**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Pinchas 5773**

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**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**The Incredible   
Legacy of the Rema**

**By Rabbi Yosef Weiss**

*(Editor’s Note: By examining history, we can clearly see that the Jewish nation has had a special fate among the nations. The continued existence of the Jewish people, against all odds, in the face of persecution, demonstrates that we are truly a exceptional nation, a nation which will "not be reckoned among the nations."*

*One of the most difficult periods in recent history was the Jewish experience in World War II. While we do not know for certain why such tragedies befell our people, one thing we know for certain: stories of amazing Divine Intervention during the darkest periods of history demonstrate that Hashem did not abandon His People.*

*The following amazing true story is one such story which illustrates a ray of light from Hashem during the darkest night.)*

**World War II: Cracow Poland**

It was World War II, in Cracow, Poland. Reb Yitzchok Isaac Klingberg's apartment had been commandeered by the invading Germans who then set up their headquarters in the building. Amazingly, the Germans allowed R' Yitzchok to remain living in the hallway. It was a precarious existence for R' Yitzchok, but he was thankful to be alive.

"Zhid!"

The German commandant's officer awakened R' Yitzchok from a fitful sleep. "Get into the office!" he commanded. "The commandant wants to see you." R' Yitzchok scrambled to obey the man's orders. He followed the German officer into the office and stood at attention, while the drunken commandant managed to stumble around his desk and sprawl into his chair.   
R' Yitzchok's eyes widened in terror as the commandant pulled his gun out of his belt and flung it on the desk between them. "You see this gun?" he barked at his shivering victim. "I'm going to ask you a question. If you don't answer me truthfully, I'll kill you."

**The Commandant was Drunk**

R' Yitzchok managed to nod, but his heart sank. The commandant was so drunk that he would probably shoot R' Yitzchok with the slightest provocation—even if he did speak the truth.

"Vaas es das Rema—who was the Rema?" the commandant demanded. R' Yitzchok stared, speechless. What sort of question was this? Why would a German commandant want to know about the Rema, and acronym for Rabbi Moshe Isserles? (died 1572)

The sixteenth century Torah leader was a towering figure whose works are among the foundations of Torah law. Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote the Shulchan Aruch, the guide to our daily lives, and the Rema added the Ashkenazic viewpoint on various customs and rulings wherever they differed. He was prepared to write the entire guide on his own, but he humbly abstained when he heard Rabbi Karo had already begun his work.

**Ordered Not to Touch**

**The Rema’s Shul or Grave**

The commandant abruptly stood from his chair. "We were commanded to destroy the cemetery here in Cracow!" he shouted. "But then they sent us a telegram, telling us not to touch the Rema's shul, or his grave."

R' Yitzchok blinked in surprise. Could this really be true?

"Vaas es das Rema—who was the Rema?" the commandant asked again, with drunken urgency. R' Yitzchok didn't know where to begin. Should he talk about the Rema's life, or simply mention his great written contributions to Torah Jewry?

But before R' Yitzchok's could say a word, the commandant suddenly swayed—and then slid to the floor, passing out right at R' Yitzchok's feet. R' Yitzchok let out his breath with words of thanks to Hashem before beating a hasty retreat from the commandant's office.

R' Shimon Spira, R' Yitzchok's cousin, had a similar experience. After the war, R' Shimon Spira walked slowly through the streets of his hometown of Cracow, Poland. It was so different now than it had been had been before the war! Where were the-sixty thousand Jews who had made Cracow their home before World War II? R' Shimon was among the paltry two thousand survivors who had managed to escape the hands of the Nazis.

After the war, it was natural for him to return to the city where he had spent his entire life. But there was not much left to see in postwar Cracow.   
As his feet led him through the deserted streets, his recollections were interrupted by a tap on his shoulder.

**Questioned by a Shabbily**

**Dressed Young Man**

"Excuse me, sir." R' Shimon turned to see a shabbily dressed young man, accompanied by two friends of about the same age. "We're looking for the grave of the Rema. Could you show us the way?"

R' Shimon raised his eyebrows in surprise as the sound of the holy Rema's name passed through this young man's lips. He himself had visited the burial site many times before the war. But what interest would three non-Jewish men have in the Rema's grave?

"Why do you want to go there?" R' Shimon asked. "I understand why you're asking us that," the leader of the group said ruefully. "But despite the way we look, we really are Jewish. We were pretty young when the Nazis took over, and we were forced to work for them. Our assignment was to knock down the tombstones in all the Jewish cemeteries across town."

The man's voice grew hushed. "When we reached the Rema's stone and prepared to knock it down, the sirens went off, and we ran to take shelter from the air raid. When the all-clear sounded, we went to try again—and again the sirens went off It kept on happening. Every time we went back to knock down the gravestone, the sirens would go off, and we had to run away."

