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The Secret “Good Guy”



Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l was a gadol hador known not only for his encyclopedic knowledge and ability to posek halacha, but also for his sensitivity, generosity and compassion for the Jewish people, which followed in the footsteps of Moshe Rabbenu.

For many years, the local grocery store in Reb Shlomo Zalman’s neighborhood was run by a widow. To operate such a store consumed every ounce of the woman’s strength. Delivery vans would pull up at dawn and the truckers would deposit crates of milk and dairy products on the sidewalk.

Later, the widow would drag them inside when she opened the store. One day, to her delight, she saw that the crates had been placed at the front entrance, considerably easing her workload.

This phenomenon recurred the following morning and continued day after day. One morning, the widow felt that she should thank the drivers personally, so

she made a point of arriving at the store very early. However, to her amazement, when the vans appeared, the men deposited her delivery on the edge of the sidewalk as they had always done in the past.

Perplexed, she stood hidden on the pavement wondering how the heavy crates had transported themselves to her door, when suddenly the figure of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach appeared, tefillin bag under his arm. One by one, he lifted the heavy crates, deposited them in front of the grocery store, and hurried off to shul. This is the kind of empathy and compassion we should strive to have.

Reprinted from the Parashat Shemot 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

Our Problem

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



Reb Tzvi Pruzansky, who passed away in 2005, was one of the early talmidim of Rav Shneur Kotler (1918-1982), rosh yeshivah of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood. Reb Tzvi was known in Lakewood as a creative, sensitive baal chessed, who would do anything for anyone in need. Tall and imposing, Reb Tzvi was soft and gentle to all who needed support and help.

He and his friends were once walking past the home of a mutual friend whose family was suffering terrible misfortunes. They commiserated among themselves at how bad things were for that family. Reb Tzvi chided them gently and said, “Don’t

just give a krechtz (sigh) at someone's tzaros (troubles). Think of ways to help him and do something about it."

His Life was a Documentary On How to Help Others

He often said, "If I were to write a book, it would be entitled, After the Krechtz: What will you do after you sigh?" He never wrote the book, but his life was a documentary of how to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

The following is a case in point. The incident took place decades before there were many yeshivos in Lakewood. It was a few days after Rosh Chodesh Elul and Reb Tzvi was driving when he recognized a young bachur, Uri,* walking down the street in the middle of the morning.

Reb Tzvi pulled over and asked the bachur why he wasn't in yeshivah. Uri replied that he had not been accepted to the yeshivah of his choice and so he was not attending any yeshivah for the Elul zman.

A Two-Hour Drive to the Out-of-Town Yeshiva that Rejected the Boy

After discussion, Reb Tzvi said, "Come with me, Uri. Let's take a ride to the yeshivah." Uri got into the car and together they drove two hours to the out-of-town yeshivah that had rejected him.

