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Story #1348

Accessing the Hidden Light of Creation

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

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The Baba Sali

Rabbi Elazar said: The light that the Holy One, blessed be He, made on the first day of Creation was not that of the sun but a different kind of light, through which Adam could observe from one end of the world to the other. But when G-d looked upon the generations of the Flood and the Dispersion and saw that their ways would be corrupt and that they might misuse this light for evil, He arose and concealed it from them. And for whom did He conceal it? For the righteous people in the future, as it is stated: “And G-d saw the light, that it was good” (Gen. 1:3), - “good” referring to none other than the *tzadikim* (perfectly righteous people). (Talmud Chagiga 12a)

The uniqueness and greatness of the holy *Baba Sali*, Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzaira of blessed memory, was not limited to those times that he revealed his powers by performing open miracles, for his entire behavior and true spiritual level were beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. All were amazed by the simplicity with which he spoke about the secrets of creation and the hidden ways in which G-d guides His world. Even as we know that the pathways in heaven are as familiar to tzadikim as the entryways to their own homes, the matter-of-fact manner in which the Baba Sali spoke about heavenly concepts was astounding.

Stories heard from reliable witnesses abound. One of the most remarkable stories about the holy light and vision of the Baba Sali took place over fifty years ago:

A Daughter of a Prominent Jewish Family in Mexico is Kidnapped

A terrible incident occurred in 1972 when a daughter of one of the most prominent Jewish families in Mexico was kidnapped by a group of Mexican gangsters who had been tracking the girl in the hopes of holding her for a large ransom. They demanded \$60 million for the safe return of the young girl. If their demands were not met, they threatened, the girl would be executed. There were to be no further negotiations, they declared.

Unfortunately, this was not wholly uncommon. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the Mexican Jewish community lived in relative stability. The economic boom that followed World War II lasted for nearly thirty years and continued to allow Mexican Jews to greatly prosper. However, the country began to experience economic difficulties, which affected them in numerous ways. Abductions, theft and gang-related crime became all too commonplace and no one was safe, least of all the wealthy Jews of Mexico and its environs.

The family of the girl was in a state of panic. They could not possibly come up with that absurd sum of money and the Mexican police could not be relied upon to find their daughter alone.

An Uncle Seeks the Advice of the Holy Baba Sali

An uncle of the kidnapped girl was dispatched to Netivot, in southern Israel, to seek the blessing and advice of the holy Baba Sali. The man rushed to the tzadik's home and explained what had occurred to his niece in Mexico. He informed the Baba Sali that the kidnappers had said they would not negotiate. They wanted their money or the consequences would be dire.

The *Chacham* (sage, wise man) sat in his chair motionless. His face was almost entirely covered by the veil he wore over it. He seemed to have immersed himself totally inward.

Suddenly, he called for a pen and paper. His attendant ran to bring the items and the Baba Sali began to talk as he traced the shape of a building on the paper. This is what he said:

Advice on How to Rescue the Girl

“In order to rescue the girl, this is what you must do. Go to so and so (he named a specific place) and there you will find two of the kidnappers. One is short and stout like a barrel and the other is tall and thin like a tree. Bring with you twenty policemen and overwhelm the two kidnappers who are acting as lookout.

“Then, take these two men and have them lead you to the spot where the girl is being kept. Be careful. There are another six kidnappers who are hiding out there. Let the first two open the doors and then the police can storm in and rescue the girl. Do this and you will be successful.”

The uncle rushed out and relayed the information, just as the Baba Sali had drawn it up on paper. The police were informed, the raid was successful, thank G-d, and the girl was rescued. The entire plan was carried out exactly how the Baba Sali had outlined it from his home in Netivot, over 6,000 miles away!

The Special Light of the Baba Sali

The Baba had never stepped foot in Mexico, nor, of course, had he ever seen the buildings he diagrammed or how the kidnappers looked. And yet, he could see them; he could see it all! Undoubtedly, it was the special light -- the “*Ohr Haganuz*” (Hidden Light) -- which enabled him to see from one end of the world to the other.

