**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Va’eira 5781**

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**Story #1202**

**The Delayed Delivery**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](https://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=00018C00:001VruKa00001%5eNI&count=1608562992&randid=1785889833&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=2&randid=1785889833)



  Once, during his travels, the ***Baal Shem Tov*** stayed at the inn of one of his followers in a village near the city Brody.

 The innkeeper wishing to honor his distinguished guest and those accompanying him prepared a huge feast on their behalf and accorded all the respect due them.

 As the Baal Shem Tov took leave of his gracious host he said:  “Ask of me what you wish.”

 “Thank G-d, I lack nothing and have no request to make, other than that my heart be strengthened to continue serving and fearing my Maker,” said the righteous innkeeper.

**The Besht Asks for a Small Favor**

 “If so, than I have one small favor to request of you.  Please do not refuse me,” asked the *Besht*.

 The good man replied readily, “I am prepared to serve you with my whole body and soul and with all my might.”

 The Baal Shem Tov went over to a desk and sat down to write a letter, sealing it with his personal seal and addressing it to two specific people by name, and also referring to them as the “Trustees for the Congregation of the City of Brody.” He handed the letter to the innkeeper saying:  “I wish you to deliver this letter yourself, not by messenger.  Give this to the people I have addressed it to.”

 “I shall do as you have instructed,” said the man and placed it in the outer pocket of his jacket.

 As the Besht prepared to go he asked his host, “You intend to accompany me part of the way, do you not?”

 The innkeeper rushed to the stable and proceeded to take out the harness from its box in order to hitch up the horses.  As he bent over to extract the equipment from the chest, the letter fell out of his pocket without his noticing it.  He hurriedly harnessed his horses to the wagon and went to accompany his departing guest.

 When he returned he had already forgotten all about the letter.  Even when he later visited the Baal Shem Tov he did not remember it, nor did the *Besht* inquire whether he had delivered it.

**The Baal Shem Tov Passes Away**

 Years passed. In 1760, the Baal Shem Tov ascended to his Heavenly reward.  Sometime after, the wheel of fortune turned against the innkeeper, to the extent that he was eventually forced to sell all he owned in order to provide for his family.  By then it was seventeen years since the Baal Shem Tov had visited him.

 One day the innkeeper went to look for something in the chest where he kept his harnesses.  All of a sudden, he happened to notice the letter.  Picking it up, he recognized the Baal Shem Tov’s handwriting upon the envelope and remembered the incident of seventeen years before.

 The innkeeper was very distressed and wept bitterly, blaming his misfortune on his oversight concerning the letter.  He dared not open the letter for it was still sealed with the *Besht*’s seal and the people for whom it was intended might still be alive.  He decided to deliver it to the addresses, convinced that a letter written by the Baal Shem Tov would be dear to its recipient even if it had been written seventeen years ago.  He picked himself up and walked to Brody, being too poor even to afford the fare for transportation.

**Finally Arrives at His Destination**

 After a taxing journey, he finally reached his destination. Immediately, he began inquiring in the different study-halls and synagogues about the trustees named on the letter.  To his great consternation he learned from reliable people who had lived in the city for over twenty years that no such trustees had ever served in Brody.  When these men heard the innkeeper’s story they were surprised too, for the Baal Shem Tov had been well known in Brody.

 During the course of the conversation one man said in jest:  “Are you aware that today elections are being help in the main synagogue for the new trustees?  Who knows?  Maybe those men will be chosen today!”

 No sooner were the words out of his mouth then some young boys rushed into the *Beit Midrash* (study hall).

 “Mazel tov!  Mazel tov!” they shouted.  Mr. so and so and Mr. so and so were just elected as the new trustees for the community.”

 The innkeeper looked at the envelope in his hand in astonishment.  Those were the very names that appeared on the letter!  He rushed to the synagogue to find the two men and tell them his strange story.

 He approached the new trustees, men in their early thirties, and greeted them:  “Blessed be you unto G-d. I have here a letter addressed to you both from The Baal Shem Tov.”