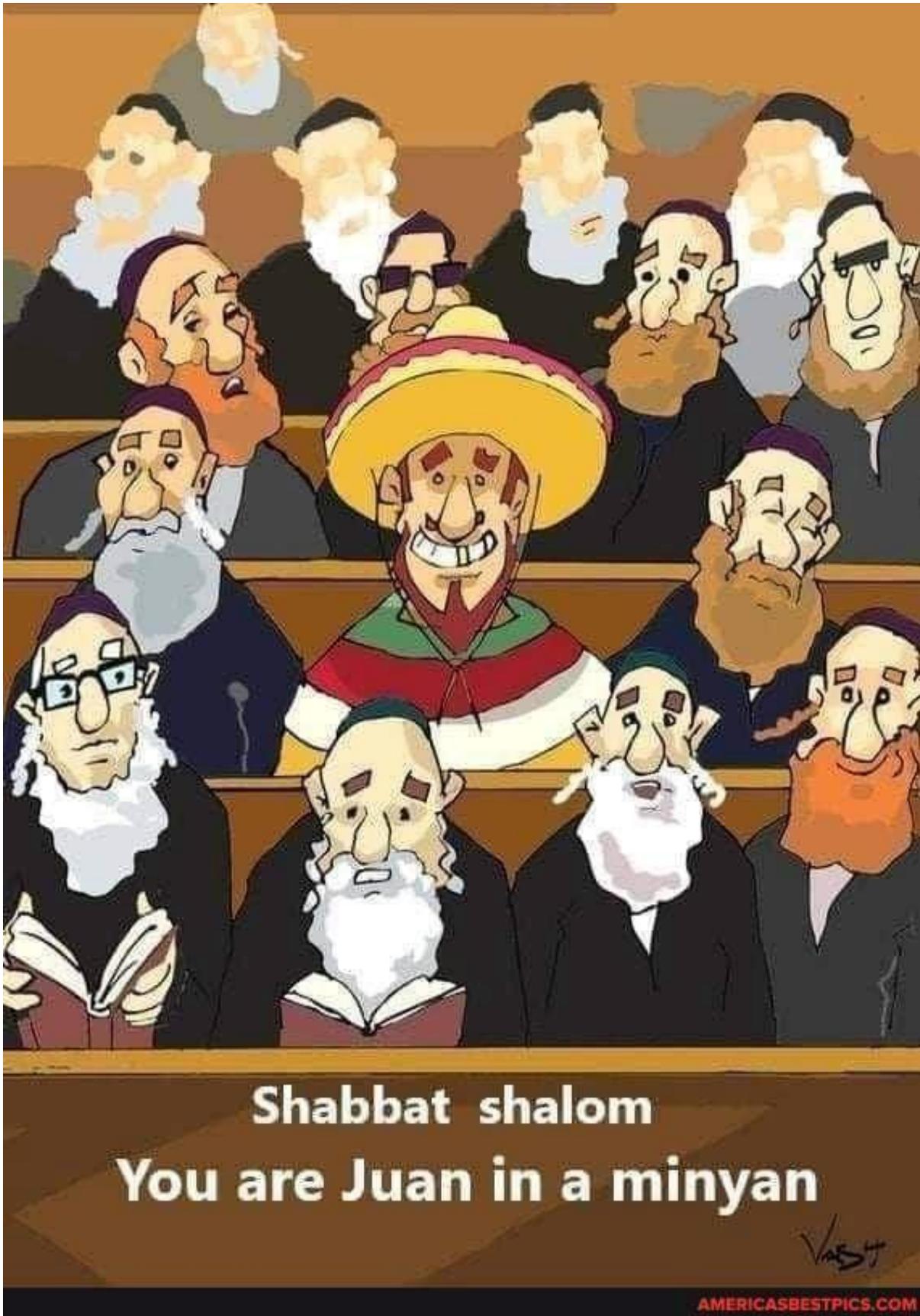
The rosh yeshivah explained to Reb Tzvi that there were reasons why Uri had not been accepted. His level of learning was not on par with the others his age, there were no empty beds in the dorm, the class was full, etc.

Reb Tzvi had a response for every excuse. "I will hire a tutor for Uri," he answered the first objection. "I will buy a bed and have it delivered today to the dorm. I will rearrange the classroom and make room for another desk." (I would not be surprised if he also guaranteed to pay Uri's tuition in full.)

The rosh yeshivah accepted Uri and he thrived in the yeshivah. When staff members heard that he had been accepted, they asked the rosh yeshivah why he had accepted Uri when Reb Tzvi intervened, but had refused to accept him when other people had advocated for him.

The rosh yeshivah's answer was classic. "The other askanim wanted to make the boy my problem. Reb Tzvi wanted to make the bachur our problem. He got personally involved and promised he would stay involved to make sure Uri succeeded, so he and I would be partners in the bachur's future."

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5783 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table.
Excerpted from the ArtScroll book - The Grandeur of the Maggid.*



Neither Sleet Nor Snow...

By Yossi Ives



Art by Sefira Lightstone

The winter of 1912 was particularly brutal, one of the coldest ever recorded. “The human race will have to fight for its existence against cold,” declared the Los Angeles Times. It was, of course, the year that the RMS Titanic fatefully collided with a giant iceberg.

In the mountaintop city of Safed, everyone hunkered down at home; only the strongest considered braving the elements.

Waiting for a Tenth Man to Join the Minyan

Unsurprisingly, the small group at the synagogue waited a while for a tenth man to arrive for the morning prayers. To their astonishment, in walked their small and frail rabbi who had braved wind and snow to join them. His name was Rabbi Yaakov David Vilowsky, known around the world by his acronym, the Ridvaz, which stands for Rabbi Yaakov David ben (son of) Zev. That was to be his last winter; he passed away on Rosh Hashanah, October 2, 1913, at the age of 68.

The rabbi entered the synagogue and strode to the *amud* (lectern) to lead the service, something he did not usually do. He was visibly emotional throughout the prayers, tears flowing freely.

After the service was over, the small crowd was eager to understand what was going on. Why did the rabbi endanger his life to come to synagogue when he could have prayed at home? Why did he lead the service, against his normal practice? And why was he so emotional?