**Wanting to Ask**

**Forgiveness of the Rema**

“We did chip off a small chunk from the gravestone,' "Now we want to go back there to ask forgiveness,' the leader concluded. With the world completely shattered by war, three secular young men sought atonement for chipping a stone. Tears sprang to R' Shimon's eyes.

"I can show you where to go. "R' Shimon reassured the three men. He beckoned them to follow him toward the shut and the adjoining cemetery.   
"Your tale does not surprise me,' R' Shimon remarked as they walked. "It is only fitting for this great tzaddik, the Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles."

R' Shimon stopped suddenly. "See that beautiful building?" R' Shimon gestured to the high archway that marked the entrance to the old shul. "The Rema's father built it in his honor, four hundred years ago. The Isserles family was very prominent, very wealthy and very supportive of Torah learning."   
 R' Shimon fell silent for a moment. "On the Rema's yahrtzeit," he continued quietly, "so many Jews came to daven here. Every year—on Lag B'Omer." R' Shimon's final words, while unspoken, reverberated through the quiet streets. "No more ...no more..."

**Vowed to Change**

**Their Way of Life**

"I showed them the grave," said R' Shimon as he finished telling his story. "Just like they said, the Rema's gravestone was still standing tall and straight. They asked the Rema for forgiveness—and then they vowed to change their way of life. All in the merit of the Rema." (Reb Yosef Weiss, page 138 Visions of Greatness.)

History demonstrates that we are a nation which will "not be reckoned among the nations." We may not always understand Hashem's ways, but we clearly see that Hashem guides us with extra special Divine Providence.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**You Lose – I Win**

What does a Jew do when he finds himself in trouble? He goes to a big tzaddik and asks him to give him a beracha. He davens to the Creator of the world to save him. But how do other nations react to trouble?

When Balak ben Tzipor, the king of Moav, was frightened of the Jews, he went to Bilaam and asked him to do something. He didn’t ask him to bless him, but rather to curse the Jews!

This is the way of the wicked, explains the Chafetz Chaim. Rather than seek a blessing for themselves, they would prefer a curse for someone else!

*Reprinted from last week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

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

**Thoughts at a Bris**

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| **QUESTION:** |

What should the father of the son think by the bris and what should everyone else think during the bris?

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| **ANSWER:** |

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| **balloon** |

During the bris the thought that should be uppermost is, Baruch Hashem, al brischa shechosamto bivsoreinu. It's a stamp of greatness. You know, the Torah says "uksoves kaka lo sitnu biv'ersachem", it's assur to tattoo yourself.

**What’s Wrong with a Tattoo?**

A Jew can't make a tattoo, any kind of tattoo. What's wrong with a tattoo? Some say because you might tattoo avodah zara on your skin, but there is something else.

A Jew is kadosh, only one cho'sum can be on him, that's the cho'sum of Hashem. Nothing else. No other mark should be on him except the mark of Hashem. Which means it's a sign of the utmost greatness.

By the way I want to tell you something. This mitzva we lose, because we did it against our will. We were little children, they forced us into it, it hurts very much. We were kicking and crying and if we could we would get up and run away, so we didn't want the mitzva.

**How to Gain Back What You Have Lost**

What can you do about it? You want the mitzva! So now you can be misaken what you lost, How? When you're bentching birchas hamazon, say, al brischa shechosamto bivsoreinu, I thank you Hashem, we thank you. By saying it lemafreah, Hashem says I'm accepting your thanks. So now you're showing you're happy with what took place, and you're thinking, if I had to go through it again, I'd do it gladly. (Of course you wouldn't) but persuade yourself.

You choose, you're bochair, it's called bechira lemafreah, retroactive bechira, it's also good. Therefore when you think, I am so glad that I enjoyed that suffering at that time, I'm so happy with what Hashem did to me, you get schar almost as if you chose to do it yourself. It's important. You heard that tonight, it was worth coming for that alone, to make use of the Birchas Hamazon to practice happiness that you're choosing the bris that was forced upon you.

And that's what everybody should think, what a great honor it is for us, what a great happiness that we were chosen by Hashem. There's a mark on us, a mark of approval, that's genuine. That belongs to me, Hashem says, nobody else has the right to have that bris, that mark.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of “A Moment with Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l” that is based on a transcript of Rabbi Miller’s answer to a question from the audience at one on his classic Thursday night lectures in his Flatbush shul.*

**Rabbi David Okunov, 30:**

**Preserving the**

**Flame of Judaism.**

**By Heather Robinson**



When Rabbi David Okunov got word in 2011 that a small shul on Coney Island/Brighton Beach needed help for High Holy Days services, he agreed to lead them. He arrived to find five individuals, including an elderly Holocaust survivor, in a dilapidated room.

