**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas vayakhel-pekudei 5781**

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**The Purpose of Our**

**Struggle to Understand**

**A Difficult Sugya**



 The Chofetz Chaim, zt”l, once spent a number of hours together with his son-inlaw deeply immersed in a difficult Halachic question. They studied the various sources in the Gemara, and in the Rishonim and Achronim. After great effort and toil, they arrived at a decision which was then written into the Mishnah Brurah.

 The entire effort took many hours, and the result was one and a half short lines in the Mishnah Brurah. The Chofetz Chaim’s son-in-law asked his Rebbe, “Will anyone who learns the Mishnah Brurah have any idea as to how much effort and toil went into producing this line that was added to the Halachah?”



 The Chofetz Chaim replied, “Let me tell you a story that will clarify this issue for you. It was during the reign of the Czar of Russia, and a father and son worked together in Siberia to lay the tracks for the railroad. This was back-breaking labor. Night and day, under the most brutal conditions, from freezing cold to stifling heat, they worked hard, putting their blood, sweat and tears into the Czar’s railroad.

 One day, the son asked his father, “Father, will the people that ride the train have any idea concerning the backbreaking labor that went into preparing this railroad?”

**We Work for One Reason and for One Purpose**

 The father looked at his son and said, “It is not important what people will or will not think, or what they will or will not know. We work for one reason and for one purpose, and that is to fulfill the command of the Czar. He is our leader and our father, who provides for our country. He has asked us to build the railroad, and that is all that matters.”

 The Chofetz Chaim continued, “The same idea applies to learning Torah. It is not important for us to know if those who later learn through our work will appreciate the time and effort that we put into getting to the final Halachah. Similarly, it shouldn’t matter to us the amount of work we put into learning a difficult Sugya. Everything that one does in this world should be done with one focus in mind, that he is serving Hashem and carrying out His will!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Legacy of Rebbe Preida**

 The Gemara in Eiruvin (54b) tells the incredible episode concerning Rebbe Preida, who had a student who was educationally challenged. Rebbe Preida would have to repeat each lesson four hundred times before the student would grasp it. One day, Rebbe Preida had to leave and attend to a certain matter involving a Mitzvah, but prior to leaving, he taught his student the usual four hundred times. However, for some reason, the student still did not grasp the lesson.

 Rebbe Preida asked him why today was different when they learned the topic the same amount of times as they usually did? The student answered, “From the very moment that the Rebbe was notified that he must attend to a Mitzvah, my attention was diverted. I was concerned that at any moment, the Rebbe will leave me, and I could not concentrate well.”

**He Teaches the Student for Another Four Hundred Times**

 Rebbe Preida then said to him, “Pay attention, and I will teach you.” He then taught him the lesson another four hundred times. At that moment, a Heavenly voice was heard, and it asked Rebbe Preida, “As a reward for your patience, do you prefer that four hundred years be added to your life, or that you and your generation merit life in Olam Haba?”

 Rebbe Preida replied, “I ask that I and my generation merit the life of Olam Haba.”

 Hashem said, “Give him both rewards!”

**Teaching Torah – A Labor of Love**

 Rav A. Leib Scheinbaum writes that this is a truly powerful story about an incredible Rebbe who would give up so much of his time to teach one student. This is how important Torah was to him. He toiled and labored a labor of love, so that his student would achieve proficiency in his Torah lessons!

 Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a, learns an important lesson from here, that in order to achieve success in Torah, one must exhibit patience. Not every Sugya is simple. At times, one must work with great intensity over the lessons of Chazal, and this requires patience and perseverance.

 Rebbe Preida accepted upon himself to teach this student, because it helped him develop his own Middah of Savlanus, patience. From teaching this student, he would himself become a better student, and develop greater patience in dealing with his own learning.

