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**The Well and the Weasel**

**By Daniel Keren**

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**Rabbi Zev Smith**

One of the featured speakers in last month’s Presidents’ Day Hakhel Yarchei Kallah Event was Rabbi Zev Smith, internationally renowned maggid shiur. He spoke on the topic of “You Are in Good Hands: Practical and Real Guidance in Daily Living and Real-Life Situations.”

 Rabbi Smith began with a story brought down in Mesechta Tainus about a young girl who fell into a pit in the well and cried out for help. A boy came and offered to pull her out, but only if she would agree to marry her. She agreed to his terms. However, he asked “How will I know that after I save you, you won’t change your mind and not marry me.” There was a weasel. So, the boy and the girl agreed that the well and weasel would serve as the witnesses to her agreement to marry him. He then rescued her and they went to their separate homes.

**A Promise Forgotten**

 When he became old enough to get married, he had completely forgot about the time he had saved the girl and had proposed to marry to marry her. Instead, he then married another lady and they had two children. While the children were still young, horrific catastrophes occurred. One child fell into a well and drowned. And the second child was bitten by a weasel and also died.

The mother was shaken up by these tragedies and she asked her husband if there was anything in his past life to explain what happened. He started thinking about his past and suddenly remembered about his previous promise to marry another girl whom he had forgotten about and that their commitment was witnessed by the well and the weasel. The wife told her husband that they had to get divorced and he had to marry that first girl. That story, Rabbi Smith said is a perfect example of Emunah, faith by his first wife.

**Refused to Give Even the Appearance**

**of Being Disloyal to Hashem**

 Rabbi Smith spoke of the story of Chana and her seven sons who gave up their lives rather than bow down to the goyish ruler who considered himself to be a divinity. All seven sons refused to bow down and were killed. When it came to the last and the youngest of the sons, the ruler felt a tinge of compassion and offered him an out, saying that he would drop his keys and all the boy had to do was bend down to pick it up and return it to the ruler. Everyone would think that he was worshipping the goyish ruler but they would know that it wasn’t true. Nevertheless, the boy refused to go along with the ruse and gave up his life for kiddush Hashem rather than give even a small impression that he was not faithful to the G-d of Israel.

**The Foundation of Emunah**

**Even When Life is Difficult**

 That, Rabbi Smith, said is the yesod, foundation of Emunah that even when things are difficult, the sons had complete faith in Hashem and that things will be much better later on in our lives or in Olam Habah.

 Rabbi Smith recalled how towards the end of his life Rav Aharon Kotler was suffering terribly from the machla. His wife tried to comort him that things will get better. He replied “nein, nein (no, no) the Abishter is already helping me even now.”

 Teva (nature) has the same gematria as Elokim (86). When we observe elements of nature such as lightning and thunder, the Chofetz Chaim would say, “Oy! Oy! My Tatte bi’shomayim is calling me…”

 The Chazon Ish besides being the Sar Hatorah was also the Sar Haemunah. From childhood he suffered from painful illnesses. He was childless and his wife suffered from serious emotional illnesses. His studying of Torah in which he excelled was done with great difficulty. But, the Chazon Ish was able to overcome his significant yissurim (sufferings) in order to with his great Emunah to study and teach Torah with great success.

 When yeshivas are overwhelmed with talmidim and you are trying to get your child in a particular school that is simply not taking any new applicants, such a challenge to a parent is to have complete Emunah that every challenge is coming from Hashem and one should not be envious of others whose children have been accepted into that school. This also, Rabbi Smith, said also applies to other important (and even unimportant) desires in his life like trying to get a particular job or pursuing a certain shidduch.

**Today One Can Sense that the Geulah is Coming**

 A person has to realize that whatever happens in one’s life is the ratzon (desire) of Hashem. When one is living today when one can sense that the geulah is coming. We are living in very challenging times. What should one do in such times? One should grab the opportunity to increase in our study of Torah and grab precious opportunities to do chesed.

 Rav Avrohom Pam told his students that we are living in an era of Erev Shabbos when the geulah is rapidly approaching. We have to grasp this unique opportunity by increasing our study of Torah and pursuing chesed. Erev Geulah demands a different response to challenging difficulties. If we don’t think about this and act accordingly, we will be less than the animals.

 We live in a world of confusion and a world that acts as though everything is hefker. We have to understand that it is Hashem who is running a world of purpose and that requires us to strengthen our Emunah and act appropriately.

