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**How a Former Gambling Addict**

**Helps Other Jews Overcome**

**Their Life-Threatening Addictions**

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**Ike Dweck, founder and director of the SAFE Foundation**

Last month, SAFE Foundation, founded by Ike Dweck celebrated its 20th anniversary. Ike a member of the Syrian or Sephardic community in Brooklyn was at the time a recovered former gambling addict and the SAFE Foundation became one of the first New York state licensed OASAS (Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services) licensed in Brooklyn.

The SAFE Foundation was initially established by Ike to help other members of his community and at the time, there was a terrible stigma that often inhibited men and women like Ike from seeking the help they desperately needed to overcome the various addictions that were causing them to suffer breakups of their families, loss of businesses or careers, their dignity and in all too many cases even their lives.

Last week Ike told his story of how he overcame his life-threatening addiction to gambling and turned around to found and direct the SAFE Foundation that today has helped more than 8,000 members of our community in all parts of Brooklyn and now New Jersey regain control of their lives in a “That’s an Issue” podcast, hosted by Dr. Tara and Yoni Klestzick. “That’s an Issue” is part of the Living L’Chaim network.

In addition to its original mission of helping gambling addicts, alcoholics and those addicted to drugs, Ike Dweck’s SAFE Foundation also has expanded to serving as a reliable haven for those experiencing difficulties with cigarettes, vaping, prescription drug addiction and eating disorders including anorexic behavior.

**How His Former Gambling**

**Almost Destroyed His Life**

In the 58-minute podcast with the Klestzicks, titled “My Gambling Addiction Story & How I Help Addicts Recover (with Ike Dweck), Ike talks about his former penchant for gambling on sports and how it almost destroyed his life. At one time, insurance companies that would pay for rehabilitation for alcoholics and drug addicts refused to pay for rehabilitation stays for gambling addicts. The insurance companies didn’t recognize gambling addictions as life threatening, although Ike would tell the That’s an Issue podcast hosts that statistics show that those suffering from compulsive gambling addictions commit suicide at even higher rates than do alcoholic and drug addicts.

An addict whether it be a gambler, alcoholic or someone on drugs, often needs to unfortunately hit rock bottom before he or she is able to accept help to recover. The SAFE Foundation which was originally established to help others in the Syrian or Sephardic community in Brooklyn soon began receiving calls from other Jewish communities such as Boro Park, Crown Heights, Williamsburg and even from beyond the New York Metro region and outside the United States. The group recently received a request for help from a family with a son suffering from a serious gambling addiction.

Today the SAFE Foundation, offers clinical assessment, family support, substance use treatment, community education and parent workshops. To meet the needs of the rapidly growing Jewish community in Deal, Lakewood and surrounding areas, the SAFE Foundation has just opened a second office in Eaton New Jersey. If you or a loved one needs help with an addiction problem, call (718) GET-SAFE.

To emphasize the increasing danger of gambling addictions, especially as the result of the easy availability of making great money losing bets on smart phones (one need not travel out of the way to racing tracks or casinos), Rabbi Joey Haber, a prominent rabbi in the Sephardic communities of both Brooklyn and Deal was interviewed this past January by Eli Langer, host of the Kosher Money podcast, another project of Living L’Chaim.

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**Rabbi Joey Haber being interviewed on the Kosher Money podcast**

Rabbi Haber spoke of the horrifying spread of gambling in his community as a result of the strong interest of many Jews in following sports. He also spoke of how this out-of-control addiction has wrecked the lives of not only individual gambling addicts, but also of their families. The danger has spread to even 10th graders. Part of the problem is the bad role models of some fathers.

