**Kol Simcha Torah Gazette**

**For parsha yisro 5785**

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**The Two-Hour Drive Each Friday to Help One**

**Girl Keep Shabbos**



***Rabbi Chaim Yaffe obm (inset) circa 1970s.***

Rabbi Shlomo Yaffe shares a letter he received from "Rochel," about his parents Rabbi Chaim Yaffe obm and his wife Rochel, then Lubavitcher Shluchim (emissaries) in Portland, Maine, and shares how meeting them changed her life.

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**Shlomo**,

Here’s a story you may or may not remember, but one I’ll never forget. Flashback to Summer 1971. I had only secured permission from my parents to take my first adventure to Israel to explore my spiritual roots the year before by promising to use the return portion of my ticket and come home, no matter what, at least for the summer.

After a year volunteering on a religious kibbutz, I thought I could maintain my budding commitment to keeping kosher and Shabbat while being a camp counselor in Fryeberg, Maine. But sadly, in a very short while, I found out how wrong I was, and how strongly the assimilation current pulled me back into Jewish oblivion.

With the second Saturday approaching, I was miserable. As the beloved counselor of the oldest bunk of 14 teenagers, they quickly understood something was wrong with me. They probed hard and found out that, somewhat like E.T., I needed desperately to “phone home”—to connect with Shabbat.

Before I knew it, we had somehow hatched a plan that convinced the bewildered camp management that experiencing a Shabbat morning service in Portland, a two-hour drive away, would be a very cool field trip for my teens. I hurriedly looked in the tattered yellow pages in the camp office and scribbled down the address of a synagogue listed as “Orthodox” that looked promising. My sympathetic non-Jewish co-counselor Linda signed out the camp van, and we were on our way.

We clambered out of the van and I was frozen in place by cold feet. Then I saw you – or rather you saw us. We must have been a strange-looking bunch approaching the synagogue nervously. You ran to get your father, who appeared like a holy apparition engulfed in his tallit. In seconds he cleared out the women’s section and you passed out prayer books. My campers were spellbound, and I was “home.”

When synagogue services concluded, your father convinced us to come home with you for lunch, and off we went. As we approached your house, I’ll never forget your excitement as you ran up the driveway ahead of us calling out, “Mommy, look what Tatty [Daddy] brought home!!!” The pride in your voice and delight at being the one to tell the big news was immeasurable.

I, however, was horrified at imposing on your family with a crowd of unexpected guests, but quickly realized that there was no need. We were greeted like long-lost friends, and within minutes card tables were set up, places were set, and we settled in like part of the family.

After lunch, presumably around 3pm, my girls had had enough, and were ready to head back to camp. There was an uncomfortable impasse, since your family wanted us to stay until nightfall, many hours later.

As I remember it, you swung into action, and saved the day. You begged your father for Baal Shem Tov stories, told us we couldn’t possibly miss this, and soon we were all settled on the couch, spilling onto the floor, and enjoying your animated accompaniment to your father’s stories that kept the entire group happy and engaged until havdalah!

Then as we were finally about to leave, there was that moment that changed my destiny. Your father asked me if I wanted to keep Shabbat. I said, “Well sure, but….” and gave several reasons why I couldn’t possibly make it to Portland every week. He asked me again, and again I gave more reasons why regretfully I couldn’t come back. After the third round, he smiled reassuringly and told me he would pick me up the following Friday from camp to spend Shabbat with your family.

You ignited in me the desire to commit to a Torah life so that one day I could have a son like you. And the whole summer, every Friday, and again Saturday night, you and your father trekked two hours each way to pick me up and take me back to camp in Fryeberg. One week I called to say that I was in the camp infirmary with a high fever and couldn’t come – but your mother laughed it off and assured me that Shabbat was just what I needed, and to be ready as usual for my pick-up.

What I remember most from the entire experience was being inspired by you, a young boy who was an energetic sidekick of his father, committed together to a mission to bring Jews home, and make the world a better place.

You ignited in me the desire to commit to a Torah life so that one day I could hope to have a son like you. And that vision of you running joyously up the driveway, leading the way, has come to me so many times along the journey. Pixie became Rochel, and lives the dream in Jerusalem with two generations of Torah-committed children and grandchildren continuing our mission.

Now as I gather for Shabbat in New York with my big, beautiful, blessed family here, my heart is full of gratitude, as always, to you and your family.

I’m telling you this story because I think it’s valuable for those devoting their lives to helping all of us to sometimes hear “the end of a story”… my story, which happened in some ways because of your love for great stories, back on that Shabbat afternoon.

