**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas shelach 5781**

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**The Unusual Shadchan (Matchmaker)**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

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**Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn and Rabbi Yose Yitzchak Schneerrohn**

 The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber (1861-1920) was a holy genius whose main concern was the Jewish people and whose main occupation was prayer, learning or teaching Torah.

 But he was a very delicate person who often had problems with his health that forced him to travel to warmer climates for a rest. On one such trip he was accompanied by his only son Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (who years later would be the next Rebbe).

 In general, the Rebbe slept very little, if at all, at nights and it was his custom to rest, sitting on a couch every afternoon, not really asleep but also not totally awake, for a half hour or so. On this vacation, It happened to be Wednesday afternoon, he sat on a comfortable chair for his usual rest but this time it was for much longer than usual.

**The Rebbe Suddenly Stood Up**

 His son, a bit worried, tried to signal, with subtle noises, that the half-hour had passed; scuffling his feet and moving things around in the room but to no avail. Two hours later the Rebbe suddenly stood and asked, "Where am I? What day is it today? What section of the Torah are we in?" As though he had seen or experienced something very unusual.

 That evening he took an unusually long time praying the evening prayer, singing the words slowly and quietly with great emotion and then, the next morning after his prayers, he asked his son how much cash they had on hand.

 There was only enough for minor expenses, but his son took the hint, went to a local pawnbroker with his silver-topped cane that had been a present from his father, and came home with twenty rubles a small fortune in those days.
 His father, the Rebbe, took the money and asked his son to wait in the room while he went shopping.  A half hour later a package was brought to the room and in the next few hours delivery boys kept bringing more and more parcels, all recently purchased from various women's clothing stores.

**Who Were the Clothes Bought for?**

 All this was very strange, his father had made this vacation trip because he was tired and weak and now he was out shopping, which was also very unusual, especially that he was shopping on his own. Possibly the clothes were meant the Rebbe's granddaughters (Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak's daughters). But in fact, they weren't.

 It was early afternoon when his father returned told him to pack all the presents in his suitcase and that they were checking out of the hotel. On the way out his son paid the bill at the front desk and followed his father to the train station where, without any explanation, he told him to buy tickets to Pressburg.
 His son did as told but his curiosity was growing.

 When they arrived in Pressburg terminal two hours later he asked his father where they were going as he began flagging down a carriage, but his father shook his head and said no need for a carriage, they would go by foot.

 This also didn't make sense, their baggage was heavy, the Rebbe, after all his efforts should have been exhausted, especially due to his frail health, but the Rebbe was never wrong, and they began walking.

**Asked a Yeshiva Student for Directions to a Hotel**

 On the way the Rebbe stopped a young yeshiva student who was walking quickly toward them, obviously in a hurry to somewhere and asked him for directions to a certain hotel. But the young man replied quickly,

 "I'm sorry, please ask someone else I have no time!" and continued walking.

 But the Rebbe reprimanded him saying, "Is that any way to treat strangers? Is that the how you fulfill the commandment of accepting guests?"

 The young man, realizing he was wrong, stopped, apologized, caught his breath and explained exactly how to get to the hotel. And added that maybe they should consider another hotel as the owner of the hotel that he mentioned just died suddenly yesterday afternoon and his wife and daughters were just beginning the 'seven' (Shiva) day mourning period.

 The Rebbe thanked him, he and his son continued to the hotel and entered to see in a corner of the reception room, a woman and three young girls, probably her daughters, sitting and weeping with several comforters around them. Obviously, these were the mourners the young man mentioned.

**Leaves the Room for a Stroll**

 The bellboy showed them to a room and the Rebbe, rather than resting a bit after the journey, told his son to leave the suitcase in the room and come with him for a stroll.

 This really surprised the Rebbe's son. It was as though his father had totally regained his health and vigor and didn't have to rest at all.

 The Rebbe led the way to a large Yeshiva (Torah academy) building, entered and made his way to a large room where some hundred young men were sitting and learning aloud. The Rebbe went from table to table asking the boys questions about the Tractate they were learning and listened to their replies.

 One of the pupils really made a good impression and the Rebbe praised him highly. Then he saw the young man they had met earlier on the street and spoke with him for a few minutes as well, and finally they walked back to their hotel.