To view the podcast “My Gambling Addiction Story & How I Help Addicts Recover (with Ike Dweck)”, you can google the title of the podcast or the youtube code <https://youtu.be/ktCGetQlJ4o>

To view the one hour and a half hour podcast – “**Gambling's Dirty Secret Revealed by Rabbi Joey Haber” can also click the youtube code** <https://youtu.be/DMwERSFjD7s>

*Reprinted from the June 16, 2023 issue of The Jewish Connection.*

**The Obligation of a Jew to Use His Intellectual Powers**

**To Fulfill G-d’s Will**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



In general, the Jewish people's entry into the Land of Israel is symbolic of the Jew's raison d'ˆtre and indeed, his very function in the world. The Jewish soul descends to the physical plane for the purpose of imbuing it with holiness, transforming the material world into an appropriate vessel for G-dliness. Similarly, the objective of the Jews' entry into the Land was to transform it from "the land of Canaan" into "the Land of Israel," a place where holiness and G-dliness would be openly perceptible.

As this week's Torah portion of Shelach relates, before the Jews entered the Land, G-d commanded Moses to "Send men, that they may spy the Land of Canaan." Whenever a Jew is about to perform a mitzva, the first step must be to carefully consider the task at hand and find the best way to achieve the objective. The Spies were sent to determine the most effective military strategy to conquer Canaan, within the confines of the natural order.

**A Jew is Required to Use His Head**

A Jew might think that once G-d has commanded him to perform a mitzva, he can ignore reality and close his eyes to his surroundings. However, the story of the Twelve Spies teaches that faith in G-d is not enough. A Jew is required to "use his head," to utilize his G-d-given intellect and abilities to determine the very best way to fulfill His wishes. For G-d has created a physical world, with the intention that mitzvot be performed within the natural order.

**The Mistake of the Spies**

At the same time, one mustn't go too far in the opposite direction. The Spies' mistake was that they interpreted their fact-finding mission as permission to decide whether the Jews should enter the Land of Israel at all. This, in essence, was their sin: Moses sent them to determine how to achieve their goal, yet they assumed the right to determine if the Jews should do it in the first place. This led them to their conclusion that "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than us."

This was contrary to G-d's will, and demonstrated a serious lack of faith. For whenever G-d sends an individual on a mission, He simultaneously gives him the power to succeed. G-d demands of a person only "according to his abilities." If it is illogical for a human being to require another to perform an act beyond his capabilities, how much more so does this apply to G-d, the Essence of goodness and kindness.

**Obligated to Work Within the Natural Order**

With this firm foundation in mind, the Torah goes on to caution that "One mustn't rely on miracles." A Jew is obligated to work within the natural order, not above it. Nonetheless, we are assured of Divine assistance whenever we encounter obstacles, so that we too may declare: "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shelach 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Volume 13 of Likutei Sichot.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on is the**

**Recent Rise on Anti-Semitism Something to Worry About**

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Absolutely! How could we not worry about it? But we have to know that there is a fundamental reason why it’s happening. It’s because Hashem is worried about us. מעליו ל‡ר ̆י ויט – Yisroel has to turn away from Eisav. We’re too much involved in gentile ideas, and it’s necessary to erect a wall. And that wall is anti-semitism. Always it happens, again and again in history – when Jews start getting lost among Gentiles then it’s time for the Gentiles to begin building a wall to prevent that.

And the first reaction to anti-semitism has to be not to contribute to the Simon Wiesenthal Center or other organizations that combat anti-semitism. No, no! In most cases those organizations cause anti-semitism. The way to combat anti-semitism is to build more yeshivos where children will be taken in for less schar limud; tuition should be be made very low.

The yeshivos should be so prosperous that they should be able to afford to take in children almost for nothing. That’s the ideal. And so, the Jewish child, sitting in the yeshivah, will be the one who is fighting against anti-semitism in the most efficient manner.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Behar-Bechukosai 5783 email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Miller’s Tape #E-231 from his classic Thursday night lectures.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Shlach 5783**



The attitude of Jews towards the Land of Israel has always been a litmus type of test of Jewish commitment and even faith throughout the ages. As we see in this week’s parsha, from the beginning of our national existence there have always been Jews – leading Jews, well-intentioned Jews, even outwardly pious Jews – who have preferred living somewhere else in the world than living in the Land of Israel.

