**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Pinchas 5774**

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**The Rav’s Tolerance**

**By Yisroel Besser**

 The Gerrer shtiebel was a bastion of people interested in serious growth. Time was the most precious commodity. Torah was learned with burning intensity and the ways of Chassidus, particularly in areas of holiness and purity, were followed with great zeal.

 It was truly an exalted tzibbur, the group at that shtiebel, each member accomplished in learning and fear of Heaven.

 Then Reb Usher got the television. It seemed that not just the people in the shtiebel, but all of Bnei Brak knew about this breach in the wall of holiness: a television in a chassidische home!

**The Rebbe’s Letter Prohibiting Televisions**

 The Chassidim in the shtiebel came to their rav and insisted that Reb Usher be instructed to daven elsewhere. The Rav seemed unconvinced, so one of the older Chassidim pointed out that the Gerrer Rebbe, the Beis Yisrael, had explicitly signed a letter prohibiting his Chassidim from owning televisions; how could Reb Usher be welcome in a Gerrer shtiebel?

 The Rav considered the point, furrowing his brow and closing his eyes before responding that the issur of the Rebbe, who had already been niftar, only took effect on the televisions that were around in his time, namely with a black and white picture. “But Reb Usher,” he said triumphantly, “has purchased a color television, and that is not included in the Rebbe’s issur, for there was no such thing at the time the Rebbe signed it.”

**The Chassidim Were Very Confused**

 The Chassidim were confused by the Rav’s refusal to take any sort of action against Reb Usher, but he was the Rav, so they accepted his ruling, and the television owner remained a part of the shteibel.

 In time, Reb Usher removed the television from his home, and he worked once again to make it a place of holiness and purity. Years later, he recalled that period, and his inner struggle, and only then did the Chassidim begin to appreciate the wisdom of the Rav.

**Reb Usher’s Real Desire**

 “I didn’t want to have a television; I wanted to be mechalel Shabbos, I was through with everything. But how does one throw away everything from one moment to the next? How could I fulfill my desire in a way that wouldn’t immediately mark me as insane?

 “I figured that if I made even the tiniest breach in the fierce wall around the beis hachassidim, I would be ostracized. They would throw me out of the shul, and then I would be a victim of their intolerance and persecution and my rapid descent wouldbe more understandable.

 “But the Rav…he wouldn’t let them throw me out – he ruined my plan and forced me to stay!”

Reprinted from the recently published book, “**Like Seeds of a Pomegranate: A Journalist’s Encounter with Greatness**” by **Yisroel Besser.** It can be found in Jewish bookstores or from the publisher by calling (718) 232-0856 or by clicking [www.menuchapublishers.com](http://www.menuchapublishers.com) or emailing sales@menuchapublishers.com

**Thoughts that Count**

Of Ozni, the family of the Oznites (Num. 26:16)

The name Ozni is related to the Hebrew word for ear, ozen. Interestingly, Rashi comments that this verse refers "to the family of Etzbon" - which is related to the word etzba, finger. What is the connection between the two? The reason, our Sages explained, that man's fingers were created long and thin is to enable him to stick them in his ears the moment he hears something he shouldn't... *(The Shaloh, Rabbi Yeshaya Hurvitz)*

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

**“Go to Kiev and I’m Sure You Can**

**Get a Job with a German Pharmacist”**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 The third Rebbe of Chabad was called the Tzemach Tzedik (Rebbi Menachem Mendel).

 A family member of his, who we will call Reb Avraham, who lived in Vitebsk was in deep trouble. He had to close his once flourishing pharmacy and, unable to find another source of income, gradually sunk further and further into debt until he was about to lose his house and all he owned to creditors.

**His Daughter’s Husband**

**Leaves Her Stranded**

 And, as if this wasn't enough, his son-in-law suddenly abandoned Reb Avraham's daughter without giving her an official bill of divorce (called a 'Get' in Hebrew) thus leaving her stranded with no source of income and permanently unable to remarry.

 Reb Avraham's wife began badgering him to travel to the Tzemach Tzedik for advice and blessing. But this was totally against his grain. True, he was a family member of the Rebbe but he definitely was not a Chassid. He was a normal Jew and had no use for the entire Chassidic movement with their outbursts of Joy and emphasis on Moshiach. In fact the Rebbe's nickname, Tzemach Tzedik, even indicated that his followers thought him to be the Messiah!