The story he told in response is deeply moving.

As a child, the Ridvaz grew up in poverty in a small town in what is now Belarus. With six children, his parents' economic situation was dire, and they hadn't been able to pay tuition since the beginning of the year.

The Tutor's Threat to David's Father

One day, young Yaakov David heard his teacher tell his father: "Your son Yaakov David is an exceptional student, but if you can't pay me for teaching him, I will have no choice but to replace him with a fee-paying student."

The boy froze; it seemed like he was on the verge of losing his teacher and with it the learning he enjoyed so much.

That night, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, consumed by fear and worry. He nearly burst out crying, but he held himself back, knowing that this would only add to his parents' distress.

Lying awake in bed he heard his parents, Zev and Hendel, talking. "Yaakov David has so much potential to become a Torah scholar," Hendel said. "We can't let him miss out on an education."

Zev came up with a solution: "Tomorrow I will dismantle our heating stove and sell it. It is now wintertime, so the stove will sell for a good price—enough to pay for half a year's tuition."

Fell Asleep Both Happy and Sad

"My relief at being able to continue learning," recalled the Ridvaz, "was marred by the realization that my parents would freeze on my behalf. I fell asleep that night at once both happy and sad." The next morning the oven was duly dismantled and sold, and the Ridvaz went on to become one of the outstanding scholars of his generation, filling rabbinic posts on both sides of the Atlantic. He authored numerous distinguished works, including his monumental commentary to the Jerusalem Talmud.

"When I saw the storm this morning," the rabbi explained, "I thought it would be religiously preferable for me to play it safe and stay home. But it is my father's *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death), and I owed it to him to be in synagogue to honor his memory and pray for his soul. My parents sacrificed so much for me, enduring a freezing winter with no stove so that I could study. Now it is my time to sacrifice for them. That is why I led the prayers, as is customary on the *yahrzeit*. It is also why I was so emotional, remembering my parents' dedication to Torah."

The Ridvaz was a particularly strong-minded scholar, not known for his sentimentality. He found himself at the heart of several fiery halachic disputes over the years. In 1903, he was enticed by a very generous offer by the Orthodox community in Chicago to be their chief rabbi. The community leaders strongly desired a rabbinic leader of the Ridvaz's stature. A mere two years later, however, he left the city and moved to the Land of Israel (then under Ottoman rule), after clashing with those responsible for supervising the city's kosher food. In that short time, the Ridvaz left an enduring impact. (Still today, candle-lighting on Fridays is called for 20 minutes before sunset in Chicago, while in virtually every other community it is called for 18 minutes prior.)

Never Forgot His Parents' Mesiras Nefesh

He never forgot his parents' extraordinary devotion, and credited them with his achievements.

This may help explain a strange anomaly regarding his name. As mentioned earlier, he was known as the Ridvaz, which stands for Rav Yakov David ben Zev. Not since the Middle Ages has it been common for a rabbi to be called after his father's name, as everyone has last names – in this case, Vilowsky. Surely, this was a special tribute to his parents.

In his will, the Ridvaz specifically urged his descendants to learn Torah on his *yahrzeit*, and not to say kaddish otherwise. It seems that he wished to pass on his parents' legacy even after his passing.

A pivotal decision taken when the Ridvaz was just six years old set him on a path to greatness. For all of his own toil and effort over many decades, he gave the credit to his loving and idealistic parents. To whom do we owe the good things we have enjoyed? Let us remember and pay tribute to those who make a significant impact on our lives.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shemos 5783 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Recognize Who Can Help You

Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita, relates that a woman suffering from extreme poverty came before the Divrei Chaim (Sanzer Rav, zl) weeping bitterly. She pleaded with the holy Rebbeto intercede on behalf of her gravely ill son. The Divrei Chaim told her, "If you give me one thousand reinit (the currency of the day), I guarantee you that your son will merit a *refuah sheleimah*, complete recovery."

The woman was incredulous and expressed her displeasure: “How can I pay so much money? I am lucky to have some coins to live and support my family. The sum the Rebbe is demanding from me is not within my reach. Please forgo the exorbitant sum. I have nothing.” The Rebbe refused to reconsider, “I must have the complete sum, or I cannot promise you that your son will survive.”

