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A Bris Milah in the Dark Days of Communist Russia



The Ribnitzer Rebbe

Rav Meilich Biderman related a story. Years ago, in Communist Russia, a Jewish couple was Bentshed with a child. The mother wanted her child to have a Bris Milah, but her husband refused because every Jewish ceremony in those days came with a risk of imprisonment.

She knew of a day that her husband would be traveling, so she wrote a letter to the Ribnitzer Rebbe, Rav Chaim Zanvil Abramowitz, zt'l, who was known for

his Mesiras Nefesh, self-sacrifice, to perform a Bris, and she requested that he come and give her son a Bris.



Rav Mendel Futerfass

The Rebbe agreed, and he arrived together with his friend, Rav Mendel Futerfass, zt”l. It was risky to perform the Mitzvah, but they did it with joy. After the Milah, however, there was a complication, and the child began to bleed profusely, and he needed medical care. They couldn’t call a doctor because the doctor would report them to the authorities.

The Ribnitzer Rebbe went into a side room for a short time, and when he came out, Rav Mendel Futerfass exclaimed, “You performed a miracle! The child stopped bleeding! What did you do in there?”

The Rebbe replied, “I Davened. I said, ‘Ribono Shel Olam! We came here to do a great Mitzvah. Please protect us!’ and Hashem heard my Tefilos.” When Rav Mendel would repeat this story, he would express his great admiration for the Ribnitzer Rebbe’s Emunah. He said, “At that time, I was so afraid that I couldn’t think straight, but the Ribnitzer Rebbe knew that the solution was Tefilah. With his strong Emunah, he saved the child, and also our lives as well!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Re’eh 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

The Prepared Shabbat Table

By Rabbi David Bibi



In the age before cell phones, a certain Talmid Haham was coming to the city of Strasbourg in France for a Shabbat. He made arrangements with a family to host him in their home, but when he arrived Friday afternoon at their home, they were not home. Perhaps an emergency or they forgot and a neighbor told him they had left the city for the weekend.

With no other choice and not knowing anyone in town, he heads to the synagogue for Friday evening prayers with his suitcase which he figures he'll store in the synagogue and make the best of it.

At the end of the end of tefilah, a man walks over to him and ask him if he has a place to eat for Shabbat and the Rabbi tells him that his plans got a bit messed up with the family not being home and so the man invites him over for dinner and to spend the night.

When the Rabbi arrives at the man's house, he sees that the man is living there with his wife and his eight children and in the dining room he sees a beautiful table set for eleven people, so he wonders if some other guest was meant to join them. A few minutes later, the host tells him that this is in fact his place.

He enjoys a wonderful dinner with a special family and the rest of Shabbat with them as well.

A few months later, the Rabbi is again needed in Strasbourg so he makes arrangements with this same family to host him for Shabbat.

After Friday night prayers and the walk back to the house, he notices that the table now is set for 12 people. He figures he's the 11th but who is the 12th? And as they make Kiddush and sit to eat, he notices there is no twelfth and he understands that the family must always set the table for an extra person.

Why the Extra Chair Each Shabbat

He asked the young man he's seated next to why the extra chair each Shabbat and the young man explains to him that each Friday they set the table for a guest and while the mother lights the candles, the father says a special tefilah that the family should be blessed to fulfill the misvah of hachnasat orchim – taking in guests, on Shabbat.

And so the scholar asked the young man, so you often have guests? And the young man says, Rabbi, we live in Strasbourg. Not too many people pass through Strasbourg. In fact, it is very rare for us to get a guest.

Later on, the scholar asks his host why then do you make the family set an extra place in Shabbat? Why not simply set the extra place if and when you bring a guest home?

The Host Has Two Reasons

And the host explained to the rabbi that he had two reasons. One was for his children to appreciate the commandments of entertaining guests. Each week they would see him pray for guests to come and they would set the table and they would remain home waiting in anticipation that they would be able to fulfill this tremendous misvah.

And if they were unable to fulfill the misvah, at least they did the preparation and had this anticipation and all that would help them see and experience how important this misvah is.

The rabbi then asked what was the second reason. The host explained that if we had a place setting at the last minute, the guest might feel that perhaps there wasn't enough food for him and only enough for the family and might be reluctant to eat, but when someone comes into the house and sees that in fact there is a chair set for them, they will feel comfortable that the family was definitely prepared for guests as well.