A married father of two who also works with youth and young professionals at the Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe (FREE) organization, Okunov discovered in the nearly abandoned shul a unique mission.

**A More Vibrant High Holy Days Minyan**

By High Holy Days 2012, the congregation was hosting 300 Jews, including 243 who are regular members of the Warbasse Jewish Heritage Congregation.

Today, under the leadership of Okunov and synagogue President Boris Shnayderman, the shul is warmly decorated with mahogany paneling and a beautiful Torah ark.

“Many people said, ‘Rabbi, you’re young. Why are you coming to such a place? It’s old and dingy,’” Okunov recalled. “I said, ‘Let’s see if people come. Then we’ll decide.’”

Okunov’s outreach is becoming the stuff of legend in the neighborhood. Congregant Mitchell Sudman, 68, described himself as a lifelong skeptic toward organized religion. When Okunov approached him, Sudman told the Rabbi to “go away.” Until he got to know Okunov. “He won me over,” said Sudman, who recently became bar mitzvah.

**A Contagious Spirit of Positive Energy**

Okunov has initiated a Passover campaign and given away 700 packages of food with help from a donor. “Just the warmth and pleasantness of this man, his positive energy, it’s contagious,” said one congregant.

Family business: Preserving Judaism is Okunov’s family legacy. His father, Rabbi Mayer Okunov, is chairman of the Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe (FREE) organization, which includes the first synagogue in the U.S. founded by refugees from the former USSR.

His grandfather, Rabbi Dovid Okunov, taught and practiced Judaism underground in Communist Russia. In 1967, the elder Rabbi Okunov, who followed the teachings of the Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, fled the KGB and moved to Israel with his family, eventually settling in Brooklyn. In 1979, he was murdered during a robbery on a Brooklyn street.

“Preserving and practicing Judaism was my grandfather’s mission; he wouldn’t give it up for anything,” says the younger Rabbi Okunov, who was born four years after his grandfather’s death, and is named in his memory.

*Reprinted from last week’s email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals) Update. The article originally appeared in the June 5, 2013 edition of The Jewish Week (New York) in their column devoted to 36 under 36.*

**How Monty Hall’s Best**

**Deal Changed His Life.**

**By** [**David Suissa**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48868297.html)

[](http://www.biography.com/people/monty-hall-9542238)

For over 30 years, starting in the early 1960s, Monty Hall hosted Let’s Make a Deal, one of the most popular game shows in television history. He was not only the show’s impresario, he created and produced it, and today, at 91, he is still involved with its creative evolution.

**Recalling a Deal He Made 75 Years Ago**

But while Hall has fond memories of the thousands of “deals” he made on his show, when I met him for lunch the other day at the Hillcrest Country Club, he had other deals in mind.

In particular, he told me about a deal he made more than 75 years ago with a Jewish man named Max Freed.

Hall had dropped out of college after his first year because he couldn’t afford to continue. He was living with his family in Winnipeg, a city of long winters in western Canada that attracted many Jews from Ukraine. The Hall clan spent many years struggling financially and living in close quarters.

Max Freed, on the other hand, was anything but struggling. He was a 29-year-old playboy with a thriving clothing company who wore fancy suits and had a reputation around town for living the good life.

**“Was That Your Boy I Saw…**

**Washing the Floors of a Warehouse?”**

One fateful day, Freed bumped into Hall’s father, a [kosher](http://www.aish.com/jl/m/mm/48958906.html) butcher, and asked him: “Was that your boy I saw yesterday washing the floors of a warehouse?” The father responded that yes, that was his son.

“Well,” Freed said, “tell him to come by my office tomorrow.”

When Hall showed up the next day, Freed made him an offer. If Hall returned to college, Freed would pay for all his schooling expenses, but with three conditions.

One, Hall’s grades had to be B-plus or higher. Two, Freed wanted a monthly report on his progress. And three, Hall had to promise that one day he’d do the same for another kid. (Freed also asked him to keep the deal confidential, a request Hall gladly ignored nearly 75 years later at our lunch.)

Hall, with the support of his family, jumped at the deal, so Freed asked him to get back to him with a budget.

**“Don’t You Want a Drink with Your Lunch?”**

As Freed reviewed the budget, which included tuition and living expenses, he noticed that Hall had put in only 25 cents for lunch. “Don’t you want a drink with your lunch?” he asked. “Go ahead and add 5 cents for a Coke, and throw in something for haircuts, too.”

Once they agreed on the budget, Hall promptly resumed his studies at the University of Manitoba.

For the next three years, Hall thrived. He was the first Jewish student to become president of the student body, a prestigious position. He had excellent grades and reported regularly to Freed, who kept a close eye on his progress.

