**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas pinchas 5770**

**Story #657**

**Handle with Care**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

 It was early in the summer of 5583 (1743) and Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar was on his deathbed, in Jerusalem. The best doctors had been called in to treat him, but to no avail. In a short while he would leave this world. His wife approached the bed. With tear-swollen eyes, she cried, When you leave me, I will be all alone in the world. Who will support me? What will become of me?

 Gathering his last bit of strength, he whispered to her: Do not fear, I will not allow you to starve. After my passing, a rich man will come to you from Constantinople (Ishtanbul) to buy my tefilin. You may sell them to him, but you must warn him that he should guard their sanctity very carefully. When he puts them on, he should not take his mind off of them, and not speak even the slightest mundane conversation.

**A Wealthy Merchant from Constantinople**

 After the Shloshim [30-day mourning period], a wealthy merchant from Constantinople appeared in Jerusalem, seeking directions to the home of the Ohr HaChaim, as he was known. Please sell me the tefilin your saintly husband prayed with, he begged Rabbi Chaims widow upon his arrival. Ill give you 300 ducats [golden pounds] for them (an enormous sum in those days, enough to support the widow for life).

 I can sell them to you, she replied, only if you will treat them with the utmost sanctity. She then delivered the details of her husbands warning. The man agreed, accepting the tefilin with extreme reverence.

**Treats the Tefillin with Extreme Care and Sanctity**

 Arriving home, the man indeed treated the tefilin with extreme care and sanctity, never taking his mind off them while he had them on -- even for a moment. And from the time he began to wear these tefilin, he experienced an arousal of holiness he never had before. The prayers left his mouth with fervor and great feeling.

 ONE DAY the wealthy man was in the main beit midrash (Study Center) in Constantinople, praying with these special tefilin on. Suddenly, one of his young attendants entered and started pestering him with questions related to his business. At first, the man did not react, but continued to pray. But the lad would not relent, and, unable to restrain himself, the man finally answered the question, sharply.

He immediately returned to his prayers, but the words came out clipped and garbled. The special feelings of holiness that he had previously felt had also disappeared.

**A Terrible Realization of a Spiritual Loss**

 As soon as he realized this, he felt greatly disturbed, but could not pinpoint the cause of the loss. He certainly did not attribute the change to that one sharp word he had spoken. He innocently thought that perhaps a problem had arisen with one of the letters in the tefilin, and decided to take them to a professional scribe for an examination.

 When the sofer opened the tefilin boxes, he and the wealthy man were astounded at what they saw. The parchment of the tefilin was completely blank. All the letters had flown away!

 Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from heichalhanegina.blogspot.com, a strongly recommended site for chasidic bios and stories, and especially music.

Connection: 267th yahrzeit

**Rabbi Chaim Ibn Atar**

 Biographical note: Rabbi Chaim (ben Moshe) Ibn Atar (1696 15 Tammuz 1743) is best known as the author of one of the most important and popular commentaries on the Torah: the Ohr HaChaim. He established a major yeshiva in Israel, after moving there from Morocco. Chassidic tradition is that the main reason the Baal Shem Tov twice tried so hard (and failed) to get to the Holy Land was that he said if he could join the Ohr HaChaim there, together they could bring Moshiach. His burial site outside the Old City of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, is considered a propitious place to pray.

(photo of 15 Tammuz pilgrimage to Ohr HaChaim site courtesy of the ohrhachaimhakadosh.org website)

 *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://webmailbb.juno.com/webmail/new/5?session_redirect=true&userinfo=eff1e795994608ed6885dfdeac88e827&count=1277734489)

**It Once Happened**

**Reflections on the Wondrous Fruits of the Land of Israel**

 The Talmud illustrates the bounty of the Land of Israel with the tale of various sages who enjoyed the wonderful fruits of the land said to be flowing with milk and honey. Once the scholar Rami ben Yechezkel was visiting Bnei Brak and came upon an orchard of fig trees. It was the height of their season and the trees were heavy with fruit which fell to the ground oozing their delectable syrup. As he watched, a flock of goats which was grazing nearby was attracted by the smell, and began eating the fallen fruits. He noticed that the goats were full to bursting with milk, with dripped from their udders, and Rami ben Yechezkel exclaimed, "See, how this is truly a land which flows with milk and honey! Here are the words of Torah so clearly seen!"

**The Dried Figs in the Barrel**

 The Talmud further tells of the time Rav Yehuda of Saskin asked his son to go to their attic and bring him some dried figs which were stored in a barrel. The boy went up to the attic, but when he put his hand into the barrel, he felt only a thick, sticky substance. "Father," he called, "I cannot find the figs. It seems there is only something sticky and wet in the barrel."

 His father replied, "Put your hand further into the barrel. What you are feeling is the fig honey. The figs are deeper in the barrel." His son did as he was told, and lo and behold, he found huge, soft figs, so rich in honey, that they dripped with thick, sweet syrup.

**The Special Shiny Olive Oil**

 In one more illustration of the wonder of the fruits of the Land of Israel, Rav Yossi of Tzippori once asked his son to bring him some olives which were kept in a barrel. The son went as his father asked, but he couldn't even get to the container, for the floor was slippery with the shiny olive oil which had spilled onto the floor.

 The olives of that time were so full of oil that the oil flowed out of the barrel in which the fruits were being stored. The blessings which were so apparent in those days have not been seen since, but in the time of Moshiach, these wonders will be common once again, only in a much greater measure.

 Rabbi Chaim Vital came to Safed to study with the Holy Ari. The Ari took him to the banks of the Kineret, where he filled up a cup and gave him water to drink.

 "This water comes from the well of Miriam, the water which sustained the Jews through their travels in the desert. It has special powers and drinking it will enable you to learn Kabala and absorb it."

 And it was true that Chaim Vital was given the ability to learn the holy, mystical secrets of the Kabala and master that knowledge.

