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**Heroic Chief Rabbi of Odessa Rescues 250 Orphans by Traveling on Shabbos**



**UKRAINE (VINnews) — This past Shabbos, the Chief Rabbi of Odessa heroically rescued 250 orphan children from potential tragedy. Rabbi Shlomo Baksht determined that it was permissible to travel on Shabbos in order to flee the country.**

 The terrifying drama began Thursday evening, when heavy Russian bombings rocked the area near the orphanage.

 “We just received an update that there were three terrible explosions near the orphanage. The girls were very anxious, sitting and crying. We are trying to move them to the city center next to us. The situation is becoming more dangerous from one moment to the next,” said Rabbi Baksht.

 After speaking with senior officials in the Prime Minister’s Office and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Jewish community decided to flee westward.

On Friday morning, eight buses set off, with all of the orphans onboard, as well as the orphanage staff, Rabbi Baksht, his daughter Shira and his partner Rabbi Rafael Kruskal.

 A few hours after they fled Odessa, Russian missiles landed near the Jewish community where they had been located hours earlier.

 “We had a great miracle that we got out of there on time,” said Rabbi Baksht, “a really great miracle.”

**Traveling for Pikuach Nefesh**

 The journey lasted through Friday night into Shabbos morning, and the Rabbi decided that the proper decision was to continue traveling for pikuach nefesh.

 “I told them that we are here to fulfill G-d’s will, and on this Shabbat, His will is for us to escape to save lives,” he said

 On Friday the Rabbi told community members, “We will continue to travel on Shabbos because it is a matter of mental supervision. Everyone will turn off their mobile phones, but on every bus, there will be one mobile left open in case of an emergency.”

 At one point they stopped in the dark and Rabbi Raphael Kruskal recited Kiddush, adding a taste of the Shabbos atmosphere during an unthinkably difficult time.

 Rabbi Baksht described the superhuman effort of the staff.

 “The babysitters on the baby bus held the toddlers in their arms for many hours. It was not easy.”

*Reprinted from the March 2, 2021 website of VINnews.*

**Thoughts that Count for Our Parsha**

 If a person commits a trespass and sins unintentionally [deriving benefit from] the holy things belonging to the Holy Temple...or by lying to his fellow regarding a pledge or a loan...He shall repay its principal and add its fifth to it. (Lev. 5:15, 21, 24)

 Our Sages advise setting aside a fifth of one's earnings for charity, which can either be given to the Holy Temple or to individuals. When one derives benefit from property set aside for the Sanctuary or tries to take money from his friend, he has acted contrary to the advice of our Sages, and as a punishment he not only returns the principal, but also one-fifth. *(Klei Yakar)*

*Reprinted from Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky*

**A Blast from the Recent Past**

**Chassidic Push to Reform**

**U.S. Prison System:**

**Interview with Shia Hersh (Herman) Friedman**

**By** [**Rabbi Yitzchok Frankfurter**](https://www.amimagazine.org/author/rabbi-yitzchok-frankfurter/)

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**Reb Shia Hersh Friedman**

 If one of the aspirations of the Satmar Rebbe, zt”l, was to embolden chasidim with beards and peiyos to participate in life in the United States without fear of retribution—and many of his closest aides have affirmed that he articulated as much—then Shia Hersh Friedman and his associates from Williamsburg are the fulfillment of that dream.

 Who would ever have believed, except for someone with prophetic vision, that a few chasidim would have what it takes to launch a successful lobbying campaign to change the way the world’s most powerful country treats its prisoners? But that is precisely what they did. On May 22, the US House of Representatives passed a bill entitled the First Step Act to make jail sentences shorter and more rehabilitative, thanks to the efforts of Friedman and his friends.

 Shia Hersh knows what the Satmar Rebbe strove for more than many others, as he grew up in Kiryas Yoel and hails from a family of true Satmar insiders. His father’s brother is none other than Reb Moshe Friedman, the renowned gabbai of Satmar. Yet while his spirit for activism may come from Satmar, he attributes his passion for facilitating prison reform to the Munkatcher Rebbe—after which it became a joint undertaking of Satmar and Lubavitcher yungeleit.

