**Shabbos Stories For rosh hashana 5785**

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**Rav Levi Yitzchak’s Belated Shanah Tovah Greetings**



It was late at night one New Year’s Eve, December 31st, and the Bais Medrash of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, zt”l, was still filled with his Chasidim who were sitting and learning. Close to midnight, the door to the private office of the Rav, which was adjacent to the Bais Medrash, opened, and the Rav shouted out to his

Chasidim: “L’shana Tova Sichasivo v’chasimo”, - ‘May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year!’.

He then returned to his office and closed the door behind him. The Chasidim were mystified. Didn’t the Rav know that this was the secular New Year and not the Jewish New Year? A short time later the same thing happened and the Berditchover Rebbe came out to bentch (bless) them. And then this happened again for a third time.

The Chasidim were totally baffled! As not just anyone could approach the Rav, the men asked an elderly Chasid to approach him and ask for an explanation. The Rav told the elderly man the following: The previous Rosh Hashanah, the Tefilos and Shofar blowing of the city of Berditchov were especially beautiful and heartfelt and went directly to Heaven. Hashem was so taken by these Tefilos that He immediately inscribed the entire city in the Book of Life and bestowed on each and every one of them a year of health and wealth.



**The burial place of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov**

When Yom Kippur came, Hashem was so taken by their fasting and crying. The people poured out their hearts into their prayers. Hashem was about to seal the inscription that He had written on Rosh Hashanah, when suddenly the Satan spoke up. “True, the people have been praying fervently, however, this is only one day! How can You inscribe them favorably for an entire year based on their actions of only one day?"

Hashem therefore held back and the inscription was not sealed. Immediately after Yom Kippur, the people started to build their Succos in preparation of the upcoming Yom Tov. The defending angel spoke up, “Hashem, see how Your people are involved in doing the Mitzvah? Even the poor people are building their Succah to the best of their abilities!”

The Satan was not to be deterred. “Again, I object! True, they are building Succos for You. But, look at the houses they live in, permanent structures of brick, stone and glass. But for You, Hashem, they merely build temporary shacks that can barely last the week!” Again, Hashem held back from sealing the inscription.

Simchas Torah came and the Shuls were filled with dancing and joyful happiness. Again, the defending angel came to Hashem and spoke up. “Hashem, don’t You see how your children are rejoicing for Your Torah? Shouldn’t the inscription be sealed?” Hashem was about to seal the inscription when again the Satan spoke up. “I object yet again! True, they are rejoicing with the Torah tonight. But, how can You inscribe them favorably based on their actions of one night? When Yom Tov is over, they will go back to their old ways! They are undeserving!”

Hashem once again held back from sealing the inscription. So it was that the inscription that was written on Rosh Hashanah remained unsealed through Yom Kippur, Succos, Hoshanah Rabbah, Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah.

Tonight, on New Year’s Eve, however, the defending angel spoke up. “Hashem, King of the Universe, do You see how non-Jews celebrate the New Year? Shouting and drinking in the streets, and all manner of carrying on! Do you remember how your children celebrated their New Year? They did it with prayer, atonement and holiness.” This time the Satan had no response.

Rav Levi Yitzchak concluded, “Therefore, after all this time the inscription was finally sealed! I felt it appropriate to bless everyone with “L’shana Tova Sichasivo v’chasimo!”

*Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.*

**Be Busy with What Counts.**

**By Rabbi Avrohom Asher Makovsky**

One Erev Rosh Hashanah, Rav Shlomo Heiman, the rosh yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, asked a few bachurim to please come to his house. The bachurim were in a state of high expectation. What mission, what words, would the rosh yeshivah have for them during this special moment right before the Yom HaDin? Much to their surprise, the mission could not have been more mundane.

“Could you please address these shanah tovah cards for me?” he requested. Immediately, Rav Shlomo noticed the disappointed looks on the boys’ faces. He realized that they expected to be asked to do something grander than addressing envelopes.