**They Thought the Letter was a Joke**

 They looked at the letter he handed them and thought that it was a joke, for the Baal Shem Tov had passed away many years ago.  The old man who had accompanied the innkeeper knew the Baal Shem Tov in person from the *Besht’*s occasional visits to Brody.  Now he spoke up.

 “It is quite possible that the Baal Shem Tov sent this letter to you; his holy vision was capable of spanning time as well as distance.  In fact, I am sure it was intended for you,” he said with conviction.

 They opened up the letter and read the following message:

  “To the new trustees of the city of Brody” addressing them by name.

 “You have received this letter from a destitute innkeeper.  I beg of you, do what is in your power for his sake, for his is a decent man who has been accustomed to wealth all of his life until his recent poverty.  His strained circumstances are such that he has no means to feed his family.  Therefore, do your best for him, for I, the Baal Shem Tov, ask it of you.

 “If you doubt that I have sent this letter to you let me give you a sign.  Your wives are both pregnant.  You will soon be informed that the wife of one (whom he named) will give birth to a boy while the other woman (and he named her as well) will give birth to a girl.  Let this, then, be the sign that I have really sent this letter and that I implore you to help the good man before you to the best of your ability.”

**The Letter is Immediately Verified**

 As they were finishing reading the letter, some people came in and announced the births, precisely as the letter had predicted.

 The two young men told and retold this amazing occurrence to everyone they encountered that day, their astonishment growing all the while.  As for the innkeeper, they did their best for him and, with Heaven’s grace, he soon became wealthy again.

**\*      \*      \***

The source of this story is the holy rebbe of Apta, Reb Avraham Yehoshua-Heshel, who once related this wondrous episode to a large assembly of chasidim in Berditchev. After concluding, he commented:

 Does this story seem strange to you?  To me it is not extraordinary at all.  The *Besht* was able to see what would be seventeen years hence, because he was endowed with a spiritual vision which transcended past, present and future simultaneously.  Plus, he had the necessary infinite wisdom to distinguish between them.

 What I do find extraordinary is the deep love for his fellow Jew that constantly burned within him and caused him to penetrate into the person’s future, and his deep concern to help and support that unfortunate man even after he himself had gone to the World Beyond.  It is this boundless love that I extract as the lesson from this story.

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*My source* : “Tales of the Baal Shem Tov,” vol. 2, pp. 84-89, by Yisroel-Yaakov Klapholz, as translated by Sheindel Weinbach.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer**[of blessed memory: 18 Elul 5458- 6 Sivan 5520 (Aug. 1698 - May 1760 C.E.)], the**Baal Shem Tov** [Master of the Good Name often referred to as the *Besht* for short], a unique and seminal figure in Jewish history, revealed his identity as an exceptionally holy person, on his 36th birthday, 18 Elul 5494 (1734 C.E.), and made the until-then underground Chasidic movement public. He wrote no books, although many works claim to contain his teachings. One available in English is the excellent annotated translation of *Tzava'at Harivash*, published by Kehos.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Va’eira 5781 email of KabbalaOnline.org*

**Shabbat Shoes**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**



 When I was growing up in Chicago, a long time ago, most Jewish families were still living under the shadow of the Depression. As such, when I was young, I always had only one pair of shoes, which I wore on weekdays, Shabbat, holidays, and even special family occasions, until they wore out. Then, I got another pair of shoes.

 By the time that my children were born and required shoes, the general financial situation in the United States and especially in the Jewish Orthodox community had changed for the better. So, one of the first things that my wife and I decided to do, to make the Shabbat special in the eyes and minds of our little children, was to institute the concept of Shabbat shoes.

**A Separate Pair of Shoes**

 They would each have a separate pair of shoes to wear on Shabbat. These shoes were shinier and prettier, though not necessarily more expensive, than the shoes that they wore to school and played in during the week. It was meant to create an idea that is central to Jewish life, that Shabbat is special and must be treated that way in every facet of our otherwise mundane existence.

 Having a different, ostensibly nicer, and better pair of shoes to wear on Shabbat reinforces the idea that Shabbat is special, beautiful, and something to look forward to all week long. However, as a child of the depression, I continued to wear one pair of shoes on each day of the week, every day of the year, until that pair of shoes finally wore out. Then, I bought another pair that I continued to wear daily until those, too, finally collapsed from wear and tear.

