

SHABBOS STORIES FOR YOM KIPPUR 5785

Volume 16, Issue 3 10 Tishrei 5785/October 12, 2024

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

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Eating on Yom Kippur



The Chazon Ish and Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz

Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz was struck with typhoid fever shortly before Rosh Hashanah of 1951. He was admitted to a hospital where the staff carefully monitored his progress and diet. As his illness lingered, Rav Lorincz realized he would remain in the hospital for Yom Kippur, and the doctors may insist that he eat on the holiest day of the year. His premonition was correct, and his doctor told him that he would not be allowed to fast.

Devastated, he asked his wife to consult with the gadol hador the Chazon Ish. Mrs. Lorincz came with all the pertinent information, and after evaluating the report, the Chazon Ish said, "If Dr. Frei feels that he must eat on Yom Kippur, then I concur with his decision."

Mrs. Lorincz returned to the hospital to relay the psak, but it devastating to her husband. To miss out on being in shul on Yom Kippur because he was stuck in a hospital was bad enough. But to have to eat as well was too much! On Erev Yom Kippur, in the early afternoon, there was a knock on Rabbi Lorincz's door.

"Come in," he said.

To his absolute astonishment, it was the Chazon Ish himself. He was overwhelmed. It was only a few hours before Kol Nidrei, and surely there were important things that the Chazon Ish could be taking care of. What had brought him all the way here?

"I have come to tell you," began the Chazon Ish, "That just as a person must be happy to fulfill the mitzvah of *את ועיניתם* by fasting on Yom Kippur, he must be just as happy to fulfill the instruction of *לנפשותיכם מאד ונשמרתם* לנפשותיכם. Therefore, you should be happy to fulfill the mitzvah to eat on Yom Kippur. I wish you a Gmar Chasimah Tova and a Freilichen Yom Tov."

In his immense concern for his fellow Jew, the Chazon Ish went through the hassle of taking three buses and spending over an hour traveling on Erev Yom Kippur. To the Chazon Ish, helping someone else in need was well worth giving up additional time

Reprinted from the Seuda Stories of Shabbos Chayeinu, Parshas Re'eh 5784. Compiled by Tzvi Schultz.

The Urgency of Rav Zalman Baharan on Erev Yom Kippur

A unique aspect of the Minhah of ereb Yom Kippur is the recitation of viduy (confession) at the conclusion of the silent amidah. This is the first of ten confessions that are recited over the course of this holiest day of the year. This halachah is stated in Shulhan Aruch. The Rambam says the reason for reciting viduy even before Yom Kippur begins is for fear that at the last meal before the fast, a person might choke and die. This way, before the meal he has already confessed his sins at least once.

Rav Pam would often repeat an incident about a holy Jew of Yerushayim by the name of Rav Zalman Baharan. As Rav Zalman was eating his last meal before the fast, two community advocates (askanim) came to his house. They asked him to accompany them on the night after Yom Kippur to raise money for a certain needy individual.

R' Zalman replied that he was ready to go right then and did not want to push off the project until after the fast.

“What’s the rush?” the startled men asked. “Can’t it wait until after Yom Kippur?”

“No!” replied Rav Zalman. “It’s an explicit halachah in Shulhan Aruch that a person would recite viduy at Minhah before the last meal in case, G-d forbid, he might choke and die during the meal without reciting viduy on Yom Kippur itself. If the possibility exists of dying during the meal, how can I push off the misvah of helping the needy person until after Yom Kippur? Who knows if I will be around to do it then?”

R' Zalman quickly concluded his sparse meal and Bircat Hamazon and set out on his rounds to collect money for the needy person. By the time Kal Nidre was recited, he and his fellow workers had raised the amount needed and resolved the matter.

May Hashem grant us all long life with good health, Amen. Rabbi Reuven Semah

Reprinted from the Parshat VaYelech 5781 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Rebbe and the Kapo

‘This particular story is one of those stories that deserves to be published in a book,’ said the Rebbe of Bluzhov, Rabbi Israel Spiro. And perhaps that’s why Professor Yaffa Eliach, A’H, included it in her book, “Hasidic Tales Of The Holocaust”

In the Janowska camp there was a Jewish foreman [kapo] from Lvov by the name of Schneeweiss, one of those people that one stays away from if he values his life.

Yom Kippur was nearing and fears in the camp mounted; everyone knew that the Germans especially liked to use Jewish holidays as days for inflicting terror and death. Nevertheless, a group of Hasidim asked the Rabbi of Bluzhov to approach Schneeweiss and request that on Yom Kippur his group not be assigned to any of the thirty-nine main categories of work, so that their transgression of the law by working on Yom Kippur would not be a major one.

The rabbi knew that the foreman had little respect for Jewish tradition. Before the war, Schneeweiss had publicly violated the Jewish holidays, and in Janowska, he was a merciless man. Despite his fears, the rabbi agreed to speak with him.

‘You probably remember me. I am the Rabbi of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira.’ Schneeweiss did not respond. ‘Tonight is Kol Nidrei night,’ the rabbi continued. ‘There is a small group of Jews who do not want to transgress any of the major prohibitions of the day. It means everything to them. It is the essence of their existence. Can you do something about it? Can you help?’