**Gives in to His Wife’s Request**

 For several months he held out but since no other solution came along and his debtors became more demanding; he gave in to his wife and much against his will he went to the Rebbe figuring he would be in and out and in any case it couldn't hurt.

 Broken in mind and spirit and with his last pennies he traveled to the Rebbe's headquarters, promised he didn't want much time and asked for an early appointment. But when he was told that he would have to wait for several weeks he reeled back a few steps, held his head and moaned "'A few weeks? OY! Why is this happening to ME?"

 He was stuck, he couldn't go back home and he didn't want to stay, but when the Rebbe's secretary heard his name and figured out that he was the Rebbe's relative he had mercy and arranged for him to enter that very evening.

 When he entered he was impressed with the Rebbe's countenance and the Rebbe seemed very happy to see him. But rather than asking why he came, he invited Avraham to join him for supper with his family that evening saying that his wife would certainly enjoy his presence.

**Overwhelmed by the Rebbe’s**

**Awesome Presence**

 Rav Avraham agreed and that evening at the Rebbe's house the spirit was so friendly that he didn't feel it was proper to speak about his problems, in fact the Rebbe's awesome presence and closeness sort of confused and overwhelmed him.

 So the next day he again requested an audience with the Rebbe, and again was immediately allowed in but this time the Rebbe was more businesslike.

 This time he poured out his heart describing his financial situation in heartbreaking detail. When he finished almost in tears he stood silently as the Rebbe pulled open a drawer in his desk, handed him some money and said.

 "Once I read in a newspaper that a German fellow was looking for help in a new drugstore he opened in the city of Kiev. Here is some money for travel. I'm sure he'll give you a job."

**But the Advice Didn’t**

**Make Any Sense**

 Reb Avraham said thank you, backed out of the Rebbe's office and headed for the train station. But hours later when he was already on the train heading home and thinking about what the Rebbe said he realized it didn't make sense.

 What did he mean by "Once I read in a newspaper"? How long ago was it? And how did he know that the German would give him work? And why Kiev? Kiev was far away!

 Suddenly he slapped himself on the forehead! And yelled "Oy! How stupid can I be!?" I forgot to mention my abandoned daughter!!!

 But when he arrived home his wife paid no attention to his doubts (he didn't dare tell her that he forgot their daughter) and the next day his bags were packed and he was off for Kiev.

 It was easier than he thought. He quickly found the German who immediately gave him a simple job and after a short time recognized his talents. In just a few months he had already risen to be the manager of the store with a handsome income and finally was beginning to stand again on his feet.

 A few weeks before Passover he requested from the German if he could have a month off for the holidays and he was immediately given permission. But when Rav Avraham arrived home there awaited him an urgent telegram from the German that he should return immediately for a matter of great importance and great profit.

**A Special 50th Birthday Party**

 So a few days later he was again standing before the German who apologized for bringing him back but explained that in a week would be his 50th birthday. He was planning to make a big and unique occasion and invite all the important people he knew including the mayor, several generals and government officials and suddenly got the idea that Reb Avraham could be the perfect person to arrange it. But there was no time to waste.

 When Avraham heard how much the German was willing to pay him he took the job. It was a lot of hard and intensive work; arranging the hall, the music, food, and wholesome entertainment etc. but in a week the party was in session and Reb Avraham was receiving the honored guests at the door while his boss was gleaming with satisfaction.

 Suddenly Reb Avraham let out a startled cry, became confused and almost lost consciousness!

 The German immediately noticed it, walked quickly over to him without attracting attention and took him to a side room, sat him down and asked him what was wrong, if he would like a doctor? etc.

**The Priest is His Son-in-Law**

 Reb Avraham stood, took his boss to the door and pointed to a priest who had his back turned to them and said.

 "Over a year ago my daughter's husband abandoned her with several children and according to our religion she cannot remarry until he gives her a bill of divorce."

 "I'm sorry to hear that," Said the German "But what does that have to do with..?"