 One more lesson we can learn from this is that Rebbe Prieda did not lose out because of the extra time he invested. In fact, he gained by receiving both rewards. Hashem calculates the amount of work that a person expends for Torah study, and rewards him accordingly!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Terumah 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**To Ask or Not to Ask**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

 Mrs. Bernstein took her pupils for an outing. It was one of the eight days of Chanukah when Jewish schools take vacations and make special programs. But this outing was special. They went to a local shopping center in New Jersey to not only light Chanukah candles but also to inspire Jews.

 It was an invention of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; to go anywhere and everywhere, even public places, to search for uneducated/ uninspired/ unattached Jews and give them a taste of Judaism. And in Chanukah it was easy; everyone liked the candles and the message of light and victory.

 They agreed that the girls would split up into groups of three to cover as much area as possible and meet back at the bus in an hour and a half.

**A Most Punctual Teacher**

 Mrs. Bernstein was a very punctual person and she demanded the same from her pupils; tardiness or disorder of any sort was out of the question. So one hour and a half meant no later than an hour and a half!

 The girls loaded up from the pamphlets and candles they had brought and set off in different directions while she took what remained and went alone in a direction they hadn't chosen.

 She immediately met with success and after almost an hour of conversing with receptive Jewish women and girls she looked at her watch to see that forty minutes remained enough for three or perhaps four more discussions. She approached five or six women and one young man sitting around the table of an outdoor restaurant.

 "Anyone here Jewish?" She asked with a smile. Two of the women raised their hands in good spirits and a lively conversation ensued. She told them about the holiday, they asked questions, she answered, they replied and the conversation continued for several minutes. Meanwhile the other women, most of which were about to leave before she arrived, excused themselves and left, while the young man, who obviously was not Jewish, sat and listened.

**“I Must Go!!! I’m Already Late”**

 Mrs. Bernstein looked at her watch and exclaimed. "Oh my goodness! We've been talking for forty-five minutes! I must go!!! I'm already late! I was supposed to meet the girls five minutes ago!"

 She shook hands with the women, they exchanged telephone numbers, and she left some of the pamphlets and candles with them and ran off to meet her pupils at the bus. It wasn't like her to keep them waiting.

 But she stopped. A voice inside of her was saying she shouldn't have ignored the young man, 'You should have at least asked him if he was Jewish'. But then she thought again. 'Why, that's foolish! I'm late! And he didn't look at all Jewish! Anyway, he didn't say anything when I first asked everyone. I'm not going back!"

 But the first voice won.

 She turned around, walked briskly back to the table, approached the young man who was now sitting alone and said "Excuse me but, by the way, are you Jewish?"

 She never would have expected his reaction. He looked up at her, eyes filled with tears, began trembling so severely that the food fell from his fork on his shirt leaving a large stain and began to cry.

**Apologizes Amidst a State of Confusion**

 Mrs. Bernstein was confused, she apologized handed him a few napkins and apologized again.

 "Why did you ask me that?!" the young man said as he was calming down. "Why did you come back and ask me that!?" He said again between sniffles, drying his eyes and blowing his nose a few times.

 "I don't really know." She replied. "I can't really explain it. I just did. But why are you crying? What happened? I'm sorry. But please tell me, are you Jewish?"

 "I'll tell you." He replied. "I you don't understand what a miracle just happened now." He invited her to sit down and spoke.

 "First of all, my name is Fred (pseudonym). My mother is Jewish, so that makes me Jewish, right? But my father is not Jewish. To you that probably isn't so important because to you I'm still a Jew. But to me it meant confusion.

**My Mother Married a Gentile**

 "My mother wasn't at all observant. That's why she married a gentile, religion meant nothing to her. But for some reason she insisted that if they had children, they would be given an orthodox Jewish education. Doesn't make sense does it. But anyway, my father agreed. So when I was born€¦ I became that child.

 "When I was three, they enrolled me in a real Jewish school and by the age of five I not only could read the Torah, I dressed and acted like a religious Jew with a yarmulke, locks of hair at the sides of my head, Tizzies, on the four corners of my garments; the whole business!