 I have always worn a special suit of clothes for Shabbat. However, I never bought for myself a pair of Shabbat shoes. I always had my weekday shoes polished for Shabbat, but habit is a very strong impediment to changing one's way of life and even spending habits. However, last month the shoes that I was wearing literally fell apart, and, therefore, coronavirus and all I went the shoe store to buy a replacement pair of shoes.

**The Shoes Had to be Black**

While there, I decided that I would buy a lighter weight shoe to wear during the weekdays. At my stage of life, anything that helps me walk more easily becomes a necessity. Naturally, the shoes that I bought had to be black, as befitting the Rabbi of the important congregation that I serve.

 However, suddenly on impulse, I also purchased a much more expensive and stronger shoe that I decided I would now dedicate as my Shabat shoes. It took almost 3 weeks for the shoes to finally arrive at the shoe store, but when they did and I began to wear them, I am happy to report, they fit perfectly and are most comfortable.

 But then I experienced a sudden surge of nostalgia and even excitement because I felt I was re-enacting the experience of my little children when they put on their Shabbat shoes on Friday afternoon. They were always so proud of how they looked in those shoes. I have no doubt that it enhanced their Shabbat, and now I felt that it enhanced my current Shabbat experience markedly. I have the delicious experience at my age, of being like a child, with all the wonder, excitement and optimism that is reserved for the very young.

**No Small Matters in Life**

 Now I know you will say that I am reading too much into the mundane and ordinary experience such as buying a pair of shoes. But all my life I have believed that there really are no small matters in life, and that everything, ordinary as they may appear on the surface, have an importance far beyond the act itself.

 Shoes are an important item in our minds. It is not for naught that there are holy days in the year when we are meant to mourn and afflict ourselves, when wearing comfortable leather shoes is forbidden.

 Part of this concept is that the rest of the year shoes are important. In fact, one of the blessings that we make in the morning, according to Jewish tradition, is that the L-rd has fulfilled everything that is needed, and this includes having a good pair of shoes to wear. Having special shoes for Shabbat really does make a lot of sense for us, both spiritually and psychologically.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayigash 5781 website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Smelling the Scent**

**Of Gan Eden**

**By Rabbi David Sutton**



**Rav Ovadia Yosef**

 A remarkable story is told in Artscroll’s biography of Rav Ovadia Yosef (Maran HaRav Ovadia, by Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz) that underscores the power of this “scent” of our mitzvot, and how the great tzadikim are capable of “smelling” this unique fragrance.

 We quote the story here with permission from Artscroll: Mr. Moshe Friedman  was born in Poland in 1930, and his family survived the war through a series of miracles that brought them to Siberia.

 When the war was over, Moshe’s father heard that the Nazis ym”sh had made soap out of Jewish bodies, and he decided to return to Poland to buy as many of these bars of soap as he could and give these remains a Jewish burial. Father and son traveled back to their hometown, and spent days combing the streets and offering to purchase the townspeople’s Nazi-supplied soap.

 This part of Moshe Friedman’s life story was known to the family; the rest was not — until it became revealed through Harav Ovadia. Mr. Friedman moved to America, married, and had children. When he was getting on in years, one of his sons in-law, who is of Syrian descent, offered to accompany him to Eretz Yisrael. Mr. Friedman was delighted to visit the Holy Land, and especially to see gedolei Yisrael and receive blessings. One of the stops they made was at Harav Ovadia’s home. No sooner had Mr. Friedman walked into the study than Harav Ovadia asked, “Why do I detect the scent of Gan Eden on your clothing?”

 Mr. Friedman did not know what to answer.

 “What special deed have you done in your life?” Harav Ovadia asked.

 At first Mr. Friedman would not answer, but when Harav Ovadia kept repeating the question, he said, “Well, I have a several children whom I support so they can devote their lives to studying Torah.”

 “That’s not it,” Harav Ovadia said. “Others do that as well and their clothing doesn’t have the scent of Gan Eden. What else did you do?” Harav Ovadia sensed that Mr. Friedman knew the answer, but wasn’t willing to say it in front of others. He sent all the people present out of his room, including Mr. Friedman’s son-in-law. The only other person who remained was a young man named David, who acted as an interpreter, translating Mr. Friedman’s English and Harav Ovadia’s Hebrew.