Hall’s accomplishments, however, were not enough to get him into medical school, so after graduation he moved to Toronto and began a career in radio broadcasting.

Hall had a restless personality and was always on the lookout for new opportunities. He moved to the United States and began working in television, creating and producing shows. His big break came when he sold Let’s Make a Deal to a major network.

Hall went way beyond his promise to help another kid get an education. He helped charities raise more than $1 billion.

**Max Was Very Proud of His “Investment”**

As Hall became one of the best-known names in television, Max Freed was becoming very proud of his “investment.” The two always kept in touch, becoming so close that Freed’s son once said to Hall: “I think he loves you more than he loves me!”

But it wasn’t just Hall’s fame and success that made Freed proud — it was also his charitable work. Hall went way beyond his original promise to help another kid get an education. In fact, he became one of America’s most celebrated fundraisers, [helping charities](http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/81459137.html) of all stripes raise more than $1 billion.

**The Man Who Doesn’t Say No**

In the charity world today, Hall is known as the man who doesn’t say no.

A few years ago, Hall heard from a doctor that Freed, by then 99, was nearing the end. He took the first flight to Winnipeg to be near him.

When Hall got to his bedside, he moved his face “nose to nose” with Freed, who was now “mostly blind and mostly deaf.” They talked and reminisced for about 20 minutes.

Finally, putting his mouth close to his friend’s ear, Hall said to the man who had picked him up 75 years earlier while he was washing floors in Winnipeg: “Max, you gave me a [life](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/The-Paperboy-From-Heaven.html).”

Max Freed, the former playboy who invested in that little Jewish boy he hardly knew, replied, in a barely audible voice: “No, Monty, you gave me a life.”

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Aish.com This article originally appeared in The Jewish Journal.*

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**Talking to Sheldon with**

**Love (Ahavas Yisroel)**

**B Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Rabbi Yankel Gluckowski was a teacher in Toronto. It was his job to teach Torah to the Jewish children in the school, but he also had a hobby: Teaching Torah to yet more Jews.

In fact he was so good at it that he was often offered payment for these 'outside' activities. But he always refused, saying that the Lubavitcher Rebbe once told him that the wage he received for teaching also included 'a few other special projects of his own''

**A Call from a Frantic Father**

One day he received a telephone call from a man that he had never met in his life and who he had no idea where he got his phone number.

The fellow was frantic. He was Jewish and his son, who we will call Sheldon, somehow got involved with a cult called Hari Krishna and no one had heard from him for months. The man was going out of his mind and was about to call the police when someone gave him the Rabbi's number.

Rabbi Gluckowski expressed sympathies at the tragic news but didn't

understand what it had to do with him. After all, he was a normal religious Jew with no experience with cults or such things. True he was an venturous sort of person with a tremendous love for all mankind, especially his fellow Jews, but he didn't understand anything about cults and certainly didn't have the time to go searching in India or somewhere else to find about this cult.

**Wouldn’t Take No for an Answer**

But the man on the other end of the phone wouldn't take no for an answer. He didn't care if the Rabbi knew about cults or not, he had heard his name from friends and was convinced that if anyone could get his son out it was him. Not only that but he had tried a lot of other things and called a lot of other people and nothing else worked.

And as far as locating his son, that was no problem. It so happened that he knew the exact location of his son, or at least where he was when he was last heard from several months ago; in an Ashram in Toronto, not far from where the Rabbi worked.

Something told Rabbi Gluckowski to do it. It was crazy! But this could be another of his 'special projects'. He took the challenge.

With no plan, strategy or inside information whatsoever he woke early the next morning, located the Ashram, said a short prayer, put on a smile and began knocking on the massive front door (there was no doorbell).

**A Response to Ten Minutes of**

**Nonstop Knocking on the Door**

At first no one answered. They probably peeked out, saw a religious Jew and figured they should ignore him till he went away. But after he knocked for ten minutes without stopping a gruff voice from the other side of the closed door answered, "Who is it?! What do you want?!"

"Hello!" he replied brightly, "My name is Gluckowski, Rabbi Gluckowski, and I want to talk to Sheldon Greenbaum. Anyone called Sheldon Greenbaum in there? His parents are worried about him."

There were a few moments of silence and he almost considered to give them another ten minute knocking session when a different voice came from behind the closed door. "Yes, this is the one who is called Sheldon."

"Sheldon? Sheldon Greenbaum?" yelled the Rabbi. A faint grunt signifying 'yes' was heard from the other side.

"Hey! Hi Sheldon! Your father called me and he's worried. He might just call the police."

"I'm okay!" he answered.

**“Listen Sheldon. Do Me a Favor!”**

"Listen Sheldon. Do me a favor. Your father called me and asked me to contact you because he's worried and he said he might call the police because he's worried."