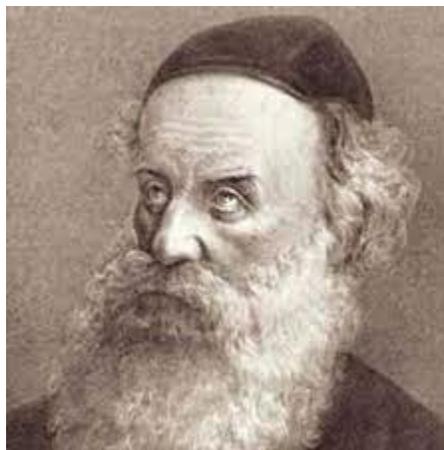
When the woman heard this final response and saw that the Rebbe was immovable, she raised her hands in desperation and exclaimed, “If the Rebbe will not help me, then I have no recourse but to turn to Hashem.” The Rebbe countered,

“This is what I wanted to hear. I cannot help you. Only Hashem has the power to heal your son. Unless you acknowledge this verity, you are assured of nothing. Now that you have accepted Hashem as the only resort, I will give you my blessing for a refuah sheleimah.”

All too often, we exhaust all avenues of salvation, while ignoring the only One who has the means for effecting a positive response to our needs.

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5783 edition of Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum's Peninim on the Torah.

The Young Man and the Magnificent Horse



The court of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chasidism, was located in the small, White Russian town of Lionzna. His many chasidim flocked there to be near him, to pray, to celebrate the festivals, to receive his blessings and to benefit from his Torah-wisdom.

Once, a chasid came to the Rebbe with a heavy sorrow weighing on his soul. When he entered the Rebbe's chambers, he couldn't restrain himself, and tears flowed from his eyes. "Rebbe," he sobbed, "my son has turned away from everything we have taught him. He no longer follows mitzvot (commandments), and I'm afraid that he will be completely lost from the path of truth. Please, Rebbe, give me some advice how to get him back."

Feeling the Chasid's Pain

The Rebbe felt his chasid's pain, and he was silent for some moments. Then he replied, "Do you think that you might be able to persuade the boy to come to see me?"

"I don't know," the man sighed. "The way he's been acting recently, I'm afraid it might be very difficult. He has some wild friends, and he hardly listens to his parents."

"Nevertheless, I want you to think up some way in which you can get him to come here. Maybe there's some errand you can send him on that would bring him to Liozna. When he gets to the town, a way will be found to bring him here to me."

The prospect of the Rebbe taking charge of his wayward son lifted the chasid's spirits. He returned home in a far brighter mood than the one in which he had come. The man spent the whole return trip to his village deep in thought, trying to hatch some plan which would draw his son to the Rebbe.

Very Fond of Horse-Back Riding

Suddenly he had an excellent idea. His son was very fond of horse-back riding, an activity considered improper for a Jewish boy. The boy, however, cared not the least for public opinion, and to his father's consternation, he took every opportunity to ride into town. This seemed a perfect ruse to get his son to the Rebbe. He would ask the boy to go and pick something up in town.

When he asked his son to go on the errand, the boy responded, "I'll go only if I can go by horseback." This time the father quickly acquiesced.

The boy happily galloped into town, unaware that his father's friends were on the lookout for him, and that the errand was merely a signal to them to bring him to the Rebbe's house.

No sooner had he arrived in Liozna, than he was spirited to the Rebbe's house, and found himself standing face to face with The Alter Rebbe. "I'm glad to see you," said the Rebbe. "But, tell me, why did you come by horseback, instead of in a wagon?"

"To tell you the truth, it's because I love to ride. And my horse is such a fine specimen, I figure, why shouldn't I take advantage of him?"

“Really? Tell me, what exactly are the advantages of such an animal?” asked the Rebbe.

“Surely you can imagine, an animal such as mine runs very fast. You jump on his back, and speed down the road, and in no time at all you are at your destination,” the young man replied with great enthusiasm.

“That is truly a great advantage, but only provided that you are on the right road. Because, if you’re on the wrong road, you’ll only be going in the wrong direction faster.”

Getting Back on the Right Road

“Even if that’s so,” countered by the young man, “the horse would help you get back on the right road more quickly as soon as you realize you’re on the wrong road.”

“If you realize yourself that you are on the wrong road,” the Rebbe slowly emphasized. “It’s true, my boy, if you catch yourself, before it’s too late, and you realize that you have strayed from the right path; then you can quickly return.”

The words of the Rebbe, uttered so slowly and deliberately, hit the young man like a bombshell, and the Rebbe’s penetrating eyes seemed to pierce right through him. The young man fell down in a faint.

