thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu always, for the years and years of sorrow that you were spared. Everyone who has a child without some disfigurement on his face, a child that's not a cripple, a child that doesn't have any serious illness, must constantly thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And not only for the child, but for yourself too. And that's the function; You need somebody in the world who demonstrates that.

**Is it Fair for the Special Child and His Parents?**

 So the question is: Is it fair that this child and these parents should be chosen for that function? And the answer is, nobody works for nothing in this world. Everybody is remunerated for his services. And a child that's born to serve such a role goes to Olam Habah eventually and he is richly repaid. He is paid off more than many people who have lived happy normal lives.

 The Gemara says, children that die young, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself becomes their Torah teacher in Olam Habah. You can not understand this world unless you understand the next world. And this world is only a vestibule for the world to come. If you'll know both worlds, then you'll realize that all wrongs are righted in the world to come. Those parents who have compassion on their child, they feed that child, and they have all the Rachmanus on it that are necessary, are gaining a great wealth of Olam Habah. Whatever the purpose of this phenomenon is, it's achieved by these people.

 Now some people have even a greater burden to bear in this world, and therefore people should be satisfied that this is the extent of their burden, and they should accept it, and understand that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is an employer that is not stingy when it comes to paying reward.

*Good Shabbos To All*

*Reprinted from this week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l” that is based on a transcription of one of the many questions that were posed to Harav Miller by the audience at the classic Thursday night hashkafa lectures. To listen to the audio of this Q & A please dial: 732-534-8868*

**A Slice of Life**

**The Sunset Stranger**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Elisha**

*Based on a speech by a yeshiva student at a pre-summer gathering before 300 pairs of students headed out to remote Jewish communities throughout the world on Lubavitch "Merkos Shlichus."*

 "Please watch yourselves here," warns the Ukrainian rabbi. "While you're walking around town beware not to stay out past sunset because once the city gets dark, it isn't safe anymore... "

 My friend Shmuel and I arrive in Odessa to help the Chabad emissary for Passover.

**Ventured Out Into the City**

 When the holiday is over, we venture out into the city. We really enjoy soaking in the ambiance of this old-world town as we search for fellow Jews. We get carried away just walking about, and then it occurs to us that it is getting late.

 Suddenly we notice that all children and women are off the streets, and we are lost in the city, with only our wrinkled map to guide us.

 Seemingly out of nowhere, a tall man wearing a leather jacket walks towards us. He looks like a skinhead. The rabbi's earlier warning rings in my ears.

 I say "hello" in Russian as I put the map away. We don't need to look like tourists.

 He says "hello," and asks where we are from.

 "I'm from Odessa originally." I tell him. His expression changes to disbelief.

 "My father was born here, and my family lived here when I was a child."

 "What are you looking for?" He cuts me off.

**We Are Looking for Pochenko Park**

 I say we are looking for Pochenko Park, which we aren't, but I mention the first place I remember from the map. We have to lose this guy.

 "I know where Pochenko Park is, it's very easy..." he says.

 "Do you see the alley by the side of the street?" He points as he explains. "Well, you go down the dark alleyway and that will lead you to the dark sea side. Then you'll go up the road there which will lead you to the edge of Pochenko Park." He smugly looks at us.

 "The alley looks awfully dark," I reply knowingly. "I would hate for something bad to happen to us there. Looking at our map also shows us that we can take the main road, which will be lit up, and that will lead us straight to our destination. The main road is just four blocks away."

**A Menacing Look in His Eyes**

 The man's smile breaks into laughter and he says, "You're smart, very smart." There is a menacing look in his eyes.

 All the conversation so far is in Russian. Shmuel by my side has no idea of what is going on. It is still before sunset and Shmuel urges me to speak to our new friend, who he thinks is Jewish, about putting on tefilin.

 Why not? What is there to lose? I ask myself.

 "My name is Israel. What's your name?" I ask.

 "My name is Senya," answers the stranger.

 "Where are you from, Senya?" I ask him.

 "I'm from Odessa," he answers.