 "But you can imagine what a feeling I had every day after school when I returned home, which was totally non-religious. And although my parents didn't bother me about how I looked the kids in school did bother me. Not my clothes but my face.

 "I looked exactly like my father; blond hair, blue eyes, small bobbed nose in other words like a total gentile. They were just little kids and, well you know how kids can be cruel sometimes.

 "Anyway, it made me confused and miserable and when my parents saw how it was ruining me, they talked it over and when I got to the fifth grade they moved me to a normal public school.

**I Removed all the Signs of My Judaism**

 "After the move it only took a few days till I removed all the signs of Judaism, made new friends and almost forgot the whole episode...  but deep in my heart I knew I was different. What I had learned in the Jewish school stuck with me, but so did the negative experiences.

 "Sometimes I even would talk to G-d and ask Him why He put me in this confusion but I didn't get any answers; only more confusion. So I tried to take my mind off it and just live life like everyone else.

 "But once in a while I had attacks of Jewish identity and one of them was just now. When you came and asked everyone except me if they were Jewish all the frustration, anger and sadness came back to me. Then, when you walked away, I decided to have my final, parting talk with G-d.

 I said 'G-d, I want to be Jewish, but I can't do it alone. I need Your help. If that lady doesn't come back here, I'm finished with being a Jew.'

 "So if you are wondering why you came back now you know; it was G-d answering my prayers!"

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tetzevah 5781 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

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**Story #1211**

**Special Favor from the**

**Most Unexpected Source**

**From the desk of Yeracchmiel Tilles**

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**Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg/The Ayatollah Khomeinei**

 This amazing story took place many years ago in Iran. It was related by a witness, Rabbi Yehuda Ezrachian, one of the Rabbanim in Iran at the time. HaRav Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg (now deceased), a beloved student of HaRabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, later in life became the chief rabbi of Mexico. He was an erudite scholar, and he was also a man of action with expansive ties to heads of state and prominent personalities.

**The Persian Islamic Revolution Broke Out in 1979**

 The year was 1979, when the Islamic revolution broke out after the Persian Shah (ruler) was deposed and replaced by the notorious Ayatollah Khomeini, a rabid hater of Israel. Until that year, ties between Iran and the West were cordial. After the revolution, however, all those ties were cut off immediately.

 There was an American consulate in Teheran at the time. When the revolution broke out, demonstrators sent by the new government, which hated the West - especially America – stormed the American consulate and took everyone inside hostage. They then presented a list of demands to the American government as a condition for their release.

 Exhausting negotiations dragged on for a year and a half between representatives of the American government and of the Iranian regime. In the meantime, more than fifty captives were living in the consulate compound, among them Jews, under deplorable conditions. As the negotiation continued, with no end in sight, the captives were suffering.

**A Delegaton of Four Neutral Clergymen**

 During that time, the Americans managed to arrange for a delegation of four neutral clergymen to enter Iran, and to visit the captives in the consulate to provide them with some encouragement. Three prominent priests were chosen for the mission, along with Rabbi Hirschberg, for the Jewish captives.

 It was Chanukah when Rabbi Hirschberg arrived at the consulate. He lit the Chanukah candles with the captives, offered them effusive encouragement. He spoke to them about the story of Chanukah - how a handful of Jews prevailed over masses of non-Jews in battle. His message infused them with hope and inner strength; some even grew closer to their heritage as a result. As Rabbi Hirschberg’s visit drew to a close and he was preparing to return home with the rest of the delegation, they were surprised to discover that they were not being allowed to leave just yet.

 The evil Khomeini, seeking to humiliate the Americans and promote himself, demanded their public attendance at a mass Muslim event that was scheduled to take place in Teheran’s central square. Millions were expected to be in attendance. The center point of the ceremony was a high dais on which senior regime officials – including Khomeini - were seated. Alongside them were the four American representatives, Rabbi Hirschberg among them.