 "That's him!" said Rav Avraham "That priest is my daughter's husband. I'm sure of it! I would recognize his face anywhere! Perhaps he changed his religion, perhaps he just in disguise .. but I'm sure its him!!"

 The German, who at that time held Reb Avraham in the greatest esteem, promised to settle the entire matter immediately. And so it was.

 He brought the 'priest' into the side room where Reb Avraham confronted him and demanded he sign the 'Get'.

 At first he denied the entire story, claimed that he didn't know this Jew and he certainly had never married anyone in his life . he was a priest!! But when the German pulled out his pistol his entire defense crumbled. He confessed to everything and agreed to sign anything just as long as it was kept secret.

 Reb Avraham brought a Rabbi, two witnesses and a scribe, the document was signed and his daughter became free.

 He realized now the greatness of the Rebbe and why he told him to go to Kiev; that only there could all his problems be solved.. even the one of his abandoned daughter that he forgot to mention. And, of course, his German boss also heard that there is a prophet in Israel.

*Reprinted from a recent email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**The True Greatness of**

**Rabbi Akiva Eiger**

**It Once Happened**

The illustrious scholar, Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1759-1837) was traveling to Hungary for his daughter's marriage to the son of the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839). He announced his intention to stop in Nikolsburg to pay his respects to the town's rabbi, Rav Mordechai Banet. Word spread quickly through the streets of Nikolsburg and the entire Jewish community thrilled at the news of a visit from perhaps the most illustrious scholar of the day. The simple folk yearned to see the holy visage of the great man; the town's scholars looked forward to hearing his brilliant reflections on Torah.

**A Special Occasion Recalled**

**Months Afterwards**

The brief visit was a real occasion in Nikolsburg, and the townsfolk spoke of it for months after. Rabbi Banet, however, was disappointed in his meeting with the scholar. There had been no brilliant, novel insight into some knotty passage of Talmud, no remarkable word to remember forever. In fact, Rabbi Banet wondered where the greatness of Rabbi Eiger lay after all. To his great disappointment, the conversation had been quite ordinary.

Not long after, Rabbi Eiger had occasion to visit Nikolsburg again on a matter of communal business. This time he made a totally different impression on Rabbi Banet, and the local rabbi invited his esteemed guest to address the congregation on Shabbat.

During the speech Rabbi Banet differed with Rabbi Eiger's opinions, and interrupted with his own interpretation. Instead of arguing the point, as would be expected, Rabbi Eiger descended from the bima and quietly returned to his seat. Later in the day, Rabbi Banet reflected on the morning's events.

Doubt, and even guilt, crept into his mind. "Did I offend or anger the great man, G-d forbid?" he wondered. He decided to visit Rabbi Eiger to make amends. To his surprise, Rabbi Eiger was neither embarrassed nor angry. But in a quiet manner, the scholar now embarked on a well-reasoned defense of his earlier remarks. Rabbi Banet soon realized the error of his position and apologized profusely.

**Why Didn’t You Present Your**

**Arguments at That Time**

"But, tell me, why did you not present your arguments at that time?" Rabbi Banet inquired.

"I thought as follows: I am only a visitor who is passing through your city," Rabbi Eiger explained. "There is no need for the townspeople to respect or honor me, but you are the rabbi of the community, of the whole country, in fact, and it is vital to the welfare of the community that your honor be respected by the people. Therefore, I felt it would be improper to contradict you in public."

Rabbi Banet was overwhelmed by these words and he wanted very much for the truth to be publicized. Therefore, he called the whole community together and explained to them what had happened. "Not only have I been given an understanding of Rabbi Eiger's great scholarship, but I have received an even greater insight into his sublime holiness and righteousness. On his first visit to Nikolsburg, Rabbi Eiger concealed his greatness from me, but this time, I have merited to learn from his singular and awesome humility."

**The Unique Faith of the Simple**

**Jews in the Holy Land**

When he was already elderly, Rabbi Avraham Dov of Everitch settling in the holy city of Safed. But although he had waited many years for the opportunity to bask in the spiritual light of the Land of Israel, once there he found life in the Holy Land too difficult to bear. The hardships were all too apparent, while the holiness of the land was hard to discern.