**Senya, What’s Jewish About You?**

 "Odessa has had so many Jews living here for so many years that they inevitably left their mark. Everything here seems so Jewish, even the non-Jews have something Jewish about them. Tell me, Senya, what's Jewish about you?" I ask.

 "Nothing." He hesitates for a second before he says, "Nothing is Jewish about me. My mother is Jewish but I'm not."

 "Senya, if your mother is Jewish that makes you Jewish, too."

 Stunned, he immediately denies my statement.

 "No, I'm not Jewish, I'm Ukranian. It even says so in my passport."

 "Senya, I don't care what it says in your Ukrainian passport. According to Jewish law, if your mother is Jewish you are Jewish!"

 Contemplating this new identity he has never considered his own, something shifts. I can see it in his face. He is silent. I continue.

 "Senya, we have so much in common. Your father is from Odessa and my father is from Odessa. Your mother is Jewish and my mother is Jewish. I'm a Jew and you're a Jew. We are practically mishpacha." Mishpacha is one of those words even the non-Jews in Odessa know.

 I offer my hand to shake his. We shake hands. He keeps my hand in his as he stares at me.

**Look at These Two Penguins**

 "Yes," he agrees. "I suppose we can say that. Israel, do you know why I stopped you today?" he asks. "Since we are practically mishpacha, I'll tell you. I wanted to rob you. I saw you two rabbinical students, and thought, 'Look at these two penguins, this will be easy money.' "

 "I'm so glad you changed your mind."

 The look in his eyes gets noticeably softer. "Yes, I guess I did change my mind." He says as he lets go of my hand. Then he looks down, perhaps ashamed. "Can you just give me $20." He begs. "I really need it. We are mishpacha after all, aren't we?"

 "I don't have money on me Senya" I tell him honestly. "But if you want to stop at the yeshiva later on, I'll make sure to have $20 waiting for you. It's getting late, we have to go."

**Let Me Walk You to the Main Street**

 "Let me walk you to the main street," he says. "It's dangerous here after dark..."

 Senya walks us to the main road. We walk together into the light. We say goodbye to the sunset stranger as we walk back to the yeshiva.

 That night we leave Odessa. We don't forget to leave a $20 bill for Senya with one of the students in the yeshiva. We dream that perhaps Senya will somehow join the yeshiva in Odessa. Who knows, maybe he will become an emissary himself one day.

 As we travel I think about our sunset encounter in Odessa. How wondrous it is that by the mere act of reaching out to another Jew - as the Lubavitcher Rebbe trained us to do - not only are we saved from being robbed but we somehow manage to steal the heart of a thief.

*Rabbi Bentzion Elisha is an award winning photographer - ElishaArt.Com - and writer based in Crown Heights.*

*Reprinted from this week’s issue of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**PERASHAT BALAK**

**The Reward of Olam Haba**

**As Heard from**

**Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

 “*Let me die the death of the righteous and let my afterward be like his*”  (Bamidbar 23:10)

 Here Bileam envies the reward of the Afterlife which is promised to Israel, and he expresses the wish that he could be worthy to share their lot.  It is noteworthy that this open declaration of the reward of the Afterlife was made by a non-Israelite prophet. Although the Afterlife is hinted elsewhere, yet no Israelite prophet spoke openly on this matter; and it was left to Bileam to proclaim publicly the reason why Hashem numbers Israel.

 The Rambam says “sadeekim yoshvim”, the sadeekim sit forever in Olam Haba. They never get tired of it.

 Every minute the simha in Olam Haba gets bigger and bigger. And “their crowns are on their heads.” What are those crowns?  The Rambam says they are the da’at Hashem, the understanding of true knowledge that you gain in this world. You have to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Borei’ (Creator); He is the Mehave’, the One who brings everything into existence. The whole world was made bidvar Hashem, with His word, and not only did He make it, He maintains it all the time.

**The Crown of True Understanding**

 All of these things are part of the crown of true understanding/da’at. The love of Hashem, going in His ways, and other things that make the crown on your head. The Rambam explained that in Olam Haba the sadeekim have pleasure in proportion to the kind of crown they have acquired in this life. The reward in Olam Haba is measured by how much knowledge of Hashem you gain (de’ah). Misvot are very good, but if you want to get more reward, do Misvot with De’ah, and De’ah is something you have to work on.