 All this was a great mystery to the Rebbe's son; it seemed that all the events of the last two days had no real connection to anything, and certainly not to a vacation, but he didn't ask for an explanation.

 Shortly everything became clear.

 The Rebbe entered the hotel, approached the woman and her daughters, in the corner of the reception room, sat down and said a few consoling words. Then, motioning toward the girls asked the widow why her daughters were not married.

 The woman moaned, almost began to cry and then said that even before her husband passed away, she had had no luck in finding fitting matches for them but now it would be impossible; she hadn't enough money to even buy nice clothes for them.

**Directs His Son to Bring Down the Packages**

 At this point the Rebbe told his son to go to up their room and bring down the packages.

 Moments later when he returned the Rebbe gave the packages to the woman and said, "Here are dresses and clothes for your two oldest daughters. And regarding finding a groom, well, I have two excellent candidates" and suggested the two young men he had spoken to earlier; the one he praised highly and the one they had first met on the street.

 The Rebbe arranged it that that very evening they would meet and, in fact, several days thereafter both couples decided to marry!

 Years later the Rebbe's son happened to be in Pressburg and, by chance, meet the youngest daughter. She thanked G-d that she too was now happily married and that her two sisters were doing wonderfully with the husbands that his father had arraigned!

 One was the Rabbi of a large city and the other the head of a Yeshiva.

 The name of their departed father, incidentally was Rabbi Avrham Bick author of the book 'Bikuray Aviv' on the Torah, and the time that he suddenly passed away coincided exactly with the time the Rebbe was 'unconscious' in the beginning of our story.

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

**The Wisdom of Hillel**

 [Hillel](/topics/hillel) used to say: be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and drawing them close to the Torah.

 He [also] used to say: one who makes his name great causes his name to be destroyed; one who does not add [to his knowledge] causes [it] to cease; one who does not study [the Torah] deserves death; one who makes [unworthy] use of the crown [of learning] shall pass away. (Chapter One, Pirkei Avot 1:12-13 – Safaria)

**Who Deserves a**

**Greater Reward?**

 A journalist in Israel was writing an article about Baalei Teshuva, people who chose to come closer to Hashem and learn about their Jewish heritage. After a class, he stopped one of the men who was leaving and posed this question: “Who do you think will get more reward, you, or someone who has been religious his entire life?”

 He thought the man would refer to the dictum of Chazal that “in the place where penitents stand, even the completely righteous cannot.”

 Without hesitation the man replied, “Definitely, one who has always been observant will get more reward.” He explained. “They will be rewarded because they think there is something better out there, yet they don’t pursue it. I know that the world without Torah and without G-d is empty. For me, coming here is the only logical response, so why do I deserve reward?”

*Reprinted from the Bamidbar-Shavuos 5781 email of Midgal Ohr (edited by Jonathan Gewirtz).*

**The Shidduch of the**

**Future Divrei Chaim**

 The following story is well-known. I repeat it due to its powerful lesson and as a segue into another story, whose lesson is also quite appropriate and significant. The Baruch Taam, Horav Baruch Frankel Teumim, zl, was an illustrious Rav and leader of Galician and Moravian Jewry.

 His son, Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl, m’Komarna, travelled to Tarnogrod, Ukraine, to meet the young man who had distinguished himself as the illui, genius, of Tarnogrod, who later became known as Horav Chaim Sanzer, the Divrei Chaim. After speaking in learning with the young man, Rav Yehoshua Heshel was so impressed that he could not wait to return home to encourage his parents to take this young man as a husband for his sister. When word went out that the Baruch Taam was taking a son-in-law from Tarnogrod, the students in his yeshivah became visibly upset. After all, it was not as if the Baruch Taam’s yeshivah did not include young men who were brilliant scholars. Why go elsewhere when an “identical” scholar could be found in one’s own yeshivah?

 The students even sent “spies” to check out the illui of Tarnogrod. They discovered that, indeed, he was a Talmudic scholar without peer, righteous and ethical to match. He did, however, have one physical impediment: he limped badly, as one leg was shorter than the other.

 “How could our illustrious Rav take a son-in-law who is not physically perfect?” was the foolish question that the jealous young men were asking. [Such a comment in and of itself explains why they were passed over.] “Why did Rav Yehoshua Heshel not inform his father and sister of this “development”? [After meeting the young man, he was so utterly impressed that he felt his physical impediment did not matter.]

