

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS SHELACH 5782

Volume 13A, Issue 44 – 26 Sivan 5782/June 25, 2022

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

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The Sambatyon River



The evil Roman ruler Turnus Rufus, who ruled over Yerushalayim during the reign of Adrianus the Caesar, used to ask Rebbi Akiva many questions. One time he asked, “Why is Shabbos more special than the other days of the week?”

Rebbi Akiva answered, “HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires that Shabbos be honored, and He commanded us to honor it.”

“But how do you know,” continued Turnus Rufus, “that the day you keep Shabbos is really Shabbos? Maybe a different day of the week is really Shabbos!”

Rebbi Akiva answered, “The Sambatyon River proves when Shabbos is. As you know, it is a very turbulent and violent river. It is full of stones that are tossed about constantly due to its force. But on Shabbos, the river slows and calms down. It is as if the river stops to rest for Shabbos. This is how we know the day we observe as Shabbos is really Shabbos.” (Sanhedrin 65b)

Once there was a Chasid, a righteous person, who went out for a walk in his vineyard on Shabbos. He only went to see how things were doing there, and if anything needed to be done. While he was walking through it, he saw that one of his fences had fallen down, leaving it wide open and unprotected.

The Chasid thought to himself that right after Shabbos he would get to work and fix the fence. Immediately after this thought, he felt terrible. “How could I have even thought about work on Shabbos Kodesh!” He decided right then that since he thought about fixing the fence on Shabbos, he would not fix it on Motza’ei Shabbos.

“In fact,” he said, “I won’t ever fix the fence! I’ll only rely on HaKadosh Baruch Hu to guard and protect the grapes, like I should have relied on Him to begin with!”

When Hashem saw how serious the Chasid was about honoring Shabbos, He made a special type of fruit tree grow at the exact spot where the hole in the fence was. It closed the opening and protected the vineyard. This special fruit tree was called a Tzelaf tree, which is a tree that grows three types of fruit at once. The Chasid was able to live off the fruits of the Tzelaf tree all the days of his life! (Otzar HaMidrashim, Yisro 20:10)

Reprinted from the Parshas Beha’alosecha 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

It is Never Too Late or Too Hopeless

Rav Aryeh Zev Ginzberg related the following story: The son of one of his congregants went to learn in Eretz Yisroel, and decided to enroll in a Hesder Yeshivah, which combines Torah study with military service. He joined the Israeli army and achieved a position of leadership in the IDF.

In the summer of 2005, during the Gaza Disengagement, the army had to forcibly remove Jewish settlers who refused to leave. This American soldier was very distraught about the assignment, but as a soldier he followed orders and participated in the forced evacuation.

When his unit arrived at one of the settlements, his job was to ensure that the settlers boarded the buses to be evacuated. He worked in tandem with the Rabbi of the settlement. The people gathered in the town’s Shul, where the Rabbi spoke, followed by the soldier. They all wept together, and then they all filed out of the Shul and boarded the bus.

Before the bus left, this soldier took a Siddur from his backpack, dug a hole, and buried it there. When the Rabbi asked him why he was doing this, he replied that perhaps at some point in the future someone will return and may find the Siddur, and will realize that they had left begrudgingly, and that they left their hearts and prayers behind.

Eleven months later, in the summer of 2006, Gilad Shalit was captured by Hamas militants in Gaza. Israel decided to reinvade Gaza in an attempt to find him. The American soldier's unit was sent back into Gaza, to set up a base of operations. As part of the discreet rescue operation, they entered the Gaza Strip under the cover of darkness and traveled for a bit in the dark.

Set Up a Camp in a Deserted Area

Although they did not know exactly where they were, they finally stopped and set up camp in a deserted area. The next morning, the soldier awoke and looked around, not recognizing anything. But after a short while, the place began to look familiar. This was the town he had helped evacuate not a year ago! Everything had been destroyed. Not a building was left standing, and rubble was everywhere.

Still, the soldier walked around until he stopped, knelt down on the ground, and started digging. To his pleasant surprise, he found the Siddur he had buried all those months before. He was shaken by the experience and called his father in America to tell him the story. He asked his father to ask a Rav to interpret the significance of what had occurred.



Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt"l

The man spoke it over with Rabbi Ginzberg, who was mystified himself by the story, and arranged for the soldier to have a private meeting with Rav Chaim

Kanievsky, zt”l, to discuss it. Rav Chaim listened to the soldier’s tale and then asked him what he did when he found out that he would have to evict the settlers.

