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**Seizing the Moment!**



**Rabbi Shlomo Diamond (left) and Rabbi Hillel Haber**

There is a story about a group of young boys who lived in our [Flatbush Syrian Sephardic] community about fifty years ago. These boys, all in their late teens, were passionate about basketball, playing in the park a few times a week.

One day after a game, a boy asked his friend to help raise money for a new yeshivah that his rabbi had opened. The friend agreed, and over the next few weeks, the two teenagers raised hundreds of dollars for the rabbi’s yeshivah.

The rabbi was so impressed that he asked to meet the second boy who aided his fundraising. At first, the boy was reluctant and shy, but then he agreed to meet with him. When they met, the teen was very inspired by the rabbi and decided to try to learn with his friend at the rabbi’s new yeshivah.

The other boys in their group didn’t follow them, but as time passed, these two boys continued to learn and grow in Torah. These two boys grew to be leading Rabbis in our community. Hashem gave them an opportunity to grow, and they seized it. For the past forty-plus years, they have been spreading Torah throughout our community through their yeshivot and kollelim.

If you haven’t guessed by now, the boys who raised the money are none other than Rabbi Shlomo Diamond, Rabbi of the Sephardic Torah Center Kollel in Long Branch and Ilan High School, and Rabbi Hillel Haber, Rosh Yeshivah of Shaare Torah. Because they were willing to grow without worrying about sacrificing their social lives, they helped countless families grow to great spiritual heights and completely changed our community, baruch Hashem!

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vayikra 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

**The Mashgiach and the Irreligious Taxi Driver**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Levin**



Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, ZT”L, the great Ponovezh Mashgiach known as Reb Chatzkel, once had to travel from Bnei Brak to Tel Aviv for a doctor’s appointment. His student, Rav Aron Tausig, accompanied him via taxi. They ordered a special car that had shades on the rear windows.

Rav Chatzkel sat the whole time with his eyes cast downward, to the bewilderment of the driver. After a while, Rav Chatzkel spoke up and said, “We have reached Tel Aviv.”

The irreligious driver wondered, “How did the Rabbi know this?” The Mashgiach replied, “The air is different here.”

They reached their destination and asked the driver to wait and drive them back to Bnei Brak after the appointment. Once again, Rav Chatzkel sat with his eyes looking down, and after a bit spoke up: “Is it correct that we are just now entering Bnei Brak?”

Indeed, it was! The driver was so amazed at the “Holy Rabbi’s” ability to sense kedusha in the air (and the opposite) that from then on, he maintained a connection with the Mashgiach. Eventually, he became a complete *Ba’al Teshuvah* (becoming Torah observant)!

    *Comment: The Zohar states (Vol 1, 116b) that the tumah (impurity) in Mitzrayim was so overwhelming that the Malachim themselves were in danger of being negatively impacted. Therefore, Hashem Himself had to go through Mitzrayim, and not His angels. As we recite in the Haggadah Shel Pesach, “I (Hashem) shall pass through the Land of Mitzrayim -I, and not a Malach (angel).”*

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra 5783 email of Torah Sweets.*

**“You Have a Wonderful, Wonderful…”**

**By Rabbi David Bibi**



One of the most difficult character traits for us to overcome is pride and hubris.

Ga’avah causes many problems. And especially today when we live in a world and even more so in a community where even when people don’t say the words, they definitely think the words, “don’t you know who I am?”

Even when we work at it for a lifetime, we are still susceptible. To illustrate let me share a story told by Dr. Alan Morinis, Founder of The Mussar Institute, who is a leading

figure in the contemporary revival of the Mussar movement. He tells us: Soon after I had finished giving a talk, an elderly woman approached me. I greeted her, and she started to say something. “You have a wonderful, wonderful . . . ,” she began, speaking slowly and stretching out the words, giving me lots of time to guess what it was she was leading up to. “Voice,” I finished her sentence in my mind, since I had just addressed the group. No, I then thought, maybe she was about to say “way with words,” since people do say I am articulate. And right after that, because I felt I had just made a really good presentation, I upped the ante to “presence.” Before I could speculate any further, however, her sentence arrived at the station to which her words had slowly been winding. “. . . wife,” she pronounced, her eyes smiling warmly. Oh, I thought. Then, “Thank you,” I recovered. “How do you know her?” I’ve never had a more graphic illustration of my own instinctive craving for praise and honor. Having blindly stepped in it up to my ankle, there was no way I could deny where I stood. Here was my spiritual curriculum.

curriculum.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace*

**The Bag of a Thousand**

**20 Shekel Notes**

**By Rabbi David Bibi**

I want to share a story I heard yesterday from Rabbi Shlomo Landau. He heard the story directly from the protagonist Rav Chaim, a well know Kiruv speaker in Eretz Yisrael for Arechim – an outreach organization. As you listen to the story, I want you to think about what you would’ve done along the way?