I’m here in New York for the week and would love to connect with your parents so that I may, finally, thank them in person.

In the meantime, sending you and your family boundless blessings for health, happiness, and immeasurable success in all your endeavors.

**Rochel**

*Reprinted from the Chabad.Org website.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Preparing for Parnasa**

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**QUESTA:** How should the yeshivos today prepare their students to earn a living in today’s harsh economy?

**ANSWER:** That’s a very good question because many times there are boys who are not going to become outstanding in the field of teaching Torah; and therefore, it’s important for parents to think about the future of their children because the *gemara* says everybody must teach their son an *umnus*, a trade. Now, if I would talk about that in a plain way many people will criticize me because today it’s the style not to think about that at all.

Of course, it’s very useful for young people after they’re married to continue a *yeshiva* career.  If he can remain in *yeshiva* at least one year after marriage, it transforms his family into a *kollel* family; and even though later he goes into *parnasa*, it makes a big difference if he and his wife first lived a *kollel* life at least for a year.  If they have enough money to continue longer, *mah tov umah naim.*

However, eventually, every person should look for a *parnasa*.  Not *toraso umnuso* unless he is capable of being chosen, of being prepared, for some career in Torah.  If he can be a *melamed*, why not?  If he can be a *rosh yeshivah*, why not?  If he can go into *rabbanus*, yes.

There are fields like *hashgachah*.  He can be a *mashgiach*, yes, or other related forms of *parnasa* in *ruchniyus*. But there are some people who are not built for that and therefore they must make up their minds when the time comes they must go into *parnasa*. You must support your family! There’s no such thing as being a loafer who hangs around the *batei medrashim* and you’re not fit to do anything.  You’re not a *melamed*.  You’re not a *rosh yeshivah*.  Nothing at all.  And many times, these people first of all don’t support their families and they cause trouble in *shalom bayis*, and many times they become ill *chas v’shalom* because of unhappiness, and therefore it’s a misfortune to live a life where it’s not *mesudar* with a regular program of *parnasa*.

Now there are all kinds of *parnasas*.  I’m not going to tell you what to do; there are all kinds of *parnasas* to choose.  But the main point is everybody must make up his mind – if he’s not going to be a *chovesh beis hamedrash*, a person who is successfully learning, then he should choose some *parnasa*.

There are plenty of things to do.  This man is in the carpet-laying business.  This man is a plumber.  This man is a painter. Another man opens a grocery store. There is no end of *parnasa*.  Take the yellow telephone book and read it and see all the different kinds of professions and trades available and learn some kind of *parnasa*.  It’s very important not to loaf and not to be a hopeless person and to waste your life in just being a disappointment to yourself and to your family.

Now, some people are capable of learning all their lives, being *kollel* people all their lives.  However, on one condition.  The condition is that their wives are satisfied with that kind of a life.  Otherwise, he should remember he promised in the *kesubah*.  He promised to support his wife *kehilchos guvrin yehudain*.  He has to support his wife.  Your wife will have children.  You have to take care of the children.  And therefore, he has to support his family.  And if he sits and learns in the *kollel* and his wife will be very unhappy then he’s a failure and not fulfilling his promise.

If his wife is willing to work all her life or he has other means of support, why not?  Many people learned all their lives successfully because they had wives who were dedicated to that.  Otherwise, *parnasa* is a very big *mitzvah*, a big *chiyuv*, and I have seen cases where they neglected this principle and they lived lives of unhappiness as a result.

What kind of *parnasa* I can’t tell you.  How should the *yeshivos* prepare their students?  I think that if boys in the high school will at least get a high school diploma, they’ll know enough later in life to be able to do many things.  In case you are a very good *ben Torah* and you wanted to learn instead of going to *limudei chol* – that happens too today.  Some don’t go to high school at all.  That’s because they have good heads.  They’re succeeding in learning.  But suppose you’re not such a *metzuyan*?  I think it’s better to finish high school in the *yeshiva* and be prepared to go out in the world and take some kind of a job.  There are plenty of jobs available if a person makes up his mind he wants *parnasa*.

*Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor, - (based on a Thursday night tape November 1991)*

**The Superiority of the Jewish Women at the Giving of the Torah**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



As we read in this week's Torah portion, Yitro, just prior to the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai G-d commanded Moses: "Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob, and tell to the Children of Israel." The Midrash explains that the "House of Jacob" refers to the Jewish women. Moreover, the command to "tell" the men implies harsh speech, whereas the command to "say" to the women connotes a gentler manner of imparting information.