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*Source* : Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the Parshas Bereishis 5779 email of *Torah Tavlin*, as posted on *ShabbosStories.com*.

*Biographical note*: Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzeira [1890 - 4 Shvat 1984] known as *Baba Sali*, was born in Tafilalet Morocco, to one of Jewry's most illustrious families. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 1964 he moved to Eretz Yisrael, eventually settling in 1970 in the Southern development town he made famous, Netivot, and where, since 1984, his tomb has become one of Israel's most visited pilgrimage sites. A number of collections of stories featuring him have been published, including at least two in English.

*Connection* : The third verse in the weekly Torah reading encapsulates the theme of the story.

*Adapted from the Bereishis 5784 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

# It's Not Just the Booth

By Mrs. C.B. Weinfeld

I had been trying so hard to promote my new business KEYZ, selling personalized key chains and mugs. I did my homework and learned the tricks of the trade. What I did not expect was competition in my own community. TRINKETS was fiercely competing for the same clientele. I tried to hold onto my emunah; tried to reinforce that every dollar a person earns is decided above, regardless of competitors such as Trinkets.

## Renting a Booth at Popular Expo

I decided to rent a booth in a popular expo. I was hoping to get the word out about the variety and quality of my products. The small-sized booth cost \$500, but the heftier price was leaving the children with my husband for two days. I had rented a booth at this expo previously, and expected a prime location for my booth.

When I got there, it was all I could do to control my extreme disappointment. I was more like furious! Trinkets' booth was located in the front-center with a gaudy banner and an inflated character nodding to the crowd. A huge crowd was gathered around their booth.

My booth, on the other hand, was in the corner. And then Mrs. Greenblatt, the organizer of the event, came by to check if I was satisfied with my booth. Hah! Was she joking?! When she asked, I responded with a scowl, "I feel like packing up right now. I don't even know why I bothered paying for this booth. Trinkets got the best booth, the best location, and the most traffic. I'm just sitting here in the corner, saying Tehillim and waiting for someone to notice I'm here."

## Disputing the Complaint of the Booth Holder

Mrs. Greenblatt seemed almost hurt, and responded, "What are you talking about? I gave you the best spot in the house!"

Huh? Was she joking?

She continued, "Look at this," and she removed the expo floor plan from her pocket. "This is a diagram of the hall and the high-traffic areas. The front-center location, where Trinkets is, from a business point of view, is the worst. People are just coming in, getting their acts together, trying to figure out where to go.

"You, on the other hand, are at the right corner, next to the Judaica stuff, which has a huge line, and the exclusive linens. By the time people get to your side of the hall, they're all pumped and ready to buy. Look around you. See where the crowds are."

I realized, to my chagrin, that Mrs. Greenblatt was right. Then she told me, “You are a repeat customer, so we gave you a good spot. But you’ve got to work the crowd. Don’t just stand there. Greet the shoppers. Give some free gifts. Make small talk. Sell your product.”

I knew she was right. I was just so focused on my competitor, that it clouded my judgment. And I neglected to focus on MY products, and sell them effectively. Then a woman and her daughter came to eye my products. They looked like the type of people who finger everything, and buy nothing. So, I was not as courteous to them as I should’ve been when they asked me more questions about one keychain than I had the patience for.

But I was astounded when they said, “We’ll take 5000 of these,” pointing to a keychain with a cute apple emblazoned with “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”

“You’ll take how many?” I said, doing everything to contain my shock.

The woman explained, “We’re from Arizona. My husband runs a busy medical practice. We’d like to hand out key chains to all our clients for the holiday season. I’ll need them all personalized with the name of our medical center.”