"So what do you want me to do?"

The Rabbi had to think fast and suddenly it came to him. "Listen, if you call him he won't believe you. He'll think you are brainwashed. I mean, three months is a long time not to call. And if I call him, what will I say?

I can't lie and say you're all right, I haven't even seen you. So I have an idea.." Rabbi Gluckowski knew he was really crossing the line here but he went through with it. "Come to my house this Shabbat and then I can tell him I saw you for a full day and he won't worry. What do you say?"

"One minute." Was the reply.

After a few minutes of silence the door opened and out stepped a thin fellow, shaved head except for a clump of hair on the top with some sort of ornament dangling between his eyes. He was dressed in an orange robe wearing loose sandals and was carrying some sort of shapeless leather briefcase that looked like it was made in Tibet. He declared, "I am ready."

Rabbi Gluckowski took him to his house, which was only a few streets away, showed him to a room in the basement asked him if he wanted anything to eat or drink, or if he possibly wanted to take a shower. But Sheldon just gave a close-mouthed smile, sat as straight-backed as possible and shook his head serenely 'no'.

**Seating Down to a Shabbat Meal**

That evening, as the Rabbi expected, Sheldon declined his offer to go with him and his sons to Synagogue. When they returned an hour or so later from the prayers they all sat down, Sheldon included, to the Shabbat meal. Luckily there were enough potatoes, salad and bread to keep their vegetarian guest satisfied.

Rabbi Gluckowski had no problem talking Torah at the dinner table but he soon realized that none of it was really pertinent to spaced-out Sheldon. So he tried a joke. no reaction, a story. no reaction, something about family, life, sports, hobbies, animals. no luck; Sheldon just smiled, sat straight backed and nodded his head and finally said a few words before he retired to his basement room.

That night Rabbi Gluckowski was awaked from his sleep by a low groaning noise that filtered up into his bedroom from the basement.

**Witnessing Some Sort of Ritual**

He put on his slippers and night-robe and went down to have a look. The moaning became louder as he descended and realized he was witnessing some sort of ritual.

Sheldon had a picture or some sort of statue propped up on a chair before him and he was actually bowing to it while chanting some monotonous mantra.

It was too weird for the Rabbi to bear: he had never seen a Jew actually worshiping an idol - certainly not right here in his house!!

He didn't know what to do. It was out of the question to let it continue, but on the other hand he couldn't get angry or evict him... poor Sheldon thought he was doing a big mitzvah!

So Rabbi Gluckowski sat up the entire night and talked to him. Occasionally he went to get a cup of coffee to keep him up but he just kept talking. Not one word about idolatry, because he didn't know what to say, and also not too much about Judaism, because it turned Sheldon off, but about everything else under the sun; especially stories.

The next day Sheldon was so exhausted that he slept the entire day, waking only for the Shabbat meal and, needless to say, Rabbi Gluckowski was a wreck. He would have liked to also catch a few hours of sleep but Shabbat was one of his busiest days, praying, being with his family and teaching several classes.

**Among Those Coming to**

**Comfort the Mourners**

Years later (only a few years ago) Rabbi Gluckowski passed away and his children, all of whom had already married and had children of their own, spent the seven-day mourning period in his home in Toronto. In that time hundreds, of people came to comfort the mourners and to praise the deceased. Among them was a thin, middle aged, religious fellow with sparkling eyes that no one seemed to recognize.

He sat opposite the mourners and said; "When I heard your father passed away I had to come. Remember me? I was by your house about fifteen years ago for one Shabbat. You were all younger then, so was I but I had a shaved head and was wearing an orange robe."

**Inspired to Think**

**About His Jewish Soul**

He told them of how that Shabbat got him to begin to think about his Jewish soul seriously for the first time in his life until finally he went to a yeshiva a year or so later and liked it.

"You know what did it?" He concluded his story," You know what really impressed me about your father? It wasn't anything he said; in fact even the next day I didn't remember any of it, not a word. It was his love. I never saw such unconditional love in my life. That is what changed my mind."

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

**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov, the Innkeeper and the**

**Gentile Servant Boy**

What an honor! The innkeeper felt it almost a holy trust that the Baal Shem Tov stayed at his inn whenever he visited the area. A special room was prepared and was always ready in case the tzadik chanced to drop in.

And so, when it happened that the Baal Shem Tov arrived and made his way to "his" room, the innkeeper was curious to find that the door to the room was locked from within.

**The Baal Shem Tov Warns the**

**Innkeeper to Not Punish the Servant Boy**

The innkeeper knocked on the door and it opened to reveal the slight figure of the gentile servant boy, Piotr who had taken a few solitary moments of rest inside. Perceiving the innkeeper's annoyance, the Baal Shem Tov admonished him. "Don't punish the boy. One day he will come to your aid when you need it the most."