Even when Hitler came to power, European Jews, in many cases, refused to consider the option of immigration to the Land of Israel. It is not my place to judge others for their behavior in a very dreadful time, especially since I am blessed with the perfect hindsight that they tragically lacked, but it is a strange fact that throughout Jewish history the naysayers regarding the Land of Israel in Jewish society have always abounded.

Jews in the generation of Moses claimed their preference for the land of Egypt over the Land of Israel. An entire generation of special and gifted Jews was destroyed in the desert of Sinai because of their unwillingness to consider living in the Land of Israel as a viable option for them and their descendants. The challenge of living in the Land of Israel was apparently too great a problem for them to overcome - physically, psychologically and spiritually.

To me this attitude remains one of the supreme mysteries of all of Jewish history. But mystery or not, it certainly is a fact that has governed Jewish life over the ages.

When Moses’ own relative refused the offer to go to the Land of Israel, Rashi explains that the two reasons for his behavior had to do with family and making a living. These are very strong reasons that exist today that prevent many Jews from considering immigrating to the Land of Israel. Again, I neither judge nor begrudge anyone in this or any other life changing matter.

However, I feel that the issue of the Land of Israel, independent of any other causes and motives, strikes at a very deep place within our personal and national soul. The fact that the most ultra-assimilated and the most outwardly ultra-pious within the Jewish people are included in our generation’s most vociferous of the anti- Land of Israel groups, shows that the problem is both deep and sensitive.

The extremes in Jewish society cannot deal with the Land of Israel as a reality and earnestly hope that the issue will somehow disappear completely. There are millions of Jews who prefer living in exile to living in the Land of Israel. The Jewish people has not absorbed the lessons of the exile, its alienation, assimilation, and its ultimate corruption of Torah values.

Today, many Jews who physically live in the Land of Israel still psychologically and spiritually live in the exile, in a fantasy of the long-destroyed shtetel of Eastern Europe. As foretold to us by our prophets, the ultimate fate of the Jewish people will be determined for us by our attitude to the Land of Israel. Living in the Land of Israel or at least visiting it regularly is currently the centerpiece of Jewish life, its faith and its future.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Beha’alotcha 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**American Jews Are Con-cealing their Jewish Identity**

**By Meryl Ain**

***And why that’s an inappropriate response to antisemitism.***



In the past, when I thought of Jews concealing the fact that they are Jewish, black and white scenes from the Holocaust or the former Soviet Union came to mind. As a Jewish baby boomer who grew up in the United States, I always felt safe here and I wore my Judaica to show off my Jewish pride.

But over the past few years, the rise of antisemitism in the U.S. and abroad is making Jews question if they should openly wear religious symbols in public.

Just recently, a loudspeaker on a train traveling through Austria near Vienna began blaring Adolf Hitler's speeches and chanting "*Sieg Heil"*at the passengers. Someone aboard the train had hacked into the PA system, and it wasn't the first time this happened. One passenger, a concentration camp survivor, left the train crying. Police are investigating, and there is concern that this may be part of a disturbing trend.

In my Long Island community, which is home to the fourth largest Jewish population in the U.S., antisemitism is virulent enough to require a community-wide response. The American Jewish Committee recently held a bipartisan meeting of more than 50 Nassau and Suffolk County elected officials to discuss antisemitism and formulate a cohesive response to it. Laura Shaw Frank, the AJC’s director of Contemporary Jewish Life, said that 41% of American Jews indicated that they felt less safe than a year ago, when the figure was 31%. And 40% of Jews have “changed their behavior” to conceal the fact they are Jewish.

**Bottom of Form**

Concealing my Jewish identity is not something that I ever had to do growing up in Queens, New York. Neither did my own children, who attended a Jewish day school on Long Island. I remember a synagogue trip to France about 10 years ago when our rabbi told the men in the group to remove their kippot. But now in the U.S.? That is sobering – and very scary.