The soldier replied that he had begged his commanding officers to abandon their plans, and he davened (prayed) fervently that the disengagement order be aborted. Rav Chaim then asked him what he did when he found out that he would have to proceed with the evacuation. The soldier replied that once it was clear to him that the order would not be rescinded and the mandatory evacuation was a foregone conclusion, he resigned himself to the situation.

Rav Chaim told the soldier that since he had ceased Davening with the same intensity once the situation became clear, Hashem was now sending him a message, that one should never stop davening! “You buried the Siddur because you felt that it was pointless to continue to daven,” said Rav Chaim. “Hashem returned it to you so you should realize that it’s never too late, or too hopeless, for tefilah! (prayers)”

Reprinted from the Parshas Beha’alosecha 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

The “Tardy” Photographer

It was late Tuesday night when the phone rang in Leo’s house. A good friend of his named Solomon was calling. “Perhaps you can help me,” he said. “I’m making a wedding soon and I’d like you to recommend a good photographer.”

After giving it some thought, Leo gave him the name of a man who was both an excellent photographer and also very reasonably priced.

“I’ve heard about him,” replied Solomon, “but I was also told that he was unreliable.”

“Oh, really?” Leo said, quite surprised. “What makes you say so?”

“Well, I’m told he was recently hired for a Bar Misvah and he first arrived after it was half over. He missed half the affair. There’s no way I’d hire a person who’s so irresponsible.”

It’s certainly a severe charge, Leo thought to himself. “Are you sure about it?” he asked. “It’s a very strong accusation.”

“I’m quite positive,” was his reply. “The head of the band that night told me himself. Go check it out yourself.”

“I sure will,” Leo said. “But what makes you so sure there wasn’t some sort of emergency?”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Solomon said, “but I just can’t risk it. Besides, there’s no reason in the world for coming late. He should have started out early enough so

that even if his car broke down he could have taken a car service and made it on time. There is absolutely no good excuse for a photographer to walk in after half the affair is over!”

It was hard to argue with him. He had a strong point and my defense wasn’t too convincing, Leo thought. Could I really recommend someone who is unreliable? Was it truly negligence on his part?

The very next day, Leo bumped into his good friend, the photographer. He brought up the subject of the Bar Misvah in question.

“Is it true that you arrived halfway through the affair?” he asked.

“Yes, it certainly is,” the photographer answered. “But why are you asking?”

“I just recommended you for a job, and the people refused to take you. They claimed you were unreliable because you didn’t come on time.”

The photographer looked at Leo in disbelief and shock, and then began to tell him his story. Leo listened very carefully.

“The job was not mine at all,” he began. “The photographer who had been hired for the job failed to show up. I received an emergency call in the middle of the affair to come down immediately. Despite being very busy at that moment, I dropped everything I was doing and raced down to the hall as quickly as possible.”

With a hurt look written on his face, he added, “I only did it as a personal favor to them.” (The Other Side of the Story by Yehudis Samet published by ArtScroll.)

Reprinted from the Parshat Naso 5782 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Please Take My Son

By Naomi Brudner

I heard this beautiful story from Rabbi Yitzchak Fanger who was talking about the importance of doing our best, going out of our comfort zone, walking the extra mile, and knowing that Hashem knows everything we’re doing, including the difficulties we are facing in order to do our best in order to help a fellow Jew.

He told about a person he met recently named Shachar Sha’air, a Chabad rabbi from Rechovot who told him that years ago he built a building in Ohr Yehuda in order to make a religious *gan*, a kindergarten specifically for secular children so that he could bring them closer to their Father in Heaven and their eternal heritage.

Among the parents who came to register their children was a woman who came to Rabbi Sha’air with her young son, Eliyahu. Rabbi Sha’air spoke to the

mother and the child and was about to accept and register the boy when the mother said: “I must tell you, Rabbi. I don’t have any money to pay you. Not now, and it’s not likely that I’ll have any money to pay you later in the year either.”



Rabbi Sha’air was surprised by this, especially since he had a staff to pay as well as plenty of other expenses, and was expecting to help cover at least some of his expenses with the money that parents would pay. As the woman and her son sat there before him, Rabbi Sha’air thought about the situation.

The Rabbi’s Dilemma

What should he do? And then he said to himself, ‘We don’t turn away Jewish children.’ And he accepted Eliyahu. The mother and child were tremendously happy and grateful and Rabbi Sha’air knew that he had made the right decision. In fact, he knew that there wasn’t even a question. When it comes to helping a fellow Jew, we must do what we can, even when it’s hard.

Gan was wonderful and Eliyahu loved it. And true to her word, his mother didn’t pay Rabbi Sha’air anything. And so it continued for three years. Eliyahu loved *gan*, participated with enthusiasm and excitement, and grew in his love of *Yiddishkeit*.