 As Shia Hersh tells it, the Munkatcher Rebbe, whose involvement in the great mitzvah of pidyon shvuim is legendary, recognized years ago what many Americans are slowly coming to realize now: that the United States locks up too many people for far too long. Although the US comprises only 5% of the world’s population, it holds 25% of all its prisoners. The disproportionate number of people who are incarcerated is mostly the result of draconian sentences handed down by judges for nonviolent crimes. After speaking to the Munkatcher Rebbe, Shia Hersh decided to do something about it.

**Initial Steps**

 “In 2009 I got involved in the government’s prosecution of several members of the Yakubovitch family. In an interesting conversation I was privileged to have with the Munkatcher Rebbe about that case, the Rebbe shared that as much as America is a malchus shel chesed, its prison sentences are among the harshest in the world, particularly when it comes to white-collar crime, and he was very concerned about the future if the trend continued. In America, a person can be sent away for life for a single ill-advised financial crime, Hashem yeracheim. That conversation made me very passionate about the issue of prison reform, and I started thinking about different things we could do about it.”

 As someone who was already familiar with government on the state level, Shia Hersh knew how lobbying worked. But what he was still unfamiliar with was how the judicial system operated, as well as the bureaucracy that is in charge of the prisons. So he decided to do some research and solicit the opinion of experts.

 “One of the things I found out was how little oversight there is when it comes to prosecutors, meaning that they can basically do whatever they want. It was also amazing to see how ridiculous the sentencing guidelines were for white-collar crimes. In Europe, people who commit murder are released sooner than those who commit a nonviolent crime in the US. Many law enforcement professionals agree that the current penal system here is widely off the mark.

**U.S. Supreme Court Decision**

 “Around the same time, the US Supreme Court came out with a decision saying that the sentencing guidelines passed by Congress weren’t mandatory but merely a recommendation for the judges. But even after that decision, the mentality of the judges didn’t change. While they’re allowed to take many different factors into consideration when sentencing, most of them continued to follow the old guidelines. That meant exceptionally long prison terms for people who did something relatively minor. There’s just no logic to it.”

 “There is logic to it,” I counter. “It’s middas Sedom, insisting on applying the strict letter of the law regardless of the circumstances.”

 “I agree,” he replies. “Just look at the person who ended up going to jail after the ‘Bridgegate’ scandal, Bridget Anne Kelly. This is a mother of two children who received a sentence of 18 months. She was only doing what she’d been told to do, but she was punished very harshly. Everyone’s talking nowadays about how unjust it is to separate kids from their parents when it comes to illegal immigration, but she’s going to be away from her children for a year and half for creating traffic. The punishment is disproportionate.

 “When a person goes to jail, they’re basically destroying the lives of everyone else who is associated with that person. The whole family is devastated, especially the wife, who is often destroyed financially. Even a short sentence of a year or two affects the person mentally and emotionally, and everyone else suffers because of that.

 “I attended the Yakubovitch sentencing. When the Munkatcher Rebbe told the judge that the defendant had a family and children who needed their father, the judge responded coldly, ‘I see lot of people from the community here. They can take care of the children.’ It made me realize that the sentencing guidelines are only one aspect of the problem, because after the person goes to jail, he is then under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Prisons. So, there were many different things to be tackled.

*Reprinted from the July 4, 2018 edition of Ami Magazine.*

***If one's offering is a burnt-offering from cattle...* (Lev. 1:3)**

 The service of the sin-offering is performed before the service of the burnt-offering, but the Torah mentions them in the opposite order. This is because the burnt-offering is an atonement for sinful thoughts or ideas, which precede the actua l wrongdoing, for which the sin- offering is an atonement. *(Korban Ha'ani)*

*They shall throw the blood on the altar all around...and the fats* (Lev. 1:5, 8)

 Both the blood and the fat are offered on the altar. This teaches us how to properly carry out the mitzvot. Blood symbolizes excitement, speed, and activity. Fat symbolizes laziness and inactivity. When performing a mitzva, one should do so with excitement and speed. But if one is, G-d forbid, tempted to sin, one should respond by being "lazy" and inactive. *(Sha'ar Beit Rabim)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5757/1997 edition of L’Chaim. Excerpted from Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**The Sunny Side of Life**



 **QUESTION: Is it possible to teach children to appreciate the world?**

 **ANSWER:** And the answer is absolutely!  That’s when it should be taught.  You should teach a child and tell him, “Isn’t it beautiful that the sun is shining right now?” Explain to him the benefits of the sun.  In the summertime, the sun warms you.  Walk on the sunny side of the street and walk on the sunny side of life.  And the sun gives you vitamins as it hits your skin.  The sun gives you light. And it’s all free energy!  No landlord will send you a bill.  Con Ed won’t send you a bill for the daytime light.  It’s so beautiful, the sunlight.