When he felt he could bear no more, Rabbi Avraham Dov began to think of returning to his home in Everitch. "After all," he reasoned, "I left my relatives and my students behind in order to live in the land, but it's all to no avail, for I am suffering so bitterly. Let me return to Everitch, and they will be happy to see me, and I will be glad as well."

**The Rainy Season in**

**Israel was Approaching**

When Rabbi Avraham Dov reached the decision to return home the rainy season in Israel was approaching. One day, as he was walking to the synagogue for the afternoon prayer, he heard noises coming from the surrounding rooftops. He couldn't identify the strange sounds, and he asked the people he passed, "What is happening? Where are these noises coming from?" The people were amused that he didn't know.

"Here, in Safed," they explained, "we have the custom of performing household chores on our flat roofs. We also use the roofs for storing food and other household supplies. The noise you hear is caused by the women scurrying about, removing all these things from the roofs."

**Removing Food & Household Items**

**From the Roof Before the Rains Come**

"But why are they doing that?" Rabbi Avraham Dov asked.

"Why so that nothing gets ruined by the rain, of course," was the incredulous reply. But Rabbi Avraham Dov was still confused. He looked up at a sky as blue as the sea when there are no waves in sight.

"It certainly doesn't look like rain," he said, hoping for some further explanation.

"Surely you remember that tonight we say the prayer for rain. We beseech G-d to remember us and send benign rains to water our crops and provide water for us. Since we are sure that our Father in Heaven will hear our prayers and will heed our request, we take precautions so that our possessions won't be ruined when the rains come."

The unquestioning faith of the people affected the rabbi deeply. Suddenly his eyes were opened and he saw the sublime heights of faith achieved by the simple Jews of the Holy Land. His pain and disappointment were replaced by a sense of awe at the holiness of the land and its people. At that moment, he abandoned all thoughts of returning to Everitch and began a new leg of his own spiritual journey to the holiness the Holy Land.

Reprinted from this week’s editon of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**G-d’s Helper**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

In a little town in the Ukraine there lived a widow and her only daughter, who was of marriageable age. The two earned the few kopeks needed for their survival by sewing *tachrichim* and candles. All week they ate only a piece of black bread with salt and with the addition of salted herring on Shabbos and Yomim Tovim. But they never complained. Only one thing bothered the widow: her daughter was single.

**Desiring that Her Daughter**

**Marry and Have Children**

“When, O G-d, will I have the good fortune to see my daughter married and have the merit of seeing grandchildren?” she would ask the heavens every day, as if expecting a reply. But as the days rolled on and no husband appeared on the scene, the woman grew more and more despondent.

One winter morning a terrible blizzard raged, the weather dropped to below zero, and the woman became desperately ill. There was no wood in the house to make a fire and the water in their buckets became solid ice. Even the windows were covered with a solid sheet of ice.

The young daughter, suffering from malnutrition, didn’t have the strength to chop wood to heat the fire. The dying woman pleaded for a drop of water, but all of it was frozen and the girl quietly began crying, “Father in heaven, Father of orphans and widows, please help!”

At that moment the door opened and in came a tall man, dressed in tattered clothing. He carried a bag on his back and a walking stick in his hands. His beard and hair were caked with snow and ice. Dropping his bag, he clapped his hands and feet trying to get the numbing coldness out of them.

“Anybody home?” he announced, not seeing the woman and the girl lying in their beds.

“There is a blizzard raging and I am happy to find shelter in this weather.”

When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he noticed the sick woman and her daughter and immediately surmised the situation. Without saying another word, he walked outside and began chopping wood. He reentered the house and soon built a raging fire. Taking off his coat, he placed it over the shivering girl who was lying on the bed. The mother was already covered with a heavy quilt. Peacefulness and serenity had descended upon the world. He took bread and food out of his pack, he prepared a meal. After carrying in snow in a pail, he heated it and soon had water to offer the woman and her daughter. Then he uttered a short prayer: “G-d in Heaven Who heals all the sick in Israel – heal her!”

**Begging for Water**

The sick woman opened her eyes and seeing him, begged for water, which he immediately gave her.

“Who are you, stranger?” she asked.

“I am a Jew, traveling through here and I noticed your house and came in to warm myself,” he replied.

The woman began to cry. “Who will take care of my poor orphan after I am gone? Who will arrange a *shidduch*, a match for her?”