After those first three years it was time to go to school and Eliyahu and his mother wanted him to continue in the religious Chabad school and again his mother took him to the principal who was Rabbi Shimon Sha'air, the father of Shachar Sha'air.

Again the mother and boy were interviewed and Rabbi Sha'air wanted to accept Eliyahu, who was a lovely boy who was clearly eager to learn in this religious school. And again Eliyahu's mother said candidly to Rabbi Sha'air, as she had said to his son three years earlier: I want Eliyahu to learn in your school very much and so does he, but I must tell you something – I don't have any money to pay, and I doubt that I will be able to do so during the year either.

Unable to Turn Away a Jewish Child

Rabbi Shimon Sha'air heard her, looked at the sweet Jewish boy in front of him who was growing so beautifully in *Yiddishkeit*, and came to the same conclusion that his son had come to a few years ago. 'I won't turn away a Jewish child.' And so Rabbi Sha'air accepted Eliyahu into his school, knowing that there would be no payment for his studies, not this year, and most likely not in the years to come either.

Years went by and Eliyahu was a wonderful, diligent, happy student who loved what he was learning and the Jewish life he was living. More years went by, and now it was time to go to yeshiva. Rabbi Shimon Sha'air was again approached by Eliyahu's mother who said that she and Eliyahu wanted so much for Eliyahu to learn in yeshiva but she must tell him the truth: she has no money to pay for his studies and it's not likely that she'll have any money to pay him in the near future either. "But," she added, "someday I'll pay you back *b'ezrat Hashem*, with Hashem's help."

And so it was that Eliyahu began his yeshiva studies in Ohr Yehuda. He was an excellent student. He learned intensely, with great interest and perseverance. He had a sincere desire to understand and progress in his studies, and he was connected to *Yiddishkeit* not just with his mind – in his studies and adherence to halacha, Jewish law – but also with all his heart. He strived to serve Hashem as best as he could, and to become closer to Him more and more.

Preparing for the Holy Seventh Day of Pesach

Pesach came and on the seventh day of Pesach, a very special day, the day of *Krias Yam Suf*, the Splitting of the Sea, Rabbi Shimon Sha'air went to immerse in the *mikva* before beginning his Yom Tov (holiday) prayers. He was the only one there at the time. He entered the *mikva* with great concentration, knowing that these holy waters purify the one who immerses in them.

But Rabbi Sha'air had a medical ailment in his leg, called Shoshana in Hebrew, (possibly Cellulitis), and that day the water was too hot for a person with

that ailment. The high temperature of the water caused Rabbi' Sha'air's blood vessels to expand so much and so suddenly that he lost consciousness and sunk into the *mikva* waters, unconscious.

Just moments later, Eliyahu, the once secular boy from a very poor family, entered the *mikva* to purify himself before the Yom Tov prayers and immediately saw someone submerged in the *mikva* and not coming up. Quickly he jumped into the water and pulled out the man who was lying under the water, and began to try his best to resuscitate him. And as he did, he saw who it was, it was Rabbi Shimon Sha'air! Eliyahu worked and worked on his beloved rabbi until Rabbi Sha'air regained consciousness *Baruch Hashem*.

Not long after that, Rabbi Sha'air said to Eliyahu: "Please tell your mother that she owes me nothing. She has already paid me to the very last shekel."

Reprinted from the June 12, 2022 website of The Jewish Press.

The Reward of A Careful Mouth

Rav Menachem Weiss published a story about his friend, a principal of a *yeshiva* in Israel. This principal, his wife, and his family were known for being extremely careful about *shemirat halashon*—*guarding the tongue* and for diligently reviewing the *halachot* surrounding *lashon hara* daily.

A Major Nisayon for the Wife

Recently, the wife was in a situation where it was incredibly difficult for her to refrain from speaking *lashon hara*, but thanks to the family's constant review of the *halachot*, she withstood the *nisayon*—*test* and remained silent.

Half an hour later she went into her kitchen and was horrified to find her two-year-old holding a sharp knife between his teeth. After freezing for a second, she spoke softly to him and managed to distract him enough to carefully extricate the knife from his mouth.

The Obvious Connection

After she calmed down, she couldn't help but draw the connection between her decision to keep her mouth closed and her rescue of her son's mouth from serious injury mere moments later.

Reprinted from the Parashat Beha'alotcha 5782 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

Dr. Judith Grunfeld:

The ‘Queen’ Who Was a Surrogate Mother to Many of the Kindertransport

By Ann Goldberg



My mother in Shefford, 1940.