Reprinted from the Parashat Reeh 5763 email of Rabbi Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Tragedy in East Jerusalem

By Rabbi Reuven Semah



A powerful but sad story told by Rabbi Yair Weinstock teaches us that it is a zechut (merit) to give.

One day Rabbi Weinstock stopped in to visit the great Rabbi Tchesnik on an extremely hot day in Israel. He found the Rabbi not looking well. He got him a glass of water, and he felt a little better.

The Rabbi explained that something happened today to cause him great anguish. He began the story which began five years earlier. Five years ago, he received a phone call to meet someone in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The Rabbi took a cab and found an old friend who knew the Rabbi from America.

Robert Goldblum was very wealthy but had no children. He was worth fifty million dollars and he wanted to give all his money to Yeshivahs in Israel to further the study of Torah. But he only trusted Rabbi Tchesnik, so he wanted to put Rabbi Tchesnik's name in his will to be in charge of distributing the money.

The Rabbi Was Not Happy with Mr. Goldblum's "Good" News

Mr. Goldblum expected the Rabbi to be pleased but he was mistaken. The Rabbi responded that it is impossible to know what will be in the future. It is better to keep a few million for yourself to live on and give the rest to the Yeshivahs now while you're still alive. But Mr. Goldblum refused and could not be persuaded to change his mind. Mr. Goldblum recorded the Rabbi's passport number for identification, and he instructed his lawyer to enter the Rabbi's name in the will.

Today, five years later, the Rabbi got a phone call from the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem informing him that Mr. Goldblum had passed away, and that he should come to the Consulate with his passport. When he arrived, the ambassador confirmed the Rabbi's identity, and told him to take a seat while he brought in all

the people involved. The Rabbi wondered, what people? Did they gather all the Rosh Yeshivahs to the Consulate in East Jerusalem? What happened next was a shock. A door opened and over a dozen monks entered the room.

“So here we are,” the ambassador began. “Mr. Goldblum has bequeathed his entire inheritance to be distributed among the academies in Israel where Bible is studied, and Bible is studied in the monasteries represented by these monks.”

“Torah! Not Bible study. He was a Jew, not a Christian, and I am positive that he never dreamed of bestowing his wealth for monks to study the Bible! This is an enormous mistake.”

Mr. Goldblum’s Lawyers Were all Devout Catholics

“It’s no mistake,” the ambassador replied. “Had your friend desired to bequeath his money to Jews, he would have made sure that it was written explicitly in his will, rather than relying completely on the discretion of his lawyers, all of whom are devout Catholics. And since Mr. Goldblum trusted you, Rabbi Tchesnik, to decide, we have gathered all of the monks, and you will decide which ones will get the money.

The Rabbi just returned from the Consulate. He wanted to shout, “Robbers! Thieves!” but he could only let out a groan. Mr. Goldblum did not merit to give to Torah. He didn’t have the zechut. It is a zechut to support Jews who are learning Torah.

Shabbat Shalom.

Reprinted from the Parashat Reeh email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

The Table with the Cold Water



Don’t you admire those wonderful baalei chesed who think so creatively to alleviate others’ discomfort? Like the ones who set up a table in front of their home, on which stands a thermos of ice-cold water and cups, with a sign inviting any

passerby to refresh themselves with a cold drink. We've always seen these wonderful stands, but never made use of them.

Until that Shabbos when the weather started rising above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. We were walking home from a simcha, and the walk was becoming just a bit too long for the children. They were kvetching and complaining about their feet, about the heat, about their thirst. They stopped to rest every few blocks – on a bench, on a ledge.

The Children Were So Excited

Then we saw one of those wonderful tables with cold water. The children were so excited – perhaps more so to press the button and see the water pour into the plastic cups than to have a cold drink! There was a garbage can standing a bit to the side of the table, obviously for throwing out used plastic cups. But we did not use the Eruv, and it would be impossible to throw the cups in the garbage.

We instructed the children to stand in one place, drink the water, and just place their used cups on the table. I can only imagine what the owners thought when they saw our used cups on the table.

“They couldn't throw out their used cups in the garbage? We offer them free cold water and they leave such a mess in return?”