I was elated, and humbled, when the woman handed me a check for \$7,500. I had been too quick to judge Mrs. Greenblatt, and too focused on my competition. And it also led me to misjudge the customer who ended up being the catalyst for a huge deal I did not expect! I learned a thing or two about judging favorably, not to mention realizing just Who is in charge of my livelihood. (Another Handful of Stars by C.B. Weinfeld, ArtScroll)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bereishis 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.*

## **Two Surprises**

**By Zelda Goldfield**

My husband and I like to plan our vacations to venues that have a strong Jewish connection. On our list was Salonica, a city whose famous port was closed on Shabbat in deference to the Jewish majority that lived there. In fact, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the city boasted the largest Jewish population in the world!

We had Googled the regular touristy information, including Hop-On Hop-Off buses, archeological sites, Jewish museums, shopping and more. We also noted the warnings against unscrupulous taxi drivers and pickpockets.

We were excited to join Helena, our Hebrew speaking Russian-born guide, married to an Israeli from Bet She’an, who led us in a tour of the Jewish highlights

and other sites. The morning weather was pleasant with light intermittent showers and the streets and markets were not crowded. As we entered the dimly lit entrance to one of the markets, I helped an elderly lady navigate a broken step.

Moments later, a woman in our group called over to me that my small backpack was wide open. *How could that be? I never left it open! I was always so careful!* I lowered the bag from my shoulder and immediately searched for my wallet. Gone. I emptied out the meager contents on the bench and verified my loss. Stolen! One man in the group berated me for carrying it on my back, instead of in front. But others in the group comforted me, telling of their own pickpocket misadventures in Turkey, India and Prague. Someone offered me money, since my cash was stolen. An English-speaking couple offered to get us a taxi to return to our hotel. I didn't need this assistance because my husband was at my side, but I appreciated the concern and compassion.

I made light of the loss. I produced a wan smile and announced to my caring Israeli group, "*Gam zu l'tovah.*" My passports were safe in the hotel, and 140 Euros was not a fortune. I drank some water – at least the thief didn't steal my water bottle – but I was shaken. Such a *chutzpa* he had! And such a fool I was to fall into the trap of helping an elderly lady while her partner helped himself to my wallet.

That, unfortunately, was our first surprise.

We took a taxi back to the hotel and reported the theft to Barbara, the sympathetic receptionist. My husband immediately cancelled my credit cards and ordered replacements. Then I sat down over a cup of coffee and chocolate, made a short list of the stolen contents of my wallet, and tried to figure out how to get replacements. The driver's license would be easy – just order it online. Same for my Health Fund card. I would have to go in person to a nearby office to replace my RavKav bus ticket, but the money on it would be transferred automatically to the new card. Anyway, I would be happy to have a new photo taken because I looked awful on the stolen card.

The cloud over my head was slowly dissipating as I realized that things could have been so much worse. After all, I wasn't mugged or injured. Even the wallet itself- the zipper was broken and anyway I had intended to buy a new one while on vacation.

But that dark cloud returned, accompanied with a shower of tears that I had stoically held back until then. I realized that my *teudat zehut*, my Israeli ID card, had been in my poor wallet! Replacing that would cost me a lot of time, aggravation, and 150 Shekels. I couldn't bear to face the long, long wait for an appointment with the Ministry of Interior, then another long wait inside the cavernous ancient building along with dozens of anxious citizens straining their ears for their numbers to be called. I suffer an allergic reaction every time I go near that building!

To cheer me up, my husband shlepped me out to the local shul for *mincha/maariv*. As I *davened* from a *siddur* I picked up in the shul – with annotations in Ladino and an introduction in Greek – I prayed in the language of my heart for help. *A kappora on the money – but I need my cards!!*

On our way back to the hotel my cell phone rang. It was a local number. *Who in Greece could be calling me?* It was Barbara, the hotel receptionist, who told me that I must come right away because two men were waiting for me in the lobby.

