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The Art of Doing Yourself a Favor

By Rabbi Yosef Farhi



There was once a contractor, a man who build homes, until he was 65. From an early age, no one knew how to build homes like he did, so a very wealthy contractor hired him from the outset, and they had a great relationship. At the age of 65, this contractor approached the project developer and said, “I am tired. I want to retire and enjoy my family. I am done. It was great working for you. I am ready to resign.”

The project developer begged him, “I have just one more house I need you to build. Just one more. Please, don’t leave, until you build one more house!” The tired contractor said, “Alright. I will do just this one last house.”

And he did, although the work was done reluctantly. He cut every corner; he did the worst job ever... just to get the job done. Just to finish on good terms with his boss. He felt bad for the person who would buy this house, “but it won’t be my problem to fix the leaks, the plumbing backups, the weak foundations, when the problems begin. I will be after my pension.”

That House will Be Yours!

He handed the keys over to his boss, and his boss told him to have a seat. “You have been so loyal to me, for so many years. I didn’t want to just let you go, without giving you a present. I thought to myself, the best present I can give you is a house. So, before you left, I had you build one last house, and that house will be yours! Thank you so much! I really hope you enjoy your future, with your brand-new house built in top condition, by the best builder.”

The whole way home, the builder was banging his head. What have I done! The only one I fooled was myself! I have to live now, with the leaks, the weak foundations, and all the problems, for the rest of my life!!!

As we edge ever-so-close to Yom Kippur, to the end of the Asseret Yimei Teshuva, some people feel like they don’t have much energy left. As people get closer to Neilah on Yom Kippur, they feel like they have already given it all they’ve got, and there’s nothing left to give...But it’s your house, your future, your life. You are not doing G-d a favor, or doing a favor for your parents or Rabbi. This is all about your house. You are going to have to deal with it. No one else.

Just a Few Hours Left Before Yom Kippur

Everyone is looking for something to take on as a merit, as a token of improvement and change. With just a few hours left before Yom Kippur, we are at the bottom of the ninth, with two strikes. There are some things that are sure homeruns, that will for sure tip the scales. One of them is to stop talking in Shul.

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5782 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Knowing that We Belong to Hashem

One Yom Kippur, Rabbi Chaim Berlin, Z”TL, had to leave his city on a matter of *pikuach nefesh* (urgent life-and-death matter). He reached a certain village and headed to the local shul, but when he arrived at the shul he was surprised to find it empty.

“How could it be empty on Yom Kippur?” he wondered to himself. “Where is the whole Jewish community?”

Shortly, he discovered the reason. The Russian Army had reached the village that morning and had issued work orders to the city’s inhabitants, including Jews. Rav Chaim was deeply shaken when he heard this, and he burst into tears over this sorry situation.

In the afternoon, Jews began to stream in droves toward the shul. Seeing the distinguished visitor standing at the door to the shul, they excused themselves by saying that they had just now been released from working for the Russian Army. “We did not even go home to rest at all,” they told Rav Chaim. “As soon as we finished working, we came directly to shul to pour out our hearts to Hashem on this holy day.”

Rav Chaim stood up at the Bimah and again burst into tears. He then related the following story: Two neighbors had a fight over the chickens in their courtyard, each one of them arguing that the chickens belonged to him and neither able to produce witnesses to testify to the ownership. The two decided to go to a Rav to rule on this dispute.

The Rav had an idea: He placed the chickens between the two courtyards, released the ropes that tied the legs of the chickens together, and allowed them to run freely. It soon became apparent who the real owner of the chickens was.

In a choked voice, Rav Chaim concluded: “Look, Hashem, what kind of children You have. Their legs are tied and they are forced to go to work, but the moment they are freed, they don’t go to the theaters or other leisure locales; they don’t even go home to rest. They run to shul right away - which proves undoubtedly they belong to You!”

Comment: This Yom Kippur, let’s declare that we belong to Hashem!

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5782 email of Torah Sweets

The Sad Yom Kippur Joke

Motty goes to the rabbi and says, "I committed a sin and I want to know what I can do to do Teshuva."

"What was the sin?" the rabbi asked.

"It happened just once," Motty assures him. "I didn't wash my hands and recite the blessing before eating bread."

"Nu, if it really only happened once," the rabbi said, "that's not so bad. Still, why did you neglect to wash your hands and recite the blessing?"

"I felt awkward Rabbi," said Motty. "You see, I was in a non-kosher restaurant."

The rabbi's eyebrows arched. "And why were you eating in a non-kosher restaurant?"

"I had no choice. All the kosher restaurants were closed."

"Why were all the kosher restaurants closed?" the rabbi asked.

Motty replied, "Well, why else, Rabbi? It was Yom Kippur."

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5782 email of Torah Sweets.

Who Stole the Wealthy Man's Shteimel?