But on the other hand, people who are such baalei chessed must view life with a good eye, so I assume they probably figured out that we left the used cups on the table because we do not use the Eruv. I can only assume they thought that way, because I want to judge them favorably by assuming that they judged us favorably!

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim email of The Weekly Vort.

The Wealthy Butcher's “Amazing” Story

Once there lived a wealthy Jewish butcher in a town on the seaside. In his youth he had been quite poor, and had worked very hard to amass his wealth. Unfortunately, he had never had the opportunity to learn Torah, but he took great pleasure in praying and saying Psalms. He never forgot what it meant to be needy, and he constantly went out of his way to help his fellow Jews.

Every Friday afternoon before Shabbat he would distribute meat and money to all the poor families in the town. His good nature made him a favorite among not only the Jews, but also the gentiles of the town. His reputation even spread to the

governor who favored him with an important appointment as the chief customs officer of the port.

As such, he would collect taxes on imports and also collect a fee for his services. As one of the benefits of his job, he was also permitted to take any one item from amongst the goods. It was in the capacity of customs collector that he amassed an even greater fortune.

The Captain's Special Offer to the Butcher

One day a ship arrived in port, and he went to inspect the goods on board. After he performed his duties, the captain approached him saying, "I have some especially good merchandise on board today. Something totally unique, but I am not at liberty to divulge to you the nature of this merchandise unless you want to buy it."

The butcher was very curious and asked what it was, but he always received the same reply: "I will tell you only if you agree to buy it."

"How much do you want for it?" he inquired.

"Ten thousand gold coins!" was the astonishing answer.

"You expect me to make the purchase without knowing what I'm buying?"

"That's the stipulation. I assure you you won't be disappointed."

The butcher was all but hooked, but the captain was enjoying his power over the butcher. He was no longer satisfied with ten thousand; he raised the price to twenty thousand coins, and then forty thousand gold coins!

The Butcher Agrees to Pay the Steep Price

Finally, the butcher agreed. "I will pay your price. Just show me the merchandise!"

"Only after you have brought all the money," the captain answered with a grin, and off went the butcher to fetch the treasure of coins. Even as he went to collect the coins, the butcher was doubting his sanity. He returned and laid the money on the table.

The captain turned on his heel and in a few minutes he returned with the "merchandise"—Jewish men, women and children in tow—bound hand and foot. The evil captain couldn't restrain himself, and broke out into laughter: "Aren't you happy now? What a bargain you got yourself! If you hadn't bought them, they would have been food for sharks—I certainly have no use for them!"

The butcher took the hapless people with him and left the ship as fast as his feet could carry him, lest the wicked captain have a change of heart. He kept thinking over and over again how G-d had inspired him to spend a fortune on unknown goods in order to save these Jews.

The butcher fed and clothed the former prisoners and treated them with the utmost kindness. One day he noticed a young girl from among them and thought,

“This girl would be perfect for my son.” The two young people agreed and preparations were made for the wedding.

On the eve of the great affair, the butcher circulated among the guests, offering a drink here, a dainty there, when he saw a young man sitting in a corner weeping.

“What is wrong? Everyone is rejoicing, why are you so sad?”

The poor boy replied, “The girl who is about to marry your son was betrothed to me before we were abducted by the pirates.”

“Why did no one tell me?” the butcher asked.

“We are all so grateful to you, that no one dared disturb your happiness,” the boy responded.

The butcher thought for a while, and then called his son to him. After recounting the entire story to the groom, he asked, “What do you want to do about it?”

“There is no question. Let the couple be married today as they had planned so many months ago. I will not stand in their way.”

And so it was, that the entire village celebrated the marriage that very day. The butcher not only made them the wedding, but furnished them with a house and furnishing and enough money to begin a new life.

The Sages said of this man that with his forty thousand gold coins he purchased a place in the World to Come equaled only to that of the greatest tzadikim.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shoftim 5783 edition of L’Chaim.

The Two Ignorant Singers of the Aleph Beis

Sefer Hadeiah V’Hadibur relates the following story in the name of the Toldos Aharon Rebbe zy”a:

Two Sefardic Jews who were originally from Kurdistan lived in the city of Teveriah. These two men were not learned, and were so ignorant that they didn’t even know how to daven. At that time, the bais medrash known as Bais Medrash Yehoshua bin Nun was inaugurated after undergoing renovations.