“Fear not,” replied the man, “I will take care of her and I will see her wed.”

Promise me you will take care of her,” she pleaded, and the man did. A little while afterwards she breathed her last and the man, Rebbe Yisroel Hopsztajn, the *Maggid* of Koznitz, made arrangements for her funeral and took the girl into his home.

The following week, Reb Yisrael had occasion to travel to a small village and was invited to stay at the house of one of the well-to-do members of the community. The man was a widower; his wife had died two years before, and he was very lonely.

*Reprinted from last week’s edition of The Jewish Press.*

**An Extraordinary Wedding**

**By** [**Emuna Braverman**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48865447.html)

Two young adults with Down syndrome got married and we witnessed a miracle.

I went to a wedding last week where the hosts were extra considerate of the needs of their guests. What was the mark of their thoughtfulness? There was a small package of tissues on every seat. They knew everyone was going to need them.

This marriage was something extraordinary, the product of hard work, determination, grit and the kindness of the Almighty. It was the marriage of two young adults with Down syndrome, of [Danielle Magady](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48910567.html) and Shlomo Meyers. (It didn’t hurt that Danielle’s parents met in our living room so I felt an extra share of *nachas*!)

**Everyone will Cry Happy Tears**

As the groom, Shlomo, told me on the day before the wedding, “Everyone is going to cry happy tears tomorrow.” And boy was he right! Not just because we had a glimpse of the work involved in getting to this moment (none of us could actually claim to really understand what was required). Not just because we had seen the bride’s parents fight and push and struggle to mainstream their daughter and give her the same opportunities as her classmates.

Not just because of the drive and determination and just plain old-fashioned effort required to bring about this moment. But because we all felt that we were witnessing something out of the ordinary, something where the world “special” just isn’t enough, something perhaps that we would never witness again.

It was like seeing a revealed miracle in our times. And yes, those happy tears flowed and flowed. As one of the guests whispered after the chuppah, “If this doesn’t bring the messiah (Moshiach), I don’t know what will.”

**An Overwhelming Fear of Awe**

There were so many additional elements that added poignancy to the *simcha* including the bride’s grandfather singing to the beaming couple under the chuppah. But I think perhaps the overwhelming feeling was awe. There was an emotional intensity that could not be contained or put into words (which is why I debated whether to even try). Sometimes I tell my children (or these days my grandchildren) that “I love you so much I can’t take it.” There are not sufficient words or physical gestures of affection to adequately convey the intensity and depth of my love.

The emotional experience of this wedding mirrored this sentiment. We felt privileged to participate in this event, privileged that we were there to witness this moment, privileged that our lives had intersected with this extraordinary couple and their parents and allowed us to witness their joy.

Sometimes (I’m sorry to say) when we attend a celebration, we feel like we are doing the host and hostess a favor. We are taking time out of our busy schedules to participate in their celebration. But in this case the favor was reversed. The favor was done to us. We are forever in their debt.

I spent quite a while speaking with Shlomo the day before the wedding. Every time his bride’s name was mentioned, a big smile spread across his face. “She is the love of my life,” he explained. (All of our husbands should feel so excited and be so emotionally expressive!) But he also made a classic mistake. He told us a few times that the wedding day was going to be “the best day of my life!”

Certainly his excitement was contagious but, as with all new couples, I tried to suggest that the wedding day is only a beginning and that, please G-d, things would only get better and better. And, like all new couples, he didn’t believe me!

I’m not naïve. All marriages require work and this one will demand more than most.

**No Time to Sit Back and Relax**

The parents who didn’t stop pushing to reach this point are not now able to sit back and relax. Their work is not over (well no one’s is). But that is part of the inspiration. Because despite the greater level of work involved in now managing two lives instead of just one, these parents persevered and moved forward. On the days when I feel that “I can’t take another minute,” I look at them and put one foot in front of the other.

Sunday’s wedding uplifted us all. And goodness knows we could use some uplifting. At a time when some of the news facing the Jewish people seems to overwhelm us with its pain and sorrow, there is still the exhilarating joy of watching this couple and their families show us what’s possible and enable us to bear public witness to the awesome kindness of the Almighty.

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