He was quickly revived, and in a subdued tone, he asked the Rebbe’s permission to remain in Liozna, so that he could renew his Torah studies.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shemos 5783 edition of L’Chaim, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

Every Dog Has His Day

By Naama Klein

I have long-professed that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* has a wonderful sense of humor and an incredibly keen sense of irony... That would certainly begin to explain why I, Naama Klein, who was bitten (okay, nipped) by a dog at age three, and who has since harbored an understandable fear of those four-legged creatures, is now the very surprised, and often surprisingly proud, Savta of two granddogs! I kid you not!

When my son and daughter-in-law were seriously considering making *aliyah* with their three young children, someone suggested that having a family dog move to Israel with them could possibly help ease that very difficult transition. The next thing we knew, they were shopping around for the perfect furry

candidate. And several misses later, they found her: Kelly,* a white and brown beauty with the most striking ice-blue eyes!



Photo Credit: 123rf.com

My husband and I were admittedly somewhat skeptical about the idea from the get-go, and absolutely shocked to hear how expensive and complicated it is to ship a dog to the Holy Land. But, like all parents and in-laws, we were trained to keep our opinions to ourselves and help our kids in every way, despite our misgivings... Including my husband waking up in the wee hours one morning, a few weeks prior to the scheduled *aliyah* date, to pick Kelly up from Ben Gurion Airport and drive her to a local kennel to sit out her isolation period before the new *olim*'s arrival.

Did Kelly help our children and grandchildren with their *aliyah* process? Hard to say. The coronavirus made everything exponentially more difficult, so we may never know for sure... But one thing that there's absolutely no doubt about whatsoever is that Kelly became a beloved member of their family, and by extension, ours as well.

So much so that, a year or so later, when my kids heard about a new litter of puppies being sold relatively inexpensively, they opted to add another dog to their

motley crew. But, while their latest addition was content to find a quiet corner in the yard, on the couch, virtually *anywhere!* to curl up and go to sleep at pretty much any given time of day or night, his older sister, Kelly, remained as boisterous and *leibidik* as ever.

Occasional Noise Complaints from a Cranky Neighbor

Kelly regularly jumped up to greet me in her signature style, licking me exuberantly while rhythmically wagging her tail. Well, she certainly knew how to make a guest feel welcome (if not utterly terrified!). In time we all got used to Kelly's over-the-top behavior (and her younger brother's sad puppy eyes and low-key demeanor), and aside from the occasional noise complaint by one chronically cranky neighbor, all was well with the new *olim*, their two very different dogs, and seemingly the world at large.

My children and grandchildren *b'H* happily settled into their lovely garden apartment, their block, and the wider community, and amassed an impressive circle of friends. Once Corona became less of a nightmare, they frequently invited their neighbors and new-found friends for Shabbos meals, and even more often were invited out. Their own children, for their part, were seldom seen without several new BFF's in tow.

In fact, I often joked that I should consider getting a dog of my own, because my kids and grandkids seemingly daily, and apparently effortlessly, made countless new friends at the "dog park." Maybe there was still some hope for me to reclaim my own social life as well!

My Children Gratefully Adopted the Afternoon Siesta

During their acclimation to Israel, my children had adopted the Israeli siesta, taking time off from work and other responsibilities to enjoy a short restorative nap during the hot afternoon hours. They really appreciated that brief respite, and were usually able to adjust their schedules to take advantage of that worthwhile opportunity.

A couple of years passed rather uneventfully, and then the *chofesh hagadol*, aka summer vacation, aptly nicknamed the '*onesh hagadol*' or huge punishment (by long-suffering parents), was upon us once again.

My kids found a private day camp for the two younger kids, and although the kids loved the program and relished spending time with their friends, the major downside was that it ended at 1:30 p.m. each day.

Now that their kids were no longer in school, but already home at that time, my kids were not quite sure whether they could continue with their chosen siesta routine, but they decided to give it a try. So, after they made sure the kids had plenty to eat and drink, they settled them comfortably in the air-conditioned living room

with ample fun activities to keep them happily and quietly occupied, and then retired to their bedroom for their afternoon nap.

However, Kelly, who routinely joined them for the daily siesta, soon began pacing and barking in agitation. Realizing that they would not get a moment's rest under the circumstances, my daughter-in-law opened the bedroom door to let her out. Kelly immediately bolted out and then ran to the front door, barking loudly and purposefully. My daughter-in-law opened the front door for the frantic dog, thinking that she just wanted to run around in the fresh air.