The inauguration took place on the night of Yom Kippur and chochomim delivered drashos to mark the occasion. These two Sefardim wanted to attend, but the shamass would not let them in. He told them that the gathering was only for talmidei chochomim and not for ignorant men like them.

The two men stood outside on the porch and told each other, “Let’s sing the letter of the Aleph Bais forwards and backwards!” They sang and danced with all their strength, reciting the letters of the Aleph Bais forwards and backwards.

Suddenly, the Kalisker Rebbe zy”a, who also had a bais medrash in that courtyard, said that he saw a great light emanating from outside. He went out to find the source of the light and saw these two simple men singing the letters of the Aleph Bais. The Rebbe declared, “The light is coming from them. As a result of their incredible temimus, the letters were arranged to create holy names and this created a great light in Shomayim!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5783 edition of The Way of Emunah: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Meir Isamer Rosenbaum.

Toras Avigdor Junior

Murder in Horki

By Aharon Spetner

The Village of Horki, 5593 — 1832

For years, the evil poritz had abused everyone in the town and taken all of their money. But this morning, the news spread that the poritz had passed away. A huge funeral was held for the poritz, and even the king himself had arrived in their little town to pay his respects. Even though everyone hated the poritz, the entire village came to the funeral. Nobody knew who the new poritz would be and they wanted to demonstrate that they showed respect to the people in charge of their town.

After the funeral, the Rebbe approached the king.

“Your majesty,” he said. “We are so honored by your presence in our small town. We are your loyal subjects and would like to offer you this gift as a thank you for your kind leadership.”

The Rebbe’s gabbai handed the king a wooden goblet that Anshel the carpenter had carved. It wasn’t that fancy, but it was the most the poor town could afford.

The king examined the goblet and looked at the Rebbe and his chassidim, who were all dressed in shabby clothes.

“Hmmm,” he said.

Everyone watched nervously. Was the king upset at the gift?

“Rabbi,” the king said. “The craftsmanship on this goblet is quite impressive, even if it is made of cheap wood. With craftsmen like this, it seems odd that you are all so poor.”



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

The chassidim stood there uncomfortably. Nobody wanted to badmouth the poritz in front of the king, even if the poritz was no longer alive.

“Rabbi,” the king said. “I have been having trouble finding a new poritz for your village. You look like you are respected by the townsfolk and there is a certain quality about you that I just can’t put my finger on. How would you like to be in charge of the village of Horki?”

The Chassidim Were Shocked by the King’s Offer

The chassidim gasped. Could this really be happening?

The Rebbe smiled. “It would be my pleasure,” he said.

“Amazing,” said the king, handing the Rebbe a large document. “Here is the deed to the poritz’s house. It’s yours now, as is the village of Horki. I trust I am leaving it in good hands.”

The king climbed into his chariot and rode off, leaving the chassidim shocked. Everyone broke out singing and dancing, thanking Hashem for the yeshuah.

In the following days, everything changed for the village of Horki. The Rebbe’s gabbai discovered vast amounts of gold stored in the poritz’s mansion,

along with records of all of the money he had taken from each person. The Rebbe immediately ordered that the money be returned to everyone, and the village soon became very prosperous.

Thanking Hashem Every Morning for Their Miraculous Good Fortune

Aharon the fish man bought new nets and was now able to catch bigger and tastier fish. Berel the innkeeper upgraded his inn to be the fanciest hotel in the region. Anshel the carpenter began producing the finest oak and mahogany furniture. Everyone was able to properly be mechaded Shabbos with beautiful and delicious seudos. Every morning the Horki Chassidim thanked Hashem anew for their miraculous good fortune.

One day, Berel the innkeeper was rolling a barrel of fine whiskey towards his inn, when he noticed the Rebbe walking by. Ah! A chance to be mechaded his Rebbe! Berel quickly abandoned his barrel in the middle of the street and ran over. “Sholom Aleichem Rebbe,” he said, bowing humbly.

To his surprise, the Rebbe looked at him angrily.

“I never thought you were the type of person to be a rotzeiach,” the Rebbe said sternly.

“A murderer???” Berel stammered. “But Rebbe, I never killed anyone! I’m a kind and gentle person!”

The Rebbe Explains the Great Danger of the Barrel

“Berel,” the Rebbe said. “Do you know how dangerous it is to leave a barrel in the middle of the road like that? It can roll down and someone can get seriously hurt!”

