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**Here’s My Story**

**The Lost Prayers of Judaism**

**By Professor Zvi Malachi**

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**Professor Zvi Malachi and the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

I come from a family with a strong Polish and Galician chasidic background. Even after my parents moved to Israel in 1935, as pioneers of the new settlement there, my father maintained ties with several chasidic Rebbes. Later on, I discovered that he had also corresponded with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

After our marriage, my wife and I moved to the Chabad neighborhood in Lod, Israel, and became close to the community. Along with my work on Hebrew literature at the University of Tel Aviv, I helped found a large library and institute in Lod — the Haberman Institute — for literary studies, as well as the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which focuses on the literature of the Mizrachi and North African Jewish communities.

**Traveled to the United States**

**For a Year-Long Sabbatical**

At the end of 1982 I traveled to the United States, together with my family, for a year-long sabbatical.

Even more exciting than the skyscrapers of Manhattan was the prospect of meeting the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe. Sometime before Shavuot of 1983, Rabbi Bentzion Lipsker of Arad, a warm-hearted Jew I had known from Lod, invited me to join him and spend the holiday in Crown Heights. I eagerly accepted.

For the duration of the festival, I participated in several public gatherings led by the Rebbe, and had the privilege of a more personal encounter as well: During the Kos Shel Brachah ceremony at the close of the holiday, while distributing wine to those present after the Havdalah service, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Lipsker, “Where is the professor?” I was standing nearby and immediately came over to receive some wine, which the Rebbe poured directly into my cup.

To my disappointment, I learned that the Rebbe had stopped holding private audiences. But, Rabbi Lipsker promised to try and arrange one for me. To what I owed the honor I don’t know, but somehow, he pulled it off.

And so, on Friday afternoon, the day after Shavuot, I found myself sitting alone on a bench outside the Rebbe’s room, waiting for his secretary to usher me in. The moment soon came, and the Rebbe greeted me with a cheerful smile.

**Handled a Petitionary Note to the Rebbe**

I immediately handed him the petitionary note I had prepared earlier. In it, I had written various questions, including one about whether to continue working for a certain research institute affiliated with my university.

I had little doubt that, after my sabbatical, I would resume my primary work as a university lecturer. It was my livelihood. In addition, it gave me the opportunity to speak, as an observant Jew, to students who knew next to nothing about Judaism. I taught them about the liturgical poems, or piyutim, and about the holy, soulful hymns of Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol and others.

It seemed obvious to me that through this work I was fulfilling a spiritual mission of the first order, as students would often approach me after a lecture and ask: “Why was the Hebrew prayer book hidden from us? Why did they hide the beauty of these sacred piyutim?” I also knew that the Rebbe had always supported and encouraged similar efforts in academic institutions and among intellectuals.

But my question pertained to my administrative work for Tel Aviv University’s Katz Institute for Research in Hebrew Literature. I had run the institute successfully for two years, and during that time I had published various works of interest and had achieved quite a bit. At the same time, I’d also become caught up with fighting various people who, for reasons of jealousy, were intent on stirring the pot and making things difficult. I had become sick of the job and wanted to give it up. But the Rebbe encouraged me to carry on. “It’s better that this position be filled by an individual who is observant,” he explained, adding that I should also view this work as part of my mission.

**Torah Works of Several Tunisian Rabbis**

I told the Rebbe about the institute and about the books we had published, especially the Torah works of several Tunisian rabbis, collections of piyutim, and biographies on several Jewish figures who were unknown in the West. “Is it possible to receive these books for our library here?” he asked. I replied that I had already given several copies to his secretariat and he thanked me.

In the course of our conversation, the Rebbe revealed great interest in my field; the subject of Jewish literature and manuscripts was close to his heart. A large share of my scientific research was based on the famous genizah, or trove of discarded writings, of Cairo. “Aside from the Cairo Genizah,” remarked the Rebbe, “there are other genizahs. It is a pity that not enough attention is paid to saving them.”

Indeed, there are a number of such troves, containing rare books and hand-written manuscripts, that have been left behind in many of the former Jewish communities of North Africa. I have personally visited Tunisia several times as part of my studies of the genizah of Djerba, and met with the Rebbe’s emissary there, Rabbi Nissan Pinson.

“The Rebbe has his emissaries spread throughout these countries; perhaps they can deal with this issue,” I suggested.

**The Rebbe Rejeced the Idea**

The Rebbe smiled, but rejected the idea: “They have other, no-less-important jobs to do,” he countered, referring of course to their work promoting Judaism. Still, I know that many Chabad emissaries in these countries sent the Rebbe a great number of manuscripts which are today sitting safely in the large library at Chabad Headquarters.