Rav Chaim explains that his daughter got engaged, and he had committed to purchase the furniture for their new apartment. So, he went to the furniture store in Bnei Brak where they had selected everything. Completing the selections, the salesperson tallied everything which totaled 22,000 shekels.

**A Chance for a 2,000 Shekels Discount**

So, he asked the lady what could she do as a package deal to reduce the price? I guess Jews don’t ever want to pay list price and always need a bargain. So, she starts playing with her figures, looking things up on the computer, and finally comes back to him. And she said that if he paid the whole bill in cash, she could reduce it to 20,000 shekels.

He said fine. He went down the block to the bank and he asked to take 20,000 shekels out from his account. The teller explained that she was short on cash and they were hoping to get cash in and if he would wait a little bit, they would take care of him. He explains that he’s in a little bit of a rush because he needs to get back to the store to drop off the money and then he hast to get to Haifa where he is going to be giving a lecture that night. They beg his patience, and he sits down.

He sat for about 15 minutes when the bank manager came out and apologized that the bank was a little messed up that day and all he had were 20 shekels notes. Rabbi Chaim said cash is cash, and they proceeded to count one thousand 20 shekels notes and place it into a very large envelope for him.



With the large envelope in tow, he walked back towards the store, but lo and behold they had closed. Now he has a problem. He’s holding this big envelope stuffed with cash and he needs to go to Haifa to give a lecture. And he is reluctant to carry this with him, but what choice does he have?

He grabs a small grocery bag and places the large envelope inside it, and hops on the bus for Haifa. And he’s holding onto that bag for dear life. He gets to Haifa. He delivers his lecture, keeping the bag close by at all times. The lecture goes very well, and as he’s leaving the hall in Haifa to go catch the bus back, he is told that he just missed the last bus for the evening and he needs to take the train.

Rav Chaim goes to the train station and in order to get through security one has to go through the metal detector and have his belongings x-rayed. He tries to explain to the security person that he is holding notes but uninterested, the guard insists that he place the bag through the x ray on the conveyor belt. He does as asked. He pulls it off the other end and he gets on the train.

**A Sudden Urge to Double Check**

While he’s on the train, he has this sudden urge to double check and make sure that he still has the envelope with the money and the money is still inside it. He picks up the bag, opens it, undoes the envelope and looks at the cash within it. He doesn’t realize, but the guy sitting behind him also sees the large amount of cash within the envelope.

He gets to the Azrieli Tower in Tel Aviv and in order to get into the station he needs to go through security again and again he tries to explain to the guard that he’s carrying this bag with cash, but the guard insists that he put his bag through the belt and so he does and he comes to the other side and nothing comes out. Now as we can imagine, the Rabbi is freaking out. He put 20,000 shekels on the conveyor belt and as far as he can tell, the money never came out. He runs over to the security guard.

**Some Guy Grabbed the Bag and Went on His Way**

The security person tells him that the bag did go through. But what happened? At that moment, they did not realize that the guy who saw the Rabbi on the train, and was right behind him when he was going through security. He slipped in front of him, grabbed the bag and went on his way.

The security guy is horrified and he takes the Rabbi to the office where they have the security cameras and monitors. He’s sure they’ll be able to find the person, but unfortunately, of all the cameras on line, the camera that was focused on that conveyor belt was the one camera not working.

Now the rabbi is extremely angry. He’s looking at the security guard and saying to himself, if this guy had just let me carry it through, then none of this would’ve happened and now because he made me put it on the conveyor belt. My 20,000 shekel is gone.

And as I am listening to the story, I am thinking that my daughter at that moment would be screaming, ”Don’t have yeush.” Yeush is where a person gives up hope of ever getting his lost or stolen object back.

The rabbi was so angry. He probably did have Yeush. He needed to let it out on someone and he just wanted to give it to this guy. I told him there was cash. He should have looked in the bag and let me carry it. But he had been working on his MIDAH of controlling anger, and he tried to implement a strategy which may at some point come to assist any of us.