The crowd of teenage girls attending the funeral on the Jerusalem hillside in May 1998 never knew the special woman who died on Lag Ba’Omer. But they had all been told that it was thanks to her that they could all attend the schools they studied in every day.

Dr. Judith Grunfeld had been one of the pioneers of girls’ Jewish education.

Born Judith Rosenbaum in Budapest in 1902, she joined the legendary Sarah Schenirer in Krakow,

Poland, after completing her university studies. Schenirer had started the first-ever Jewish school to teach girls Jewish studies.

The Traditional Method Of Teaching Jewish Girls

Until then, the entire Jewish education of girls was culled from their mothers. While this traditional method of passing on our heritage had served the Jewish people well for centuries, Schenirer knew this was no longer enough and set out to establish high-caliber schools with in-depth learning.

For five years, Rosenbaum taught young girls and prepared them to be teachers to continue the chain of Jewish education into the future.

In 1933, she married Dr. Isidor Grunfeld. They moved to London, where she joined the Jewish day-school movement and quickly became the head of the girls' Jewish secondary school, beginning the chain of Bais Yaakov schools in England.

But war was on the horizon. And even though Jews in England didn't realize the extent of the atrocities being wrought on the Jews in Europe, the United Kingdom had accepted 10,000 children between the ages of 1 and 15, who had arrived on the Kindertransport (children's transport) from Nazi Germany.

Quite a number of those children (including my mother) had been sent at their parents' request to Orthodox homes, and thus found their

way to the school headed by Dr. Judith Grunfeld.

A Plan to Evacuate the Children if War Broke Out

The British government had decided that if it entered the war, it would evacuate children from London (which was bound to be the target of enemy bombs) to the safety of the English countryside.



Judith Grunfeld

Grunfeld knew how traumatic it would be for these children, who had recently been torn away from their parents. Many would never see them again, although at that time, the kids all still harbored hopes that their parents would arrive at any minute. Now she

would have to take them away from their foster families and settle them in yet another strange house.

“Pied Piper Tomorrow”

The code word for the evacuation, which Grunfeld hoped she would never hear, was “Pied Piper tomorrow,” which would mean that all schools had to prepare the children for evacuation the following day.

The code word was broadcast on the radio on Thursday, Aug. 31, 1939. The following day, Grunfeld boarded one of the eight buses filled by the pupils of her school. Only when they were all on board did the officer in charge tell her she was headed to Shefford.

This was the first indication she had of where she and 400 Jewish children would be spending their lives until the end of the war.

A Small Village of 5,000

Shefford is a small village in Bedfordshire with 5,000 inhabitants—none of whom had ever seen a Jewish person before. All over the British countryside, the villagers had been told by the government that they would be hosting young schoolchildren as their contribution to the war effort.

They turned out to meet them on the village green, each family choosing “their” children as though at some cattle market, as the sad, bewildered Jewish students stood and waited to be chosen.

There was a billeting officer in charge of allotting homes for any children who weren’t picked, and off they all went. And that was the start of the bizarre relationship between “the chosen people” and their new non-Jewish foster parents.

Refusing the Warm Filling Meals Offered by their Hosts

A warm, filling meal awaited these youngsters in their new homes as their families were sure they would be tired and hungry. But, of course, the children politely but firmly refused to eat anything since they knew it wasn’t kosher.

This was not a good start to their new relationship, as Grunfeld writes in her memoir, simply entitled “Shefford.”

To complicate matters further, this was a Friday afternoon—a few hours before Shabbat. Grunfeld realized she had a lot of work to do to avoid hunger and homesickness from the children, and outrage and bewilderment from the families who couldn’t understand the kids’ unusual behavior.

As if on cue, a car drove up with Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, the principal of the school, who had brought with him some food so the children could have a kosher, if impromptu and sparse, Shabbat meal. He off-loaded his goods, had a short chat to introduce himself to the local clergy of Shefford, and then sped off to

get home to London before the start of Shabbat.



Dr. Grunfeld on a fundraising mission.

With her charming, diplomatic personality, Grunfeld managed to arrange the use of a local hall for Shabbat services and as a temporary dining room. She then dispatched several of her teachers to go around to each foster family and give them a brief overview of Jewish dietary laws and Shabbat restrictions. Most of the families accepted this with confusion but good grace. They realized that being given the honor of hosting “the chosen people” was going to complicate their lives.

Only half of the 400-plus students were able to be accommodated in Shefford; many others were in neighboring villages where teachers were facing similar problems. Over the years (until she acquired a small car), Grunfeld could be seen cycling along the country lanes tending her scattered flock and smoothing out differences with the foster families.