The Rebbe inquired about the subject I lecture on in university, the field of piyut, and especially the piyutim of the Avodah service of Yom Kippur, which formed the subject of my doctorate.

I related to the Rebbe that I had discovered many other ancient and entirely unknown piyutim that were composed over 1,500 years ago. I proceeded to share a theory I had developed regarding the name of one the most prominent composers of piyutim, Rabbi Elazar the Kalir. Several explanations and theories have been proposed as to the meaning of this word, but I discovered that his original name was Rabbi Elazar Birbi, meaning “great,” or “important.” The word kalir is apparently Greek for a cantor or a cleric who leads the prayers.

The Rebbe listened intently and I believe he accepted my theory. He seemed to relish the literary discussion about piyut, a subject that not too many people study, as well as the various prayer rites and prayer books, and the meaning of and customs associated with the prayers themselves. I was tremendously impressed with the vast scope of his knowledge, which is not commonly found in the world of traditional Torah scholarship.

**A Genuinely Scientific Discussion**

It felt that we were engaged in a genuinely scientific discussion.

Our conversation stretched on, and although it was a long summer’s Friday, Shabbat began to draw close. The Rebbe’s secretary entered the room several times to signal that it was time to conclude, but the Rebbe waved him away. Despite the gulf that exists between the chasidic and secular-academic worlds, I noticed that the Rebbe was neither dismissive nor afraid of the academy. Rather, he knew how to engage with it for his own purposes, and in a way that was in consilience with Torah pursuits.

Professor Zvi Malachi, a retired senior lecturer at the Department of Hebrew Literature in the University of Tel Aviv, is the founder of the Haberman Institute for Literary Research and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Israel. He was interviewed in January of 2015.

Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5782 Here’s My Story, a project of JEM, the Jewish Educational Media.

**There are four types among those who give charity (Ethics 5:13)**

Two men once came to Rabbi Yehuda Landau, to collect for a poor person. "How much does he need?" Rabbi Landau asked. After citing a particular sum, Rabbi Landau offered the entire amount, minus a few gilden, to the two visitors. They did not understand his gesture. If he could afford to part with such a large sum of money, why not the entire amount? "The Torah states, 'One who wishes to give but that others should not -- he begrudges others.' One must leave room for others to perform the mitzva of charity as well..." Rabbi Landau explained. *Reprinted from L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #482)*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Hiding Your Judaism at Work**



**QUESTION: Should I put up my payos and hide my tzitzis when I go to work?**

**ANSWER:** It depends.  Sometimes I would say yes.  It depends.  After all, parnassa is very important.

But many times people are unnecessarily embarrassed.  Look; here’s a Hindu, lehavdil.  A Hindu is coming in with big pants, a mile too big for him, and a big shirt, also a mile too big for him. And he’s wearing a turban too.  He’s not embarrassed!

And how many Hindus are there around here? But lehavdil, the Jews, there are plenty of them, so we have less reason to be embarrassed.

And so in most cases it won’t harm you. However I would say that in your individual case you should consult your local rav or rebbe.  I wouldn’t tell you a general rule because parnasa is very important. Consult your local rav and rebbe if you want to know how far you should go.

*Reprinted from the August 18, 2022 emil of Toras Avigdor (Tape E-59, May 1996)*

**The Challenge for Jews**

**To Not Be Swayed by the Ways of the Gentiles**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



In this week's Torah portion, Re'ei, the Children of Israel are commanded to maintain their own code of behavior and not to learn from the nations that inhabited Israel before its conquest. "Take heed to yourself that you not be snared by following them." A Jew must never ask, "How do these gentiles worship their gods, that I may do the same?" For G-d has commanded us: "You must not do this before the L-rd your G-d... But hearken to the voice of the L-rd your G-d, to keep all His commandments... to do that which is right in the eyes of the L-rd your G-d."

Moses warned the Jews against imitating the gentiles' conduct. They have their own culture and customs, he explained. Some worship idols, some spend their lives trying to satisfy earthly lusts and desires, while others are motivated by the pursuit of power. But it is forbidden for a Jew to learn from their behavior.

From a numerical standpoint, of course, the Jewish people is the most insignificant of all the nations. Nonetheless, its conduct is entirely unique. Some Jews might mistakenly think that the key to earning the respect and admiration of the gentile nations is to copy their behavior. And yet the opposite is true. It is only when Jews proudly maintain their Jewish traditions and unwavering faith in G-d that they merit not only the respect of their gentile neighbors, but their support and assistance as well.