 That is why Talmud Torah is so important. You have to learn Hashkafa (Torah outlook) and Emunah and all the topics dealt with in the Hovot Halevavot (Duties of the Mind), in order to recognize Hashem’s Hesed and Wisdom in the world. “Gudlo v’tubo male’ olam”, His kindliness and greatness and wisdom fill the world (Shabbat prayers).

Adapted from “Journey Into Greatness”  by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT’L and from “Rabbi Miller Speaks Vol. 1” (ArtScroll)

*Reprinted from this week’s “As Heard From Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l” as edited by Mr. Sam Gindi*

**Once Upon a Time**

**A Miracle in Meron**

 It was a typical autumn day in 1906 when Rabbi Yedidya Horodner walked into the "Tiferet Yisrael" synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem with a big smile on his face. With a grand flourish he placed a bottle of whiskey and some cake on the table, and invited everyone to make a "l'chaim."

 The congregants wondered what the cause for celebration might be. A rumor had been circulating that the day before, Rabbi Horodner had gone to all the local yeshivot and distributed candy to the children. Something good had obviously occurred, and they waited expectantly to hear what it was.

 Indeed, after everyone had made a blessing on the cake and lifted a few glasses, the Rabbi filled them in:

**Story Revolved Around the Rabbi’s Nephew**

 The whole story revolved around the Rabbi's nephew, a 15-year-old boy named Shmuel Rosen who was originally from Riga. His father, Rabbi Ozer Rosen, had sent the lad to his uncle when he was only eight years old, in the belief that there was no better place in the world to develop the boy's intellectual talents than the holy city of Jerusalem.

 Rabbi Horodner raised little Shmuel as if he was his own son, and the boy flourished. He was a delightful child, and exceptionally devoted to his studies.

 A few weeks earlier, however, disaster had struck. After experiencing deteriorating vision for several months, Shmuel was now completely blind. The total darkness had set in as he was sitting and poring over a volume of the Talmud.

**The Boy’s Spirit Was Completely Broken**

 The boy's spirit was completely broken. For days and nights he wept over his fate, most bitterly over his inability to study Torah by himself. Suffering from a profound sadness, he withdrew and rarely ventured from his room.

 His uncle felt helpless, until it occurred to him that a change of place might do the boy good. He contacted his friend, Reb Shimon Hoizman of Hebron, who agreed to let the boy stay in his house. Shmuel felt a little better in Hebron, but remained very depressed.

 At that time the Jewish community of Hebron was headed by two Torah giants: the Sefardic Rabbi Chizkiyahu Medini (author of Sdei Chemed), and the Chasidic Rabbi Shimon Menashe Chaikin, the chief Ashkenazic authority in the city. Every evening at midnight, the two Rabbis would go to the Cave of Machpeila, the resting place of the Jewish Patriarchs and Matriarchs, to recite Tikun Chatzot (a special prayer lamenting the destruction of the Holy Temple).

 Reb Shimon Hoizman was very affected by the boy's suffering. But what could he do to help? Then one evening, he came up with a plan...

About a half hour before midnight Reb Shimon went into Shmuel's room. "Wake up, son," he whispered to him softly. "Get dressed and follow me." The two went off into the night, in the direction of Rabbi Chaikin's courtyard.

 A few minutes later the two rabbis could be seen approaching, on their way to the Cave of Machpeila. As soon as they reached the spot where Reb Shimon and Shmuel were standing, Reb Shimon disappeared and left Shmuel by himself. The two rabbis quickly realized that Shmuel was blind. With gentleness they asked him how he had become sightless.

**The Last Words He Had Studied Before Going Blind**

 When the young man got up to the part about how he had become totally blind while studying, Rabbi Medini asked if he remembered the last words he had been able to see. "Of course I remember!" Shmuel responded. "They were in the Talmud, Tractate Chulin, on the first side of page 36: 'On whom can we count? Come, let us rely on the words of Rabbi Shimon [Bar Yochai]'"

 The two rabbis became very excited. "If that is the case," they said almost simultaneously, "then you can certainly rely on the holy Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to help you. Go to his grave in Meron, ask for his blessing, and G-d will surely heal you."