“Am I doing the right thing to be busy right now, Erev Rosh Hashanah, addressing envelopes for shanah tovah cards?” he asked. “I don’t know. Maybe I’m not doing the right thing. But I want to tell you bachurim something important. For you, this is definitely the right thing, because you are doing the Torah mitzvah of gemillus chassadim. You are doing the greatest thing possible to earn a zechus before Rosh Hashanah.”

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**Rav Shlomo Heiman**

This is a remarkable perspective. Regardless of whether Rav Shlomo was doing the optimal thing, the moment he asked the boys to help him do it, they had a full, beautiful mitzvah d’Oraisa — no less than hearing the blowing of the shofar or putting on tefillin — and all the merit it brings. Someone needed help and they stepped up to provide that help. No other segulah they might have engaged in to bring them a favorable judgment on Rosh Hashanah could have been as powerful.

Let’s imagine that someone asks his friend to be sandek at a bris on Erev Rosh Hashanah. The sandek is bound to feel that this is a wonderful zechus that Hashem has dropped into his hand. However, the Pele Yoetz says that this great merit of being a sandek pales in comparison to giving someone change for a dollar. This is because providing change fulfills the mitzvah of v’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocha. If we needed change, we would want someone to give it to us. Therefore, when we give someone change, we are fulfilling the mitzvah of v’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocha.

Being a sandek, as important an honorific as that is, is not a mitzvas asei d’Oraisa of gemillus chassadim. Therefore, Rav Shlomo taught his students this lesson: Nothing could be greater on Erev Rosh Hashanah than performing the mundane task of helping someone address shanah tovah cards, because doing so changes that mundane task into the fulfillment of a Torah mitzvah. A segulah does not provide this merit.

**Reading an Article About Segulos**

**to Merit a Kesivah v’Chasima**

The challenge is to internalize this idea and keep it in mind when opportunities to do chessed arise. Imagine someone sitting on chair, reading an article about segulos a person can do for 40 days to merit a kesivah v’chasimah tovah. Just then, a neighbor knocks on the door and asks to borrow a hammer. The person who was poring over the article is disturbed — he’s busy thinking about which segulos to try and now this neighbor comes along and he is compelled to go into his garage and hunt down a hammer.

**No Greater Segulah than the**

**Mitzvah of Gemilus Chassadim**

If this person had internalized an understanding of what chessed is, he would excitedly drop the article and run to find the hammer. As the Chofetz Chaim explains in Ahavas Chessed, based on numerous sources, there is no greater segulah than the mitzvah of gemillus chassadim. We need to look for these opportunities, big and small — changing a dollar, giving a ride, helping someone fill out a form, loaning an item — and treasure each one as an easy, accessible opportunity to fulfill a Torah mitzvah.

*Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5784 edition of the At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book - Living Chessed by Rabbi Avrohom Asher Makovsky.*

**Getting Berachos,**

**Giving Berachos**

**By Rabbi Naftali Weinberger**



For many years, hundreds of men converged on the Lederman Shul in Bnei Brak on the first night of Rosh Hashanah to offer the customary greeting of shanah tovah to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. The line started before Maariv, as people tried to bypass the two-hour wait by approaching him before davening.

One year, the greetings took over four hours, as hundreds of people of all ages filed by Rav Chaim in the men’s section of the shul. One year, after hundreds had passed by to wish him a good year, Rav Chaim told the rebbetzin, “With Hashem’s help, we will have a very good year, since so many Yidden gave us a berachah for a shanah tovah!”

After giving berachos, Rav Chaim hurried to eat the Rosh Hashanah meal before midnight, as he was planning to wake up at his regular time to follow his chovos schedule of learning before sunrise. During the meal, one of the grandchildren asked him, “If you are going to get up so early tomorrow morning, how can you wish shanah tovah to so many people in one night?”

Rav Chaim quickly replied, “If so many Yidden come to wish us the berachah of a good year, how can we not stand there and get so many berachos?”

*Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5784 edition of the At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – Rav Chaim by Rabbi Naftali Weinberger.*

**The Awesome**

**Power of the Day**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**



**Rabbi Menachem Stein**

On Rosh Hashanah, we read the parashah relating to Sarah Imeinu having a child and the haftarah of Channah having a child. Chazal tell us (Yevamos 64b) that Sarah was an Ailonis, which means it was not physically possible for her to conceive. Chazal also tell us (ibid. 64a) that one of the reasons Hashem decreed that Sarah be barren was because He loves listening to the prayers of tzaddikim.

Rabbi Menachem Stein asked: It says elsewhere that we are not supposed to pray for Hashem to change nature and perform open miracles, so how could it be that Hashem wanted Sarah to pray for a child if it would have entailed an open miracle for her to conceive?

**Physical Change Can Happen on Rosh Hashanah**

Rabbi Stein explained that on Rosh Hashanah, everything is created anew. For a physical change to happen on Rosh Hashanah, it is not a miracle. It is in the nature of the day. In fact, Sarah became capable of having children on the day of Rosh Hashanah. What was true last year does not have to be so this year. Everything is a new creation, and it gives us an opportunity to be zocheh to great blessings.

Rabbi Stein told of a girl—we’ll call her Ilana—whom he and his wife occasionally hired as a babysitter. One day, Ilana told Mrs. Stein that she did not want to go home after the job was finished. The Steins investigated and found out that she came from a broken home where conditions were not ideal.

With her parents’ permission, she began to spend her days with the Steins, just going home to sleep. Ilana eventually married an outstanding Torah student and moved to another city. Eight years passed, but she did not have children. She consulted with top specialists in America, who told her that her chances of having a baby were very slim. Toward the end of Elul one year, she contacted the Stein family, asking if she and her husband could come to them for Rosh Hashanah. She remembered praying at Yeshivat Ohr Yisrael in Petach Tikvah in her youth and said that she never found another minyan since for the Yamim Nora’im that was as spiritually elevating as that one.

**Remained Focuses Throughout the Entire Tefillah**

The Steins happily welcomed the couple. For the entire two-day Yom Tov, Ilana did not engage in mundane talk, only in Tehillim, Torah, or tefillah. She had heard an inspiring speech about how Rosh Hashanah can change anything and was determined to do whatever she could to merit having a baby. She went to shul early in the morning on Rosh Hashanah and remained focused throughout the entire tefillah.

When the baal korei read from the haftarah about Elkanah asking Channah why she was crying— wasn’t he better to her than ten sons?—Ilana burst into loud and piercing sobs. The baal korei could not continue reading. Ilana’s cries kept getting stronger and she could not hold them back.

The congregants stood there in trepidation, somberly contemplating what the day of Rosh Hashanah truly meant. After a pause of over five minutes, the haftarah reading resumed and the prayers continued. The rest of the tefillah that day was the best it ever was in that yeshivah. Everyone was inspired by Ilana’s tears.

**Tears on Rosh Hashanah that**

**Seemed to Have Pierced the Heavens**

The students asked the rabbi afterward about that episode. Who had been crying in such a heart-rending manner? He explained that it was a woman who wanted a child, just like Channah. Nine months later, Rabbi Stein received a phone call from Ilana, informing him of the upcoming bris milah for her baby. Today, baruch Hashem, she has eight children. Her emotion and tears on Rosh Hashanah seemed to have pierced the Heavens and recreated her into a woman who can have children.

Rabbi Stein concluded by saying that another woman, who heard him recounting this story on Kol Halashon, was so inspired by it that she told her niece to listen. That same year, she invited her niece to come pray with her on Rosh Hashanah in Yeshivat Kol Torah in Bayit Vegan. Her niece had been married for thirteen years without having children.

When the baal korei reached the part of Elkanah asking Channah why she was crying, she motioned to her niece: This is the time you should pour out your heart to Hashem! And, indeed, that year she was blessed with a baby of her own.