 When everyone left, Mr. Friedman told Harav Ovadia a story that had happened on the last day he and his father had attempted to buy and bury human soap in Poland — a tale, he said, he had not shared with anybody. After spending a few weeks in Poland, they had already bought and buried all the soap they could find, and they decided it was time to rejoin their family in Siberia.

 The day they were planning to leave, however, a non-Jewish man approached the 15-year-old Moshe Friedman and asked, “Are you the one who is buying the human soap?”

 Moshe confirmed that he was.

 “I have a full box of such soap, and I’m willing to sell it to you.” The man named a price, but Moshe did not have enough money on him, and his father was nowhere in sight. “I don’t have money here,” he said, “but give me the soap, I’ll bury it, and I’ll bring you money later.”

 “No, I want the money up-front,” insisted the seller.

 Moshe thought for a while and then said, “Look, I have this pair of warm, woolen pants, and yours are thin cotton. I’m willing to trade my pants for yours if you’ll allow me to buy the soap.”

 The man quickly agreed to the deal; a pair of warm woolen pants were a premium commodity in the harsh European winters. After the two traded pants, Moshe buried the box of soap, and then rejoined his family in Siberia, undoubtedly shivering his way through the winter in those cotton pants.

 When Harav Ovadia heard this story, he said, “This explains why your clothes have the scent of Gan Eden. The neshamot of all the Jews whose remains you buried were all kedoshim, who died ‘al Kiddush Hashem’ and are therefore in Gan Eden, and these neshamot have been accompanying you throughout your life.” The humble Mr. Friedman never told his family of this exchange. When they asked about his visit to Harav Ovadia, he just said, “It was very inspiring.” In 2004, Mr. Friedman passed away, and David, the interpreter who had been in the room and now lived in the same community, came to console the mourners.

 “The story with the pants was so inspiring,” he remarked.

 “What story? What pants?” the mourners asked, befuddled.

 David was shocked that they hadn’t heard the story. True, Mr. Friedman had told Harav Ovadia that he hadn’t shared the tale with anybody, but David hadn’t realized that that included Mr. Friedman’s own family. He then retold the entire story, giving the family great comfort as they came to appreciate their father in a new light — all due to the ability of a gadol hador to detect the“scent of Gan Eden” on his clothing.

 Even in our times, we have with us the “scent” of Gan Eden, and we have great tzadikim who are capable of smelling it.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vayishlach 5781 of iTorah.com*

**The Hero Behind the “Mask”**

**By Rabbi Joey Haber**



 One Friday night, I gave a speech in shul about the importance of maintaining emunah (faith) during challenging times. Later, one of the congregants, who I had seen a thousand times in shul and always thought of him as a fairly simple person, came over to me and said he had a story to tell.

 A few years prior, he lost his job. He did everything he could to try to find a new position, sending around his resume, networking, and so on, but to no avail. Every day, he turned to Hashem and desperately asked that He send him a job so he could support his family.

**After a Number of Months without Income**

**The Debts Started to Mount Quite Quickly**

 For a number of months, he had no income, and the debts started to mount. Finally, one day somebody called him with a job offer. He went to the office, and he sat and spoke with the employer for hours. The job was perfect, and paid a respectable salary. After several hours, the employer finally pulled out a contract for the fellow to sign.

 Just as he was about to sign, the boss said, “Just one thing – you’ll have work five Saturdays a year. It’s not such a big deal. Just five a year.”

 “What?!” the man said. “I cannot work on Saturday.”

 “Look, you really need a job, and this job is perfect for you. What’s the big deal? It’s only five Shabbatot a year!”

**The Man Refused to Sign the Contract**

 The man refused to sign the contract, and he turned down the offer. As he walked outside, he turned to Hashem and said, “You gave me a special gift – Shabbat – and I’m not going to give it up, for anything in the world.” Even if he had to work on Shabbat just once, he said to himself, the job was not for him.

 The next morning, he woke up at 6am, and saw a message with a great job offer. He’s been working in that job ever since.