Within minutes we arrived and met Micha’el, a Jewish Greek guide and his Israeli pal, Yigal. We sat down as Yigal unfolded his tale. The two friends had just been walking in the market when Yigal noticed something dark blue with Hebrew letters in the gutter. He thought that maybe his *teudat zehut* had fallen out of his pocket! But when he opened it, he saw the photo of a woman. He showed it to Micha’el who noted that since the woman was wearing a head covering, she was probably staying at the Astoria Hotel where the Chabad Center is located. They phoned the hotel, and sure enough, I was registered!

Barbara and I hugged each other in glee as my husband thanked Micha’el and Yigal profusely and gave them a mini-*shiur* on the importance of the mitzvah they had just performed.

And that, fortunately, was my second surprise!

*Reprinted from the September 29, 2023 posting on The Jewish Press website.*

## “Oy Vey! Where is My Passport?”

Rav Ephraim Wachsman once related an amazing story. His grandfather, Rav Betzalel Stern, zt”l, lived in London, but he grew up in Vienna. He was there when the Germans entered Vienna to seek out any Jews that were there. Everyone who could flee fled for their lives, and he went to France.

But then the Germans came to take over Paris, and tens of thousands of refugees sought a place to escape to, but there was nowhere to go. One day, he saw a man wearing a sailor uniform, and Rav Betzalel asked him what he does. The man responded that he was heading out to England, and that he was wearing his sailor’s clothing.

Rav Betzalel asked if he could join him, and the man agreed. But he told him, “You need visas to enter Britain. They won’t allow you entry without it.” With that, Rav Betzalel headed to the British Consulate to arrange visas, but as he approached

the offices, he saw hundreds, if not thousands of people already gathered around the entrance, holding papers to assure they could get visas, but the guards weren't granting anyone entrance.

Miraculously, while he was waiting there, it started to rain torrentially. It rained so much so that the guards all ran inside for protection, and as they did, many of the people who had been trying to get in, followed them. Rav Betzalel also joined them, and before he knew it, he was standing in front of the British consulate officer.

He opened the door, and the man at the desk asked him how he could assist him. Rav Betzalel responded that he's a father of many children and he is in need of visas to go to Britain. The officer said, "But sir, there is no boat leaving for England now. How are you going to get to England?"

### **I Need Visas for My Family**

Rav Betzalel replied, "I met a sailor who is sailing out tomorrow. He told me that if I come with visas, he'll give me seats for my family on his ship." The officer responded, "All right then. Show me your passports and I'll prepare the visas." Rav Betzalel put his hand into his pocket to take out the passports, and to his utter astonishment, he didn't have them! He must have left them at home!

Realizing that he had now lost his last chance to escape, he fainted and collapsed to the ground. The next thing he knew, he was being revived with a cold splash of water on his face. When the officer saw the gravity of the situation, he kindly responded, "Don't worry. I'll write an official document that holds the British stamp, and you won't have any trouble getting in to England with it." He then handed Rav Betzalel a document that had the official British stamp on it, with the names of his children, and his wife as well. Rav Betzalel thanked him profusely, and left the office.

### **There was Still Some Space to Add Other Names**

When he later looked at the document, he saw that there was still some space on the paper, and he said to himself, "I can add many names to this list and save other Yidden as well as my family!" He contacted other people he knew and added fifty people to his paper, and they were all able to escape. From those fifty people, many beautiful families and many generations of Yidden continue to owe their thanks to Rav Betzalel!