The Baal Shem Tov turned to the frightened child and said, "What is your heart's desire?" He replied, "I want to become educated and I want to have beautiful clothing to wear." "It will be exactly as you wish," replied the tzadik, and he mounted his carriage and left the inn.

**Becomes the Chief Bookkeeper for**

**The Innkeeper’s Many Properties**

The boy began attending school and his bright mind quickly grasped whatever was offered to him. He returned to the inn and became chief bookkeeper for all the innkeeper's properties.

One day his obvious intelligence caught the attention of a traveling aristocrat. The aristocrat offered the innkeeper a handsome sum to part with the young servant, and after consulting with Piotr, the innkeeper agreed.

To his great delight Piotr was again enrolled in school and he completed his studies with honors. The nobleman loved him and took him into his home saying, "I was not blessed with children and I want to adopt you as my own nephew."

Piotr succeeded in everything he undertook, and was popular with everyone. After a time, his master died and all his possessions passed to Piotr, who was considered to be his only relative.

**Piotr Decides to Visit the Innkeeper**

It was then that it entered Piotr's mind to pay a visit to the Jewish innkeeper who had given him his start in life. But when he arrived at his former home, he found strangers in the inn.

"Where is the former innkeeper?" he inquired. The new proprietor told him the whole sad story, how after the young gentile servant boy had left, the innkeeper's fortunes had turned and he had eventually lost everything and was living as a beggar in a nearby town.

Piotr's heart was touched and he traveled to that town and sent out an announcement that he would be distributing alms to all the poor. The poor gathered outside his lodgings and he gave each person a few coins. When he came to his former master, he asked him to relate his life story.

**Overwhelmed by the**

**Success of His Former Servant**

The Jew obliged and only after he had completed his tale, did Piotr reveal his identity. The Jew was overwhelmed at the young man's appearance and his obvious success. "Please allow me to bring you to my estate. I will provide you with a good living and you will want for nothing."

The Jew was reluctant, but after some coaxing, he finally accepted. Piotr decided that he would build an inn and give it to the Jew to manage. When construction was completed, he would send for him. For now, he paid up all the man's debts and left him a sum with which to live.

It so happened that just at that time a robbery occurred in the town. With his new-found "wealth," the Jew became the prime suspect. He was arrested and thrown into jail where he languished for several weeks.

When the inn was completed, Piotr came back to get the Jew, but he was in prison! Losing no time, he went to the authorities, and attesting to the honesty of his old employer, obtained the man's release.

Settled on the estate, the Jew and his family were happy as could be, but that happiness was not to last. The jealous peasants couldn't stand seeing a Jew in the young master's favor. Together with the local priest, they cooked up a sure scheme.

One night a woman crept into the courtyard of the inn and laid a small bundle under the shrubs. Piotr, who was just leaving the inn, watched silently in the darkness.

The next day chaos broke out at the inn. The priest, the peasant and the police all converged on the inn and in no time, the Jew was led away in chains having been accused of killing the baby that was in the bundle under the shrubs. The trial would be swift and the sentence would surely be death.

Again, Piotr arrived and was able to have the Jew released, but this time just until the day of the trial. The Jew took advantage of this freedom to run to the Baal Shem Tov, begging his blessing.

"Didn't I tell you that the young boy would help you in your time of need? Go back and don't worry."

The day of the trial arrived and Piotr was ready. Acting as defense, he summoned the peasant woman to the stand. The ignorant woman was no match for him, and weeping copiously, she confessed her guilt. Then the judge took over, questioning the scheming priest. With no way out, he confessed to masterminding the plot and was sentenced to death by hanging. Thus, were the words of the Baal Shem Tov realized yet again.

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

When Death Paid

Me a Visit

**By** [**Rabbi Ephraim Shore**](http://www.aish.com/authors/48866822.html)

This was no made-for-TV movie. It was real and shockingly happening to my life.

Pain is hard to describe in words. They don’t do it justice. Hospitals use a sophisticated scale of “1-10.” Mine was at least 11.

Thursday I was biking around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, rushing as usual. At the end of the day, I felt a bit of lower back ache, nothing unusual for a Type-A personality like me who regularly swims, mountain bikes and does yoga. I took a bath and went to bed.

Friday I woke up and it felt worse. I got out of bed and screamed as a massive spasm suddenly seared through my lower back. I collapsed on to the bed, blinded by the pain. It was like one of those awful leg cramps but way more intense and across my whole lower back. And the pain would not let up. In fact, the spasms were getting worse and worse. I had no idea that this kind of pain existed.



Ephraim and Esther Shore with their family

The slightest movement of any part of my body magnified the daggers plunging into me. My wife had just stepped out, so I made the massive effort to focus and struggled to call an ambulance.