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*Every one with a willing heart brought earrings and nose rings, and rings, and bracelets, every article of gold* (Ex. 35:22)

Earrings: Jewish parents must listen to the Torah's directives concerning the Jewish education of their children. They should also overhear their children's conversations with their friends, in order to guide them properly. Nose rings: Parents should develop a keen sense of "smell" to make sure their children's playmates are appropriate. Rings: Parents must be able to "point" their children in the right direction. Bracelets: In addition to explaining things in a pleasant manner, parents must also stand firm (symbolized by the arm) when it comes to Jewish education. The child should always feel that this is his parents' priority. (Likutei Diburim)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Vayakhel 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Hashem’s Endless Miracles**

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**QUESTION:** What lesson can we learn from the Islamic fundamentalists terrorists that were caught right before they wanted to blow up tunnels in New York City?

**ANSWER:** Well, the fact they were caught before they did harm we have to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for that. Certainly.

But we have to understand from this story that there are many *reshaim* that are planning all kinds of wicked things that we don’t know about. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu is constantly saving us in ways of which we are unaware. You have to know that. Very many things have happened to save us from things which we’re not aware of. And although we don’t have the slightest inkling that we were in danger, but we have to know that many times we are in very extreme *sakanos* and Hakadosh Baruch Hu has rescued us.

I’ll give a *mashal*. I always quote the same *mashal*. The blood vessels are very narrow, especially in the brain. Some are so narrow that the blood corpuscles can pass through only one by one; they’re so narrow.

Now you know the blood is viscous; it’s a sticky fluid. And it’s very easy for it to get stuck there. If it would get stuck there would be *chalilah* a stroke. A stroke in the brain! And still the blood vessels continue to march. The corpuscles march through the tiniest blood vessels in the brain and we rarely, rarely ever get a stroke. Sometimes one of the corpuscles gets stuck. That man is in trouble now! It’s a stroke *chas veshalom*. Suddenly Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends along the next corpuscle and it gives it a push and it’s unclogged! A *neis*!

We have to know Hakadosh Baruch Hu is doing miracles without our knowing it. Wonders are taking place within us. We’re being saved every day. על נפלאותיך שבכל יום עמנו ועל ניסך שבכל עת. Hashem is doing miracles all the time. We’re being saved. And it’s important for us to realize that.

So, this story with the terrorists is just a *mashal*. Just like there we see that they planned to do something but Hashem frustrated their evil intentions, there are many instances where things are taking place that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is constantly rescuing us from perils.

TAPE # 927 (August 1993)

*Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor, - (based on a Thursday night tape #927 from August 1993.)*

**Thoughts that Count for Our Parsha**

*And everyone who is wise-hearted among you shall come, and do all that G-d has commanded* (Ex. 35:10)

Commenting on this verse, the Vilna Gaon would quote the Book of Proverbs: "The wise in heart will heed commandments, but a prattling fool will come to ruin." The wise man does a mitzva as soon as it presents itself, before any obstacles can arise. The "prattling fool" discusses it endlessly and puts it off, until it remains undone...

*And Betzalel made the ark* (Ex. 37:1)

Of all the components of the Sanctuary, why is Betzalel's name associated specifically with the ark? At different times in history, all of the other vessels were also fashioned by other people (i.e., for the First and Second Holy Temples; they will also be made for the Third Holy Temple when it is reestablished). However, there has always been only one ark, made by Betzalel. Although hidden away after the destruction, in the future it will be revealed. (Meshech Chochma)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Vayakhel 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim.*

**The Purpose of a Jew’s Fire**

**or Spiritual Service to G-d**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



There are 39 categories of "work" prohibited on Shabbat, derived from the 39 different types of labor that were required to build the Sanctuary. As every Jew is enjoined to erect a "Sanctuary" to G-d in the spiritual sense, these laws reveal many important lessons for our Divine service.

**The Requirement that Setting**

**A Fire be for a Distinct Benefit**

As we read in Vayakhel, that setting a fire is one of these prohibited labors, as it states, "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day." The strict definition of "setting a fire" for which a Jew is culpable requires that some sort of benefit be derived from the act: either illumination, heat, or for the purpose of producing ashes. Without the element of benefit, it is not considered "setting a fire." (However, by Rabbinic decree it is forbidden to set any kind of fire or engage in related activities on Shabbat.)

In spiritual terms, this means that "fire," in and of itself, is not considered an actual component of our Divine service unless it produces practical benefit. To explain:

**A Longing to Reunite with its G-dly Source**

"Fire" refers to the innate flame within the Jewish soul, as it states, "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." A Jew is required to kindle and encourage this inner fire, until his whole being is suffused with longing to reunite with its G-dly Source.