 The next morning Shmuel returned to Jerusalem, and the very same day he and his uncle set off for Meron. It was a difficult journey, but after several days they arrived safely. Even before they approached the holy gravesite they were filled with a feeling of confidence. For days they remained at the grave of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, praying steadily to G-d for a miraculous recovery.

**The Miracle Occurred One Week Later**

 The miracle occurred exactly one week later. Rabbi Horodner was reading aloud from the Talmud when all of sudden Shmuel let out a shadow. "Uncle! I can see your shadow!"

 Over the course of the next few days, Shmuel's vision improved steadily, until 13 days later it was restored completely. Still camped out at the holy gravesite, uncle and nephew broke out into a spontaneous dance, as they sang the verses that are traditionally sung on the anniversary of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's passing:

 "His teachings are our protection; they are the light of our eyes. He is our advocate for good, Rabban Shimon Bar Yochai.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Tefillin, Just Do It!**

 Having gotten his Tefillin from one of the most prominent scribes of his time, Reb Michel Prager was quite proud of them. He would always point out how dear they were to him and how rewarding it was to wear them.

 Throughout his lifetime he had been faced with numerous challenges and difficulties, but never did he miss the opportunity to wear his tefillin. As a Chassidishe Yid, Reb Michel's davening played a major role in his life, and knowing that his tefillin were so special made it all the more gratifying.

 Although be knew that there were some opinions that encouraged checking tefillin every so often, Reb Michel was careful not to have the sealed boxes opened for fear of exposing them to air and dust, and perhaps ruining them. And so, the tefillin were never checked.

**Seventy-two Years After**

**He First Put On Tefillin…**

 One day, however, seventy-two years after he first put on the tefillin for his bar mitzvah, someone inadvertently switched their tefillin with his, and this man gave what he thought were his tefillin to a sofer (scribe) for checking.

 The sofer (scribe) carefully checked all the words, scrutinizing them to ensure their validity. Suddenly, he let out a gasp. "Oy Gevalt! These tefillin are missing an entire word!" He continued to check the shel yad (hand) portion of the tefillin and found a missing word in them as well, rendering the entire pair pasul (invalid).

 The man who had brought the tefillin to be checked was quite upset, but soon realized that these were nor his tefillin at all. Upon closer examination he was able to determine that they were Reb Michel's tefillin. It was unbelievable! Reb Michel's tefillin were posul.

**How Would They Break the Bad News?**

 How would they break the bad news to the elderly man? He was 85 years old and the shock, horror, and disappointment of never having fulfilled a mitzvah of which he had been so proud could possibly cause him enough grief to endanger his life.

 Several of the elderly members of the shul conferred and decided that they had no choice but to tell him. A doctor was brought along just in case, Reb Michel experienced any medical problems. "Reb Michel." one or the elder gentlemen said, "we have something important to tell you,"

 Slowly they spelled out the story — how the tefillin were switched, how the tefillin were taken to a sofer, and how Reb Michel's tefillin were found to be posul - invalid. They didn't have to explain further. Reb Michel understood that he had never properly fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin. Not even once.

 At first Reb Michel sat there frozen. They worried. Had he heard them? How was he going to react? They were wondering what else they should do when suddenly Reb Michel stood up and started smiling. At first Reb Michel began to laugh and then he started to sing and dance, instead of joining him they watched with pity, assuming that he was "losing it,"

**Who Could Blame Him**

**Now for Losing Control?**

 This was someone who look more pride in his tefillin than in any other mitzvah. Who could blame him now for losing control? He sang and danced around the room, skipping with joy. To see an 85-year-old act this way was quite unusual and, under the circumstances, very sad. But, no one dared to interfere. After all, he was entitled. Finally he finished dancing and singing. Suddenly he looked up and noticed everyone staring at him. He then explained. "Do you know what this means? Had my tefillin never been checked, I never would have had [he opportunity to fulfill this precious mitzvah. But now I will. For this, I am very grateful."