**The Daughter Demanded a Say in the Matter**

 The Baruch Taam asked his son the same question: “Why did you not inform me of his condition?” Rav Yehoshua Heshel explained that his father might not have agreed to the match. He felt that once he met Rav Chaim, he would be so overjoyed that his condition would go unnoticed. While this rationale assuaged the Baruch Taam, his daughter, Rachel Faige, who was a special young woman in her own right, demanded to have a say in the matter.

 She wanted to meet the man whom everyone wanted and expected her to marry. It was settled – Rav Chaim was coming for a visit to meet with the Baruch Taam, and (if that went well) afterwards he would meet his daughter. The Baruch Taam was very impressed with the young man’s brilliance. He could not believe that such a young person was so erudite. Nonetheless, his daughter would have to reconcile herself to one condition.

 The future chassan and kallah met for a short while, and, after their meeting, the kallah fully agreed to the match. What did they talk about? The traditional tale is that Rav Chaim asked her to look in the mirror. What she saw unnerved and frightened her, because she saw herself bent and limping in pain. Her face portrayed the extreme pain that she was experiencing with each step.

**The Original Heavenly Decree**

 Rav Chaim said, “You see now what was the original Heavenly decree. Knowing that I was your predestined chassan, I prayed before He Who rests upon High to transfer this impediment to me. I have experienced this pain for years, so that you would not endure the agony and shame. Now, if you want to forgo and ignore this, I absolve you from the shidduch.”

 Rachel Faige understood that before her stood an unusual, saintly man. She acquiesced to the marriage and, as a result, merited to be the progenitress of the Admorim of Shiniev, Kishanev, Sanz, Gorlitz and Bobov. Not all yichus is positive. Even the most negative yichus, however, can be (by the right, positive-thinking person) ameliorated and used favourably.

*Reprinted from the Shavuos 5781 email of Peninim on the Torah (edited by Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum).*

**The Mashgiach and the Intern**



 **Rabbi Meir Chodosh,**OB”M, Mashgiach of Yeshivas Chevron, was once hospitalized with a serious illness. When a young intern entered Rabbi Chodosh’s room to draw blood from his arm, Rabbi Chodosh uncharacteristically asked all his visitors to leave the room.

 When the visitors returned, Rabbi Chodosh explained: “Drawing blood can be a tricky procedure, even for an experienced doctor. It isn’t always easy to find a vein, especially in the arm of an elderly person. I knew the young intern must be feeling rather nervous, and I figured the last thing he wanted was a crowd watching him. Imagine how flustered he would have grown had it been necessary for him to make several attempts to pierce my vein, and with an audience yet! Can you imagine how he would’ve felt? That’s why I asked you to leave.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Va’era 5781email of Torah Sweets Weekly.*

**The Determined Baalas Teshuvah’s Explanation**



 The Bostoner Rebbe, zl, related the story of a young baalas teshuvah, penitent, from America, who had spent Shabbos in Har Nof with the Rebbe, and returned a week later to ask for a brachah. In the course of the conversation, the Rebbe asked her how she had become such a determined baalas teshuvah.

 She replied, “It began with my grandfather. He once called me in and said, ‘I want you to remember three things: remember that you are Jewish; remember Shabbos; remember me.’ “His statement left a powerful impression on me, but, since our home was far from religious, I was rather at a loss. [It is unclear if the grandfather was maternal or paternal.]

 “I started out by lighting candles Friday night. Every Friday night, I faithfully lit the Shabbos candles… week in and week out. And every Friday night (like clockwork), when my father saw the candles, he proceeded to quickly extinguish them. So, I became observant because of my grandfather… and my father.”

 She spoke these words with complete seriousness, as if almost matter of fact. At best, this seemed baffling. How did her father assist in her becoming observant? “Your father?” the Rebbe asked. “He is the one who put out your candles every week. Why would you attribute your successful journey to religion also to your father?”

 “Yes,” she said, “it was my father who made me realise that if he could so obstinately continue in his persistence to extinguish my Shabbos candles, I could just as stubbornly continue to keep them burning. So, I became religious because of both my grandfather and my father.”