**The Gentile Governor of Jerusalem and**

**His Attempts to Discover the Gichon Spring**

 In his autobiographical work, Shem Hagedolim, the Chida (Rabbi Yosef David Azulai) writes that during the lifetime of the Ari, Jerusalem had a gentile governor. This man wanted to solve the water problem of the city. He studied the ancient history of the city and discovered that during his war with Sancherib, King Hezekia had stopped up the Gichon spring, which flowed from the Holy Temple and provided water for the entire city. This he had done to prevent the enemy forces from gaining control over the water resources.

 The gentile governor called all of his advisors and charged them with finding a way to clear the spring. Finally, they suggested that Chaim Vital be called. He was known to be a saintly rabbi and he would be able to release the waters.

**Rabbi Chaim Escapes the Governor**

 Rabbi Chaim didn't want to obey the governor, who had commanded him on pain of death. And so, through the use of holy names and prayer, he transported himself out of the Land of Israel and far away to Damascus. That night, the Holy Ari appeared to him in a dream. "It is very tragic that you disobeyed the governor, for you had a chance to repair King Hezekia's error. It was wrong of him to close up the spring of Gichon, and you could have remedied his mistake. If you had heeded his words, you would have hastened the Redemption."

 Rabbi Chaim was crestfallen. "Should I return to Jerusalem now and do as the governor ordered?" But the Ari replied, "The chance has passed; it is too late for now."

**A Special Bottle of Wine**

**From the Land of Israel**

 Once, a great sage was visiting the court of a famous Rebbe. In his honor, a special bottle of wine from the Land of Israel was brought to the table. This wine was used sparingly, and only for great occasions, since it was a rarity to obtain wine from the Holy Land.

 Everyone looked forward to a small taste of this unique wine, but when it was served, the sage refused to partake of it, opting to drink instead the simple local wine. Everyone was surprised at his reaction and questioned him about his refusal to partake of the special wine.

 The guest was reticent, but when pressed for an answer he replied, "I am no expert on wine; in fact, I know nothing about the relative merit of different types and varieties of wine. I am afraid that if I taste the wine from the Land of Israel I will not be able to sense its true value, and therefore, I will sin against the Holy Land, insult its fruits. That is why I prefer to drink only the simple wine of this land."

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

**RABBIS' MESSAGES**

**Why a Jew Has a Love**

**For the Land of Israel**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**

 “*The daughters of Selofhad…son of Menashe of the families of Moshe son of Yosef drew near*.” (Bemidbar 27:1)

 The daughters of Selofhad requested an inheritance in the Land of Israel. Their father had no son, so they asked Moshe Rabenu if they, as daughters, could receive the inheritance when the land is divided. Moshe asked Hashem and Hashem told him that they will receive a portion. Rashi wonders why the name Menashe was mentioned twice. He answers that it was mentioned again to say that Menashe was the son of Yosef. This was stated to tell you that Yosef loved the Land of Israel and commanded to bring his bones out of Egypt to be buried in Israel. So, too, the daughters of Selofhad loved the land as they said, “Give us a possession.”

**An Obvious Question Concerning**

**Their Desire for the Land**

 The obvious question is, how do we see from their request that they loved the land? Perhaps it was just a desire to have land for financial support? Rabbi Tzvi Feldman zt”l explains that the hint is in the wording that they used. “Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father’s brothers.”

 They said that if they don’t receive a portion the name of their father will be missing from the land because he had no son. We see that they weren’t concerned about themselves to have a portion, but for their father. Their father’s name should have a place in the land and thereby give him a place in his family.

 Rabbi Feldman explains that each Jew must have a connection to the Land of Israel because the essence of the observance of the Torah laws is dependent on one’s connection to the Land of Israel. It is not for nothing that Hashem promised us this land over and over again. For just as Hashem gave us the Torah because He chose us from all the nations, so, too, He gave us the land that He chose from all lands. There is no Jew that does not have at least a small spot (four amot) in the land. The possession of that area in the land gives each of us his perfection.

**We Shouldn’t Visit Our**

**Holy Sites Like Tourists**

 Rabbi Feldman adds, after the Six Day War and all of its miracles, it resulted in us returning to the Kotel and the Old City of Jerusalem. We shouldn’t be like all the nations that visit these places like tourists, just to see this beautiful place. The Torah Jew should come to the land with the feeling of holiness that he is making a connection between his soul and the land. Just as Hashem gave us the Torah, so, too, He gave us this land, because the Torah and the land are one. The essence of the Torah is in the Land of Israel.

**The Importance of Understanding and Tolerating Others**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

“May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint…” (Bemidbar 27:16)

 When Moshe asked Hashem to appoint the next leader, he described Hashem as G-d of all spirits of men. Rashi explains that Moshe was saying, just as mankind is made up of all kinds of people, each with their own mind and personality, You Hashem should find a leader who can relate to each one on his own level. This lesson is not only regarding leadership.

 We all know that no two people are exactly alike. What we don’t realize is that since there are so many different kinds of people, we must have an enormous amount of tolerance and patience when dealing with others. This is where we tend to go wrong and what causes relationships to be strained.

 We expect others to know how we are feeling and what we need or want, and then we get disappointed when they don’t come through. Very often, two people are in the same situation and one thinks it’s a great place to be and the other is miserable. When we realize how we are all different from each other, we will be patient and tolerate each other’s peculiarities. This will bring us peace and unity.

**Forgive and Forget**

**By Rabbi Raymond Beyda**

 It is not easy to forgive someone who hurt you. Whether the damage was financial, physical, or emotional, the pain caused does not disappear totally. Even if you should decide to forgive, it is still very difficult to forget. Overcoming this difficulty is a requirement for good human relations, as expected by our Father in Heaven.

 Even after being sold by his brothers into slavery, Yosef was able to forgive. Upon confronting his siblings years later when he was in a position of power, not only did he choose to refrain from inflicting punishment, but he consoled the brothers and assisted them. Where did he get the superhuman strength to decline the sweet taste of revenge? Our Sages use the following parable to answer this question.

**The Lesson of the Dog**

 There was a man who was annoyed by the barking of a dog. He picked up a stick and whacked the animal. The boisterous pup retreated to a corner whimpering softly. When the man discarded the stick and turned to walk away, the dog violently attacked the piece of wood, biting and growling. The man smiled at the creature which had failed to realize that it was the man, not the stick, who had struck him.

 The connection is apparent. Hashem uses everything and everyone in Creation as His tools to mete out punishment, pay rewards, and bring justice to our planet. If you are struck, or hurt, look in the mirror and search for the true cause of the pain. You will see that the source is probably not what you think. Don’t bite the stick; acknowledge the One Who hit.

 Becoming adept at this technique will save you much anger and aggravation, and a great deal of misguided bad feelings towards others. The more you realize that Hashem is in charge, the more you can forgive and really forget. (Excerpted from Rabbi Raymond Beyda’s book – “One Minute With Yourself.”

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

**THE GOLDEN COLUMN**

**The Gaon Rabbi**

**Yaakov Ibn Ssur zs"l**

 Three hundred years ago, the Gaon Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Ssur zs"l, author of the book of responsa "Mishpat U'ssedakah BeYaakov" and book of liturgy, "Et Lechol Hefess," lived and worked in the city of Fez, Morocco. He was an astounding genius and an expert in the byways of the Torah, but he never left the study hall. He worked as a scribe in the courts of the Geonim, Rabbi Vidal Hassarfati and Rabbi Menahem Sidiro zs"l, and he would present them with all his doubts on points of the law.

 He carefully attended these sages by scrutinizing their legal decisions and by rigorously analyzing their reasonings. After their deaths, he was appointed as a judge along with Rabbi Yehudah ben Atar and Rabbi Shmuel Hassarfati zs"l, and he served in the Rabbinate for forty-nine years.

**An Expert on Rabbinic Customs**

**And Practical Kabalah**

 The Gaon, Our Rabbi, the Chida zs"l, wrote of him that he had written many books and, beyond that, had crowned many books with his comments and notes. He was an expert in all the Rabbinic customs that devolved from the expulsion from Spain. He also had a firm grasp on practical Kabalah.

 We will bring the well-known words of this ssadik, so that his lips will still speak in the merit of those who learn his words. His words are especially appropriate now that, once again, the foolish suggestion to establish a casino to waste the money of Israel has arisen.

**A Game of Chance**

 Once, news reached the ears of the Rabbi that a game of chance was taking place. He got up and found that those present could be divided into three groups: the winners, the losers and the spectators. He said to them: about you the prophecy said: "Is it good for you that you exploit, when you are disgusted with the work of your hands, and when you have appeared at the conference of the wicked?" (Iyov 10: 3)

 Do you see how you are all listed here? Those who profit from a game of chance are exploiters, and about them it says: "Is it good for you that you exploit?" Of the losers, whose hard-earned money has disappeared, it says: "When you are disgusted with the work of your hands." And about those who gather to watch this corrupt game, it says: "When you have appeared by the conference of the wicked…"

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aram Sobah Newsletter, a project of Bnei Yosef*

**Perashat Pinhas**

**As Heard From**

**Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Zt”l**

“*And on the day of the Shabbat, two lambs…*”  (Bamidbar 28:9)

 What is the message that is proclaimed by the Shabbat offerings?

 Three gigantic principles are being enunciated.

 (1) The Universe was created from Nothing.  “By the Word of Hashem the heavens were made; and all their hosts by the breath of His mouth” (Tehillim 33:6). “For He spoke, and it became; He commanded, and it arose” (ibid. 33:9). Forever Hashem, does Your Word stand in the heavens” (ibid. 119:89). “You established the world and it stands” (ibid. 119:90). The word “Hashem means “Being” and also “Causing Being”. He alone has intrinsic existence (“Being”), and all that exists has come into being and remains in being, because of His Will. Thus all of what we call Reality is solely His Will.

**The World is Built with Kindliness**

 (2) “The world is built with Kindliness” (ibid. 89:3). Every phenomenon: every object and every process are intended for kindly purpose. “For His kindliness is everlasting” (ibid. 118:1), not only in the sense that the processes of the world continue to function forever with the same purpose of benevolence for life in this world; but the phenomena of the world, if utilized properly by the holy nation, cause the eventual happiness of the Afterlife, which is forever.

**Shabbos is a Sign Forever**

 (3) “Between Me and the sons of Israel it is a sign forever, that in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth” (Shemot 31:7). The message of Shabbat proclaims that this superlative privilege of serving as agents in the promulgation of Hashem as the Creator: is given solely to the sons of Israel. No other nation (or creed) is permitted to assume the dignity of this function, and therefore cannot be justified in declaring a Shabbat, whether on the seventh day or any other day of the week. “The Kingdom of Cohanim, and the holy people” (Shemot 19:6) are elected by Hashem for this function.

 The Mussaf-offerings of Shabbat come to remind us of these three principles. Even today, when we are unable to bring these offerings, we are still expected to proclaim these outstanding lessons of the Shabbat.

Quoted from “Journey Into Greatness” by Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”;

*Reprinted from this week’s “As Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt’l” email as prepared by Mr. Sam Gindi.*

**California Encounters**

**By Yanki Jacobs & Sholom Cohen**

 We were visiting one of the very involved members of the Jewish community here in S. Luis Obispo, CA (whom we later learned was actually a former officer at the local temple). As we were about to leave, he suggested that we go down the street to visit another Jewish family that he knows. Thanking him for his time and the tip, we ambled off down the road.

**A Long Earnest Conversation**

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| **Scott at his bar mitzvah.** |

 As we approached the house, we were jovially greeted by a gentleman named Scott and his family. After inviting us into their home, Scott told us that he does not believe in G‑d but he "identifies very strongly with Judaism." We spent a long time in earnest conversation, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Subjects ranged from anti-Semitism to the core of Jewish identity. Other highlights included seeing some old family photos. Some of the pictures bore the images of deeply religious Jews wearing traditional clothing and the men sporting full beards.

 During the course of our conversation we learned that Scott had never had a bar mitzvah. To the delight of the entire family, we whipped out our *tefillin* and held an impromptu belated bar mitzvah right then and there.

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

**The Human Side of the Story**

**The Sticker that Saved**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

 In our *Parshat Terumah* issue we related the story of the car driven by an Arab which was stopped at Erez checkpoint and identified by the checkpoint commander as a stolen vehicle because its bumper sticker had three Hebrew words on it: *Ain od milvado*. ("There is no one but Him.")

 How that sticker got on to that bumper is a story in itself. Some yeshiva students involved in outreach in the Jerusalem suburb of Maaleh Adumim had approached one of the residents who had just purchased a brand new car and tried to interest him in religious observance. When he stubbornly refused to listen they politely departed but not before asking him if he would mind if they put a sticker on his bumper with a message of faith in G-d, and to their surprise he consented. Half an hour after the sticker was attached, the car was stolen from in front of the home of its owner who came running to the head of the yeshiva with a complaint of suffering such a loss after consenting to the placing of the sticker.

 The rosh hayeshiva assured him that no harm could result from that sticker and even convened a group of students to say *Tehillim* for the distraught fellow to recover his car. An hour later the phone call came that the stolen car had been recovered – because of the identifying bumper sticker

*Reprinted from this week’s Ohr Somayach International website – Ohr.edu*

**A Slice of Life**

**She Is Pure!**

**By Miriam Karp**

 I took a deep breath to gain composure. I followed the four women.

 Early that Wednesday morning we had taken side-roads for our 30 minute drive, avoiding rush hour traffic, coming together to do a special mitzva (commandment).

 I entered the refrigerated room. There she lay. Everyone else faded into the background.

 I recognized Rachel by her bulky shape, as I had once visited the elderly woman in one of her many hospitalizations during her months of decline.

 As the women wheeled her into the preparation room, I followed, a bit nervously.

 For several years I had been thinking about taking part in this mitzva of tahara - purification - preparing a Jewish body for burial.

 I had been touched and intrigued since I first learned of this mitzva. But, busy for many years with young children and their 24/7 demands, I didn't feel physically or emotionally available.

 In recent years, I started to feel ready, and somewhat obligated to participate. Obligated in the sense that a tahara is a sacred ritual, performed with care by Jews the world over. Some unknown tahara team had prepared my grandparents and in-laws, may they rest in peace. In our small community, I knew that every set of willing hands counts.

**Rituals Performed with the Utmost**

**Dignity, Privacy and Respect**

 "Alehem hashalom, may they rest in peace."

 A small but important part of preparation necessary to will allow the soul to rest in peace, is to prepare the body through a purification process established by Jewish law and tradition.

 The rituals are all done with the utmost dignity, privacy and respect. They are focused on purity and simplicity, each step infused with deep Kabbalistic meaning;

 I knew all this. In my head. But still, could I do it?

 The group leader, Naama, a brisk and efficient woman, helped dispel my initial discomfort by referring to Rachel as "her." "Bring her over here. Hold up her head."

 This a real woman, a she, a person. And we have a job to do.

**A Sense of Humility and Relief**

 Yes, we respect her, and we feel for her. Watching my experienced partners' faces, for a cue in this new universe, I feel humbled, I feel relieved. Humbled by their ability to roll up their sleeves, take stock of the situation, and figure out the best way to proceed, with earnest and everyday kind of caring. Relieved to see signs of compassion and distress at some of the signs of suffering Rachel must have endured these last few months. Though they were more experience than me, it was hard for them too. They each took a breath and continued.

 The first glance at Rachel was hard. The first touch was hard.

 Holding back, watching with my hands folded, I knew jumping in would be the best. So as they turned her to wash her back, I held her hand to keep it from falling over.

 I helped more and more, as we proceeded, following the others' spoken and intuited guidance. As we gently washed her body, a body that had lived and loved and borne children, it became almost like bathing a totally dependent infant, as we hovered protectively around.

 As three of the women poured buckets of "living" rain water in a non-broken sequence from head to toe, they said, "Tahora hee - she is pure." They said this over and over in almost a chant, rhythmically, asserting, defining.

 We gently patted her dry. We dressed her in tachrichim (burial shrouds). Then Ruth brushed her hair. I watched the wet, grey-white hair spring into soft, fine curls. This tender act was touching, like giving a small child that mother's touch.

 Finally, we gently lowered her into the casket. We sprinkled soil from the Land of Israel on her and in the casket. We asked her forgiveness if we did anything to offend her during the tahara and then, in English, we wished her a speedy journey to the World to Come. We placed the cover on the casket and e wheeled her back to wait for the next step of her journey.

**How to Describe the Mitzva?**

 Was it profound, quiet, hushed, spiritual? Yes and no.

 It was surprisingly prosaic. Earthy. Even ordinary.

 Stepping out of that quiet room into windows, daylight, time, schedules, we collected our purses and cell phones, and stepped back into our day, a sunny summer one.

 Chatting about this and that on the way home, Malka asked me, "So, how was it for you?"

 "It was ok," I said, with a quiet smile.

 I felt buoyed throughout the day. Catching up on the phone with my daughter, a new mother, I told her, "I did my first tahara."

 She gasped. "Really?"

A Very Jewish Thing to Do

 But, it wasn't a gasp of horror, and not of an "Oh wow!" envious of a mystical high. It was an ordinary, extraordinary thing to do. In that sense, a very Jewish thing to do.

 Rachel's image flitted though my mind once or twice. Not morbid. Just like a friend I was glad to have helped.

 The next morning I said "Modeh Ani," the prayer upon awakening thanking G-d for returning our souls to us, with a fuller moment of gratefulness. Rachel was in her place in G-d's universe, and I was thankful to be here, in mine; chaotic, imperfect, struggle-filled as it may be.

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

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**An Aussome Story**

**Of a Blind Girl**

 We open our discussion of this week's Torah portion Pinchas, with a brief review of a topic we have discussed in recent weeks. We are referring to the power of our righteous Torah leaders to uplift us spiritually.

 In our portion this week, the Torah tells us how Hashem commands Moshe to count the Jews. When commanding Moshe to count the Jews, the Torah uses the word "Seh-oo." (Bamidbar 26:2) The word "Seh-oo," can also mean "to uplift." As in the verse in Psalms "Lift your hands in the sanctuary and bless Hashem."  (Tehillim 134:2)  In order to learn a spiritually uplifting message from this parsha, let us try to understand the verse in the following way: Hashem is giving Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) the power to uplift the Jews. As the verse states in the parsha:  "Uplift the entire assembly of the Children of Yisroel..." (26:2)

**Righteous Leaders in Every Generation**

 Since the time of Moshe Rabeinu, Hashem has appointed in every generation Tzadikim (the exceedingly righteous Rabbis) to lead Klal Yisroel. Just as Hashem gave Moshe Rabeinu the power to uplift the Bnai Yisroel, so too does Hashem give the spiritual leaders of every generation the power to uplift Jews.

 The following amazing true story demonstrates the tremendous power of our Torah leaders to elevate us. A very successful businessman, a Chabad Chassid by the name of Rabbi Chaim Gutnick who lived in Sydney Australia, was invited by the small Jewish community of "Adalide" to serve as their Cantor for the High Holy Days. Rabbi Gutnick was in a dilemma.

**A Letter from the Lubavitcher Ebbe**

 True, he had a pleasant voice, but he also had four small children at home, and had no desire of becoming a Rabbi or a Cantor. "They have a few months, let them find someone else." He thought to himself. Two weeks later he was surprised to see in his mailbox a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, addressed to him.

 The Rebbe wrote that he was disappointed to hear that Rabbi Gutnick refused the Adalide community. The Rebbe advised him to accept the offer, and not to forget the Egyptian Jews there.

 (The community in Adalide got Rabbi Gutnick's name from the head Rabbi of Sydney, who also advised them to write the Lubavitch Rebbe if Rabbi Gutnick refused.)  Needless to say, he took the job.

 When he arrived in Adalide the morning before Rosh Hashanah, the first thing he did after getting settled in, was to go the Synagogue to meet everyone and get acquainted with the place.

 After everyone had left, he sat down in the back of the quiet Synagogue, opened a Torah book and began learning. No one was in the building except him and the caretaker. A perfect preparation for Rosh HaShanah. About two hours later he heard the door open, and turned to see a middle-aged woman entering. She approached, apologized for the intrusion, and explained that although she herself was not Jewish, there was a Jewish girl outside who wants to know where the holiest place is in the Synagogue?

**Points to the Ark in the Front Room**

 He pointed to the Ark in the front of the room, she thanked him, went outside, and returned seconds later escorting a blind girl of about fifteen years old.

 She led her silently down the aisle toward the Ark, and when they reached the front of the room, the girl fell to her knees put her head in her hands and began weeping.

 "Please G-d, send me a sign. Please, send me a sign. If you are there, and you hear me, send a sign!!"

 After a few minutes she stood up, dried her eyes on her dress sleeve, and was escorted by her companion back out of the Synagogue.

 Rabbi Gutnick was frozen from the incident. The room seemed a hundred times more silent than before, until the caretaker happened to enter.

**One of Those Egyptian Jews**

 "Oh, it must be one of those Egyptian Jews" he said to Rabbi Gutnick after he heard the story. "Nothing to get excited about. A small group of them arrived a while ago, but they don't seem to want to have anything to do with us. No big loss if you ask me. We tried to be friendly but they just keep to themselves.

 Suddenly the Rebbe’s words flashed in his mind "Egyptian Jews". He ran outside to see if she was still there, but there was no trace.

 The next evening Rabbi Gutnick led the Rosh Hashanah services, and after they were finished, the Synagogue president requested of him that they stand by the door and bless everyone as they exited. The only people that didn't file past, were a group that sat silently in the back corner waiting for everyone, including the Rabbis to leave.

 "Oh, those are the Egyptian Jews," whispered the president when he noticed how Rabbi Gutnick was staring. "If I were you, I'd forget about them. Let's go."

 The next day, after the morning prayers, Rabbi Gutnick didn’t wait for them to come to him. He walked over to where they were sitting, shook their hands and happily wished them all a happy and holy New Year. "And please wish the blind girl a good new year from me also."

 Seven days later, the evening before Yom Kippur, the phone rang in Rabbi Gutnick’s hotel room.

 "Hello, are you the Rabbi?" said the voice on the other end, "I am the blind girl. I want to...." suddenly the phone was cut off.

 When she didn't call back he phoned the president, somehow he got her name, address, and phone number and Rabbi Gutnick called her back."Yes?" A man answered, "Who is it please?"

**Phone is Hung Up on the Rabbi**

 "Hello, this is Rabbi Gutnick and...." As soon as he said his name, the phone hung up.

 So he decided to take things into his own hands. Although it was already late in the evening, he called a taxi, and a half hour later he was knocking at the blind girl's door.

 When it opened he put his foot in, and insisted that they let him enter saying that he took a taxi, and had an important message for them. And it worked! They invited him in, and they all sat down together in the front room.

 When Rabbi Gutnick explained what had happened, and how the Lubavitcher Rebbe told him to visit the Egyptian Jews in Adeline, they were stunned speechless; they had never heard of this Rabbi, how could he have heard of them? And who were they that he should even think about them?

**The Girl Begins to Weep**

 But the girl began weeping and whispering, "This is my sign! Thank you G-d!"

 After several minutes, her mother, with tears welling up in her eyes, broke the silence and told the following story.

 "We fled from Egypt about a year ago, and almost as soon as we arrived in Australia, my husband and I found work here in Adalide. The only problem was finding a school for Betty. You see she is blind, and the only school we could find for her in this area is run by priests.

 "At first it wasn't so bad" her father continued. "Tuition was low, Betty was making good progress, and...well Rabbi, we are almost not observant at all, so we really didn't care, as long as she was learning."

**The School Demands Conversion**

 "But then things changed,” her mother continued. "They began suggesting, and then demanding, that she change her religion and become a Catholic."

 "I'm a Jew", Betty said with tears streaming from her colorless eyes, "And something inside me says it's wrong to stop being a Jew. I don’t even know what a Jew is! But I'll never stop being a Jew, even if they kill me."

 "Then one day they said that she should stop coming to school," her mother continued. "And if she wanted to be so stubborn she shouldn't come back."

 "That's when my parents started pressuring me" whimpered Betty. "They said that I had to do what the priests wanted. And that’s when I really got confused."
"But what can we do?" Said her weeping mother.

 "You can't just sit around in the house!!" said her father "Of course we don't want you to stop being Jewish!! But we aren't so religious anyway and it's for your own good! For your own good!”

**Asks a Neighbor to Take Her to the Synagogue**

 "So one day last week when my parents were at work" Betty continued, "I asked the neighbor, and she took me to the Synagogue. I just had to pray to G-d to send me a sign what I should do."

 "Then, the miracle happened! A few days later, my relatives told me that you asked about me in the Synagogue after the New Year's prayers. They were all laughing about it, but I was so excited I could hardly move. And then, believe me, it was not easy to get your phone number and call you."

 At that point even Rabbi Gutnick was not succeeding in holding back his tears.
He dried his eyes, picked up the phone and called the president again. "You must come now to the blind girl's home, we have to get her connected with Yiddishkeit!"

**The Shul President is In His Pajamas**

 "What!!?? It’s twelve midnight!!" Shouted the president over the phone. "Listen Rabbi Gutnick. You're a good Cantor, but I'm not coming to talk to anyone at twelve midnight, I'm already in my pajamas!!"

 "So come in your pajamas," he answered. "You can come any way you want, but if you aren't here soon, you can find a replacement for Yom Kippur."

 A half hour later he arrived in the girl's house, and in no time they had a list of ten telephone numbers to call after the Holiday, to set her up with a complete Jewish education.

 The story had a happy ending; the president found a place for Betty, and her relatives strengthened both their Judaism and connection to the community. The next time that Rabbi Gutnick was in "Yechidus" (private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe) The Rebbe told him, "That "sign" was for you also! It's a sign that you should leave the business world, and devote yourself completely to becoming a Rabbi!" Good Shabbos Everyone.

*Reprinted from this week’s Good Shabbos email*

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

**Buying a Home**

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| **QUESTION:** |

Why should we buy a home, if Moshiach comes, weâ€™d have to liquidate it and go to Eretz Yisroel. So maybe we should keep the cash in the bank?

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

|  |
| --- |
| how-much-is-your-house-worth2 |

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yirmiyah Hanavi. HE said you're going to Bavel for 70 years. HE says, Bnu Botim, build homes in Bavel, and see that your daughters are married off.

 Get busy and live a normal life wherever you are, because life must go on. When the time will come I"LL call the shots. Don't disturb your normal life. While you're doing all these things, do it L'shem Shamayim, remember Hakadosh Baruch Hu, be grateful all the time. Teach your children Torah, and so on, but don't break up your lives. We're not supposed to break up our lives. If you liquidate your house and make it into money, and you'll wait till Moshiach, by the time Moshiach comes you won't have any money left. And who knows if you won't have to go to the poor house before that.

**The System of the Torah**

 So therefore, that's the system of the Torah. We don't liquidate anything now. You don't know how long it will take. You have to hope everyday, but you cannot make any reckless steps. And even people that tell you, go now, sell your homes, and settle in Eretz Yisroel, even though they're not saying because of Moshiach, just settle in Eretz Yisroel, you need a lot of circumspection, you need a lot of good advice before you do such a thing.

 I'll tell you a little story. Reb Yisroel Salanter was once approached by a man, many years ago, who was thinking of going to Eretz Yisroel. So Reb Yisroel said no. So he said why? Because in Eretz Yisroel he said you'll become a beggar, you'll have to come constantly to beg for money. There's no way of making a living. In those days you couldn't make a living. Where you are now, you're making a living.

 What do we see from this, that's the words of a big Chachom. Making a living, it's a very important thing. Your morale breaks down if you don't have a Parnosso. When you need charity, who knows to what depths, what moral depths of degradation, you'll fall. It's very degrading, it's breaking of the spirit it's discouraging .

 Only great people are able to overcome poverty and to continue. And even those, you have to know, a lot of people have died young in Eretz Yisroel because they didn't work. Now I am not discouraging work .People that are able to learn successfully, go ahead. But there are people who didn't have enough to eat, who neglected their health, and died young as a result of poverty. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not happy when people ruin their health because of poverty.

**Most People Must Take Good Advice**

 So if you're able to live successfully under certain circumstances, then go ahead and do it. But most people must take good advice before you do it. It says "Harbeh Asu K'rebbi Shimon Ben Yochai V'lo Alsa B'yadam". Many people tried to do like Reb Shimon Ben Yochai, who didn't want to do anything except learn Torah and they didn't succeed. Some can, but the multitude can not. Not everybody is suited to that existence. And therefore it's important to take consul. Don't liquidate anything before you get the go ahead from somebody who knows

 *Good Shabbos To All*

*Reprinted from the “A Moment with Rabbi Miller” email based on transcriptions of some questions posed to Harav Miller by the audience at his classic Thursday night hashkafah lectures. To listen to the audio of this Question and Answer, please dial (732) 534-8868.*

**Three Difficult Weeks**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**

 The period of the “Three Weeks” on the Jewish calendar beginning with the fast day of seventeen Tamuz and culminating on 9 Av starts this week. This period of time is marked by different social and personal customs in the Jewish world. Ashkenazic Jews do not cut their hair or beards, refrain from listening to music and other forms of entertainment, marriages are not solemnized and new clothing is not purchased during this three week period.

 Sephardic Jews usually limit most of these restrictions to the week of 9 Av itself. In any event, this period of time commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem and the subsequent loss of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel and the enforced exile and scattering of the Jews throughout the world.

 Personally, I have not found the restrictions imposed by the advent of this period of mournful restrictions especially onerous. I fast well, my hair grows slowly, I am not that much of a music fan and the relief from not having to attend weddings every night of the week (such as was the case during the previous month) is soothing, both physically and mentally.

 But this period of time is always very troubling to me and it agitates my thoughts and philosophical well-being. For it raises to me the fundamentally unanswerable question of all Jewish existence over the past millennia – why? Where is there the justification for all of the centuries of persecution and the fate of the millions of Jewish martyrs who were killed only because they were Jewish?

**Naïve and Simplistic Questions**

 Does the punishment seemingly fit the crime? These questions are of course naïve, simplistic and not subject to human logical responses. The L-rd operates in a special way, a way that precludes questions such as these. A wise man once stated that for the true believer there are no questions and for the committed non-believer there can never be any satisfactory answers.

 Yet is it not ironic that the Jew always bears the burden of others’ guilt and their past misdeeds. Look how the State of Israel, innocent of the accusations showered upon it is being made to pay for the imperialism, colonialism, racism and evil by the very countries and societies of Europe that perpetrated those very policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Making the Jews a**

**Scapegoat for Gentile Guilt**

 Somehow overwhelmed by this gnawing sense of guilt that their dubious record of past behavior now engenders within them, the Europeans search for a scapegoat upon which to cast their past misdeeds and thereby be absolved of their sins. And the most likely and favorite scapegoat is the Jew, now represented by the State of Israel.

 This is in reality the message of these mournful weeks on the Jewish calendar. We are always available to serve as that convenient scapegoat. We should not be surprised by the world’s attitude towards our existence and especially our success against all odds. Hatred and bigotry towards us go along with the prize of being a special people and a source of irritation to the remnants of the world’s moral conscience.

**A Litmus Test of Human Morality and Decency**

 The three weeks of mourning and sadness, though localized in the history of the Jewish people, are really of universal import. The Jew and the Jewish nation has always been the litmus test of human morality and decency.

 Bilaam said that Israel is not to be reckoned amongst the nations. Its existence and history is singularly unique. Yet the corollary to this statement is that the nations are to be reckoned, judged and held to account according to their relationship to the Jewish people.

 All of the persecuting empires that triumphed during this three week period of Jewish defeat are all since long gone from the human scene. In our time, Nazism, Fascism, Communism, all oppressors of the Jewish people and at one time seemingly invincible, have crumbled into nothingness. Our “friends” England and France have been cut down to size and all of Europe has been destabilized by ethnic divisions and economic misfortunes.

**The Weeping of Our Oppressors is Permanent**

 It should be obvious to all that we do not mourn alone. Our very oppressors are partners to our sadness and regrets. There have been no comebacks in history. No empire, once weakened and defeated, has risen again to world dominance. Their weeping is permanent for former greatness is never restored.

 The United States itself currently teeters on the verge of losing its preeminence in world society. I feel that its attitude and policies towards Israel will somehow be weighed in determining its future.

 Jewish mourning always eventually leads to determined consolation and a renewed future sense of purpose and accomplishment. It is never permanent. These thoughts are worthy of our contemplation as the period of the three weeks arrives.

**Reflections on Rubashkin**

**By Daniel Keren**



 These words are being written a few days before the start of the *Three Weeks of Mourning for the Churban Bais MaMikdosh*, the destruction of our Holy Temple in *Yerushalayim* by the ancient Romans in the year 70 of the Common Ear.

 For much of Jewish history, it hasn’t been too difficult for us as Jews to mourn the loss of both our spiritual glory and our national independence in *Eretz Yisroel*, the Land of Israel. For in most of our Post-Churban history, our nation has been terribly afflicted by most of the host nations in which we have found ourselves trying to survive.

**America’s Unique Golus – A Medina Shel Chesed**

 That is until our recent *golus*, exile in the United States of America, a land that many rabbis have dubbed a *Medina shel Chesed*, a kindly government. Never before have Jews been privileged to live in exile in a land that has not legally persecuted us for the right to observe our religion and perform our required rituals.

 And while there had been gentleman’s agreements to not sell homes to Jews in select areas or admit Jews as members of exclusive country clubs or there were private quotas on the number of Jewish students admitted to elite colleges such as Harvard; much of this was swept away with the shame that the world apparently felt after the truths of the murderous brutality of the Holocaust were revealed.

 Most Jews growing up in America after the 1950’s simply have no concept of what it means to be harshly discriminated because one is a member of Hashem’s *Am Segula*, Chosen People. Indeed, for Jews who constitute less than 2% of the American population, it become a little embarrassing to realize that if President Obama’s nominee to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Supreme Court is approved, the number of Jewish judges on the highest court of the land will rise to three or 33.33% of all nine seats on the court.

**A Kaparah for Klal Yisroel in America**

 Perhaps that is why Reb Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin must serve as a *kaparah* (atonement) for the rest of *Klal Yisroel* (the Jewish people) in America who are too dulled to appreciate the necessity of truly desiring the coming of *Moshiach* (our Redeemer).

 As an executive officer in his father’s business – Agri-Processors, at one time the largest kosher meat distributor in the United States, Reb Sholom Mordechai was the target of special interest groups that wanted to bring down his family’s company for varied reasons. Labor unions were upset because of his opposition to unionizing Agri-Processors and PETA, an animal rights organization was out to attack the Rubashkin business because of alleged abuses of animals.

**An Overall Attack on Kashrus and the Jewish Religion**

 What PETA really wants to do is to outlaw *kashrus* by charging that kosher slaughter is cruel. If they succeed (G-d forbid), their next target with be to outlaw the production of *tefillin* and *Sifrei Torah* (Torah scrolls) because it is “cruel” to the animals to kill them for their kosher leather parchment.

 This realization has amazingly united diverse segments of the Orthodox Jewish community that nobody would have imagined before could ever find common ground. Also the harsh treatment that Reb Sholom Mordechai has faced in the court system has made us realize that Jews still do get persecuted at times more heavily than gentiles because of the fact that one is a Jew.

A Uniting of the Klal

(Jewish Community)

 All across America, special gatherings have been held on behalf of Sholom Rubashkin. At one such *Kinus* was held last month (June 17th) at the Merkaz HaSimcha in Flatbush, Rabbi Yaakov Zev Smith spoke before the participants recited *Tehillim* (Psalms) and *davened* (prayed) Maariv, the evening service. The following are some of his remarks.

 “I can’t remember a time when one individual had a problem and the whole *klal* (Jewish community) came together as though it was their problem. When will the *geulah* (the redemption from our current long and bitter exile) come? When we are inspired by the words “Yachad Shivti B’Yisroel. (All the tribes of Israel are united!)”

 Rabbi Smith told of the story of a wealthy man who was riding in a beautiful carriage driven by three fancy horses who suddenly got stuck in the mud. His driver’s harsh whipping of the horses was unable to get the carriage out of the mud.

 A simple peasant farmer came along with two of his plain horses and offered to get the carriage out of the mud. He released the three fancy horses and tied his two plain horses to the big beautiful carriage. He gave but one whip to one of the horses and the two horses together pulled the carriage out of the mud.

**The Stunned Wealthy Man Asks “How Was it Possible?”**

 The wealthy man was stunned and asked the peasant farmer how was it possible for his two plain horses to accomplish what his three fancy horses couldn’t do? The farmer asked where the wealthy man’s horses came from and was told that one horse is an Arabian mare, the second comes from the finest horse farms in England and the third comes from an excellent farm in France.

 “That is the reason!” exclaimed the peasant farmer. “Your horses are not related and when they see each other being whipped, it doesn’t affect them individually. But my horses come from the same stable and they feel each other’s pain. That is why as soon as I whipped one, the other wanted to help get the carriage out in order to stop the pain being afflicted to his brother horse.”

Symbolizing the Unity of Jews

 That *moshul* (example) is true with the Jewish people. If an Englishman or a Japanese citizen is victimized in the courts of law, there is no sense of “*Yachad Shivti B’Yisroel*.” But when one Jew like Reb Sholom Rubashkin is victimized in the American court system because of the fact that he is a Jew, then intrinsically all Jews feel that pain and cry out, in order, to come to his aid.

 Rabbi Smith pointed out that he was asked recently if he personally knew Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin. He answered, “No, but I owe him an unbelievable debt of gratitude. Beside the many years of his incredible *tzedokah* (charity) and his efforts to make kosher meat affordable to all Jews, his incredible pain has served to unite all *Yidden*.”

**Persecuted for Only One Reason – Being a Frum Jew**

 It is terrible to see a person who built an empire of *chessed* (kindness) who is being destroyed and crushed by the government for only one reason – that he is a *frum* (religious) Jew. Pointing to the audience at Merkaz HaSimcha, Rabbi Smith declared:

 “We are here tonight because Sholom Mordechai’s pain is our pain. I don’t remember a time before when *Yidden* around the world came together because of the pain of one man. Shalom Mordechai’s pain is hurting me! And this is the way it is supposed to be. He quoted the Rambam as declaring that if a Jew sees the pain and tragedy of another Jew, it that fails to affect him, than one is guilty of *achzorus*, being cruel.

 “How is it possible,” asked Rabbi Smith, “that we shouldn’t be affected by another *Yid’s* pain and crying out for justice?” He suggested that we should learn from Sholom Mordechai’s tragedy and take upon ourselves to cry out for somebody else’s pain and in this merit, Hashem will come to the rescue of Mr. Rubashkin.

 For example, Rabbi Smith said that every one of us knows a lonely person who needs comforting words. Why not adopt that *neshama* (soul) and give him or her *chizuk* (encouragement)?

**Believing that Our Tefillah Can Make a Difference**

 Another point is that when we recite *Tehillim* or *daven* for Reb Sholom Mordechai, we should, Rabbi Smith declared, do so with the belief that it is our *davening* that is going to make a major difference .We have to have a firm belief in the power of our praying. We have no idea of what *Hakodesh Baruch Hu* has in store for Sholom Rubashkin on June 22nd (the day that Federal Judge Reade harshly sentenced Mr. Rubashkin to 27 years in prison). But whatever the sentence is, we must not lose hope and we should never ever underestimate the power of a *Yiddishe tefillah*.

 Perhaps these words of Rabbi Smith, a *maggid shiur* at Mesivta Torah Vodaath and Irgun Shiurei Torah, will aid all of us to gain new insights that will help us to better *daven* during the remaining days of these *Three Weeks of Mourning*, gaining a better feel of why not only Reb Sholom Mordechai, but all Jews in America truly need the coming of *Moshiach* and the ending of our long *golus*, even in this *Medina shel Chesed*.

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