**With Tears Streaming Down His Eyes**

 And then, with tears streaming down his eyes, he began to unwrap a pair of kosher tefillin and put them on his head and on his arm. With a smile on his face and rears running down his checks. 85-year-old Reb Michel Prager fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin for the very first time. (Touched by a Story, p. 205, Reb Yechiel Spiro.)

 In this week's portion Balak, we read about the attempts of the evil Bilaam to curse the Jewish people.  When Bilaam opens his mouth intending to curse the Jewish people, Hashem causes Bilaam instead to utter praises of the Jewish people.  In Bilaam's first "blessing" he says about the nation of Yisroel, "Behold!  It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations."  (Bamidbar 23,9)

**We Are Different and Special**

 When the verse states that the Jewish nation will "not be reckoned among the nations," it means that we are different and special.  We Jews have different priorities in life than the nations.  We get excited about mitzvahs such as tefillin while the nations are busy rioting when their sports team wins.

 Tefillin are referred to as a sign, a sign of being a Jew.  Every male must put Tefillin on daily except Shabbos and Yom Tov.  If Let us all be inspired to dedicate and rededicate our lives to doing that was distinguishes us from the nations, namely the performance of mitzvahs such a Tefillin.  Good Shabbos Everyone.

*Reprinted from this week’s Good Shabbos email.*

**Stars of David: Sandy Koufax**

**By Marnie Winston-Macauley**

During a time when many Jews found it difficult to be different, Sandy Koufax was proud of it.



*I'm Jewish. I'm a role model. I want them to understand they have to have pride." – Sandy Koufax*

 Sanford "Sandy" Koufax, the "man with the golden arm," one of the greatest pitchers in baseball, established record after record throughout his relatively short 11-year career with the Dodgers.

 Wait. A Jew? Lighting up a baseball diamond? “Jews own, don’t play,” right? How could a Member of the Tribe pitch for the Dodgers or Yankees? The “greats” were red, white, and blue, and they had *nicknames*. They were the Tommys, Hanks, Joes. They pushed crackerjacks and ate hot dogs made of pure *treif*. *Your* ma made liver and onions, and pushed kishke.

Sandy not only played ball, he did

something even greater: The right thing.

 Ah, but if you were a Jewish kid growing up in the 1950s we had Sandy, who could not only play ball, he did something even greater:

 The right thing.

 Koufax, born Sanford Braun on December 30, 1935, raised by mom, Evelyn, and step-father Irving Koufax, a lawyer, breathed inYiddishkeit in Borough Park. For the “uninitiated,” Brooklyn wasn’t merely a borough of New York City. It was its own planet, plunked, unaware and uncaring next to Manhattan and Queens.

 Your “block” is what you remembered, back when Brooklyn was the world. And it was. Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia abounded. But Jews and Italians defined it.

**A Brave New World**

 Yiddish and Italian made a secular turn to Yinglish and Italiadish with a brave new world; one waffling equator between the old and new. From pushcarts you could get *arbus;* from barrels, pickles. While you got your chicken flicked, you could tell Mrs. Abrams your remedy for corns – in Ameridish. In the summer, you headed to Coney Island, or Nathan’s. Or ... sit. Stoops were more than hunks of sidewalk. They were box seats in your personal stadium. Streets, teeming with animation were the cheapest ticket in town for the greatest show in town.

 But there was another. For the kids, there was “the new.” *That* stadium. Ebbets Field and the beloved Dodgers. Immigrant children were learning about America. And America was baseball. For many of the new generation, “Dem Bums,” was more than a team. *Their* fortune represented the fortune of Brooklyn itself.

 Sandy Kaufax was rooted here. Like other Jewish kids, he enjoyed Yiddish theater, and a local Jewish Community Center, where he excelled at basketball. A good thing?

**Athletics and Judaism Has**

**Always Been an Uneasy Mix**

 Despite the fact that We Jews have been “running” for 3,000 years, athletics and Judaism has always been an uneasy mix. The Judaic point of view disparages blood sports, but most important, many Jewish scholars, while appreciating the healthful benefits of athletics, fear the lure of “the game.” A Jewish lad is expected to study Talmud, not throw balls with “the goyim.”