**More than a Million Muslim Men in the Square**

 Many more than a million Muslim men filled the square and the surrounding streets. The prayers began, in Persian. When the signal to bow was given, the religious figures on the stage all knelt on their knees and bowed – including the Christian priests. After them, the millions of Muslim men all bowed too, and also prostrated themselves, as is their custom.

 Of all the millions, one man remained standing tall – Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Hirschberg, similar to Chananya, Mishael and Azariah in their time,1 He did not move, standing out among the masses. The Ayatollah Khomeini sensed something, and flew into a rage. He immediately summoned Rabbi Hirschberg to him, and through a translator, asked him why he had not bowed, while his three American friends, the Christian priests, had?

 Rabbi Avraham Mordechai – despite being overcome with fear and sure he was going to be sent to his death– did not display any of his inner angst. He turned to the translator and politely asked him to explain to the ruler that our Torah states that one must not bow in idol worship, and because he did not understand Persian, he did not know to whom everyone was bowing. As such, he was forbidden from joining them. It is possible that the priests who did bow were familiar with the Persian language and knew to whom they were bowing. But because he did not know, he was compelled to remain standing.

**The Rabbi’s Response Took the Evil Ruler by Surprise**

 His innocent words of truth took the evil ruler by surprise, and also found favor in his eyes. Instead of killing Rabbi Hirshberg or otherwise punishing him, he instructed the interpreter to tell the rabbi that he liked his answer. He was impressed by the fact that he was not a flatterer like the three priests in the delegation were. This was a truly remarkable turn of events. Khomeini was known for his burning hatred of Jews, and yet, he respected and admired the Jewish rabbi for adhering to his religion.

 When Reb Avraham Mordechai understood from the translator how much of an impression his words had made on the Ayatollah, he decided to utilize the opportunity to try to help his Jewish brethren in Iran. He asked to set up a meeting to discuss their plight with him. The Ayatollah agreed and told him when to come. At the appointed hour, Reb Avraham Mordechai arrived at the Ayatollah’s residence.

 When the audience began, the Rabbi said with tears in his eyes: “I want to plead for my Jewish brethren who live here. I have learned that the remaining Jewish residents are suffering terribly at the hand of their neighbors and enemies. Perhaps the ruler in his compassion can save them and help prevent this persecution.”

**The Defense Strategy of the Humble Rabbi**

 The Ayatollah first tried to argue that the Jews were collaborating with his enemies. But Rabbi Hirschberg, with his humble nature, was able to influence him by calmly proving that the Jews had no hatred for the ruler and the revolution at all. On the contrary, they hoped and yearned for the new government to protect them from their harassers.

 Surprisingly, the ruler agreed to the request, whereupon Rabbi Avraham Mordechai seized the moment to make one more petition, relating to something he had become aware of during his conversations with members of the community. When the revolution broke out, a curfew was imposed throughout Iran, each night, until the early morning hours. This was very difficult for many Jews, who were used to going to pray in their shuls (synagogues) at dawn so they could then go to work.

 Now, due to the curfew, they could not fulfill their religious practices. Once more he received help from Heaven. The Ayatollah agreed to this request as well. He promised he would issue an order to the Iranian police commander that from that day on, if they saw a person during the curfew in the early dawn hours carrying a tallit and tefillin case, they should accept that as a sign that he is not an enemy of the revolution, but rather a Jew performing his religious duty and rising early to pray in synagogue.

**The Remarkable Accomplishment Made Waves**

 This remarkable accomplishment made waves, and generated tremendous encouragement throughout the community, as everyone was able to see how a Jew who fulfills the commandments of his religion proudly and is not afraid of scoffers or those who threaten him ultimately merited to find such special favor in the most unexpected place.

**Source:** Adapted and expanded by Yerachmiel Tilles from the version on //bneyemunim.co.il, where Mipikudecha Asichah, Vol. II p. 21, is cited as the source.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tetzaveh 5781 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascentof safed.*

**A Mother’s Legacy**

**By M.S.**

 We were sitting shivah for our dear mother who had passed away. Mother was a woman of kindness whose whole life revolved around kindnesses, both revealed and concealed. Most of her chesed came naturally to us in the house and we did not pay attention to her devotion or what it took out of her for another in difficult times.