The Shemen HaTov relates the following incident, which involved the grandfather of the Belzer Rebbe. It was Yom Kippur in Belz. They had finished Minchah early, and the Chasidim went to take a walk, or to rest, before they began Neilah, the final Tefilah of Yom Kippur.

Everyone had left the Bais HaMedrash, and like many others, one of the wealthy Chasidim left his Shtreimel at his seat. When he returned before Neilah,

however, his Shtreimel was missing. Someone stole a Shtreimel from the Bais HaMedrash in Belz on Yom Kippur! There was a great commotion. Who could do such a thing?!

The Rebbe, who was unaware of what had happened, went to begin Davening Neilah as scheduled. After Yom Kippur, the Rebbe called over the Chasidim and asked them what the big commotion was about before Neilah. They told him that someone had stolen a Shtreimel, and the Rebbe then told them to all to go home and break their fasts.

Later, the Rebbe asked to see a certain Chasid. The Chasid came to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe told him, “You stole the Shtreimel,” but the fellow denied it. The Rebbe persisted in the charge until finally the Chasid broke down in tears, and confessed.

The next day in Belz, everyone proclaimed a miracle: “The Rebbe has Ruach HaKodesh!”

However, the Rebbe explained, “It was not Ruach HaKodesh. The way that I knew who stole the Shtreimel was simple. Before Yom Kippur, all of my Chasidim gave me a Kvitel, a small written note with their requests for me to Daven for. Everyone has their needs.

“One asked me to Daven that he see Nachas from his children, another asked me to Daven for him to marry off a daughter, there are all sorts of requests. One Chasid, however, asked only for Parnasah. A Jew who can think to ask for nothing else on Yom Kippur besides Parnasah, is the type of person who would steal a Shtreimel on Yom Kippur. And that is how I knew who took it!”

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5780 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

Saving the Life of a Jewish Heretic

Rav Yissocher Frand relates a story about Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, zt”l. “In the year 1905, when Rav Chaim was the Rav in Brisk, there was a young Jewish Bundist. In that period of history there were many different philosophies and movements that were swirling around, and Bundism was one of them.

This fellow was a heretic who rejected everything relating to Judaism. He used to go out of his way to light up a cigarette on Shabbos whenever he would see Rav Chaim pass him in the street. The fellow was also an anarchist.

He took a picture of Czar Nicholas and shot a bullet through the picture. For this crime, the young man was arrested, brought to the local governor, and was

sentenced to execution for anarchy and sedition. The arrest took place right before Rosh Hashanah, and the execution was scheduled to take place on Erev Succos.

The governor of the area let it become known that if the Jews would ransom this anarchist for 5000 rubles, the charge would be dropped.



Rav Chaim gathered the people of Brisk and told them they were obligated to raise the money to save this Jewish boy.

The members of the community couldn't believe it. They told their Rebbi that it states explicitly in the Torah in Parashas Shoftim, exactly the opposite of what he was advising them to do. They quoted to him the Pasuk (Devorim 17:7), 'And you should eradicate the evil from your midst'. What could be a bigger fulfillment of this Biblical command, they asked, then letting this Bundist be killed?

Rav Chaim told them that they misinterpreted the Pasuk, and the context of the Pasuk was crucial. He said, 'Immediately prior to this Pasuk we read (17:6), 'By the word of two witnesses or three witnesses shall the condemned person be put to death, he should not be put to death by the word of a single witness'.

The Torah requires process. There must be testimony by witnesses. There must be deliberation and ruling by a Jewish court. Only then are we commanded to eradicate the evil from our midst. To take the words 'eradicate evil from your midst' as a complete freedom to say that we can get rid of every undesirable character in the city is an incorrect application of Torah law!

He insisted that the community raise the money to free the young man. This happened right before Rosh Hashanah. However, the community did not raise the money. Erev Yom Kippur came. As is the universal custom, on Erev Yom Kippur,

the community Davens Minchah early, and then goes home for the meal before the fast, the Seudah HaMafsekes.

After Minchah on that Erev Yom Kippur, Rav Chaim announced that the Gabai was instructed not to open the Shul for Kol Nidrei, until the full amount of the ransom was raised. Furthermore, no one would be allowed into Shul for the entire Yom Kippur, until the money was raised.

The saving of a Jewish life, even the life of a Bundist, is important enough to violate Yom Kippur, Rav Chaim ruled. The community had no choice. They went and raised the money, presented the funds to the governor, and freed the individual a half hour before sunset on Erev Yom Kippur.

Rav Chaim and the other people involved in this effort did not have time to have their Seudah HaMafsekes that year. They went straight from the governor's office to Kol Nidrei."

Rav Frand concluded, "This is a significant story. It teaches us the importance of every single soul in Klal Yisroel. It does not matter if he is a Bundist, or Orthodox, a Jew is a Jew. The Brisker dynasty is known for their zealotry, but nevertheless, their biggest zealotry was for the teaching in Bava Basra (11a), that whoever saves a single Jewish soul, is as if he saved the entire world!"

Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5780 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.