When a person gets angry, it’s generally because of their ego and their haughtiness and their pride, thinking, how could you do this to me, how could you act this way to me, how could this happen to me,?

But if when a person is getting angry, they can throw the focus off of me, and do something good for someone else, it can come to defuse that anger that centers on the I, and the me.

**No Longer About the Me and the I**

As he’s about to lose it on this guard and thinking about how he can control it and defuse it, perhaps in some way, he remembers a certain bride who is trying to get married, and she literally has nothing and so he commits in his mind that he’s going to donate 1000 shekels towards her wedding. And his mind focuses for a minute on the act that he’s going to do and that he is committed to do to help another person, at that moment, he is no longer the center of his world and it’s no longer only about the me and the I.

 He announces to himself, As soon as I get back home to Bnei Brak, I am going to give her 1000 shekels and then in some way some feelings of tranquility enter his mind and he is able to control himself. He is giving something to someone else. He took himself for a moment out of the equation. He’s going to do something for someone else. And although the situation has not changed, his mindset has.

Standing in the middle of the lobby of Azrieli tower in the middle of Tel Aviv with the security guard saying there’s really not anything that they can do but they can call for a supervisor to come, but it will take a little bit of time. A man taps the rabbi on the shoulder and asks, aren’t you Rabbi Chaim?

**The Bat Mitzvah Daughter was a Great Fan of the Rabbi**

And it’s a rhetorical question because he knows who he is and he tells him that on the top floor of the building his daughter is having a bat mitzvah celebration and she is the Rabbi ‘s biggest fan and is always listening to his tapes and lectures, and perhaps he can come upstairs for a couple of minutes Just to give her a blessing because that would truly make the event something memorable.

Rav Chaim considers that he has to wait anyway and there’s not much that anyone’s going to be able to do so he might as well go up and give a girl a blessing, and do a good deed. They ride up the elevator together to the 47th floor and it’s a big party. The man grabs his daughter and the rabbi gives the girl a blessing and speaks for a couple of minutes. They take a few pictures, and as he’s walking out, he sees a familiar face.

It’s the guy who was sitting behind him on the train, and who was walking out behind him when he went through the security. The rabbi thinks to himself, “This must be the person”. And then he sees that the man has his bag within another bag at the foot of the seat where he is sitting.

The man gets up to get a beer and the rabbi thinks perhaps he should just take his bag out of the man’s bag and walk out, but he doesn’t want to get into a confrontation with this big guy in the middle of the party.

**“I Can’t Imagine that You Really Wanted to Do This”**

The rabbi sits at the table opposite him, and when the man returns, he leans forward towards him, and the man has a glimmer of recognition. And the rabbi tells him, Adoni, listen, my sister-in-law‘s sister is married to the chief of police, and I’m about to make a phone call and have a squad of police come And arrest you for stealing my money. But I know that every Jew has a good soul and I can’t imagine that you really wanted to do this.

The man recognizes that he’s caught red-handed, and begins to apologize with excuses that he found himself into terrible debt, and all of a sudden he saw this money, and then he stepped through the metal detector first, and he saw the money come out of the conveyor belt and he just took it.

The rabbi calmly directs the thief to just hand me back the money. And the man sheepishly reaches down, takes out the bag and hands it to the rabbi across the table. Now the rabbi says to him. I can understand that you’re in a very difficult situation, and things must be very hard for you now, but let me make a suggestion.

**Offers the Thief a Three-Day Free Stay**

**in a Hotel for a Religious Seminar**

“How does it sound to stay in a hotel for three days for free”? And the guy says I really have nothing else going on in my life. The rabbi says next week we are doing the seminar in such and such a place and I want to invite you as my guest. You’ll come, you’ll hear some lectures, and it will give you an opportunity to think about doing the right thing. The man sheepishly thanks him and gives him his number.

The Rabbi thinks to himself that it’s going to cost him 500 shekels to sponsor this guy, but that’s all good and he stays in touch with him and the guy does come to the seminar and begins to turn his life around. But that’s not the end of the story.

The next day he goes back to the furniture store with his big envelope of cash to pay them the 20,000 shekels. But in the meantime, it’s costing an extra 1500 shekels. The thousand that he immediately donated for the girl getting married and the 500 for the seminar for the guy who took the money.

But at least he has his money back.