“Oy, I’m sorry, Rebbe,” Berel said. “It was an accident. But I’m not a rotzeiach — I promise!”

“Berel, in Parshas Shoftim we talk about someone who kills someone beshogeg — by accident, and his punishment is that he is sent to an Ir Miklat — he essentially becomes a prisoner for not being careful.”

“But Rebbe, nobody died. Look, I’ll move the barrel right now!”

Berel quickly rolled the barrel to the grass on the side of the road and ran back to the Rebbe.

“Berel,” the Rebbe continued. “The Rambam has a whole section where he discusses protecting oneself and others from danger. And do you know what section that is? It’s ‘Hilchos Rotzeiach U’Shmiras Hanefesh’. He puts the halachos of someone who kills on purpose, someone who kills accidentally, and someone who puts others in danger, all under the same section: ‘Rotzeiach U’Shmiras Hanefesh’.

“Do you understand? Putting someone else in danger is like murdering someone. Even if nobody gets hurt or killed, it is the same action. Being careful not to leave something where someone could get injured is just as serious as not going out and killing people.”

“Oy, I never realized that,” lamented Berel. “Thank you so much, Rebbe, for teaching this to me. I will bli neder never do something like this ever again.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

Takeaway:

Safety is a very serious responsibility. We can’t say “it was only a mistake”, or “what’s the big deal?” The Torah treats safety as the biggest deal.

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5783 email of Toras Avigdor Jurnior based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l.

The Power of Just “One” Ois (Letter)

By Rabbi Nosson Muller

I recently visited the new home of a talmid of mine. As he and his wife proudly showed me around, I noticed an exquisite mezuzah case on one of the doorposts. I asked where they had gotten such a beautiful case and my talmid’s wife told me the following:

“I had a very difficult childhood. My parents divorced when I was young, and ever since, one unfortunate situation after another seemed to come my way. My only safe haven was my day in school. Despite my defiant behavior and total lack of cooperation in doing my work, my teachers and principals stood steadfast by my side, constantly being mechazek me and tolerating my continual misdemeanors with patience and love. I miraculously graduated high school and seminary and finally settled down and married.

My teachers were with me all the way through. “Even after I married, my teachers would consistently check up on me to see how I was faring. When my elementary school principal heard that we had purchased our new home, she went out and bought us this mezuzah holder as a gift. It reminds me each day that the Shomer Yisrael has many messengers that He sends to watch over us. True, there might be just one letter on the cover of the mezuzah holder, but to me that one ‘ois’ speaks volumes. When I kiss that mezuzah, I am thanking Hashem for so much...”

One letter is indeed so small, yet its ramifications are greater than we can ever imagine.



Rav Gad Eisner

Rav Gad Eisner was a well-known and pious Gerrer chassid who endured excruciating suffering through the war years. Nonetheless, he became one of the greatest mashpi'im in Ger, infusing emunah and bitachon into yeshivah bachurim with much vigor and dynamism.

Once, when talking to mechanchim about his war experiences, he related the following anecdote:

"I recall trudging together with a group of my friends on one of the infamous death marches. After a few days of walking, I simply could not continue and felt my body giving way to all the torture and exhaustion it had endured. I realized that this was it; my time had come.

"I lay down on the road surface and began reciting my last prayers, knowing that even if I didn't pass out

on my own, I would be shot by one of the German guards.

Suddenly, I heard one of my friends tenderly call out to me, "Gade'le! Get up and loif, get up and run! You can do it!" And I did. And here I am to tell the tale.

"I want to tell you something," Rav Gad continued telling the group of mechanchim. "You know what gave me the strength and courage to stand up again? Not what he told me to do and not why he told me to do it...but how he told me!

"He didn't say, 'Gad, stand up.' He said, 'Gade'le, stand up!' He used the name that my beloved parents had affectionately called me when I was a young boy. It was that one extra syllable that he added to my name – not even consciously – that stirred in me a voice of the past, a voice of courage, which enabled me to somehow, somewhere, find the strength I didn't have to get up and try again."

One letter isn't just simply a letter. Sometimes it can be life itself. Literally

Reprinted from the Parshas Shoftim 5783 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book "Pirkei Avos: Generation to Generation" by Rabbi Nosson Muller.