Over the course of the next few hours I can only remember a few moments. I wasn’t unconscious but the pain was so overwhelming it left no room whatsoever for anything else to enter my consciousness. The only words I could force out between moans of torment were “I can’t” and “Need pain killer now!” Thank G-d none of our kids were home to witness this. My wife rushed home and was unfortunately not spared.

**Just Yearning for Deliverance, No Matter How it Came**

I spent the next week in varying degrees of utter agony. The back pain was only minimally alleviated by morphine and other pain killers and within a day my entire body started breaking down. Water in my lungs, enlarged spleen and kidneys, fever, my mouth so parched I couldn’t swallow. IV, catheter, and oxygen tubes invaded my body.

Now I understand viscerally how torture works. Our frail bodies are just not equipped for this degree of pain. I would have done anything to escape it. After a few days, utterly spent from the unrelenting suffering, I yearned only for deliverance, no matter where it came from.



Ephraim on the rooftop of Aish HaTorah

Doctors searched for an explanation. The usual suspects were eliminated fairly quickly. After six days, the doctors sat my family down with me and carefully offered their conclusion. “We believe you have multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood.” They warned us not to Google it. My brother and parents flew in. My wife dropped everything and became my full time guardian and nurse.

I was transferred to the cancer ward where I was finally given the massive amounts of pain meds required to make my pain livable. Finally I was able to think of something other than my pain and it was time to come to terms with my new state in life.

I was in shock. I never thought I was the [cancer](http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48970906.html) type of person, if there is such a thing. I’m in good shape, eat healthy, and well, as someone who is constantly on the move, I never imagined cancer could ever tackle me. Boy, was I wrong. Two weeks prior I attended the funeral of a friend who died of cancer three weeks after his diagnosis, and that image filled my mind.

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But the respite from pain was so soothing I couldn’t help but feel a certain joy of relief. Still locked to my bed, completely sapped from a week of agony that continued to revisit me in regular spasms, I had a lot to [contemplate](http://www.aish.com/sp/ph/What_is_the_Purpose_of_Life.html): taking a hard look at my life and the coming years of treatments, hospitals and life interrupted.

**Discovering the Inherent**

**Majesty and Meaning of Life**

I looked out from that hospital bed onto my life…and possible [death](http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/How_to_Die.html), a strange new visitor. One part of me (the exhausted, beaten down part) wanted to sink into the comfort of putting all the pain and hassles of life behind me.

But the overwhelming feeling was that I was deeply connecting with the beauty of life. I looked out the window and stared in wonder at the mountains and trees. I wanted to paint (and I don’t paint). I know this sounds cliché but for me it was profound. I suddenly saw the inherent majesty and meaning all around me. And I didn’t want to die.

I felt I had to grapple with the meaning of my illness and how I should be changing my life.

**Receiving a Very Heavy**

**Message from G-d**

At the same time I knew that G-d was giving me a very heavy message. Brutally honest, personal reflection is difficult, and I was forced to stop and do it. I felt I had to grapple with the meaning of my illness and how I should be changing my life.

When I thought about my life, the word that hit me was “hysteria.” Ambitious and driven at work, with wife and nine kids at home, my life is a non-stop maelstrom of running from one obligation to the next. And with all that running I seemed to be missing the point. It’s not just ‘get it all done so that it’s all done,’ a mad scramble to the finish line.

I committed that if G-d spares me and I have the chance to return to life again, I would not allow myself to lose sight of my ultimate goals – being aware of G-d in my daily life, giving my wife and kids more attention and love, appreciating what a great team of people I’m working with and what a special privilege it is to devote my life to helping the Jewish people – and not to get lost in the myriad means to reach those goals.

**A Living Nightmare**

I shared my room in the neurosurgery ward with eight others – the brain injured, the brain tumors, the strokes. Everyone was moaning for attention. It was a Third World setting: an understaffed ward, each person stuck in his curtained-off, five square meters, constantly encroached by everyone else’s visitors, sharing two filthy bathrooms with those lucky enough to be able to get there.

One thing we all shared in common was that we were all fighting for our lives, fighting through mountains of pain to get back to where we last stepped out of our lives.

Why? I asked myself. Why are we all fighting so desperately through life, through such sacrifice and even horror? To go back home, back to work and throw ourselves into the rat race once more? I hope not. We all instinctively know that it’s because life is precious, gorgeous, beautiful. Even if we ignore that 99% of the time.

**A Classic Rabbi Noah Weinberg Question**

Rabbi Noah Weinberg, zt”l, would ask people if they’d be willing to give up one of their kids for $100 million dollars. (“Come on, you’ll still have two left! What about the one who’s always kvetching?”) Naturally, no one ever replies in the affirmative.