The AJC report evoked memories of my mother, who enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II as soon as she graduated from college. She had seen a film about Hitler and was determined to do her part to fight the Nazis. Growing up in a New Jersey community with a tiny Jewish population, she knew what it was to be a suspect minority; her friends had even accused her of killing Jesus. When she tearfully told them she had nothing to do with it, they accepted her explanation and resumed their play. That’s probably the reason she and my father chose to raise their family in an area that was heavily Jewish.

My mom shared stories of army life with my brother and me, but never explained why she didn’t wear a Jewish star. As a child, I didn’t understand it, but she didn’t stop me from wearing the Jewish symbols my grandmother gave to me.

**Long Island’s German Gardens**

As someone who writes about the Holocaust and is a member of The International Advisory Board for Holocaust Survivor Day, I am very well versed in this dark chapter in our history. While doing research for my second post-Holocaust novel, “Shadows We Carry,” I learned that there was a community called German Gardens in eastern Long Island, which required residents to show proof of German lineage to live there. I used this community as a setting in a section of my book that explores neo-Nazism.

This German community still exists in Yaphank, a hamlet in Suffolk County, and it was one of the German American Bund’s main centers of activity before World War II. In 1935, the German American Settlement League bought a large tract of land in the hamlet and the neighborhood soon became a Nazi community for those of pure Aryan lineage. The fliers that were distributed at the time inviting German Americans to live there read, “You will meet people who think like you.”

***In this May 22, 1938 photo provided by the New York City Municipal Archives, a large swastika is surrounded by a white picket fence at Camp Siegfried in Yaphank, N.Y.Credit: AP***

The main street, which ran the entire length of the community, was named Adolf Hitler Strasse. This and other street names honoring Nazis have since been renamed, but it wasn’t until May 2017 that the requirement to be of German ancestry was dropped. New York State prosecutors reached a settlement with the League to end any discriminatory housing policies and practices.

As my Jewish community and others throughout our country cope with antisemitic incidents, we need to be vigilant in reporting such acts, and not just ignore them. These acts impact not only our lives, but also the next generation. It’s heartening to see that the country as a whole is addressing this disturbing issue. It can no longer be shrugged off as an innocent prank.

**The Jewish Star Pejorative**

The Nazis made the Jewish star pejorative, and that’s probably what my mother was reacting to in not wearing one.

My response to today's antisemitism? To keep wearing my Judaica and feel proud of my Jewish heritage, as well as a sense of connectedness to all Jews. My mother felt constrained from wearing hers, which keeps me motivated to wear mine every single day. I think of her when I put it on and wish for a world in which all Jews can be proud to display their heritage. I can't change her experience, but I can change what's happening today and try to make the future brighter for my children and grandchildren.

*Reprinted from the June 11, 2023 website of aish.com.*

**The Joke That Became an International Scandal**

**By**[**Yossi Ives and Mendel Hurwitz**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/9055/jewish/Ives-Yossi.htm)



***Art by***[***Sefira Lightstone***](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

Caselle, a small village near the historic city of Padua in northern Italy, was home to a small Jewish population of no particular note. We would probably know little about this sleepy hamlet were it not for a minor event that turned into a major drama.

**The Event**

Chaim Morelo, one of the community’s leaders, was a popular fellow, and his home was a hub of comings and goings and gatherings.

Two days before Rosh Hashanah, 1710,[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a5971672');) Yedidya Luba, a well-known jocular character, walked into Chaim’s home. Present at that time were two men, Tuvia and Moshe, along with Chaim’s widowed daughter, Gotla.

Yedidya Luba chatted with Gotla, asking (among other things) whether she would be attending the pre-Rosh Hashanah Selichot service.

As they spoke, Gotla noticed that Yedidya was holding two rings—one with a beautiful diamond, the other made from horse hair.

Gotla asked him to show her the ring.

Presumably as a joke, Yedidya took the ring made from horse hair, put it on her finger, and uttered some words to her. This took place in front of Moshe and Tuvia.