In Judaism, however, spiritual elevation is not an end it itself. The objective is not to feel elevated and close to G-d, to the extent that the physical, mundane world becomes unimportant.

On the contrary, the Torah teaches that this is not a true "fire," for although it is pure it is devoid of purpose. In order to build a genuine "Sanctuary," a Jew's fiery love for G-d must result in actual consequences and actions.

**The Purpose of a Jew’s**

**“Fire” is to Produce “Ashes”**

This is reflected in the physical phenomenon of ashes. Ashes are symbolic of the most intense level of corporeality, which is why they remain after other matter is completely burned and consumed. Indeed, the whole purpose of a Jew's "fire," i.e., spiritual arousal, is to produce "ashes" - permeate the very lowest levels of existence with Torah and mitzvot.

The refinement of the physical plane through Torah and mitzvot is the underlying objective of the world's creation. When a Jew utilizes physical objects for the sake of Heaven he attains the most elevated of spiritual heights and fulfills G-d's will, according to the dictum "Action is the main thing."

The service of every individual Jew elevating his own corner of the world will in turn lead to the ultimate elevation of creation: the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Vayakhel 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitcher Youth Organization. Adapted from, Volume 36 of Likutei Sichot.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Ki Tisa 5785**

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The haftorah for this week’s parsha describes the efforts of the great King Shlomo in the construction of the First Temple. King Shlomo himself is a great and tragic figure. The attitude of the Talmud towards him is an ambivalent one.

On one hand, he is the builder of the Temple, the expander of the kingdom, the builder of great fortresses, and the administrator of twelve districts of his country. He is also the wisest of all men who understands even the sounds of animals and birds, the author of three of the great books of the Bible and someone upon whom the Divine Spirit itself has rested.

And yet on the other hand, the Talmud questions his right to immortality, criticizes his excesses and hubris, condemns his tolerance of the public support of idolatry by his foreign wives and even attributes the rise of Rome and the subsequent destruction of the Second Temple to his marrying the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Jewish legend has him driven off of his throne by a demon and having to wander in exile for part of his life. All of this naturally dims the luster of his great earlier accomplishment, of building the Temple. The haftorah parallels the parsha in the description of the work in constructing the mishkan and its artifacts, with the same type of artisanship in the creation of the Temple and its artifacts.

Shlomo, so to speak, becomes the second Moshe in supervising the building of the house of G-d. But, in the case of Moshe, the building of the mishkan was only one of his career’s accomplishments and was dwarfed by his major accomplishment of teaching and instilling Torah within the people of Israel. The building of the Temple by Shlomo was the high point of his career. Afterwards he slipped off the mighty pedestal of greatness that he had attained.

The Talmud teaches us that “happy are those whose later years do not shame their earlier accomplishments.” My old law school professor taught us that every lawyer makes a bad mistake at least once in his professional career. He also stated that those who are fortunate enough to make that mistake early in their career are truly blessed because they can recover and advance. Making it late in one’s professional life can be disastrous to one’s reputation and life. The reverse trend may be true of accomplishments.

Early accomplishments can be very dangerous because they set a standard and inspire a sense of self-aggrandizement that will prevent any further achievements. Only gradual ascent and mature considerations, which usually are part and parcel of advancing years, can guarantee that those early achievements become lasting and untarnished by later behavior. The comparison between the two great builders of G-d’s house – Moshe and Shlomo - is illustrative of this truth. Building G-d’s house is a great achievement in itself. Maintaining it and using it for greater spiritual influence and instruction to the people of Israel is an even greater achievement.

**More Thoughts that Count for Our Parsha**

*And Moses saw all the work... and Moses blessed them* (Ex. 39:43)

According to the Midrash, what Moses saw was all the angels that had been created by the Jewish people's fulfillment of G-d's command to bring contributions for the Sanctuary, as it states: "He who does one mitzva acquires one advocate." Moses thus understood that the mitzva had been done with sincerity and pure intent, "and he blessed them" (Birkat Shamayim)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Vayakhel 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim*

**Ellie Zeiler: The Social**

**Media Sensation Who Discovered Her Jewish Soul**

**By Kylie Ora Lobell**



*After attending Aish’s seminary in Jerusalem, she embarked on a journey home to Judaism – and is now running on Aish Ha’am’s World Zionist Congress slate.*

Ellie Zeiler was living the high life. At just 17 years old, the social media sensation – who has millions of followers on [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/%40elliezeiler?lang=en) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/elliezeiler/?hl=en) – was living in Los Angeles, going to exciting events and following her dreams. She was young, popular, and successful and had everything she could have ever wanted… or so she thought.