 I always assumed this man was a simple, ordinary, nothing special kind of person, but in truth, he is a hero. He overcame a challenge that is far more difficult than anything I had ever encountered, and I always looked at him as just an average, run-in-the-mill kind of guy. I made the mistake of forgetting that we know so little about other people.

 We see only the “mask,” and not the person behind it. Let us remember how little we know about the lives of other people, and we will then be less judgmental and critical, and more respectful, accepting and loving in all our dealings with the people around us.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vayishlach 5781 of iTorah.com*

**The Strange Wedding Invitation**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

 A story is told about a man, who we’ll call Moshe, who was learning in yeshivah. One day, while he was learning, a young man who he didn’t know approached him and gave him a wedding invitation. The young man said, “I am getting married tomorrow night and it is very important to me that you join us.” Moshe said, “But I don’t think I even know you!” The young man responded, “Please, it would mean so much to me. I promise I’ll explain at the wedding tomorrow night.”

           Moshe decided that he couldn’t disappoint the hatan so he went to the wedding. When he arrived, the hatan hugged him and thanked him for coming, and even invited him to say one of the berachot under the huppah. Moshe was so curious that he stayed until the end of the wedding when he finally pulled the hatan aside and asked him to explain what was going on.

           The hatan said, “A couple of years ago I was new to the yeshivah and I was struggling to fit in. Things were not going well for me. I hadn’t made any friends and I felt completely lost. After one particular difficult day, I made the decision that the next morning I would pack my things and leave the yeshivah, and go out to find a job.

 “The next morning after shaharit, while I was standing in the hallway outside the bet midrash, you came up from behind me. You straightened the collar of my jacket, patted me on the back and said, ‘Good morning. I hope you have a great day!’

 “After that encounter, I reconsidered and decided to give the yeshivah another try. Baruch Hashem, things turned around and I stayed in yeshivah. Recently a shidduch was suggested to me and, as you see, I just got married to a wonderful kallah from a family of talmidei hachamim.  This would not have happened if I was not learning in yeshivah. You couldn’t have known it at the time but your kind words that day changed my life and made this day possible, and that is why I insisted that you be here tonight.”

 In every encounter with others we have the option to see them in a positive light or the opposite. Viewing others favorably and giving them encouragement can have far reaching effects. This is especially important when dealing with our family members and friends. If we think about how we feel when someone compliments us, we can then understand how important it is to compliment others. There is greatness in everyone. We just have to make the effort to see it.

*Reprinted from the Mikess 5781 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace as compiled by Rabbi David Bibi.*

**Rav Moshe Feinstein’s**

**Pacemaker**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**



 In his later years, Rav Moshe Feinstein experienced an irregular heartbeat. His family took him to a world famous expert on the subject who immediately inserted a pacemaker. A few weeks later, the irregular heartbeat returned, and Rav Moshe was rushed to the local emergency room. This time he was seen by a junior doctor who diagnosed a pacemaker malfunction. He removed the defective model and successfully replaced it.

           During his recovery, Rav Moshe related, “Here I am with a pacemaker inserted by a trainee and not as we planned by a gadol hador (referring to the first doctor who was world famous). This happened in order to teach me that it is important for a Jew to remember that while we must seek competent medical care, ultimately the outcome is in Hashem’s Hands, not ours, no matter how good one’s qualifications are.”

*Reprinted from the Mikess 5781 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace as compiled by Rabbi David Bibi.*

**The Straightforward Mishna**

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 The Chazon Ish zt”l, was very hidden from the public eye and was a complete unknown in the Torah world until R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt”l, publicized his greatness.

 R’ Shlomo Shimshon Karelitz zt”l related, “The Chazon Ish once attended a sheva berachos in Vilna and, as usual, he did his utmost to conceal his greatness by sitting with the simple people on the far side of the head table.

 R’ Itzele Ponevezher zt”l sat in the place of honor and delivered a very difficult and intricate discourse on the subject of pruzbul. He presented a very novel idea. The Chazon Ish immediately spoke up, “But that contradicts a straightforward Mishna!”