**The Mashal of Sun and Hakodosh Baruch Hu**

 It’s a mashal of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. The Gemara says the sun is a mashal of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.  Just like the sun floods the world with happiness and light and joy, so does Hakodosh Boruch Hu.  And so certainly you can teach children to enjoy sun.

 We have to teach ourselves too, by the way.  Let’s enjoy the sun.  The biggest bracha that we make in davening is on the sun.  Doesn’t that show the hypocrisy among us?  The longest bracha in davening is on the sun — ברוך אתה ה’ יוצר אור and it concludes יוצר המאורות and the malachim are so excited over the sun that they say קדוש קדוש ברעש גדול; with great excitement they’re praising Hashem — and we, we’re the recipients of all this, and we’re not interested.  We’re asleep.

 So, there’s a lot of work to be done on children and on ourselves.

*Reprinted from the March 1, 2020 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from Tape #301*

**The Important Eternal**

**Lesson of the Korbon Tamid**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 The Book of Vayikra deals primarily with the korbanot (sacrifices) that were brought in the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple. These sacrifices were among the most important features of the Temple service.

 The first sacrifice to be offered each morning was the korban tamid (perpetual offering). The daily service concluded with another one that was offered at dusk.

**The Proper Order of Service**

 The korban tamid teaches us the proper order of service -- perpetual service -- that is required of every Jew. G-d does not demand that we sacrifice everything we possess, that we bring all our belongings to the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the perpetual offering consisted of one lamb, a small amount of oil and wine, and a little flour and salt. Thus, it was composed of all levels of creation: a lamb, representing the animal kingdom; wine, flour and oil from the vegetative kingdom; and salt, which is inanimate.

 The korban tamid was brought on behalf of the entire Jewish people, but each Jew was not required to bring his own individual offering. Rather, the sacrifices were purchased with a special fund to which all Jews contributed. By donating a tiny sum of money, every Jew was able to participate in the twice-daily service.

 G-d does not want us to give Him everything and leave nothing for ourselves; quality is much more important than quantity. The question is not how much we have given or invested of our efforts, but how we have done so. G-d requires that we give Him only a small amount, but He wants us to do so willingly, with joy and with enthusiasm. The actual contribution each individual Jew made to the perpetual offering was almost insignificant, but if it was given with a whole heart, it was sufficient to merit G-d's blessings.

 Despite its name the perpetual offering was made only twice a day, at specific times. When a Jew begins the day with a "korban," from the Hebrew word meaning "to draw near," its effect carries over throughout the day. It becomes a "perpetual offering," and is not limited to a specific time.

**Today’s Equivalent of the Perpetual Offering**

 When a Jew wakes up in the morning, the very first action is to say "Modeh Ani," the equivalent of the perpetual offering. The person addresses G-d as "the living and enduring King," declaring his/her subservience and willingness to serve Him. Beginning the day in this manner ensures that his conduct will have the same effect as the korban tamid, and the entire day will be infused with a longing to draw ever closer to G-d.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5757/1997 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Likutei Sichot Vol 3.*

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**“Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘When a person among you brings an offering to Hashem . . .’” (1:2)**

 In the times of the Beis HaMikdash, a person who sinned at least had the comfort of knowing that he could bring a sacrifice to complete the atonement process prescribed by the Torah. In the absence of this option, how can a contemporary person fully repent and cleanse the effects of his transgressions?

 The Mabit offers us a tremendous consolation. He writes that in the times of the Temple, when Hashem’s presence could be tangibly perceived, the ramifications of sin were correspondingly greater, thus necessitating the offering of a sacrifice to fully purify oneself from its spiritual damage.

 Since its destruction, we have been living in an era in which Hashem’s Providence is subtly hidden. While this makes it more difficult to feel and recognize His constant presence, it also effected a change in the amount of spiritual destruction caused by sin.