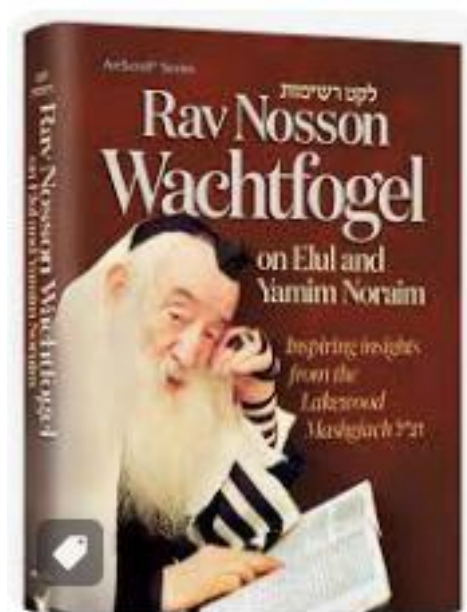
Rav Betzalel later reflected that had he brought the passports with him to the Consulate, all those precious people would not have been saved. It was only because Rav Betzalel "forgot" the passports that he was able to get that paper, and it was that seemingly "terrible" oversight that ended up saving all of those generations of Yidden.



Rav Wachsmann said that many times, we don't see the good within the situations that we encounter, but we must remember where our challenges are coming from. They're coming from Hashem who loves us more than we love ourselves. Hashem's love for us is infinite, and we must remember that anything that happens to us is all for our very best. Sometimes we have to endure a hardship, but that will only be so that it can lead us to a good outcome. Even though we don't always see the "happy ending," we must strengthen our Emunah and our reliance on Hashem that it is all being done for our own best, whether we see it at the present moment or not!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bereishis 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

## Why Do People Want My Brochas?



Rav Nosson Meir Wachtfogel, zt"l, the Mashgiach of Bais Medrash Govoha, once visited Eretz Yisroel. The trip was particularly strenuous at his advanced age, especially since many people wished to meet with him and ask him for a Brachah.

One day, Rav Nosson Meir went to Daven at the Kosel. After he had finished Davening, he turned around to see a long line of people waiting to talk to him!

Rav Nosson Meir patiently spoke with each person, listening to their requests and offering his Brachos. Later that evening, Rav Nosson Meir reviewed the day's events. He said, "Who am I, and what am I, that people should come to me for Brachos?" the Mashgiach humbly exclaimed to his Talmid. "I want to clearly acknowledge the truth about myself. I carry a heavy burden on my shoulders for all the precious time that I've taken away from learning Torah. Moshiach will soon come, and everyone will find out who I really am. I will be so ashamed!"

The next day, the Mashgiach called someone who was having trouble with his personal relationships. This man had a very strong character, and his dominating personality was causing much strife.

Rav Nosson Meir told him, "Yesterday, I went to the Kosel to Daven. When I finished, I turned around to see a huge line of people waiting. Do you know who they were waiting for? They were waiting for me. They wanted a Brachah from me. Why did they want to come to me for a Brachah and not someone else?"

"Why don't they go to you for a Brachah? Do you know why they were waiting for my Brachah and not for yours? It is because for my whole life, I have worked on being humble to others. Please," Rav Nosson Meir gently encouraged him, "please treat others with respect. Treat people respectfully, and be humble. Then they will also come to you for Brachos!"

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bereishis 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

**Toras Avigdor Junior**

# **Doing in this World**

**By Aharon Spetner**

"Yitzy," asked Shimmy, as the two boys headed to cheder. "Why are you bringing a clipboard with you?"

"Oh it's because of something I read in one of Totty's old Toras Avigdor booklets."

"Rabbi Miller said you should bring a clipboard to cheder?" Shimmy asked, confused.

"No," Yitzy said. "But he brings the possuk from this week's Parsha that we say every week in kiddush. - on that day Hashem rested from all of the work which He created to do'. Rabbi Miller asks what it means 'which He created to do'? And

he answers that Hashem put us in this world to do, to create, to kiviyachol take over from the work that Hashem started.”

“Okay, I understand that,” Shimmy answered. “But what does a clipboard have to do with it?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Yitzy asked his confused older brother, who clearly did not see what was obvious. “We need to improve the world. And I am going to do that by teaching everyone all of the Taryag Mitzvos - imagine how much better a place the world would be if everyone knew all 613 mitzvos by heart! Isn’t that a great idea?”



**Illustration by Miriam Weinreb**

“I guess so,” said Shimmy.