**Treating a Needy Little Boy with Special Attention**

 Every Friday a needy little boy would come to us and she would treat him with special attention until we sent him home so his parents would have time to calmly get him ready for Shabbos. She would pour out kind words of encouragement and many other mitzvos too numerous to count and during shivah we began to get a little understanding of the great worth of our mother.

 In the middle of shivah, a woman who endured difficulty in her life came to comfort us and told us that Mother was her support. I remember she always left our house with shopping bags. I brought her to the kitchen and I loaded her with food since so many people brought platters and there was more food than we could ever eat. I saw the opportunity for a hungry family to benefit from good food instead of throwing it out. (We asked a Rav if we are allowed to give food to a hungry family from the house of a mourner.)

**Difficult for Her to Reach the Bus Stop**

 After supplying her with all these good things, it was hard for her to make it to the bus stop. I sent my daughter to go with her and help her to the bus stop. I thought, what will she do when she has to change buses since she lives in another city far away, and how will she manage when she gets off the bus at her stop and has to make it home?

 While I was thinking these things, a good friend showed up who came just about every day to comfort me and she lives in the same city as that woman. I asked her if she truly wanted to help me and she said that she did. I asked her if she would take the woman home with all her bags as she lives in a neighborhood literally right near her own. She did it wholeheartedly, and she took the woman and all her shopping bags to the door of her home and she gladly helped bring the bags inside with her.

 We saw how the siyata d’shmaya of the kindnesses of Mother had not ceased and they still continued to leave the doors of her home. May it be His will that this story be an elevation for the pure soul of my mother, my teacher a”h.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5781 email of Tiv Hakehilah.*

**The Forty Day Challenge**

**By Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

 There was once a young man who excelled in his learning and was known as a Talmid Chacham, with a great deal of Torah knowledge under his belt. On one occasion, while the young scholar was engrossed in his learning, he came across an idea found in the seforim hakedoshim that if a person fasts for forty consecutive days, he will attain the highest form of spirituality and merit Ruach Hakodesh (Divine Inspiration), just as Moshe Rabbeinu did, when he was on Har Sinai. Excited about the prospect of attaining such an elevated plateau and confident that he was worthy of this lofty achievement, that very day he began his quest and refrained from eating for the next forty days straight.

**Weak and Haggard, Without the Inspiration**

 He was weak and haggard, however, when he completed the allotted time, no matter how hard he tried, he could not feel any inspiration, divine or otherwise, and he was thoroughly disappointed. He decided to go to his local Rebbe and discuss the matter.

 The Rebbe, seeing the seriousness and earnestness of his young chasid, listened fastidiously as the man put forth his complaint that he had pushed himself and fasted for forty consecutive days, and according to the reading he had done, this should have merited him divine inspiration. However, he felt no different than before. How can this be so?

 The Rebbe stroked his beard thoughtfully and then began to illustrate the chasid’s pitiful error. “It is well-known that the holy Baal Shem Tov zt”l traveled at miraculous speeds. A trip that should have taken days was completed in hours or even minutes. This was due to the greatness of the Baal Shem Tov who experienced what only the greatest men in our history achieved: Kefitzas Haderech - the ground literally folding underneath his wagon to make the trip go faster. “Now, as we all know, it is the practice of people who travel by horse and buggy to stop at every inn to feed and water the horses. This is extremely necessary in order that the horses will not tire out during the trip and in order to care for and maintain the wagon.

 “I imagine that when the Baal Shem Tov’s horses flew by the first inn at great speed, they were surprised and thought to themselves, ‘Horses need to take a break to rest. We didn’t do so, so maybe we are not really horses after all! Maybe we are really human beings, who only stop to eat every few hours.’ Indeed, a horse’s logic!”