This is not the only difference in the way Moses was commanded to transmit the Torah to the women and to the men. In fact, Moses was instructed to communicate the "general principles" to the women, whereas the men were to receive the "laws in detail."

At first glance, this seems to imply a diminution of the value of Jewish women, as if the assumption is that they will not understand the minutiae of Jewish law. However, an in-depth analysis of the Midrash reveals something quite different:

"General principles" does not mean simple or nominal matters. On the contrary, it implies essential fundamentals and rules. In other words, G-d commanded Moses to transmit to the Jewish women the basic foundations of the Torah, from which all the smaller details he was to convey to the men are derived.

"General principles" is thus synonymous with the Torah's very essence. Similarly, at the giving of the Ten Commandments, the first two contained the "general principles" of the other eight. ("I am the L-rd your G-d" is the source of the Torah's 248 positive commandments; "You shall not have any other gods" is the source of its 365 prohibitions.)

Seen from this perspective, the Jewish women received the quintessence of the Torah, whereas the men "only" received its laws and ordinances, which obviously represent a lower level. The Torah is thus emphasizing a certain advantage women have over men.

In truth, the qualities of simple faith and awe of G-d are more openly revealed and manifested in women. G-d created women in such a way that their intellect does not override or control their personalities - who they really are - nor can it weaken their basic faith in G-d. Women are therefore more closely connected to the Torah's essence, which is why being Jewish is determined by the mother and not the father. (A person whose mother is Jewish is Jewish; a person whose mother is not Jewish is not Jewish, even if his father is.)

This also relates to the Final Redemption: In the same way the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous Jewish women, so too will Moshiach come in the merit of the righteous women of our generation, may it happen immediately.

*Reprinted from Parshat Beshalach 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitcher Youth Organization. Adapted from Volume 31 of Likutei Sichot*

**Thoughts that Count For Our Parsha**

*The people come to me to inquire of G-d. When they have a matter it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his fellow; and I make them know the statutes of G-d* (Ex. 18:15-16)

Every Jewish leader of his generation fulfills three functions: He must pray on behalf of every individual Jew ("the people come to me to inquire of G-d"); resolve monetary disputes and disagreements ("judge between a man and his fellow"); and teach Torah to the Jewish people ("make them know the statutes of G-d"). (Nachmanides)

*Reprinted from Parshat Beshalach 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Yitro 5785**

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At the revelation at Sinai the L-rd set the goal for the Jewish people – “to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These noble goals, like all great ideas and lofty ideals, require definition. What is meant by a kingdom of priests?  In Jewish life the priests, the descendants of Aharon, were people who were freed from the daily mundane chores of life and were supported by the masses of Israel who sustained them physically and financially.

Now if the entire nation was to be a kingdom of priests, in those terms of support and life, it obviously was an impossibility to maintain such a kingdom. Therefore, the idea of the kingdom of priests must mean a broader reality. It is the challenge of being a kingdom of teachers of others – “for the lips of the priest shall guard knowledge and Torah will be asked to be taught from his mouth.”

We are all teachers by example if not by profession. How we act influences our children, our neighbors, our customers and our coworkers. And a priest in the service of the Jewish people was someone who served the public and private needs of Jews. He was someone who was on call to answer the needs of the community, whether in the required Temple service or in the private endeavors meant to enhance the status of the community or of help to other individuals. The priest was the social worker, the peace maker, the cement that binds a community together and gives it its necessary sense of unity and cohesion. Every Jew is obligated to attempt to be such a priest.

A holy nation is also a phrase that requires definition and detail. Holiness in its Hebrew root means dedication, loyalty and an ability to break down the barriers of society that oftentimes prevent us from achieving spiritual satisfaction and nobility of purpose. A holy nation must therefore mean a nation that is able to retain its unique identity. It cannot be swallowed up by the prevailing and ever-changing majority cultures that will always surround it.

Holiness requires the ability to care for everyone while remaining apart from everyone at one and the same time. Holiness refers to the body and not just to the soul and the spirit. It speaks to discipline and order, self-control and resisting impulse. The great challenge here is to instill these virtues and traits of character and behavior in an entire nation and not only in a few special chosen, extraordinary individuals.

These goals of probity and correct behavior are to be the national goals of the Jewish people and the hallmark of its society. Other societies look for greatness and morality from the few. Not so the society of the Jewish people, where these demands and goals are laid upon all who are part of the household of Israel.