Rosh Hashanah contains tremendous power. We should use the day properly in all aspects, especially in tefillah. We should accept Hashem’s sovereignty as we are supposed to, we should accept upon ourselves to improve our ways, and, be’ezras Hashem, we should all be inscribed in the Sefer HaChaim.

*Reprinted from the Rosh Hashanah 5784 edition of the At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – Living Emunah on Shidduchim by Rabbi David Ashear.*

**An “Unusual” Rosh Hashanah Concert in Spain**

           In Spain of August 1492, all Jews were ordered to leave the Spanish kingdom. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella had recently conquered all of Spain and sought to make their new kingdom an entirely Christian nation. No Jews could remain. Thousands of Jews fled, and within days, the Jewish community of Spain, which had flourished for hundreds of years, had ended.

           However, not all of Spain’s Jews had fled. It was possible to remain in Spain, but every Jew had to publicly convert to Christianity and renounce all Jewish observance. Many Jews lived outwardly as goyim in public, but held on to their Jewish observance in secret.

**Whispering the Words of the Kiddush**

           On Friday nights, these secret Jews would shutter their windows so neighbors wouldn’t see them light Shabbos candles. They would bake their challah in hiding, and would whisper the words of the Kiddush. They knew their lives were at stake if they were ever discovered. The Spanish Inquisition had begun years before, and Jews were frequently killed when their secret Jewish lifestyles became known.

           Even though these Jews had apparently embraced Christianity, the secret Jews of Spain were never trusted by the Spaniards. They called these Jews “Marranos”, a disparaging term that means “pigs”, and many looked for any sign of Jewish practice in order to turn them over to the Inquisition.

           There was a large group of these secret Jews in the city of Barcelona who clung to their ancient traditions. One person, a prominent Jew named Don Fernando Aguilar, was the conductor of the Royal Orchestra in that city, and he enjoyed great wealth and prestige. He privately kept all the mitzvos he could. When he would come home each night, he kissed a Mezuzah that he kept hidden in his floorboards. He was careful to eat only Kosher food and observe the Jewish holidays.

**A Nearly Impossible Mitzvah to Observe**

           Some Mitzvos, however, were nearly impossible to observe, like hearing the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Blowing a Shofar out loud would lead to an immediate arrest, and death. After five long years of living this secret life, Don Aguilar saw an opportunity. In 1497, he made a public announcement, that on Sunday, the 5th of September, he would personally lead the Royal Orchestra of Barcelona in a brand- new concert of his own composition, and the piece he had written was unlike anything ever heard in Spain before.

           He declared that it was going to be a musical celebration of different people and cultures from around the world, featuring every instrument ever invented from across the globe, no matter how far away. The only thing he didn’t announce was that it was also the first day of Rosh Hashanah. He generated much excitement for his concert, and on the day of the performance, the orchestra hall was filled with an over-flow crowd.

**An Array of Interesting Music from a Wide Range of Instruments**

           Also, in attendance were those “Marranos”, but nobody seemed suspicious of them. As the concert began, Don Fernando Aguilar was true to his word, the audience heard interesting music from a wide range of instruments. There were bells and horns, stringed instruments and an array of different drums.

           Then, in the middle of the concert, a musician with the orchestra who was rumored by many to be a secret Jew took the stage. He was holding an unusual instrument: a ram’s horn. The musician put it to his lips, and began to blow. He blew a Tekiah, a Shevarim, and a Teruah. Each note of the Rosh Hashanah Shofar service rang out throughout the hall, one hundred notes in all.

                       Most of the audience appreciated it as a skillful performance of an unfamiliar instrument, but to the secret Jews in the audience, Don Aguilar’s “music” gave them their first chance in years to fulfill the mitzvah of hearing the Shofar! (The Book of Our Heritage, Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov)

*Reprinted from the Parashat Nisabim-Vayelech 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*