The Rebbe of Bluzhov of blessed memory

The rabbi noticed a hidden shiver went through Schneeweiss. He took his hand and said, ‘I beg you to do this for us so that we may still find some dignity in our humiliating existence.’

The stern face of Schneeweiss changed. For the first time, the rabbi saw in it a human spark. ‘Tonight, I cannot help you,’ Schneeweiss replied. ‘But tomorrow, on Yom Kippur, I will do whatever I can.’

Even the Transgressors in Israel

The following day, the rabbi and a small group of young Hasidim were summoned to the foreman’s cottage. He arranged for them to clean in a way that would not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work.

The rabbi was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. ‘The floor was wet with our tears. You can imagine the prayers of that Yom Kippur...’

At about twelve o'clock noon, the door opened wide. Into the room stormed two angels of death, S. S. men in their black uniforms. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. The room was filled with the aroma of freshly cooked food, such as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming hot vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat.

The German Gives a Live or Death Threat

The tall S. S. soldier commanded, ‘You must eat immediately or you will be shot on the spot!’ No one moved. The rabbi and the Hasidim remained in their places. The German repeated the orders. The Jews remained glued to their places. The S.S. men called in Schneeweiss. ‘Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them!’

Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in a quiet tone, ‘We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement.’

‘You don’t understand, Jewish dog,’ roared the tall soldier. ‘I command you in the name of the Fuhrer and the Third Reich — fress!’

Schneeweiss, composed, his head high, repeated the same answer. ‘We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting.’

The German’s Revolver is Aimed at the Jewish Kapo

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss’s temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced the room. Schneeweiss fell.

The rabbi and the Hasidim remained frozen in their places, not believing what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly transgressed against Jewish tradition, had sanctified God’s Name publicly and died a martyr’s death for the sake of Jewish honor.

The Nazi ordered the stunned Jews to clean up the blood of the holy martyr and left the room.

In that moment, the soul that was completely separated from above in the body below was completely reconnected.

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Yom Kippur in Bergen Belsen

By Gina Frankel



For a little while, we forgot the straw, the supervisors and the prison.

Gina Frankel was born in Lodz to a close-knit religious family. She was 12 when the war broke out in Poland in 1939. She and her family endured terror and starvation. Her father died in the Lodz Ghetto. Gina, her mother and sisters were transported to Auschwitz where her mother and sisters were murdered. Gina and her surviving sister were then transported to several other concentration camps.

The following excerpt from Gina's manuscript takes place in 1944 in Bergen Belsen, during the High Holy Days when Gina was 17.

We Had to Pray as Inconspicuously as Possible

On the day of Rosh Hashanah, we sat together in the straw, trying to make a joint effort to create some semblance of the traditional services. Besides our other handicaps, we had to pray as inconspicuously as possible in order to hide our crime from the eyes of the supervisors. Of course we had no prayer books to refer to, but like a silent miracle as we looked into one another's eyes, the old words flooded back to us.

As I prayed, memories of past services and the spirit of communion that existed then washed over me. The others must have had similar thoughts, for as we

prayed our spirits soared to a higher peak than they had reached for longer than I care to remember. I had a feeling of nostalgia and religious ecstasy combined.

Someone began to sing softly, and soon others of us joined in. As we sang an atmosphere of holiness and G-dliness enveloped us all, and there was created in our souls a response from the very bottom of our existence. Our voices, though low, were strained with a prayer that cried to release us from the iron obstructions that gripped us, to try to find a way to freedom, perhaps even to reunite with our families. Most of all we prayed for a release from the everlasting torment of hunger.

Our Hearts Were Filled with a Warm Confidence That Our Prayers Were Heard

Nothing was changed externally. But inside, our hearts were filled with a warm confidence that our prayers were heard.

When the prayers were ended at last, nothing was changed externally. We still sat huddled in the straw, and our bellies were still gripped by the powerful claws of hunger. But inside, our hearts were filled with a warm confidence that our prayers were heard, that our fervent please would be accepted by our glorious G-d.

I felt an utter exhaustion beginning to overtake me, and suddenly I was seized by the impossible desire to be alone with myself. I lay down upon the dirty straw and pulled my blanket around me, trying to create an illusion in my mind of physical isolation. I closed my eyes and saw as clearly as yesterday the image of our home as it was on the day of Rosh Hashanah. I couldn't cry, but I felt a lump growing and hardening in my throat, and the tears wanting to be shed but unable to let themselves loose.

A Candle Glowed Softly in the Middle of Our Tent

After that the days progressed quietly and monotonously as usual, until the advent of Yom Kippur. This was the holy day of atonement and of twenty-four hour fast. Though it seemed almost a joke to fast any more completely than we already were, each of us attempted to observe the traditional services as well as our memories would let us. On the eve of Yom Kippur, a candle glowed softly in the middle of our tent. We planned to perform the Kol Nidre service. Someone had found the old candle somewhere in the tent, and had carefully preserved it until such an occasion as this should arise. It was an old tin can in its honored position in the center of the tent. We all sat in the straw in our accustomed positions.