Rav Chaim hands the sales girl the envelope with the 20,000 shekels in 20s and she looks at it and asks, “what do you want us to do with this? We can’t take this! The rabbi responds that cash is cash. She won’t take it and agrees to get the owner. The owner comes down and sees Rabbi Chaim and immediately recognizes him and tells him how much he enjoys his videos and not to worry and asks him if he has a story to share.

The rabbi says have I got a story to tell you, but it’s gonna cost you. Am I going to get another discount. Maybe says the owner? Immediately the sales lady chimes in that she already gave him 2000 off and the owner says that was your discount I can give them my discount. And he turns to Rabbi and says for a great story, how about another 1500 off and with that the rabbi said to him. Wow now have I got a story to tell you.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace*

**Giving the Grade**

**By Rabbi Yechiel Spero**



**The Steipler Gaon**

Some teachers have a one-size-fitsall grading system. Everyone is graded by how they do on tests and everyone receives the same test. It doesn’t matter how bright you are or what type of extenuating circumstances you may be working under. The Al-mighty understands that some children are smarter than others. In fact, He was the One Who made that determination. Some have been given the ability to sit for long periods of time while others struggle to sit for more than a half-hour. The Al-mighty understands His students. He knows the challenge — and rewards accordingly.

Though Yanky very much wanted to succeed, he was not blessed with a good head for learning. No matter how hard he tried, he always found himself behind his peers. During his elementary school years, this was not so glaringly obvious, but as the years went by and the learning became more and more challenging, the gap between Yanky and his classmates grew.

**He Struggled to Comprehend the Sugya**

He worked hard and listened to shiur every day, but failed to understand the material. There were times when he recorded the shiur and reviewed it again and again, yet still struggled to comprehend the sugya. He was only able to go so far, to dig so deep. This made it difficult to find a chavrusa. No one wanted to learn with a boy who was so weak, he couldn’t understand the Gemara.

Though his rebbeim managed to convince some of the stronger boys to learn with him, Yanky knew that nobody was doing so willingly, and it didn’t do wonders for his self-esteem, confidence, or pride. Yanky felt like a failure. By the time he was 17, sadness and a deep, dark cloud of hopelessness engulfed him. His rebbi tried to be mechazek him, to no avail. He told Yanky that all Hashem wants is for us to do our best, but Yanky wasn’t convinced. Though he heard the words, they made little mark on his damaged psyche.

**A Special Visit to the Steipler Gaon**

Finally, his rebbi decided to take him to the Steipler Gaon, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky. He didn’t know what the Steipler would say, but he was confident that if anyone had the right words, it would be he. As he presented his dilemma to the Steipler, Yanky’s voice cracked from emotion. He detailed how because of his weak memory skills, he didn’t have the background knowledge his friends had.

Thus, he had to learn each Mishnah from scratch, with all of its references, as if he had never heard the concepts before. It took him months to learn what the other boys mastered in a few days. By the time he understood the first daf, the others in his shiur were eons ahead of him. While his peers were already on daf yud (page 10), he sadly conceded, “I’m only holding on daf beis (page 2, which is the first page).”

The Steipler, who was hard of hearing, asked him, “So you’re holding on daf kuf beis, page 102?”

“No,” Yanky corrected with reverence and respect, “daf beis.”

But the Steipler repeated, “Daf kuf beis?”

Yanky didn’t want to be disrespectful, but he was aware of the Steipler’s hearing issues and he wanted the Steipler to understand clearly where his frustration lay.

So, he wrote down on a piece of paper in very clear letters, “Higaati l’daf beis, I reached page 2.”

**Responding to the Vulnerable Bachur**

The Steipler looked at the vulnerable bachur and clarified, “Bachur’l, I heard you clearly. And I know that you think you got up to daf beis. But in Shamayim (Heaven), they count differently. There you are up to daf kuf beis, because every daf you learn with difficulty is like 100 dapim to Hashem. Although you think you are ten dapim behind your friends, you are really ninety ahead of them!

“Do you still think you’re unsuccessful? Do you still think you’re behind in your learning? “This is what we believe and you must believe it, as well. And if you do, you will feel so much more berachah in your learning, and you will feel so much happier and more satisfied.”

Yanky walked away with a newfound belief in himself and went on to become quite accomplished in his learning. Students often feel unsuccessful because they compare their accomplishments to the others in their class or shiur. Although it is always nice to grow together as a group, if the feelings of failure overwhelm you, then you must remember what really matters. And Who is giving the grade.