Moshe turned to Yedidya and said, “You know, you’re lucky you gave her a ring that has no value. Had it been worth something, you’d be considered married to her, since we have two witnesses here, Tuvia and me.”

Moshe’s comment turned out to be wrong, as the horse hair ring did have sufficient value to be valid for the purposes of affecting betrothal.

Talk of the incident circulated among the community and eventually became known to the local rabbis.

They realized that this could be a serious issue with far-reaching ramifications.

Although the two had not gone ahead with a full marriage ceremony, the fact that he had given her a ring could qualify as betrothal, which is almost identical to marriage from a *halachic*standpoint.

If this were the case, should Gotla ever wish to remarry, she would need a divorce from Yedidya.

**The Testimonies**

After the holiday season, the local rabbis convened a court to examine the matter.

Yedidya and Gotla both claimed it was nothing more than a joke. Yedidya was known as a jokester. The whole thing, they claimed, was clearly in jest.

Moreover, they argued, Yedidya was already married, and it was forbidden by Jewish custom for him to marry a second woman. Obviously, he didn't mean it seriously.

For her part, Gotla testified that Yedidya had merely said humorous things after putting the ring on her finger, and he never pronounced the proper Hebrew formula stating that he was betrothing her “according to the law of Moses and Israel.”

The court summoned Moshe and Tuvia to hear their versions of events, which turned out to be somewhat different.

Moshe testified that he heard Yedidya make the full appropriate statement of betrothal when placing the ring on Gotla’s finger. According to him, this act met all the requirements of a kosher wedding, as it was duly observed by two valid witnesses, himself and Tuvia.

Tuvia, on the other hand, had no recollection of any such serious statement, although he did recall Yedidya saying a few words which were met with laughter.

**Does It Matter If It Was a Joke?**

The court had two major issues to contend with. The first was whether or not betrothal had taken place.

On the one hand, it seemed rather obvious that it was intended as a prank. On the other hand, *halacha*does not always read into a person’s intentions—which are invisible to all—but only his actual actions and words.

In his glosses to the Code of Jewish Law, the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Moshe Isserles ruled that if a woman agrees to be betrothed and throws away the betrothal object immediately after receiving it, claiming that she never had any intention of accepting it, we regard her as duly betrothed.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a5971672');) She is judged by her actions alone, not what we believe to be her intentions at the time.

As such, if it could be substantiated that Yedidya had indeed carried out the act of betrothal, his intentions may not matter.

**Were There Two Witnesses?**

The second consideration was whether the supposed act of betrothal had two witnesses, which is a basic requirement for it to be valid.

Moshe claimed that there were two witnesses, but Tuvia did not remember hearing the betrothal formula. Could he be considered a witness? The rabbis cited a ruling from an important earlier *halachic*authority, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderet (Rashba), that in order to be considered a valid witness for a wedding, the individual must have complete knowledge of what took place, including hearing the formula said.[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a5971672');)

Since Tuvia could not attest to hearing the formula, there would be only one witness.

In that case, we have the emphatic ruling of Maimonides and many other major *halachic*authorities who say that it is regarded as if nothing happened and no divorce is necessary.

Some *halachic*greats, however, such as Rabbi Eliezer of Metz and Rabbi Moshe of Coucy, are more stringent and require a divorce even if there is only one [kosher](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/113424/jewish/Kosher.htm) witness.[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a5971672');)

In the [Code of Jewish Law](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4305141/jewish/14-Facts-About-the-Code-of-Jewish-Law-Shulchan-Aruch.htm), Rabbi Yosef Karo rules that no divorce is needed,[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a5971672');) but Rabbi [Moshe Isserles](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/111847/jewish/Rabbi-Moshe-Isserles-The-Remo.htm) adopts the more stringent view as a precaution.4

Furthermore, some argued that since Tuvia could not categorically state that the formula was not said, perhaps he could indeed be counted as a second witness.