 R’ Itzele assumed that the simply dressed man sitting with the baalei batim hadn’t even grasped his words and dismissed him declaring, “We are not Mishna Jews!”

 After the drasha, R’ Itzele decided that even though it seemed unlikely, perhaps the young man knew what he was saying. He went over to the back table and asked what he had meant. The Chazon Ish showed him a Mishna in Moed Katan which clearly contradicted the Rav’s drasha.

 When R’ Itzele heard this he was so impressed that he removed his chair from the head table and placed it next to the unknown young man. When R’ Shlomo Karelitz, asked the Chazon Ish if this was a true story, he said nothing, as was his wont. R’ Karelitz concluded, “It is clear that this was true for if not, the tzaddik would surely have denied it!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Va’eira 5781 email of Torah Tavlin.*

**The Cut-Out Tongue**

 Shmuel HaNagid was a vizier to the Caliph of Granada and leader of the Spanish-Jewish community. A Jewish man once bad-mouthed him and the Caliph, following accepted Muslim protocol, instructed R’ Shmuel to personally “cut out that man’s evil tongue.”

 R’ Shmuel took the trembling man to his home and made him comfortable. He treated him as an honored guest and never mentioned the issue of his being insulted, nor did he take the opportunity to belittle the man for his affront.

 Sometime later, the Caliph called for the man to see that his order had been carried out. The man could not stop lavishing praise on Shmuel HaNagid for his wisdom, kindness and generosity.

**The Caliph was Very Angry**

 The Caliph was incensed at R’ Shmuel. “How dare you disobey me? I told you to cut out his tongue, yet he still speaks!”

 R’ Shmuel responded with typical insight, “Your eminence, you told me to cut out his “evil” tongue, and that’s exactly what I have done. Don’t you see how this tongue only speaks with sweetness and love?”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5781 email of Migdal Ohr.*

**A Miracle in Yerushalayim**

 Rabbi Ashear told a fitting story in his book *Living Emunah on the Parasha*. Rabbi Stern was on his way home after praying *arvit* at the *kotel* [in Yerushalayim/Jerusalem] one night.

 Spur of the moment, he decided to stop by his sister’s house to visit his mother, who had been living there at the time. The visit lasted much longer than usual. When he finally left his sister’s house and realized how late it was, he was anxious to get home to his family. The streets of the Old City were empty, except for one man who was limping erratically.

**Recognized His Close Friend**

 He immediately recognized the man to be his close friend, Rabbi David. Rabbi David told Rabbi Stern he’s been stabbed in the stomach by an Arab and he needed help. Rabbi Stern rushed to him, offering his shoulder, and trying to look around for medical assistance.

 Rabbi David halted abruptly, “I can’t take another step. I need an ambulance,” he said. By then, blood was pouring from the wound in a steady stream. Rabbi Stern was afraid to stop a car, since it would likely hold more Arabs, further endangering them. He also didn’t want to leave Rabbi David alone while he ran into a house to call an ambulance. Every second mattered.

 Just then, a police car drove by! Rabbi Stern waved it down, and the police radioed for an ambulance, which arrived in two short minutes! They took Rabbi David to the hospital, where they performed emergency surgery, and he was able to recover.

**Marvelling Over the Incredible**

**Hashgacha Peratit (Divine Providence)**

 Rabbi Stern called Rabbi David to check on him the days after his surgery, and they marveled at the hashgacha peratit­— that Rabbi Stern was delayed at his sister’s house, and that the police showed up when they did!

 Rabbi David told Rabbi Stern the best part of all. When the doctor did the surgery, he noticed the knife had entered above Rabbi David’s intestines, but that they should have been hit— killing him— but his intestines were out of place. After the surgery, Rabbi David later explained to the surgeon and to Rabbi Stern that for two years, he had experienced pain in his stomach, and X-rays showed his intestines had shifted out of place, causing the pain.

 He planned to schedule surgery to correct it, but he had spoken to the Lelover Rebbe, who told Rabbi David to hold off. He even asked the Rebbe again a couple months earlier, and he insisted he hold off once more. The pain he experienced ended up saving his life.

*Reprinted from the Parasht Vayigash 5781 email of Rabbi Amram Sananes as written by Jack Rahmey.*