 Because a transgression does not cause as much damage as it once did, the bringing of a sacrifice is no longer required to earn complete forgiveness. Atonement may now be fully accomplished through the other steps of the repentance process, namely correcting one’s ways, confessing the sin, and accepting upon oneself never to do so again. (Parsha Potpourri Rabbi Ozer Alport)

**The Alef of Leadership**

**By Rabbi** [**Yossy Goldman**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/1351/jewish/Goldman-Yossy.htm)



**Artwork illustrated by Sefira Lightstone**

 Where I live, in South Africa, everyone knows our national treasure continues to be the late Nelson Mandela. The status and respect he enjoys even after his death is legendary and fully merited. To have suffered imprisonment for 27 years and still come out preaching peace and reconciliation is nothing less than awe-inspiring. Mandela became president and received every imaginable honor, including a well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize. But those who knew the man knew him to possess genuine humility.

**Bumping into Nelson Mandela**

 Many years ago, my family bumped into then-President Mandela while he happened to be going for a walk near our home. He took the time to stop and chat with the children, asking each of them about school and their favorite subject. Then he carried on walking the next two blocks while holding the hands of my two young children, just like a loving *zayde*. How many presidents or prime ministers can you see doing that when they’re not running for election?

 He took an interest in our children because they were interesting to him. A giant of humility, he saw them for who they were: fellow human beings with whom he could interact and from whom he could learn. In Mandela we saw a leader who was as humble as he was great.

 The beginning of the Book of Vayikra (Leviticus), features an interesting lesson in humility of the most genuine kind.

**A Smaller-than-Usual Alef**

 The very first word, *[vayikra](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8162/jewish/Leviticus.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Leviticus)*, features a smaller-than-usual *alef*. Tradition teaches1 that Moses had initially written the word without the [*alef*](https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/705822/jewish/The-Aleph.htm) at all, which changes its meaning. *Vayikra* means “and he called,” whereas without the *alef* it reads *vayikar*, “and he chanced upon, ” which is the way G‑d communicated to the heathen prophet Balaam, rather than approaching him deliberately and lovingly as He did with Moses.

 [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm), however, insisted that Moses write the word *vayikra* with an *alef*, so he had no choice. But he used a small *alef* which is almost indiscernible, reflecting his true humility—despite his greatness, he remained the humblest of men.

 Today, fame and recognition seem to be the keys to success. We have our fair share of self-appointed celebrities with millions of “followers.” Often, these are individuals with absolutely no claim to fame whatsoever, but they know how to market themselves. To become world-famous in the digital age, all you need is confidence, *chutzpah,* and … a publicist.

**Some Intelligent Divergent Voices**

 But thankfully, we are beginning to hear some intelligent divergent voices.

 Author Malcolm Gladwell has much to say about the downfall of the overconfident. His stories and illustrations range from upsets on the battlefield to meltdowns in big business. How refreshing it is to read that according to Gladwell, “Being humble should be a qualification, not a disqualification, for picking a leader.”

 Indeed, the contemporary successful CEO is more likely to be appreciated for his humility than respected for his hubris. He or she will be more communicative, will lead by consensus, and will be a team player rather than a controlling unilateralist.

 In Jewish tradition, humility was always considered one of the most exalted virtues. In his famous letter to his son,2 the great Spanish sage, Nachmanides (1194 – 1270), called it “the finest of all admirable traits.”

 Arrogance, on the other hand, was seen as one of the most negative characteristics in the whole catalogue of human personality. According to the Talmud, G‑d Himself abhors the arrogant to such an extent that “He and I cannot dwell together in this world.”3

 The Torah states categorically that the Almighty Himself declared Moses to be “the humblest man on the face of the earth.”4 And the commentators explain that although Moshe was the most powerful leader in history, who took the Israelites out of bondage, who split the sea, and received the Tablets from G‑d, still, it didn’t go to his head. Why? Because he always considered his strengths and qualities as gifts from G‑d. Had someone else been granted those very same talents, he reckoned, they might have done even better. So, Moses was simultaneously the greatest prophet and leader of all time, and also the humblest of all men.

 And he was a role model to all future spiritual leaders.

 A great leader in our generation, who likewise reflected utmost humility despite having a huge international following of students and admirers, was of course the Rebbe. It took G‑d a full week at the Burning Bush to convince Moses to take the mantle of leadership and confront Pharaoh. And it took the Rebbe a full year before he agreed to accept the position of Lubavitcher Rebbe (after his father-in-law’s passing).