**Conduct Ourselves According to**

**His Will as Revealed in the Torah**

G-d placed the Jewish people among the nations so that others may see and learn from their simple and uncompromising faith. Jews must always remember that "You have chosen us from among the nations" and conduct themselves according to His will, as revealed in the Torah.

When Jews conduct themselves in such a manner, so as to serve as living examples to the gentiles, they demonstrate that it is indeed possible to adhere to the Seven Noahide Laws that apply to all mankind.

The Jewish people has lived according to the Torah's laws for over 3,000 years. Yet despite its antiquity, the Torah is equally relevant to our present day and age, imparting all who follow in its ways with renewed strength and vitality.

When Jews keep G-d's laws and refuse to mimic the surrounding nations, they merit a multitude of G-d's blessings: long life and good years, tranquility and peace, physical health and true pleasure.

**How to Influence the Gentile Nations**

Additionally, when Jews do what is right, the gentile nations not only hold them in high esteem, but lend their assistance as well.

*Adapted for Maayan Chai from Hitva'aduyot 5745, Vol. 5*

**The Evil Median Charactristic**

He who says...what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours--this is a median characteristic, and some say that this is the characteristic of the people of Sodom (Ethics of the Fathers 5:10)

An individual who behaves in this manner, not wanting anything from others and unwilling to give of himself, does not seriously threaten the existence of the world. Yet, if this same attitude is adopted by an entire society, it leads to the degradation and indifference of Sodom, where poor people died in the streets from hunger. *(Lachmai Toda) Reprinted from L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #482)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Re’ah 5782**



There is a shift in mood in the book of Dvarim beginning with this week’s parsha. It no longer is a review of the events of the desert or of the Exodus from Egypt. Moshe no longer will concentrate on the faults and failures of the generation that left Egypt – a generation with that saw their high hopes dashed by their stubbornness and a lack of faith. The past is the past and it cannot be changed. G-d, so to speak, will not turn the film back again for some sort of replay.

The direction of Moshe is now the future, the entry into the Land of Israel and the establishment of a normative Jewish society in that land. Moshe warns the Jewish people that the lessons of the past should not be forgotten or ignored. Their consequences are likely to be repeated if the Jewish people will backslide again.

Life and death, good and evil, success and failure – these are the choices that lie before the Jewish people. And Moshe advises us to choose wisely, to treasure life and do good and honor tradition and Torah. A positive future always depends upon making wiser choices than were made in the past.

The word re’ah which means “see” is the key word in the parsha. This entails a vision for the future and an understanding as to its new demands and changing circumstances. Moshe turns the attention of the Jewish people to its future in the Land of Israel and to new commandments not mentioned before in the Torah. It appears that these new commandments are brought to the fore to help the Jewish people be successful in their new environment.

The holy days of the Jewish calendar appear in detail in this week’s parsha. In the Land of Israel these holy days had a physical and agricultural content as well as their inherent spiritual nature. In the long and dark Jewish exile, the physical and agricultural aspects of the holidays were lost but the spiritual and holy qualities of those days nevertheless sustained the Jewish people.

The early pioneers who returned to the Land of Israel, secularized and Marxist to the hilt but nonetheless Jewish, attempted to reinsert the physical and agricultural qualities of the holidays of the year and at the same time to discard completely the spiritual and Torah qualities. Unfortunately, that experiment has proved to be a dismal failure.

The holidays are bereft of any spiritual content and of any agricultural or national meaning. Moshe would caution us to begin again, to include life, goodness, and tradition into the holy days so that they would have true meaning and impact – and through them to revive our attachment to the holy land and its bountiful produce.

I think that the revival of the true spirit of the holidays is one of the great challenges that face us in our land today. In its own way, it is a key to solving many of the difficulties that bedevil us currently. Moshe bids us to look clearly at all these matters and to decide wisely.

Shabat shalom.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Which is a controversy for the sake of heaven?**

The controversy between Hillel and Shammai (Ethics 5:17)

Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner used to say, "Only people the stature of Hillel and Shammai could engage in controversy for the sake of heaven. People on our level, however, must avoid even this type of disagreement."