The prayers became a muted cry, an expression of tortured souls in hell.

We took the greatest precautions to conduct our meeting secretly, and to avoid the attention of the guards. The light flickering softly in the darkness, the light of the lone candle, impressed us profoundly. We remained in absolute silence and nothing moved. We could have been pieces of cracked statuary casting strange wavering

shadows in the dim light. Songs began to swell from different parts of the tent, and some began to chant the prayers they remembered, the prayers of the evening service. The strain that encompassed us became almost unbearable.

An Expression of Tortured Souls in Hell

Our hearts responded with such feeling that the prayers became a muted cry, an expression of tortured souls in hell, and we all sensed that there was such great might in our feelings that there would certainly be a breakthrough in the heavy strong gate that must be opened for our prayers to be heard. The Kol Nidre service lasted as long as the candle burned. When at last the flame shuddered and died, we all assumed our positions for sleep without an added word.

The next day at six o'clock, we were awakened for the regular morning checkup and the coffee. We did not to attract attention to our fasting, so we took the coffee and bread as usual. Later we soaked the ground with the coffee and cached the bread. We would dig it out later to be eaten when the fast ended.

At the first opportunity after they had checked us, we gathered again on the straw, sitting as close to each other as we could. There was a great mixture of feelings provoked by the knowledge of what the holy day of Yom Kippur meant to us. Through our keeping of the prayers there pervaded the emptiness of what we had experienced, the longing for our missing families, and the sharp feeling of repugnance that resulted from the ugliness around us. Our environment could never become anything except the imprisonment of patched and dirty canvas walls and damp straw beneath us. We sat there like poor sheep whose shepherd had been swished away by a horrible fate.

With More Warmth of Heart

Never, I am sure, had the Yizkor service been held with more warmth of heart than it was that day.

We girls who prayed in the tent had been educated to read and understand the Yom Kippur prayers in the book. Now we felt deeply the misfortune that was caused by our not being able to obtain even one precious copy of the prayer book. Without it we could not possibly carry on the services properly, and we could not help feeling more bitterness because of it. As the time for the Yizkor service approached later in the morning, we felt even more lost and desperate without a prayer book.

One of the girls at this point began to sing in a soft lilting voice. I found myself listening with a certain tingling of the spine to her melodious tones. As if a signal had been given, all of us joined her and together we sang the "Yiddusheh Mameh." Never, I am sure, had the Yizkor service been held with more warmth of heart than it was that day. We were sure that the G-d of Israel saw our feelings and felt their depth, and accepted this makeshift Yizkor. We felt a visible reward in the form of a

wonderful warmth which overflowed our hearts. For a little while, we forgot the tent and the straw and the supervisors and the prison. But soon, all too soon, the glow became another memory and the days melted once more into uninterrupted lethargy.

Reprinted from the aish.com Yom Kippur website.

Higher Than Heaven

By Shula Bryski



It was the night of Yom Kippur, the holiest time of the year.

As all the Jews were gathering in shul anxiously awaiting their rebbe's arrival to begin the prayer services, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, also known as the Alter Rebbe, mysteriously left the small European village.

Some of his devoted and admiring chassidim speculated that their beloved leader went to heaven, connecting to G-d and His angels in the heavenly spheres in preparation for this holy time.

Where was their beloved leader?

As the Rebbe's chassidim waited worriedly for him to arrive, he was climbing deep into the woods, with a sack on his back, to chop down wood.

They later learned that he then proceeded to bring the firewood and the sack into the lonely little house of an impoverished widow who had just given birth and her five small children. Saving a life is so important, that chopping wood and creating fire—normally forbidden on the holy day—are permitted.

Going to a Higher Place than Even Heaven

No task was beneath this great Torah scholar as he created a blazing fire in the fireplace, unpacked the food and clothes from the sack, lovingly fed the children and left the woman with many kind and caring words.

Perhaps we could say that the Alter Rebbe went to a place even higher than heaven.

True goodness and giving often involves nurturing and caring in little ways that go unseen. What is true goodness? What is true giving?

Judaism gently teaches us through the stories of the scroll that true goodness is not carried out in a blaze of glory.

Nurturing and Caring in Little Ways That Go Unseen

True goodness and giving often involves nurturing and caring in little ways that go unseen.

Often when it's hard.

Often when it hurts.

Often when it's not really "my job."

Impacting this world is not reserved for the knight in shining armor, for the airbrushed faces of Hollywood.

It is the responsibility and right of every one of us—with all of our talents and strengths, and yes, with all of our weaknesses.

Touching the Divine and Ascending Higher than Heaven

We, and our loved ones, are immortalized long after we are gone, through the kind acts on this earth—the comforting whisper to a frightened child, the mending of a broken heart, the giving of charity when we need to dig deep, the patience and forbearance to a cantankerous relative, the nourishing home-cooked meal delivered with love . . .

It is through this goodness and giving that we touch the divine, ascending higher than heaven.

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur website of Chabad.Org