“So, what’s Mitzvah number 46?” asked Yitzy, taking out his pen.

“Um I don’t know - sefiras ha’omer?”

“Nope,” Yitzy said, making a mark on his clipboard. “Mitzvah 46 is shtei halechem!”

“Oh okay,” Shimmy replied not too enthusiastically. “Thanks for teaching that to me.”

“Amazing!” Yitzy exclaimed. “Now remember that and I’ll test you on it later today!”

“Um... okay,” Shimmy repeated, as they approached the cheder.

In the courtyard, a bunch of boys were throwing a frisbee around before class started. Yitzy ran towards them, his clipboard gripped tightly in his hand.

“Pinny! Chezky! Dovy!” he called.

“Good morning Yitzy!” replied Chezky as he caught the frisbee in mid-air. “Do you want to play with us?”

### **Something Much Better than Playing with a Frisbee**

“No, I’ve got something much better in mind!” Yitzy said brightly.

The boys stopped playing with their frisbee for a moment. Something better? What game did Yitzy have in mind?

“What’s that?” asked Dovy with interest.

“Do you know what Mitzvah number 215 is?” Yitzy asked, looking at his clipboard.

“What?” Dovy said, confused.

“Mitzvas aseï number 215,” Yitzy repeated. “What is it?”

“Uh... I don’t know, why don’t you ask Rebbe Caplan?”

“No, I know what it is - I’m asking you! It’s bris milah!”

“Okay,” Dovy said, while Chezky tossed the frisbee to Pinny, who started running to catch it. “Thanks for telling us.”

“Wait!” called Yitzy as Dovy turned to rejoin the frisbee game. “I want to teach you more Mitzvos!”

“Okay, that sounds great,” Dovy called. “Maybe during lunch!”

### **Disappointed by His Friends Lack of Excitement**

Yitzy walked away, disappointed that his friends didn’t seem to be as excited as he was about his new project.

“Good morning, Yitzchok. Is everything okay?” asked Rebbe Caplan as Yitzy walked past him.

“Good morning rebbe,” Yitzy said. “Yeah, everything is fine. It’s just that my friends aren’t as interested as I thought they’d be in learning all Taryag Mitzvos.”

Yitzy told Rebbe Caplan what he had read in Toras Avigdor and about his new project to teach everyone all of the Mitzvos. Rebbe Caplan listened patiently as he described what he was trying to do.

“I don’t understand how I’m supposed to make Hashem’s world a better place if nobody will listen to me,” he finished dejectedly.

“Yitzchok,” Rebbe Caplan said. “I actually remember that Toras Avigdor booklet. You didn’t read the whole thing, did you?”

“Well, no,” Yitzy explained. “As soon as I read about how we have to make the world a better place I ran to get a clipboard and I made this chart of all of the Mitzvos.”

### **Our Mission is to Constantly Improve Ourselves**

“Well, if you would have been a bit more patient you would have seen what Rabbi Miller said next. He says that the most important thing we can improve in this world is ourselves!”

“But I already know all of the 613 mitzvos by heart,” Yitzy replied.

“That’s gevaldig!” Rebbe Caplan said warmly. “But that doesn’t mean that you’re done working on yourself. Self-improvement is a lifetime avodah. It’s a job that never ends.”

“So, the only thing I’ll ever get to improve in this world is myself?” Yitzy asked, somewhat disappointed.

“Of course not!” Rebbe Caplan answered. “You will find that there will be many times in your life where you can help improve things - or even other people who are willing to listen to you. But you must remember that first and foremost, YOU are the most important thing that you have to work on. That’s why we have mussar seforim like Chovos Halevavos and Mesillas Yesharim. These teach us how to make ourselves into better people, which in turn makes the world a better place.”  
Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

### **Takeaway:**

Hashem created us “to do”, to accomplish change within ourselves by becoming better people.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bereishis 5784 email of Toras Avigdor Junior.*