 But *unlike* a lot of Jewish kids, Sandy’s stepfather encouraged the young athlete, who went on to become captain of the basket team at Lafayette High School. At age 15, Koufax joined the “Ice Cream League,” where he honed his pitching brilliance. It was here he was spotted and at 17, recruited to pitch for the Coney Island Sports League's Parkviews.

**Youngest Former Player Inducted**

**Into the Baseball Hall of Fame**

 And the rest, as they say… A Dodger, both in Brooklyn and Los Angeles from 1955 to 1966, he broke record upon record for wins, and awards. In 1972, he was the youngest former player to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

 For the “Herschels” that would be enough. A role model for every Jewish kid who ached to pick up a bat. Look at the crowds. And dream.

But it takes more than this to be a true Star of David. And Sanford “Sandy” Koufax did more.

 October 6, 1965. The first day of the World Series ... the Los Angeles Dodgers vs. the Minneapolis Twins. This was it. The whole *raison d’etre* of the sport. Koufax, the team’s lead pitcher was *asked* to play.

 October 6, 1965. Yom Kippur. Sandy Koufax refused. As he had *always* refused to play on the High Holy Days. He stayed in his hotel room that day (despite rumors that he went to shul).

**Don Drysdale Realizes**

**The Value of Being Jewish**

 Don Drysdale pitched and he gave up seven runs in 2 2/3 innings. "I bet right now you wish I was Jewish, too," Drysdale said to manager Walter Alston when he pulled him from the game. The Dodgers lost to the Minnesota Twins, 8-2.

 The day after Yom Kippur, Koufax was visited by Rabbi Moshe Feller, regional director of the educational arm of the Lubavitch movement. He brought Sandy a pair of tefillin. "Since you bat right and throw left," he told the pitcher, "I wasn't sure what type to get you.” With the issue resolved, Feller later explained, “The Talmud says that tefillin is representative of all the mitzvot of the Torah, so I could not think of a better way to honor a person for enhancing Jewish values.”

 Following the holidays, Koufax pitched Games Two, Five, and Seven, throwing complete-game shutouts in Games Five and Seven! He led his team to victory, and was named MVP.

 Koufax's decision and his pitching brilliance remain a source of pride among American Jews, even those who aren't baseball fans.

Koufax quietly and firmly stood by his principles,

regardless of the fall-out.

 There were others before Koufax who faced similar dilemmas. But what makes this story unique is the unusual “ordinariness” of the sensibility of this humble man. How a simple, unpretentious Jew raised eyebrows even among the devout.

 Sandy Koufax emerged as a Jew of conscience. It was his way of saying, “For me, for my people....it’s simply the right thing to do.”

 In the 1960s, “the right thing to do” wasn’t easy, or for some, even imaginable. Anti-Semitism and intolerance still existed with Jews fighting for acceptance. And this was baseball, the World Series. America’s ultimate game.

**Quietly and Firmly**

**Standing by His Principles**

 Yet Koufax quietly and firmly stood by his principles, regardless of the fall-out. Regardless of what anyone else thought.

 In that singular decision, he became known forever as the pitcher who refused to play the opening game of the World Series because it fell on Yom Kipper. *And still win.*

To every bar mitzvah boy and bat mitzvah girl in America, Koufax became a personal role model. Here was a Jew who could succeed in the secular world, while standing by his Jewish beliefs.

 A new inspiration took hold in American Jews. Yes. We could do it. We could be Jews and still reach the top of our games -- thanks in part to Sandy Koufax, a true Star of David.

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**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Grandfather’s Return**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 The problem that came before the eminent halachic authority Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv was one that sometimes occurs in this era of return to the roots.

 When a son was born to him, the *ba'al teshuva* was asked by his non-observant father to grant him the privilege of being the *sandek* at the *brit mila*. The son hesitated because of the ruling in *Shulchan Aruch* that one should give such an honor to a very righteous Jew. Upon hearing his son's hesitation the father vowed that if he could serve as *sandek* he would begin observing Shabbat.



 Rabbi Eliyashiv ruled that the father should be given this honor because there could be no greater merit for the child than having his grandfather become observant because of him.

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