But Kelly frantically raced off to the side of the house, barking even louder. The sight that greeted my daughter's eyes made her blood run cold: There were her two young children – no longer on the couch, but in the backyard – or more accurately, inside their large *and very deep* above-ground family pool! Kelly's quick-thinking had not only saved the day, but quite possibly their young lives as well!

Our kids told over this story with a decided mixture of awe and profound gratitude. Needless to say, Kelly achieved instant hero status in our book too.

And, as much as I hesitate to admit it, it looks like there's now one more reason for a professed non-dog-lover like me to consider getting a furry four-legged best friend of my own.

Reprinted from the November 6, 2022 website of The Jewish Press.

The Origins of Today's Strong Jewish Community In South Bend, Indiana

By Rabbi Hillel Goldberg

At a wedding, Rabbi Yisrael Gettinger, Rav of Cong. Bnei Torah of Indianapolis, related the following story to Rabbi Hillel Goldberg. Between dances, he leaned over the salad and asked, "Do you follow football? Let me tell you a story..."

It is a story of how the sport of football founded a Torah community. The storyline is winding, moving backward from the chosson's place of residence, South Bend, Indiana, to the cleverest stunt in football history. Many people are unaware that the midwest city of South Bend, Indiana, is blessed with a strong Jewish

community, with over fifty percent of its entire Jewish student population enrolled in its Orthodox day school.

It was founded and is still supported in large part by the Lerman family, which originated in Rock Island, Illinois, and came to South Bend via the Notre Dame football team. The beginning of the story really goes back further, to Lithuania, in which a certain Mr. Lerman, a shochet, a kosher slaughterer by trade, decided to come to America.

He settled in Rock Island, Illinois, and died when his children were young, in the 1920's. One of his children was short and strong. He was not more than eleven years old when his father died. Somehow, he had mastered the Jewish basics - most notably his father's strong religious commitment. But as a young American, he loved football, too. He was a strong and athletic lad so football was his natural choice.



In larger cities in the United States in the 1920's, the student body at any given public high school could be almost entirely, Jewish, because Jewish neighborhoods were strong and vibrant. In one public school in Chicago, for example, almost the entire student body was Jewish, and the school football team was entirely Jewish too. So much so that they called their signals in Yiddish. Clever, if you think about it. Which opposing team would ever figure that out?

Due to the vagaries of high school football schedules long lost to history, one fine day the Chicago Jewish football team showed up in Rock Island, Illinois, to play an inter-school game. On the local Rock Island team was young Lerman the orphan and strictly religious Jew. And he, too, was fluent in Yiddish.

The Chicago team was calling its plays in Yiddish, yelling them out audibly, since they assumed that no one other than their team members could understand. Unfortunately for them, the Chicago team had a lot of trouble with the Rock Island team that day, since the Lerman boy never let on that he knew Yiddish and understood every play that they called.

Calling Their Plays in Yiddish

Chicago would call its signals in Yiddish and Lerman knew exactly what those big tough city boys were saying. He positioned himself before every play and stopped the Chicago team dead in its tracks.

The Rock Island boys went on to defeat the bigger, stronger, badder Chicago team, in epic upset fashion. The Chicago team did not know that young Lerman knew Yiddish and apparently, by a twist of Providential fate, neither did the college scout in the stands! A scout from Notre Dame - one of the biggest football programs in the country till this day - was watching Lerman play and was mightily impressed.

He filed this report: "Never in my history of scouting have I seen a football player who has a better sense of the play, who knows where it is heading, who knows where to go and what to do, than the boy Lerman in Rock Island, Illinois."

A Football Scholarship to Notre Dame

Yiddish-speaking, Orthodox Jewish Lerman won a football scholarship to Notre Dame, a Catholic university located in the sleepy town of South Bend, Indiana. Lerman accepted the scholarship. He was dirt poor and this scholarship was his salvation. However, his football career never got off the ground as early in his first year, he injured his knee and could not play football anymore.

His scholarship was canceled. His financial security was gone. He could not go home as he didn't have the money to travel. With no other choice, he settled down in South Bend. Eventually, he met a traditional Jewish girl there, married, and they had ten children. They reinvigorated their religious traditions and dedicated themselves to preserving the small Orthodox Jewish community of South Bend, even when the local synagogue burned down.

Today, it is the children of young Lerman, the Yiddish-deciphering, Notre Dame-footballing orphan who pick up the slack in the budget for the local Jewish day school in South Bend - the school reflecting the community with the highest per-capita enrollment in a day school in the broader United States. (Adapted from *The Unexpected Road*, by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, Feldheim Pub)

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5783 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin