**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Masei 5774**

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**Good Shabbos Everyone**

**Because of an Elephant**

**By Rabbi Yosef Weiss**

Rabbi Eliezer Sandler was fortunate; in 1973, he became the first full-time Chief Jewish Chaplain in the South African army since World War II. As part of his duties, Rabbi Sandler would visit bases throughout South Africa and Namibia. At that time, the army was fighting terrorist elements who were trying to destroy the fabric of South African society.

On his first visit to a certain base, Rabbi Sandler was told that there were three injured Jewish servicemen in the infirmary.

**The Third Patient Didn’t**

**Seem Sick at All**

"I will go there at once," said Rabbi Sandler. The first two patients were clearly ill, their faces were gaunt and pale. One wore a cast from the hip down. The other was recovering from malaria. But the third patient surprised Rabbi Sandler. This third patient was a tall healthy-looking soldier who did not seem to be hurting in any way.

"Why are you here?" Asked Rabbi Sandler in puzzlement. "I am recovering from shock." The young soldier explained. "You see, I was trampled by an elephant."

"An elephant!"Said Rabbi Sandler in astonishment. The soldier nodded and said: "Let me tell you my story: I was part of a reconnaissance patrol. We were roaming though the jungle, looking for the enemy. Now remember, this is a wild jungle. Besides the human enemy, we also have to contend with the danger of wild animals such as lions and tigers. And when you see those animals close up in the African jungle, they look a lot larger than when you see them in a zoo!"

"As the radio man, I always carry radio equipment on my back. The radio gear is a big heavy package. If we spot the enemy, it is my job to call it in on the radio.

**The Elephant Started Charging**

"Well, one day we happened to bump into a huge elephant. By buddies were bored and they decided to have some fun by teasing the elephant, pulling at its ears and tail. Nothing muchhappened at first. But eventually the elephant got angry. He raised his tusks in the air, he blasted his horn and trumpeted his war march, and started coming for us.

"We got the message, and we started running away as fast as we could. But my radio pack was heavy; it slowed me down. I tripped over a root on the jungle floor and fell flat on my face. Seconds later, the elephant ran right over me!"

"Now, elephants are pretty heavy. (An adult male African elephant can be up to 11 feet tall and weigh up to 6 metric tons!) The radio pack on my back was squashed to the size of a penny. So why am I still alive? That is just it. It was an absolute miracle. The ground happened to be soft sand, and when the elephant ran over me I sank right into the ground. I ended up completely unhurt. I am here just to recover from the shock."

**Tells the Soldier that He**

**Has to Bench Gomel**

Rabbi Sandler was in shock himself when the soldier completed his amazing story. "I have never heard a story like that," Rabbi Sandler began to say. "You know, you have to bench gomel (the thanksgiving blessing) and offer thanks to G-d for saving you."

"I have never heard of that," said the soldier with interest. "How does it work?"

"You have to go to a shul and make the blessing with a minyan." Rabbi Sandler explained.

The soldier raised up hands and said "I am afraid that I still do not know what you are talking about."

Rabbi Sandler explained to the under-affiliated soldier some of the basics of Jewish ritual, including the idea of praying together in minyan (a quorum of ten men) in a shul. The young man listened intently. Unfortunately, he had grown up without any real Jewish education. After hearing what Rabbi Sandler had to say, the soldier was even more interested in giving thanks to G-d, but there was no synagogue or minyan in the African jungle.

After his recovery, the soldier returned home to Johannesburg, South Africa, where he finally had the opportunity to "bench gomel" in a shul on a day when the community read from the Torah. However, the soldier did not stop at just "benching gomel." He was determined to find out more about his heritage, the heritage which he was deprived of while growing up. Little by little, the young man learned more and more about Torah and mitzvahs. Today, the young soldier has come home and is totally Torah observant. All of his Torah is because of the foot of an elephant.

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**Today in Jewish History**

**Tammuz 23**



In 1099, Crusaders captured Jerusalem. The Crusades were a Catholic Church-sponsored movement to "liberate the Holy Land from the infidels." (En route, the Crusaders carried out a campaign of rape and pillage; an estimated 40% of European Jewry was slaughtered in the process.)

The day following their conquest of Jerusalem, the Crusaders murdered all the city's Jews, by herding them into a synagogue and setting it on fire. Jews were barred from Jerusalem for the next century.

Muslims were also victims of the Crusaders, which historians believe planted a deep-seeded hatred of the West.

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

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**Rashi – Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

Let us take a look at the remarkable origins surrounding the birth of Rashi.

Rabi Yitzchak was a great scholar but never wanted to use the Torah as a means of making a living. Instead, after marrying Leah Miriam, the sister of Rabi Shimon HaGadol, he opened up a store that specialized in precious stones. The years passed and the couple was content, except for one thing. After being married for 10 years, they were not blessed with a child.

**Comes into Possession of a**

**Truly Remarkable Gem**

Though it was what they wanted more than anything in the whole world, Rabi Yitzchak never complained, continuing to live his life according to the dictates of the Torah. One day, he came into possession of a truly remarkable gem. News of this flawless stone spread throughout the city of Mayence where he lived and finally reached the ears of the bishop of the city.

The bishop wanted the stone so he could have it mounted in a statue in the main cathedral. He sent word to Rabi Yitzchak offering a great sum of money. When Rabi Yitzchak heard this he discussed the matter with his wife.

“I cannot sell any possession of mine knowing that it will be used for a religious purpose contrary to my own.”

Rabi Yitzchak sent a cordial letter of reply to the bishop telling him that his religion forbade him from selling the gem. Though the bishop accepted the answer, some of the more extreme priests hit upon an ugly scheme by which they hoped to force Rabi Yitzchak into selling them the precious stone.

**Threatened with Death**

By means of a clever pretext, they succeeded in getting Rabi Yitzhak aboard a ship and sailed it down the river. Then they threatened him with death by drowning unless he handed over the gem. Rabi Yitzhak never hesitated. With a mighty heave he sent the gem, which had cost him a small fortune, into the water, preferring to lose money rather than his principles.

No sooner had the waters swallowed up the gem than a voice from Heaven cried out: “In place of this precious stone, G-d will send you another gem in the form of a son who will illuminate the eyes of Israel with his Torah and wisdom.”

That year, Rabi Yitzhak’s wife gave birth to a son, who was named Shlomo. He was the great Rashi. Because of this wonderful story, one of the families that descended from Rashi named itself “Margolis,” or precious stone.

**Wandering In the East**

In common with many of the pious men of his time, Rashi chose several years of exile in order that he might understand what it meant to suffer privation and poverty.

While in the Eastern countries, he met a Christian monk who was also learned and well read. They began to discuss theology, belief and philosophy. Rashi’s clear and precise answers amazed and impressed the monk, who came to look forward eagerly to his daily discussion.

One day, however, the monk fell ill with a dangerous sickness. Rashi, who was a student of medicine, ran to his side.

“I will remain here with you until you are better,” he said.

“There is nothing you can do, my friend,” said the monk. “This is an illness that cannot be cured. My days on this earth are numbered.”

“You must never speak this way,” said Rashi sternly. “The mercies of the Almighty are boundless and one must never lose hope.”

Rashi never left the bedside of the sick man. He used all his skills and devotion to bring the man back from the brink of death. At last it was clear that the monk would live.

“How can I thank you, O great rabbi? All that I own is yours.”

“You owe me nothing,” replied Rashi. “Though our faiths are different, we are all the children of Adam. All of us are created in the image of the Almighty and my Torah compels me to aid each and every human being in his time of need.

**A Horse For A Life**

Toward the end of Rashi’s life, Klal Yisrael was beset by the Crusades. Thousands of Jews were killed and their property plundered, and Rashi himself was almost killed.

One of the leaders of the Crusades was named Godfrey of Bouillon. According to historical records, Godfrey conquered Jerusalem and massacred the Muslims there. Following this, he turned his attention to the Jews. Rounding up every Jew in the city, he forced them into one of the synagogues and then set fire to the structure. Every Jew in the building was burned alive.

Prior to his murderous journey, he had visited Rashi, and asked whether his mission would be successful.

“Why have you come here?” asked Rashi.

“I have heard that you are a holy man,” answered the crusader. “I want to know whether I will succeed or fail on my crusade to the Holy Land.”

Rashi thought for a moment and then answered, “You do not really want to hear the truth. You only want me to say that you will come back victorious.”

“No, no,” he protested. “I wish to know the truth. Tell me what will be my fate in the Holy Land.”

“Very well,” said Rashi. “You will indeed succeed in conquering the city of Jerusalem. You will only hold it, however, for three days before the Muslims drive you out. You will flee the Holy Land and return to this city with only three horses.”

**The Crusader Threatens Rashi**

**And the Jews of France**

When Godfrey heard this he grew livid with anger.

“I promised you that I would do you no harm and I will keep my word. But I give you fair warning now. Should I return with even four horses, I will cut your head from your shoulders and massacre all the Jews of France.”

“I have told you what the truth is,” replied Rashi. “You will not enter the city with more than three horses.”

“Very well, stubborn Jew,” scoffed the crusader. “We shall see who is right.”

Godfrey went on his Crusade and was away from France for four long years. Eventually he succeeded in conquering Jerusalem, committed his atrocities, and was then driven out by a powerful Muslim army that destroyed his army and forced him to flee for his life.

He returned to France and made his way to the city with four horses, his own and three others, ridden by the sole remnants of his once mighty army. As he neared the gates of the city, he remembered the incident with Rashi and the desire for punishment burned within him.

“The Jewish rabbi dared to think he could emerge victorious. I shall kill him and wipe out the Jewish community in the kingdom of France.”

The four horsemen neared the gates of the city and rode through the archway. As they did so, however, a heavy slab of masonry broke away from the arch and came crashing down on one of the horses, killing both the horse and its rider.

The prophecy of Rashi was fulfilled. Godfrey returned to the city with only three horses.

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**It Once Happened**

**The Gentile’s Red Heifer**

While the Holy Temple stood, G-d gave the Jews a way to purify themselves from even the grossest impurity, and that was through sprinkling upon them the ashes of a red heifer. But finding such a cow was no easy matter. First of all, it had to be completely red, with not even the slightest admixture of another color.

Secondly, it had to be a cow which had never borne a yoke on its neck, that is, a cow which had not yet been used for any work. Such a heifer was rare, and, therefore, every valuable, and the Sages would go to great lengths to procure one.

**The Sages Ask the Gentile**

**To Sell His Red Cow**

So, when the Sages heard that a red heifer was owned by a certain gentile, they travelled to seen him and to examine the heifer. Upon close examination, they saw that the cow was completely kosher and they offered to buy it. "We would like to buy this cow from you and we will gladly meet your price. How much do you want?"

The gentile was very agreeable and answered, "If you pay what I'm asking, I will sell it to you." The man realized that this was his chance to make a good profit. He said, "I'm asking three, no, four gold coins."

Although the price was high, the Sages didn't haggle. They agreed at once, saying only that they had to return home for the rest of the money.

When they left, the gentile began to think: Why did the Jews want this particular cow? What was so special about it? And if something was so special about this cow, perhaps he should have asked a higher price. He thought and thought, until he remembered that the Jews needed a red calf for their Temple. He decided to renegotiate when they came back.

**The Rabbis Returned**

**To Get More Money**

The rabbis returned shortly, expecting to make the purchase and return home, but the gentile refused to sell the animal! He demanded a much higher price--a thousand gold coins! The rabbis were shocked but acquiesced and returned home to get the enormous sum of money required.

The gentile, however, wasn't satisfied. Now he decided to have one up on them. He would put a yoke on the cow's back - why, they would never know and he would get the money anyway! What he didn't know was that there were two signs distinguishing a cow that has never worked from a cow which has borne a yoke: there are two hairs on a cow's neck that stand up straight before a yoke is placed upon it and a cow's eyes look straight ahead. Afterward, its eyes tend to cross and look to the side.

The Sages returned, money in hand, ready to bring the precious heifer back to Jerusalem with them. They examined it for a final time, but they couldn't believe their eyes! The telltale hairs on the heifer's back were now flat and crooked. They checked the heifer's eyes, and they were crossed and gazed to the side. They understood that they'd been duped. The cow that had been priceless in value was now worthless.

**The Gentile was Shocked at**

**The Rabbis’ Understanding**

Meanwhile, the gentile, never suspecting a problem, was impatiently waiting to receive his money. His mouth dropped open when he heard the words: "We have no use for your cow now, since by putting a yoke in it, you have made it invalid for use in our Holy Temple. We will have to look further for a red heifer." With those words, the rabbis turned and sadly made their way back to Jerusalem without the coveted cow?

The gentile was shocked by what had occurred. He had thought to play a joke on the Jews, but he had never dreamed that he would be the one to suffer. His opinion of the Jewish Sages changed to one of respect and admiration. How had these holy men been able to discern any difference in the heifer? The man suffered from his great disappointment to such an extent that his health suffered and he was never the same again.

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

**L’Maaseh…A Tale to Remember**

**A Zechus for Rav Shach**

When Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, *zt”l*, was approximately 75 years old, he became very ill, and he felt that he didn’t have much time left to live. Until that time in his life, he was very well known to *Talmidei Chachomim*, but he generally did not involve himself in public matters.

He thought that perhaps, if he would be able to do more for others, Hashem would allow him to recover in that merit, and he decided to start giving more *brachos* to people. This was something he did not regularly do out of his humility, but if people would derive *chizuk*, strength from it, then he would do it, and this could help strengthen their *Emunah* and *Bitachon* in Hashem.

Rav Shach started to give *brachos* to people in need of *yeshuos*, salvation from Hashem, and soon after he recovered from his illness, and he started to involve himself in all communal affairs. Rav Shach felt that Hashem had kept him alive so that he could help other people, and ended up living for another 30 years!

*Reprinted from last week’s email of Torah U’Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights Compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Rich Man, the Rabbi, the Curse and the Mikva**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Some 250 years ago in the Ukraine a Pupil of Besh't (Baal Shem Tov) was asked to accept the job of Rabbi in a small town that he had never heard of. He was told that some 5,000 Jews lived there and he had been highly recommended.

He asked the Besh't if he should accept the job and when the answer was positive he gathered his family together with his few belongings, loaded up their wagon and moved there without even seeing the place. If the Besh't said to take the job there was no room for doubts.

After he arrived and got settled, that very day he took a tour of the town, and discovered to his dismay that the first thing he asked to see: the women's Mikva (immersion pool built to Torah specifications for Jewish women) was not fit for use and was beyond repair. A new Mikva had to be built.

The Rabbi gathered the elders of the community demanded an explanation (A Mikva is more essential to a Jewish community that even a Synagogue) and discovered that the reason nothing had been done was lack of funds. Everyone Jew in the town was on the verge of poverty (as were 99% of Russian Jewry) except for one wealthy man who was separated from his wife, had no need for the Mikva and was totally unwilling to co-operate.

**The Rabbi Knocks on the Rich Man’s Door**

But he was the only hope the Rabbi had. So he said a prayer, knocked on his door and hoped for the best. The rich man warmly invited in and treated to what seemed like genuine hospitality.

"I understand that you probably have come regarding the Mikva, correct Rabbi? Well, first of all allow me to congratulate you on your new appointment in our community. Secondly, you probably heard unfavorable things about me from the congregation. Well the fact is that I have been ignoring their requests for help because I need help myself and I'm sure that none of them cares.

"But I'm sure you, Rabbi, are different. And if I'm right ….. you have yourself a new Mikva for the entire congregation.

"Let me get to the point, Rabbi. I understand you are a pupil of the Baal Shem Tov. Correct? Well, being a pupil of the holy Baal Shem Tov I'm certain that you possess supernatural powers, correct? Well, I need a supernatural favor and if you help me, I'm willing to not only pay for an entire new Mikva, I'll give you as much money as you want.

"You see, my wife and I don't get along. In fact we hate each other. I would like to divorce her but she is demanding that I give her all my money and possessions first. So we now live apart and both of us are suffering."

**The Rabbi Offers to Try and**

**Make Peace with the Wife**

The Rabbi said, "What would you like me to do? To talk to her? I'll be glad to try to make peace and …."