The Funny T-Shirts with Strings

Not all the families were happy with their kids, who apart from wearing funny T-shirts with strings (*tzitzit*) and going to sleep with the light on every Friday night (so they wouldn’t violate the Sabbath), didn’t even speak English.

But on the whole, the families gradually came to appreciate their Jewish charges, and many would be sure to check that the children were keeping all their special laws and would automatically turn off their bedroom lights on Friday night if they were inadvertently left on.

On that life-changing Friday afternoon in 1939, no one had any idea that Shefford would be their home for six long years, during which time Grunfeld would become a surrogate mother to all and would see some of them through the shattering news of their parents’ fate in Europe or the blitz on London.

She would help them cope with teenage moods and development, sibling fights and friendly falling-out.

She was loved by all her pupils, to whom she managed to give personal, private quality time whenever it was needed.

My mother recalls her many private conversations with the

“queen”—as she was known by everyone—and she always felt that she was loved and cared for. When my

mother had to be hospitalized in London for a small operation on her foot, Grunfeld found the time to visit her. On my mother’s return to Shefford, she found chocolate and gifts on her pillow from Grunfeld with a “welcome home” note.

But Rebbetzin Grunfeld wasn’t just a head teacher and chief coordinator of the evacuation of her school, she was also the wife of a rabbi on the London Beth Din (rabbinic religious court) and young mother to three small children (she gave birth to their fourth child while in Shefford). When her school was settled enough to give her some respite, she set about finding a home to rent for her family so that her husband could join them and commute every day to his work in London.

“This is a Splendid School”

All this time, Grunfeld was providing a full Jewish and secular educational framework for so many children. Her school-in-exile was highly praised by the visiting Ministry of Education inspectors. After his visit, the inspector told Grunfeld, “This is a splendid school You are doing the most extraordinary work under the most adverse circumstances.”

His report, Grunfeld was sure, was what led to future recognition and funding of the Jewish day-school movement in the United Kingdom.

After the war, Grunfeld returned to London to continue to lead the school, but her husband’s heart attack nine years later in 1954 necessitated her early retirement and she spent the next 20 years caring for him.

Ann Goldberg and her family made aliyah from the United Kingdom (Great Britain) over 35 years ago, and live in Jerusalem. She is a writing coach and gives essay writing workshops by email and on Zoom. She recently published her memoir *PATIENT - Taking Tefillah, Emunah and Humor on a Journey to Healing*.

Reprinted from the Parshat Beha’alosecha 5782 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Insights into the Infamous Mendel Beilis Case

By Rabbi Sholom Dovber Avtzon



Mendel Beilis

When Mendel Beilis (1874-1934) was arrested in 1911 and accused of killing a gentile child, the Rebbe Rashab (the Fifth Rebbe of Chabad) understood that Beilis would need the best advocates to defend him from these completely fabricated and libelous accusations. So, he concluded that he would hire the renowned lawyer Mr. Oscar Gruzenberg and that Mr. Gruzenberg will assemble the team needed for the defense.

The Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, 1860-1920) wrote a heartfelt letter to him and his son, HaRav Yosef Yitzchok, 1880-1950, personally delivered it. Being that the lawyer lived in the Ukraine, HaRav Yosef Yitzchok first traveled to Kremenchuk and requested Reb Shmuel Gurary to come with him to Mr. Gruzenberg.



Oscar Gruzenberg

Mr. Gruzenberg received them graciously and after reading the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe's letter, he said that while he is honored, he felt that the government was going to get their best lawyers to prosecute the case and any defense lawyer's efforts might be futile. So therefore, he respectfully declined.

HaRav Yosef Yitzchok explained to him the severity for the entire Jewish nation if Beilis is not acquitted, and therefore they are obligated to give it their best chance of success, and if we don't hire the best we are helping them achieve their objective. After discussing it for a half an hour, he accepted the task.

He prefaced his acceptance with the following thought.

When I was a child there was a family in my city that was well liked by everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike, besides for one family that was extremely envious of them.



The Rebbe Reshab and his son Rav Yosef Yitzchok

One night while they were asleep, that person arranged that someone should torch their house and that would be the end of them. However, for some reason the master of the house woke up in middle of the night and couldn't continue to sleep, and then he suddenly smelled the fire, woke up his family and they all were able to escape the inferno.

My parents then told me, the family was asleep, but unzer basheifer – Hashem, doesn't sleep. So too Hashem should protect His nation from those who wish to torch us.

For the next two years until the trial began and throughout the trial, HaRav Yosef Yitzchok had numerous conversations and correspondence with Mr. Gruzenberg, clarifying pertinent question about Jewish traditions and laws, helping him to win the case.

Reprinted from the last week's Weekly Story email of Rabbi Avtzon.