A holy nation is not restricted to being so only in the house of worship and study. It is to be a holy nation in every walk of life, at home and in the marketplace, in the halls of government - and certainly in its treatment of others. That is the blueprint of Sinai that was set before us millennia ago and still binds us to this very day.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

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*The hard matter they brought to Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves* (Ex. 14:26)

In the Jewish system of law, "the law of a penny is the same as one hundred." The only criterion is whether a case is straightforward or complicated, the more complicated ones requiring the greater and more skillful Torah sages. (Rabbi Chaim Berlin)

*Reprinted from Parshat Beshalach 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim*

**Courage in Captivity: Agam Berger’s Faith in Gaza**

**By Yehudis Litvak**



*After being held captive in Gaza for 482 days, Agam Berger is inspiring the nation with her courage and strength of spirit.*

When 20-year-old Agam Berger, one of the young women recently released by Hamas in the hostage deal, was picked up by the Israeli military helicopter, she was handed a white board and offered to write a message to everyone, in Israel and beyond, watching and waiting for her reunion with her family. Agam’s message began with, “I chose the path of faith, and in the path of faith I returned.”

From an early age, Agam has been living a life filled with purpose. A talented violinist, Agam has been playing violin from age 8. She studied in a music program in her hometown of Holon. She also volunteered with children with special needs and learning difficulties. Agam has a twin sister, a younger sister, and a younger brother.

When Agam was 16, she created a board with newspaper clippings with words and phrases that were especially meaningful to her. Among the phrases are “The story of my life is faith” and “Family is a gift.” Agam has always felt strongly connected to her religion, to her roots, and to her family.

After high school, Agam attended a premilitary academy, hoping to contribute to Israel’s security. Upon graduation, she was assigned the position of an IDF lookout.

Agam’s mother, Meirav, shared that Agam was disappointed with her assignment. “She wanted to be a basic training instructor and tried to change her assignment without success. She decided that if this was her role, she would do it to the best of her ability and aim for command and officer positions."

Like everything in her life, Agam saw her assignment as her mission. When her placement was changed last minute from the Kerem Shalom base to the Nahal Oz base, she was disappointed once again.

Speaking to her mother about the change, Agam asked, “Mom, is this for the best?”

Her mother reassured her, telling her, “Wherever you are, that's where your destiny is.”

They’re shooting at us, there are terrorists, everyone is crying, but I'm not afraid.

Agam accepted her destiny. And that’s how she found herself at the Nachal Oz army base shortly before October 7th, 2023.

On the morning of October 7th, Hamas terrorists infiltrated the Nachal Oz army base, murdered many soldiers, and took Agam hostage. In her last phone conversation with her family before she was taken hostage, Agam said, “They’re shooting at us, there are terrorists, everyone is crying, but I'm not afraid.”

**Birthday Greetings from Captivity**

At first, Agam was held together with the 17-year-old Agam Goldstein-Almog. On November 26th, 2023, Agam Goldstein-Almog was released in a hostage deal. On the way to the IDF helicopter, Agam Goldstein-Almog requested to make a phone call. She called Shlomi Berger, Agam Berger’s father.

That day was Shlomi’s birthday. Agam Goldstein-Almog told Shlomi that his daughter Agam had asked her to call him and wish him a happy birthday. Shlomi was moved to tears by the phone call and the fact that his daughter managed to send him a birthday greeting from captivity.

Agam Goldstein-Almog reassured Shlomi that though being in captivity was hard, Agam Berger was not only doing okay but was a source of strength and support to other hostages.

“She braided all the girls’ hair, I’m still wearing the braids she made for me,” she said.

Later, Agam Berger was moved and held together with four other female IDF lookouts, also kidnapped from Nachal Oz. She continued encouraging the other captives and braiding their hair. The braids became a symbol of her strength when the four young women were released before Agam, their hair beautifully braided.

Shabbat in Captivity

Agam grew up in a traditional Jewish family. Though they weren’t strictly Shabbat observant, Jewish traditions were important to them.

After Agam’s grandmother passed away in January 2023, Agam’s mother Meirav decided to observe Shabbat in memory of her mother. The rest of the family respected her undertaking but did not participate.

*****Agam with her parents***

When Agam Goldstein-Almog called Agam’s father Shlomi on his birthday, she also told him that Agam was observing Shabbat in captivity. The terrorists forced the young women they held captive to cook for them. Agam cooked for the terrorists the rest of the week, but on Shabbat, she refused to light a fire. The terrorists threatened her, but she held firm.