But the miser cut the rabbi short, shook his head no and said. "I've tried that. In fact I've tried everything. There is only one solution….that she should, well, leave. If you know what I mean…. Up there." And the miser pointed up to heaven.

"What?!" Gasped the Rabbi. "Are you implying that I should end someone's life? Why that is insane! And it's totally forbidden. How can you even request such a thing?! It is against everything the Besh't stands for."

But the miser wasn't moved. "Listen Rabbi, do you want the Mikva?" The Rabbi shook his head yes. "I mean, the entire congregation is suffering, hundreds of people, even thousands! And, well…. about my wife…. after all, everyone dies eventually, don't they? And as things are she is miserable. I am miserable, the entire town is miserable. So really what am I asking you? Only to make peace in Israel! Nu? Do we have a deal? Do I have your word? I'll trust you! I'll build the Mikva and you take care of her….. okay? Everyone benefits! Is it a deal?"

The miser stuck out his hand, the Rabbi thought for a minute, took it and the agreement was made.

**The Rich Man Promises to**

**Pay for the Entire Mikva**

That Shabbat in Synagogue before the reading of the Torah an announcement was made that, after much work from the Rabbi the rich man wanted to make an announcement. He stood, cleared his throat and dramatically announced that had a change of heart and decided to build the entire Mikva!

Everyone stood and applauded while the rich man feigned embarrassment, stood there smiling and blushing all over and assured everyone it was 'nothing'.

That next day the builders arrived, work began and just a few weeks later the Mikva was almost finished. As was expected the workers and their manager went to the Rabbi for payment and the Rabbi told them he would get the money from the donor and they should return in two weeks.

But when the Rabbi went to the house of the miser and asked for money he was flatly refused. "Money? You want money? But I want something too! Have you forgotten? Listen, Rabbi, you keep your side of the deal and I'll keep mine. I pay AFTER you take care of my wife. I saw her walking in the street a few minutes ago. I know I said I would pay in advance but I changed my mind.

"What?" Said the Rabbi "She's not dead? I sent the Angel of Death there this morning. One moment, I'll be right back."

**The Angel Couldn’t Recognize**

**The Rich Man’s Wife**

The Rabbi left the miser and returned a half-hour later with the explanation.

"It's your fault! You made it impossible for the Angel. He looked for your wife but he couldn't find her! It's because, well, you don't treat her like a wife and in fact you are like strangers. You live in separate houses, never talk, and never even see each other. No wonder he couldn’t recognize her!

"I know how these Angels work." The Rabbi continued, "You can't fool them. If you want the job to get done you have to cooperate! Be man and wife. Understand?

The miser shook his head yes and knew what he had to do. The next day he sent his wife a bouquet of roses and a box of chocolates. The day after he sent another bunch of flowers and some new expensive dresses. The third day he wrote her a poem attached to a bottle of perfume, and on the fourth day she wrote him a thank you note.

"Aha! It's working!!" he said to himself rubbing his hands in glee as he sent her an invitation to eat at his home. "Soon I'll be rid of her!"

But as they were sitting there eating together by candlelight strangely something else was happening… he got so involved in pretending that he even told a joke; the first joke of his life … and she laughed! They began talking and he totally forgot about his agreement with the Rabbi. She even agreed to move back home for a few days.

But then, just after she moved back in she began having serious trouble breathing.

The miser realized what was happening. It was the curse! It was taking effect! He ran to the Rabbi.

**Begs the Rabbi to Remove the Curse**

Rabbi, take it away!!! Take away the curse!! I retract my request!! Can you do something??

The Rabbi smiled and explained. "My dear friend, I never cursed or even promised to curse your wife. G-d forbid!

The reason your wife is now sick is because of your vow. You took a vow in public, in the synagogue, remember? You promised to pay for the Mikva and you didn't keep your vow. That is the reason she is so ill. So if you want her to get better, pay for the completion of the Mikva. Keep your vow and she will get better!

Of course the miser gladly complied, paid for the entire Mikva and due to the wisdom of the Besht's pupil; both a Mikva and a marriage were built anew.

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