**The Inconclusive Verdict**

After lengthy deliberation, the majority of the Caselle rabbis determined that the marriage was not valid and no divorce was required.

Nevertheless, since some (albeit a minority) objected to the lenient ruling, the Caselle court decided to consult the *beit din* in Padua, a much larger and more prestigious Jewish community.

While the court in Padua, led by Rabbi Yosef Chaim Kohen, didn't agree with all of the reasoning of the rabbis of Caselle, they did concur with the final verdict.

Rabbi [Kohen](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/762109/jewish/Raise-Your-Hand-If-Youre-A-Kohen.htm) was adamant that without two valid witnesses there is nothing to discuss. His colleague Shmuel David Otilengi added that since all present agreed that the act was meant frivolously, there is no reason to treat the matter seriously.

**The Controversy Goes Viral**

The story could have ended here, but the minority rabbi in Caselle pressed his case. His argument was that since Tuvia admitted to being present and didn’t contradict Moshe’s account of the proper formula being said, they should be regarded as two valid witnesses.

Although Rabbi Kohen defended his position, the dispute quickly spread across Italy and beyond. Many of the greatest rabbis of the age got involved.

**Great Rabbis on Both Sides**

Rabbi Yosef ben Emmanuel Ergas, rabbi of Pisa and Leghorn as well as a great kabbalist, wrote a long letter arguing that no divorce was needed.

After receiving a response from a rabbi who disagreed with him, he wrote two more letters defending his position. Rabbi Ergas made the powerful point that if we are going to regard Tuvia as a valid witness, we also have to accept his testimony that the whole matter was a farce. He published his exchange of letters in his book, Divrei Yosef.

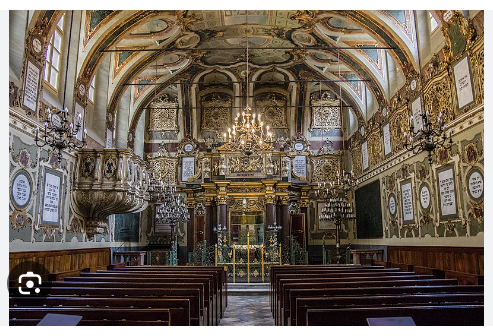
Rabbi Ergas was particularly insistent that it is wrong to require a divorce if unnecessary.

Other rabbis were vociferous on the other side of the argument. Scholars from the cities of Lugo and Ancona, both in Italy, wrote lengthy letters questioning the lenient position.

The famed Rabbi Zvi Ashkenazi of Amsterdam also sided with the stringent camp,1 as did the brilliant but controversial scholar Rabbi Moshe Chagiz, who sent forceful letters to many rabbis protesting what he considered a lax ruling.

Ultimately, the local court accepted the lenient view, and Gotla was allowed to get on with her life without any further ado.

While things ended smoothly for her, the complexities of this case—and the mounds of scholarly essays and letters it spawned—have demonstrated that pretending to get married is no joking matter.



**The historic 1595 synagogue in Caselle, Italy**

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5971672/jewish/The-Joke-That-Became-an-International-Scandal.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a5971672) The story is told in detail in She’elot uTeshuvot Chacham Zvi 135. Extensive documentation is collated in the contemporaneous encyclopedia Pachad Yitzchak by Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti, who lived in Padua at the time.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5971672/jewish/The-Joke-That-Became-an-International-Scandal.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a5971672) Even Haezer 42:1.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5971672/jewish/The-Joke-That-Became-an-International-Scandal.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a5971672) She’elot uTeshuvot haRashba response 1193.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5971672/jewish/The-Joke-That-Became-an-International-Scandal.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a5971672) These views are delineated in Bet Yosef to Tur Even Ha’ezer 42:2.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5971672/jewish/The-Joke-That-Became-an-International-Scandal.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a5971672) Shulchan Aruch Even Ha’ezer 42:2.

*Reprinted from the current website of Chabad.Org*