The Berger family was moved and felt proud of Agam.

After Agam’s return, more information came out about her Jewish observance in captivity. Agam made a special effort to keep kosher. She refused to eat meat given to the hostages, even though food was sparse in captivity.

Agam also fasted on Tisha B’Av, the fast day commemorating the destruction of two temples in Jerusalem.

In captivity, Agam prayed a lot. She wished she had a *siddur*, a traditional prayer book, but it was not something easily found in Gaza. Agam even asked one of the terrorists who held her if they had a *siddur*. The terrorist laughed at her. Undeterred, Agam prayed in her own words, asking G-d to send her a *siddur*.

Two days later, that same terrorist brought Agam a siddur. “Your G-d loves you,” he told her. “We found this in Khan Yunis.”

The *siddur* had likely been left behind by an IDF soldier.

**The Return**

As the hostage deal took effect, Hamas insisted on releasing the hostages on Shabbat, knowing full well the significance of Shabbat for Jews. Due to the life-threatening nature of the situation, Israel agreed to Hamas’s terms.

*****Agam entering Israel upon her return from Gaza***

When Agam’s mother Meirav found out that her daughter might be released on Shabbat, she requested that everyone involved in Agam’s return to minimize violation of Shabbat as much as possible.

Meirav wrote, “From you I ask, those who embrace us and who have gone this entire journey with us, and who have the great merit of bringing our children home - please do not desecrate Shabbat. Do not photograph, do not be photographed, and wait for Shabbat to end. At the conclusion of Shabbat, we will come out, and there will be time, a lot of time, to take photographs and be photographed."

In the end Agam was released on a Thursday, without any Shabbat violation whatsoever.

**Agam’s Emotional Reunion with Her Family**

The whole country, as well as Israel’s supporters outside of Israel, watched Agam’s emotional reunion with her family. Her mother, Meirav, told Agam, “We are here, we will never leave you, forever. A promise from your mother."

“How are you so tall? You’re as tall as Dad!” Agam exclaimed when she saw her younger brother, who had celebrated his bar mitzvah while she was in captivity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEOLX2M-suE>

Agam was also reunited with the four IDF lookouts with whom she was held together in captivity. The young women, who had been released the week before, waited for Agam in the hospital, prepared welcome signs for her, and received her with a warm embrace.

Four days after her release, Agam attended her younger sister Bar’s IDF ceremony celebrating the completion of a course. Agam was honored with placing a purple aiguillette on her sister’s shoulder. Both sisters had tears in their eyes as Agam said, “I’m proud of you![1](file:///C:\\Users\\HERSHS~1\\AppData\\Local\\Temp\\lu1616v3ayqj.tmp\\lu1616v3ayqn.tmp\\agam%20berger.htm" \l "sdfootnote1sym)”

**Stating Her Desire to Return to IDF Service**

Less than a week after their release, Agam and the four other IDF lookouts, Liri Albag, Karina Ariev, Daniella Gilboa, and Naama Levy stated that they wanted to return to IDF service. Their families were surprised yet proud.

The IDF responded that it was too early for the young women to return. “This is their time to recover,” they said[2](file:///C:\\Users\\HERSHS~1\\AppData\\Local\\Temp\\lu1616v3ayqj.tmp\\lu1616v3ayqn.tmp\\agam%20berger.htm" \l "sdfootnote2sym).

There is no doubt that Agam and her friends will make significant contributions to the State of Israel and to the Jewish people in the future. They have already inspired many people throughout the world.

[1](file:///C:\\Users\\HERSHS~1\\AppData\\Local\\Temp\\lu1616v3ayqj.tmp\\lu1616v3ayqn.tmp\\agam%20berger.htm" \l "sdfootnote1anc) Emanuel Fabian. Days after release from Gaza, Agam Berger attends IDF ceremony for her sister Bar. The Times of Israel, February 3, 2025. Available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/days-after-release-from-gaza-agam-berger-attends-idf-ceremony-for-her-sister-bar/>, accessed on February 6, 2025.

[2](file:///C:\\Users\\HERSHS~1\\AppData\\Local\\Temp\\lu1616v3ayqj.tmp\\lu1616v3ayqn.tmp\\agam%20berger.htm" \l "sdfootnote2anc) Freed IDF lookouts ask to resume their army service. Israel National News, February 5, 2025. Available at <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/403424>, accessed on February 6, 2025.

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