 He would speak, teach, and interact not only with the most advanced scholars, but with all people. On various occasions, he spoke only to groups of children. On most weekdays, if he encountered children on his way into shul he would stop and give them coins to put in a charity box. And on Sundays, when he would bless people while distributing dollars for *tzedakah,* anyone and everyone could see him personally. There was no admission policy. All were welcome, great and simple, famous and ordinary, religious and secular, Jew and non-Jew.

 Greatness is no reason for arrogance. Indeed, the truly great are truly humble.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5416736/jewish/The-Alef-of-Leadership.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a5416736) Baal Haturim.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5416736/jewish/The-Alef-of-Leadership.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a5416736)Iggeret HaRamban.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5416736/jewish/The-Alef-of-Leadership.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a5416736) Sotah 5a.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5416736/jewish/The-Alef-of-Leadership.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a5416736) [Numbers 12:3](https://www.chabad.org/9940#v3).



 Rabbi Yossy Goldman was sent by the Rebbe to South Africa in 1976, where he was founding director of the country’s first Chabad House. In 1986, with the Rebbe’s guidance, he accepted the invitation to become the rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, where he is now Life Rabbi Emeritus. He is also president of the South African Rabbinical Association and often represents the Jewish faith on South African radio and television.
 His first book, [From Where I Stand](https://www.chabad.org/2014230), was published by KTAV in 2012 and has since been reprinted. His sermons have been translated into Hebrew, Spanish, Russian and German, among other languages.

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**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parshas Vayikra**



 One of the categories of sacrifices that are described in this week's Torah reading describes the offerings that are meant to bring about forgiveness for sins that one committed inadvertently. The Torah details for us how the sacrifice was to be brought, and what its effects regarding forgiveness from Heaven would then occur.

 Even though we live in a time when such animal sacrifices are not possible, one of the main lessons which is pertinent to us is that all forgiveness for wrongdoing requires true "sacrifice" on the part of the perpetrator of the sin. There is no free lunch involved here. The ability to request forgiveness for wrongdoing is completely contingent upon the true contrite feelings of the sinner.

 And in our time, being remorseful can be expressed by one's willingness to sacrifice one's own time, wealth, abilities, and even social standing, to achieve the forgiveness so necessary for spiritual and physical survival. In many ways, we are accustomed to sacrifice to achieve goals that we have set for ourselves. We are willing to sacrifice much of our youth and its pleasures, in the hope that we will survive and live comfortably and nicely in our later years. We restrain ourselves, no matter how strong our desires may be, in the hope and belief that this will somehow bring us to a better future. We understand fully that without sacrifice, it is useless to expect forgiveness. And since human beings are, by their nature, imperfect, we are engaged in a continual process of sacrifice and self-restraint.

 Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon – Rambam - expresses the idea that the sacrifice of an animal on the altar of the Temple should engender in the mind of the sinner who brought forth the sacrifice that the sinner himself or herself should be brought on the altar. The animal being sacrificed is to be seen merely as a substitute for one's own self in attempting to redress past wrongs and trying to engender heavenly forgiveness for transgressions and sins.

 Even though we no longer can bring such animal sacrifices on the altar of the Temple, we, nevertheless, can perceive ourselves as being the necessary sacrifice to accomplish our atonement and forgiveness. And this can only be accomplished through regret for the past misdeeds and the stronger permanent commitment of restraint over our future actions and behavior.

 It is this deep understanding that we ourselves are the sacrifice that can bring us to a true attainment of forgiveness, in terms of heavenly judgment. In so doing, no detail of our behavior and actions can be considered insignificant or unimportant.

 Just as the animal sacrifice cannot contain any blemish or imperfection, so, too, the mental, spiritual, and physical sacrifice entailed in obtaining forgiveness for our sins must be, as far as humanly possible, free from blemish and imperfection. This is a lofty goal to achieve, but it is the only sure path to goodness in life in this world and to the achievement of eternity in the Next World.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of rabbiwein.com*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Our Parsha**

*When a ruler of a tribe sins* (Lev. 4:22)

 The previous verse ends with the words "it is a sin offering of the assembly." The connection between the two verses shows us that the obligation of a leader is to guide and reprimand the people. His actions set an example, and if he acts improperly, so will his followers. Therefore, he will not only have to atone for his own sins but for those of the people whom he was supposed to have been guiding. *(Chida)*

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