 The Rebbe gazed at the frail young man and smiled. “As they continued to pass more and more inns at breakneck speed, without stopping for food and water, these thoughts escalated. ‘Well, even human beings would have stopped to eat by now. Since we are still not being fed at all, maybe we horses are actually angels, who require no food and water at all!’ These were, after all, the horses of the Baal Shem Tov,” said the Rebbe to the wide-eyed chasid with a wink.



 “Of course, one would expect them to be smarter and more spiritual than the average mare.” The chasid nodded in agreement. “Now, when the Baal Shem Tov finally arrived at his destination, the horses instinctively pounced on the hay that they were given with animal relish. They traveled a great distance and hadn’t eaten in some time. At that point, all their wild thoughts of being human or angels vanished as they realized, ‘In the end, we must be horses after all.’”

 Looking at the young chasid pitifully, the master concluded his words instructively. “Forty days of fasting cannot earn you divine inspiration if after all that you’ve done, you go back to eating like a horse - with the same level of indulgence you maintained before. The idea of attaining Ruach Hakodesh is that you must work tirelessly and never stop working. Never stop attempting to reach the unattainable.”

 The Rebbe took the young man’s hand in his own and concluded, “I do not know if you’ll ever reach that lofty height, but I do know that unless you strive ceaselessly and never stop working toward your ultimate goal, you will not reach the pinnacle that you so strive for, and the inspiration you seek to attain. Fasting for forty days and nights and then going back to your normal routine is the not the way to gain Ruach Hakodesh.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5781 email of Torah Tavlin.*

**Rav Shlomo Zalman’s Interview**



 When Yeshivas Kol Torah in Jerusalem was looking to hire a new Rosh Yeshivah, they considered R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l as a good candidate and offered him to come give a shiur and try out for the job.

 At the time, R’ Shlomo Zalman was still relatively young in age and was in the process of completing a new sefer he hoped to publish and was tempted to turn the offer, but in the end, he accepted the opportunity because he felt it was far more important to teach talmidim directly than to publish a sefer to be read by the masses. During the “test” shiur, someone posed a question, which caused R’ Shlomo Zalman to stop in mid-sentence and say, “I believe I made a mistake.” Later, when his wife asked him how it went, he answered “not so well” because someone had asked a question which he wasn’t able to answer. Then he confided to her that he had immediately thought of three solid answers to this question, but he held himself back from saying them because he felt that the question was still better than any of the answers. As a result, he “admitted defeat,” and probably lost the job.

 Several hours later a delegation from the hanhalas hayeshivah came to offer him the position, explaining that a Talmid Chacham who so values truth is the most fitting person to assume the role of heading the yeshivah.

 A Yid always follows in the ways of Hashem. Just as Hashem is merciful, a Yid must be merciful. And just as Hashem is the G-d of truth, a Yid must always strive to speak the truth and act with truth. Emes is not just in the words we speak, but in the actions we do on a regular basis. One whose actions appear differently then his words, is not just distancing himself from Emes - he is inviting falsehood into his life and allowing it to control his daily actions.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5781 email of Torah Tavlin.*

**Rav Moshe’s Painful Car Ride**

 Rav Moshe Feinstein z”l would generally leave the Yeshiva during the lunch break, and a different boy was honored each day with escorting him down the steps to a waiting car.

 One day, the boy, not realizing that the Rosh HaYeshiva was not settled in the car, slammed the door on R’ Moshe’s fingers. He let out not a peep. A few blocks away, R’ Moshe asked the driver to pull over, whereupon the sage opened the door and released the bloody fingers of his frail hand.

 The driver realized what had happened and exclaimed, “Why didn’t the Rosh Yeshiva say something earlier?!”

 R’ Moshe explained that if he had cried out in pain, or even opened the door immediately, the boy who had done it to him would have felt terrible about what was clearly an accident. He therefore controlled himself not to react in any way, lest he cause pain to another.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Sisa 5781 of Migdal Ohr as compiled by Jonathan Gerwitz.*