“I was at a point where I could barely turn off my phone for an hour,” she said. “Every morning, I’d wake up with so much anxiety when I checked my phone. I realized that the connection we think we have on social media is fake. It wasn’t a real connection. My days were revolving around me and my looks and makeup and surface level things.”

Ellie had a gut feeling that she was missing out on meaning – and she knew where to find it.

“I always knew there was something more to life, and it had to do with Judaism,” she said.

The San Diego native grew up in a Reform Jewish home, attended Hebrew school, and loved Israel.

“I was always very proud to be Jewish,” she said. “But I didn’t know the textbook rules of Judaism.”

After October 7, one of Ellie’s friends in LA told Ellie she was going to Israel to learn about Judaism. Something clicked in Ellie’s head.

“I decided I wanted to go too,” she said. “I’ll never forget calling my mom and telling her, ‘Mom, I’m going to learn to be a better person.’ She said, ‘That sounds great.’”

What Ellie discovered at her seminary, Aish’s Aspire program in Jerusalem, was eye-opening.

**A Journey of Meaning**

Ellie, who is now running as a World Zionist Congress delegate on the Aish Ha’Am slate, took in as much learning as she could at Aish.

“They taught me such beautiful concepts that I use daily,” she said. “A lot of them had to do with being a good person and being good to others.”

The content creator and influencer started posting videos and pictures of herself praying from a siddur, visiting the Kotel, and lighting candles for Shabbat. One post read, “My *neshama* (soul) loved 2024.”

Ellie said, “I’m showing people how to live the everyday life of a committed Jew. I’m trying to do more every single day, because there isn’t an on and off switch. I’m showing that you can be modest and fashionable while keeping Shabbat, have an amazing friends’ group, and go out on Saturday night. I show how I’m living a religious life that is much more-grounded and happy, with fewer of the pressures that society is putting on us right now.”

What truly resonated with Ellie was keeping Shabbat for the first time.

“I turned off my phone, and for the first hour, I was anxious,” she said. “I thought, ‘What if my mom calls me?’ Then, I had this feeling that if I’m making God happy, there is no way something is going to go wrong, so I should just surrender to it. It was amazing.”

That Shabbat, she rested, ate, played games, and hung out with friends.

“When I turned my phone back on after Shabbat, I had this sense that it was no longer in control of me,” she said. “Shabbat saved me.”

**Running on the Aish Ha’Am Slate**

Ellie, who won an award from Aish for her advocacy, is now running on their World Zionist Congress slate.

“I am the biggest advocate for Aish,” she said. “Everything they stand for I stand for as well. The slate has such incredible and diverse people of all ages and backgrounds.”

If Ellie is elected, she will use her platform to protect young Jews on college campuses. She recently spoke with Jewish sorority members at the University of Texas at Austin who are experiencing antisemitism, and she wants to help them and others.

“They told me they thought their job was going to be to plan parties and make new friends,” Ellie said. “Now they live three houses down from another house with a ‘Free Palestine’ sign, and they have to hire a security guard because people are threatening them.”

When it comes to advice for her peer group, Ellie advises being proud of their Jewish identity and focusing on bettering themselves, just like she is doing.

“If you are curious about connecting with your religion, go ahead and do it in small steps,” she said. “Try and turn off your phone on Shabbat. Read a Jewish book. Do some mitzvahs. I promise you, once you start following the Torah, your soul will light up. You’ll feel so good.”

*Reprinted from the current website of aish.com*

**A Shabbat on the Battlefield That Saved My Life**

**By**[**Shmuel Gurewicz**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15228/jewish/Gurewicz-Shmuel.htm)

In 1960, I married an Israeli girl and, in 1964, we settled in Israel. I was conscripted to the Israeli army in 1965 and was assigned to the reserve troops.

In May of 1967, the Egyptians amassed troops in the Sinai Desert, close to the Israeli border, and closed the Straits of Tiran to shipping. Israel regarded this as a declaration of war.

While the diplomats were running between Washington, London, Paris and Tel Aviv, the Israeli public was preparing for war, expecting the worst. The Arab leaders were violently inciting their populations with dramatic promises to "push the Jews into the sea."