 We are able to learn a great deal from the positive influences which we encounter, and from the negative ones as well. When we withstand the negative, we transform them and strengthen ourselves in the process. Obviously, we could discuss this anecdote in much more detail, but I will leave that up to the reader.

*Reprinted from the Shavuos 5781 email of Peninim on the Torah (edited by Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum).*

**The Rebbe and the**

**Question of Lashon Hora**



 Once, a certain father heard that a child of the Rebbe of Toldos Aharon, zt”l, wished to make a Shidduch with his son, who was the Rebbe’s grandson, and this man’s daughter. He was overjoyed about this, until someone told him that the young man who was to be the Chosson was not totally normal, and the father was distressed about this.

 He was also worried about how to ascertain the truth. Surely, a Maggid Shiur or other person within the Toldos Aharon system would not say anything negative about the Rebbe’s grandson. He finally decided to ask the Rebbe himself, since he was certain that the Tzaddik would not deceive him.

 When the question was put to the Rebbe, he denied the claim against his grandson. He said, “I know that child since he was born. No one has ever thought there was anything wrong with him.”

 The father was very relieved and glad to hear this, but also furious at the one who had slandered the innocent Bochur, and immediately blurted out, “Do you know who told me? It was…”

 But the Rebbe interrupted him and firmly said, “Just a moment. This is a question of Lashon Hara. Perhaps it is forbidden for you to tell me. Working out whether this is allowed or not is no simple matter. In the next few days, I am going on a fundraising trip for two weeks. When I return, you are welcome to come back and I will tell you the Halachah.”

 When the Rebbe was away, he learned the entire Sefer Chofetz Chaim, and went through it twice with great care. When he returned, the father of the girl came to ask whether he was permitted to tell the Rebbe who had slandered his grandson. The Rebbe of Toldos Aharon said, “I learned the topic very carefully while I was away and I concluded that if you don’t derive any pleasure in telling me who this person is, you are permitted to tell me who slandered the young sBachur.” But before the man could say a word, the Rebbe stopped him from even starting and held up his hand, and the man was astounded by what the Rebbe said: “Even though it may be permitted for you to tell me, nevertheless, I do not wish to hear about it!”

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

**The Torah Learning of**

**The Malachim (Angels)**

 Rav Meilich Biderman one related a story. A man once came to his Rebbe for a Brachah, and the Rebbe asked him, “Do you have set times for learning Torah?”

 The man replied, “Rebbe, does Hashem really need my Torah learning? Does it make a difference whether I learn Torah or not? Hashem has enough Malachim that are serving Him far better than I can.”

 The Rebbe responded and asked, “What is your profession?”

 The man replied, “I’m an artist.”

 The Rebbe asked, “What was the nicest painting you ever saw?”

 The artist responded, “I once saw a most beautiful painting of the sun setting over the ocean. It sold for five million dollars.”



 The Rebbe said, “Five million dollars? Why so much? Anyone can take a picture of the sunset and it will appear even more genuine that what this artist painted. What makes his work so expensive?”

 The artist replied, “Rebbe, that is true, but taking a picture doesn’t require much effort. A painting requires hours of work. That is why it is so much more precious than a photo.”

 The Rebbe persisted and said, “I could understand if you would tell me that it was sold for ten thousand dollars. Perhaps even for twenty thousand dollars. But five million dollars? That seems exaggerated and unrealistic!”

 The artist realized that the Rebbe didn’t understand much about art, so he explained a little more. “When a person takes a picture, he is almost certain that it will turn out well. But when an artist begins to draw, he knows that it is very possible that the painting will not turn out well. The slightest wrong stroke of the brush can ruin an entire painting that took weeks or months to create. There is only a small chance that his painting will turn out exactly as he wants it to. This is the reason he deserves to be paid so well.”

 The Rebbe responded, “Pay close attention to what you have just said, and you will understand the value of your Torah learning. A few moments ago, you were wondering why Hashem needs your service, since the Malachim in Shamayim can serve Hashem so much better than people can. That is all true. However, Malachim do not have the hardships that people have.

 “They don’t have a Yetzer Hara, they don’t have to honor debts at the bank, and they don’t deal with other people. We struggle very hard to serve Hashem. We have a Yetzer Hara that fights with us we have obligations, temptations, and so much more.