“But think about all the pleasure you can buy with $100 million? Yachts, vacations, homes in Paris, New York and Palm Beach! Every gourmet meal imaginable!” That means, he would point out, each of our kids is worth more than $100 million. “So why aren’t we spending more time with them? Why aren’t we enjoying them?”

The culprit is not life and its endless responsibilities. The problem is with us and how we choose to experience our “mundane” (gorgeous, stunning) daily life. It’s our unwillingness to take a deep breath, send up our periscope from the depths of that hysteria and constantly remember that we’re doing all of this because of the meaning and pleasure inherent in it all. It’s far more comfortable to just get lost in the busy-ness of life than to make the ongoing effort to choose to focus on the good and genuinely love and embrace life. And every sick person fighting for his life is a testament of this truth. No one would endure such an intense battle unless they were deeply aware of the infinite value of life itself.

**Death Sentence Retracted**

After a week in the cancer ward, the doctors came to my room and informed me and my wife that there had been a misdiagnosis. I did not have myeloma! I was most likely suffering from osteomyelitis, an infection in the bones in my spine, treatable by an intense, long term treatment of antibiotics.

Looking back on this experience, I feel that G-d has given me one of the greatest gifts imaginable.

The wave of relief that rushed through me cannot be described in words. I was being given the gift of life again! And this wasn’t some made for television movie. It was my life.

**One of the Greatest Gifts Imaginable**

Looking back on this experience, still taking small quantities of morphine, I feel that G-d has given me one of the greatest gifts imaginable. My death sentence was withdrawn and my life was renewed. Saved! A fresh start. All the benefits of a life-threatening disease without actually having to go through it.

When you check in for a couple weeks to a cancer or neurosurgery ward, chances are you’ll come out a different human being. It’s a trip worth much more than a vacation in Tahiti.

My [resolutions](http://www.aish.com/h/hh/gar/sa/Spiritual_Accounting_System.html) are many and I know, naively unrealistic. Those awful weeks in the hospital taught me so much about what I like and don’t like about myself. From now on I will be stopping regularly to taste the beauty in everyday, boring, simple, undramatic (please G-d, no more drama!) life.

**Dancing for Joy Because of the New Gift**

I’ll be patient and ever-so-expressively grateful with my wife (who was insanely devoted to my recovery), I’ll be spending more time with my kids and truly enjoying them, I’ll enjoy my prayers and remember that I’m actually talking to the Creator of the Universe, and I’ll ask Him to help me take pleasure in my day. I’ll smile to the cashier. And I’ll dance with joy at the gift that I can do meaningful work that is helping the Jewish People and Israel.

I’m still human. All that may not all happen immediately, but I do hope some of it will stick. Not just hope – I plan on G-d-willing working hard on that. For now, I’m relishing the slowly receding pain in my back (I can now brush my teeth and put my own pants on!). And I’m enjoying the effort to bite my tongue when my wife drives too slowly and to smile when my kids are fighting.

It’s the struggle for sanity and I’m back in the ring.

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

**Chasidic Story #813**

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe And the Boyaner Chazan**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

A Boyaner chasid came to Melbourne, Australia to be the chazan (cantor) for the High Holidays of 5771 (2010). Rabbi Mottel Krasnjanski noticed that from time to time in the middle of the services he would pause and glance at a little piece of paper that he had placed on the podium with his Machzor (High Holiday prayer book).

**Questioned about the Paper**

After the services were over, Rabbi Krasnjanski asked the chazan about the paper. The chazan replied that about 20 years earlier, shortly before the High Holidays, he had gone to **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on a Sunday when the Rebbe distributed dollars to be given to charity. The chazan told the Rebbe that he was going to be a chazan in a certain shul. The Rebbe’s response was, “We must remember that we are praying to G-d.”

The chazan appreciated the nice thought but didn’t take it too seriously at the time. After the holidays however, it occurred to him that throughout the services he was so preoccupied with remembering the tunes, hitting the notes crisply, creating the right emotions through his voice, that he really hadn’t thought much about G-d!

**More than Just a Nice Thought**

He then realized that the Rebbe hadn’t just told him a “nice thought,” but rather had given him guidance and something to work on. Since then, the chazan concluded, “whenever I lead the prayers, I carry with me this piece of paper on which I wrote the Rebbe’s message, “We must remember that we are praying to G-d, and look at it from time to time during the prayers to make sure that I never forget it!”

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Eli-Noson Silberberg in Living Jewish #351, originally posted on //LchaimWeekly.org. Rabbi Silverberg is a Rosh Yeshiva in Chicago, but every summer he is the rabbi-scholar-in-residence at Machon Alta, a Chabad women’s seminary here in the holy city of Tzefat.

**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 Shvat 1950. 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.

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