*Reprinted from L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #482)*

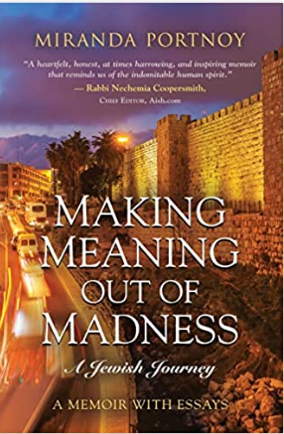
**Looking for Love**

**And Acceptance in**

**All the Wrong Places**

**By Daniel Keren**

(“Making Meaning Out of Madness: A Jewish Journey – A Memoir with Essays” by Miranda Portnoy, 377 pages, paperback BookLocker, 2021)



“Making Meaning Out of Madness” is a fascinating memoir by a former feminist who has written a book that alternates from painful almost never-ending revelations of her secular past and her difficult but intriguing journey towards a rewarding and spiritually fulfilling life as a Torah-observant wife and mother. The book is written under a pseudonym as the material tells a most awful story that would perhaps embarrass the author’s family if her actual name was revealed.

The penname of the author’s first name is interesting allusion to the Miranda Rights or Warning. In 1966, Ernesto Arturo Miranda’s conviction in Arizona for a series of brutal crimes was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court on the basis that his constitutional rights to be warned by the arresting police of his right to remain silent when they wanted to interrogate him and his right to have an attorney present was violated. Since then, all police departments in the U.S. have been more careful about not violating a suspect’s “Miranda Rights or Warning.”

**An Allusion to a Controversial Novel**

The last name of the author’s penname is also an obvious allusion to the late Jewish novelist’s Philip Roth’s controversial novel titled “Portnoy’s Complaint” which reveals the protagonist’s obvious difficult relationship with his mother.

The beginning chapters of Miranda Portnoy’s memoir is a painful read as she reveals the many challenges of trying to grow up in a most dysfunctional home with a very narcistic mother and a father out of hell, and a brother who obviously was warped from that poisonous combination.

In that toxic background after repeated emotional and even severe physical abuse by her mother over a period of almost twenty years, what is amazing was Miranda’s constant hope that she could still win her mother’s acceptance and love.

Further adding to Miranda’s agony is her painful almost never-ending attempt to earn a bachelor’s degree in an Ivy League college (also given a pseudonym) located in Boston where the faculty and administrated ignored her pleas for help; combined with her tragic and unsuccessful attempts at trying to find a permanent relationship with a “nice” Jewish male that reminds one of the popular 1980 country and western song recorded by Johnny Lee titled “Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places.”

**A Not-So-Easy Journey**

**Towards a Torah Way-of-Life**

And even after all of these non-ending mishaps in her life from her birth onwards, Miranda’s journey towards a Torah way-of-life that is also in the beginning of her spiritual journey surprisingly overwhelmed by seemingly impossible challenges. Even when she manages to get enrolled in an Orthodox Seminary in Jerusalem for Jewish women coming from secular backgrounds, that first seminary in which she spent six months appears to be so toxic that it is amazing that Miranda still had an interest in staying religiously observant.

It is not until page 260, the start of part six of “Making Meaning Out of Madness” that Miranda’s finally turns her life into a beautiful positive direction that focuses on her “Redemption.” G-d sometimes give some individuals an easy path in life. And yet others like Miranda have had many more challenges to overcome in their attempts to come closer and develop a strong personal relationship with Hashem.

After reading more than 200 pages of Miranda’s unpleasant life and first difficult steps in recognizing and establishing a relationship with G-d, it is a pleasure to read of her finally finding her bashert – a committed religiously observant man from a prominent Orthodox family, though even that shidduch (matrimonial match) was not without its mind-boggling difficulties.

“Making Meaning Out of Madness,” in my opinion was written by Miranda Portnoy for millions of Jewish American women who like her grew up in secular (i.e., strongly feminist) backgrounds. If you have relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues in work, etc. who fall into that category, this is a book that you should send them.

The memoir’s sometimes abrasive language may not be appropriate for Orthodox Jewish women. “Making Meaning Out of Madness – A Jewish Journey” by Miranda Portnoy can be found in bookstores or from Amazon or other internet book sellers.

*Reprinted from the August 19, 2022 edition of The Jewish Connection.*

The Price of the

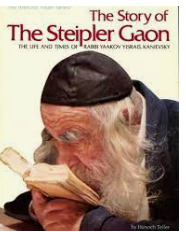
Knitted Yalmukah



Rabbi Moshe Feinstein often stated that the commandment to tithe obligates one to contribute a tenth of one’s time and energy aside from his income. I have a friend who does both simultaneously. People commission her to knit kippos. She is very deft and quick and her kippos are works of art. But she doesn’t take the money she charges. Instead, she gives an envelope from the many various charity organizations that send her in appeals, and asks that the person give the money to that charity. That’s how she gives tzedaka. She triples her mitzvah and gives other people a zechus as well. Knitting kippos, by the way, is not this woman’s livelihood, it is a hobby, one that she uses to devote herself to Hashem. (Partners in Kindness)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Re’eh 5782 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn*.