*Reprinted from the Shemini 5782 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “What a Story!”*

**Tricks of the Trade**

**By Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski**

Rabbi Yosef Dov of Brisk received a complaint that a wealthy man refused to contribute to the community charities. The next time they met in his home, the Rabbi steered the conversation to the subject of the Egyptian sorcerers described in the Torah, who were able to mimic some of Moshe’s miracles. The rich man revealed that he was cynical about all of this, and doubted that anyone could perform either magic or miracles.

“Why do you say that?” Rabbi Yosef Dov asked casually, ignoring the affront to the Torah. “Even I can perform miracles. I will gladly do so right now, but only if you donate one hundred rubles to charity.” The skeptical man accepted the challenge.

“Very well,” the Rabbi said, adjusting his tone to the event. I will now show you that if you place four twenty-five rubles notes on the corners of this table, I will utter only one word, and the money will find its way into the bowl at the center.” The man was veritably trembling with anticipation as he placed the four notes on the four corners of the table.

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**Rabbi Yosef Dov of Brisk**

“Hayim!” Rabbi Yosef Dov then called to his little son, who promptly picked up the four bank notes and deposited them into the bowl.

 “Well, there you have it! It is just as I said,” the Rabbi declared.

“That is not fair!” the man howled in protest, “There was no miracle involved in this.”

“No miracle?” the Rabbi mocked, good-naturedly. “You think that getting one-hundred rubles for charity out of you is not a miracle?”

Everyone had a hearty laugh, and the wealthy man left without ill feelings.

*Reprinted from the ArtScroll book – “Smiling Each Day.”*

**Hearing the Voice**

**By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zal**

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**Painting by John Singleton Copley (1780)**

One of the most touching is the story of the young Samuel, dedicated by his mother Hannah to serve in the sanctuary at Shiloh where he acted as an assistant to Eli the Priest.

In bed at night, he heard a voice calling his name. He assumed it was Eli. He ran to see what he wanted but Eli told him he had not called.

This happened a second time and then a third, and by then Eli realised that it was G-d calling the child. He told Samuel that the next time the voice called his name, he should reply, “Speak, L-rd, for Your servant is listening.”

It did not occur to the child that it might be G-d summoning him to a mission, but it was. Thus began his career as a prophet, judge, and anointer of Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David (see I Samuel 3).

*Reprinted from Rabbi Sacks essay last week on Parshas Vayikra titled “The Pursuit of Meaning”*

**The Unanswered**

**Knock on the Door**

I called Chavie on Friday, and we planned to meet at her house on Shabbos afternoon at around 4:00 pm. I was looking forward to spending time with Chavie; we hadn’t had undisturbed time to enjoy each other’s company for a long while. Wouldn’t you know it – Shabbos turned out to be the hottest, most humid, day in the summer. But I was so looking forward to visiting Chavie, that I went over anyway and sweated out the walk.

It was 4:00 pm on the dot when I knocked on Chavie’s door. No answer. I knocked again.... No answer. The sun was beating down on my neck, but I waited. And waited. And knocked again, admittedly a bit more forcefully. And I waited some more. Finally, after 15 minutes of waiting, I turned around and went home. I felt so hurt, so disappointed, and well, so foolish.

"How could she forget that we agreed to get together?" I fumed. "Doesn't she care about our friendship at all?!"

On Motzei Shabbos, I eagerly waited for Chavie to call to apologize. It’s the least could’ve done! But she didn’t call. I did consider calling her first, but I was too, hurt to even speak. "She must not care that much about our friendship," I concluded. "She's not worth keeping as a friend."

But I then calmly took a step back and a deep breath and thought to yourself. "Wait a minute. I know in general that Chavie does care about me, and it doesn't fit the picture that she would totally forget about my visit. Let me try to understand what happened."

So, I picked up the phone and called Chavie. Before I could even get a word out, Chavie’s enthusiastic voice filled the line. "Hi! I'm SO glad you called!" she said. "I'm SO sorry I didn't get to see you on Shabbos. My grandfather was rushed to the hospital on Friday afternoon and I had to drop everything to rush over and spend Shabbos in the hospital.

“I threw all my stuff into a bag and forgot to bring my phone. I would have called you earlier to let you know, but I only just got back from the hospital 20 minutes ago."

Wow! Never would’ve thought of THAT! Good thing Chavie explained herself before she might have heard all the angry thoughts that had been churning in my head for hours!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tzav email of The Weekly Vort.*