In Israel, the army started a general mobilization. First, the pilots and armored corps were called up. Then, more and more reserves were called to duty.

The Jewish burial society of Tel Aviv alone dug fifteen thousand graves, ready for civilian casualties. The threat was real. More and more homes were left without parents and siblings. People were frightened, concerned for the future of Israel and their families.

Israel was outnumbered one hundred to one. The Egyptians had German scientists developing missiles and the Russians supplying them with tanks and combat jet planes. The French, who supplied Israel with Mirage fighter planes, declared an embargo on supplies to Israel with the excuse that they do not supply arms to a combat zone.

The threat was real.

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**Shmuel in his uniform on the battlefield**

I was called on May 25th to report for duty the following day, Friday, the 26th. My regiment organized themselves by Sunday, where we were moved to a hill, 500 feet from a Jordanian village called Budrus.

Prior to the next Shabbat, the commanding officer, Victor, announced that ten percent of the soldiers could go home for Shabbat, a twenty-four-hour leave. We were 130 soldiers and the first permitted to leave were fathers of three children and more. I fell into this category.

Unfortunately, the truck that came to take us back to civilization arrived at 7:00 p.m., twenty-five minutes before Shabbat began. Therefore, I could not go—as doing so would have caused me to desecrate the holy day. The following evening, Saturday night, again, another thirteen soldiers could take leave and I was hoping that this time I would be able to go. But again, the truck came at 7:00 p.m., while it was still Shabbat. Once again, I missed out.

Victor, my commanding officer, who was not a religious man, took pity on me and said that since I missed out on my leave because of my religious principles, he would let me go on Sunday night for forty-eight hours. To me, forty-eight hours was an eternity! I impatiently waited for the day to pass.

Prior to the next Shabbat, the commanding officer, Victor, announced that ten percent of the soldiers could go home for Shabbat, a twenty-four-hour leave. On Sunday afternoon, we heard on the radio that Iraq sent two armored divisions into Jordan to bolster their army for the forthcoming war with Israel.

A little later, Victor came to announce that all leave was cancelled. Since we were in the center line defending Israel from Jordan, the readiness level was raised to the uppermost limit.

I was terribly disappointed, not so much because of the prospect of the war, but because my leave was cancelled!

I tossed and turned a whole night. On Monday, the 5th of June, at 5:00 a.m. I went to Victor's tent and begged him to let me go see my family even for a short period of time. Victor told me he would let me go, but only for eight hours. I'd have to be back by 3:00 in the afternoon.

No one knew that the war was to begin in another two hours. Even Victor, a commanding officer, did not know.

I did not wait to argue about the eight hours. I took my rifle, put my prayer shawl in my backpack and ran! I got a lift with a motorcyclist and arrived in Jerusalem at 8:30 a.m., where my wife and children were at the home of my sister-in-law.

One can imagine the reunion with my wife and children!

Soon after, the radio reported that heavy fighting had broken out in the south. So the long-expected war had begun.

But in [Jerusalem](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4246466/jewish/Jerusalem.htm), people felt safe. Though Jerusalem was then a divided city, with Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem in close proximity to Israeli West Jerusalem, no one believed Jordan would start hostilities.

But at about 11:00 a.m., the Jordanians started shelling West Jerusalem. We all went down to the air raid shelter, and I was the only soldier in a packed shelter full of women and children.

A little later, I called up the town-major to report that I was in Jerusalem and asked what I should do. I was told to return to my unit and, in fact, I should have not been away in the first place... So I had to say goodbye to my family and in midst of Jordanian shelling, made my way to the main road where I waited together with many more soldiers. I got a ride with a police car that dropped me off in Ramla. From there, I had to walk about two hours to join my unit on that hill near Budrus. All along the way, shells were exploding in the distance and also nearby.

I got to my unit at about 5:00 p.m. I tried to look for my foxhole to take cover but could not find it. Something had changed since I left that morning. I found Victor and reported that I returned. He looked at his watch and sternly told me off for being two hours late. I began excusing myself that I got stuck in Jerusalem and so on....

He then turned to me with a smiling face and tears in his eyes, "Now I know that there is a G‑d in heaven! At exactly 3:00 p.m., a shell fell and exploded in your foxhole!"

If I would have taken leave on the previous Friday night, I would not have been away on that Monday! And I would have not been here telling this story...

*Reprinted from the current website of Chabad.Org*

**Photo of Orthodox Jews (circa 1910-1915)**



**Reprinted from the George Grantham Bain Collection, part of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.**