**Rabbi Yaakov Israel Kanievsky – The Steipler Gaon -**



“The Steipler” Ztza"l was born on Tammuz 9, 5659-1899 [died 23 Av 5745-1985] in the Russian town of Horon-Steipel (hence the moniker “the Steipler”). His father, Rav Chaim Peretz Kanievsky, was a Chernobyl Chassid. He died when his son was only 7 years old, and food was hard to come by in the Kanievsky household after his departure.

Later, when the Novardok Yeshiva sent representatives looking for new students, the Steipler’s mother sent him with them and told them, “Take him with you to study in the yeshiva. There he will have something more to eat to satisfy his hunger.”

He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah alone at the yeshiva: He received a pair of Tefillin, gave a brief speech, and then returned to his studies. At the age of 18, he was bestowed the leadership of the Rogatchov Yeshiva. However, the Bolshevik revolution was in full swing and Rabbi Yaakov Israel was drafted into the Red Army.

He once briefly remarked about this period in his life, saying that because he refused to work on Shabbat, he was forced to pass through a row of soldiers that beat him with their rifle butts. He related that he would never forget the joy he felt for the honor of Shabbat.

**Military Duty in Siberia**

Once, when he had to perform night duty in Siberia during a deathly cold night, he refrained from wearing his hood because he feared that it might contain some Shatnez. He managed to survive the night thanks to the indomitable willpower that always characterized him. Yet from that day on, he began to lose his hearing because of what the cold had done to his ears.

He managed to get discharged from the army and with some old friends attempted to maintain yeshivas under the new communist regime. Noting the futility and danger of such an initiative, he decided to move to Poland to study at the Bialystok Yeshiva. His devotion to Torah study quickly garnered him a special place in the yeshiva.

Over the course of the years, he imposed on himself a rigorous schedule that was quite impressive, studying long hours at a stretch and sleeping a few hours for what amounted to a minimum of rest. As his friends could testify, his bed at the yeshiva was mostly vacant. In 1925 he published his first book, Sha’arie Tevunah. This book made its way to the Chazon Ish in Vilna.

The Chazon Ish didn’t know the author of the book, but reading it was sufficient for him to decide that the author should marry his sister Miriam. The marriage was in fact celebrated, and Rabbi Yaakov Israel began to teach at the Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk.

**A Turning Point**

A turning point in his life occurred in 1934 when, pressed by the Chazon Ish, he went to settle in Eretz Israel in what was then the tiny village of Bnei Brak. Thus, he went from first directing the Novardok Yeshiva to assisting his brother-in-law in running the Chazon Ish Kollel. He continued in this capacity even after the death of the Chazon Ish, assuming the responsibility of lecturing as well.

During his final years, he was content to give a shiur on his brother-in-law’s yahrtzeit. The official responsibility for the yeshiva, as important as it was, nevertheless was far from doing justice to the place occupied by the Steipler. His office was never empty, as it was constantly accommodating yeshiva students and directors of institutions, just as it did businessmen, craftsmen, doctors, industrialists, mothers of families (Ashkenaz as well as Sephardic), and so on.

All were searching for a father, a teacher, a counselor, the Tzaddik of the generation. In his book Birkat Peretz, the Steipler writes that the Patriarch Jacob kept his name even after he was called Israel, for Israel and Jacob refer to two different, yet complimentary aspects of the Jewish people. The Steipler was clearly Yaakov [Jacob] Israel: Israel on one side (battling against celestial forces, consecrating his life to an incessant and demanding spiritual ascent), yet also Jacob (Yaakov – from the Hebrew word ekev, the heel – a person of great simplicity, to whom nothing in the human realm was unfamiliar).

Yet what was the secret to his radiance and influence, devoid as he was of the means of the powerful people of this world? Perhaps it was because he had basically lost, for more than 35 years, his sense of hearing. A painful disability for sure, but also a protection against all the banality, pettiness, and ugliness of our world. Plunged from his early years into a universe in which Torah, Avodah, and Gemiluth Chesed are the real foundations of life, he possessed a true and just view of men and things (hevratpinto.org/tzadikim)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Re’eh 5782 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parshas sheet*