 “Taking all of this into account, a person’s service is indeed very valuable to Hashem, far more precious than the service of the Malachim. So yes, be very certain about it— Hashem wants your Torah learning! It is very important to Hashem. It is specifically your learning Torah that finds favor in the eyes of Hashem, and it is more precious than all the services of the Malachim in Shamayim!

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

**The Blessing of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld**

**By Rabbi David Bibi**

 I saw a beautiful story told by Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro which really showed the power of will no matter the sacrifice.



**Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro**

 It was a beautiful day in Jerusalem as the legendary Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt”l strolled down the street for a walk. The day was filled with the beauty of life and the beauty of G-d’s world. But such a mesmerizing reality came to a halt as soon as Rav Sonnenfeld noticed a little four-year-old girl crying in front of a school.

 Seeing that she was clearly perturbed, he approached her. “Is everything alright?” Rav Sonnenfeld gently whispered to the girl. As it turned out, today was the first day of school, and the little girl’s mother was critically ill in the hospital. The doctors’ prognosis was dismal. With no one to therefore pick up the girl from school, she was left alone in tears.

 But Rav Sonnenfeld did not waste any time. He proceeded to obtain the girl’s home address and walk her home.

 The story could have ended here and it would have been a beautiful demonstration of Rav Sonnenfeld’s care and concern for others. But it didn’t.

**Met by Total Disarray**

 When Rav Sonnenfeld shortly thereafter entered the little girl’s home, he was met by total disarray. The house was not exactly organized and put together, but there was good reason for it. Yet, as Rav Sonnenfeld stepped further inside and extended his warm greetings to the family members, he said, “I just want you all to know two things. Firstly, the mother is going to have a complete recovery. Secondly, the mother is going to walk this four-year-old girl down to her chuppa.”

 And so it was. In an inexplicable change of circumstances, the mother underwent a total recovery. It came as an incredulous shock to all the medical staff, yet everyone graciously accepted such news. Now it came time for fulfillment of the second part of Rav Sonnenfeld’s blessing.

 The four-year-old girl had grown up and she was now seventeen. Although young, names of prospective shidduchim were coming her way. Yet, one after another, she turned them down.

 She was now twenty, and her younger siblings began getting of age to marry. Although still unmarried herself, she encouragingly and happily let them go ahead. And indeed, it happened. Three years later, her younger brother got married. And another three years later, two more of her siblings had gotten married. All the while, she received names of some wonderful boys who seemed quite suitable for her. But she just didn’t go along with any of them. It seemed as if she was extremely picky.



**Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld**

 By her 32nd birthday, the last of her siblings finally married. It was an unbelievably joyous occasion for all of the family. Within a number of months, the four-year-old girl who was now 32, finally got engaged and then married. And like Rav Sonnenfeld had said, her mother walked her down to the chuppa.

**The Mother Did Not Get Up**

 As the next morning rolled around and everyone began to get up for another day, the mother did not. And that was not because she was tired. Rather, in fact, she had passed away in her sleep. The newly-married girl of 32 would be going to her mother’s funeral.

 As is the custom in Jerusalem, children ask forgiveness from their parents before they are lowered down to the earth for their repose. The kallah of just barely 12 hours had difficulty speaking, but went on to say:

 “Ma, I want to ask mechillah (forgiveness) from you. For fifteen years, I appeared to be overly picky in the many shidduch offers I received, and it brought much heartache to you. I am sorry, and I am asking for mechillah. But I just want you to know why I was so picky. It was because I wanted all of my younger siblings to also benefit from Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld’s blessing to have you at their chuppa. Only after every one of them had gotten married and you walked them down to their chuppas was I ready… Please be mochel me…”

**Her True Reasoning**

 All along, it may have seemed like the girl was being picky for herself. It was about her finding the perfect boy. But, in reality, nothing could have been further from the truth. It was all about her siblings and her beloved mother.

 It was about affording her brothers and sisters the opportunity to have their mother dance at their weddings, and about her mother having the chance to reap the nachas of seeing her children’s most joyous moments where they would begin building the family’s future and legacy. That is what it means to lead a selfless existence. That is what it means to care for others outside of yourself.

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