

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS SHEMOS 5785

Volume 16, Issue 17 18 Tevet 5785/January 18, 2025

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

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So That My Soul May Bless You.



Reb Aharon of Belz, zt"l

Reb Yitzchok Shlomo Ungar, the Rav of Chug Chasam Sofer in Bnei Brak zt"l related:

Maran Reb Aharon of Belz zt"l once visited the Pressburger Rav zt"l in Yerushalayim. Before Maran Reb Aharon departed, he asked the Pressburger Rav to bentch (bless) him.

This request shook the Pressburger Rav and he could not proceed to bentch Maran Reb Aharon. Reb Aharon insisted, and the Pressburger Rav started verbalizing some brachos. Maran Reb Aharon said: "I did not mean this." He took

the hands of the Pressburger Rav in his hands and placed them on his head, asking the Pressburger Rav to bless him with the bracha of the blessing of the Kohanim.

The Pressburger Rav started crying and proceeded to bentch Maran and then bid him farewell.

Sometime later, Reb Yitzchok Shloime escorted the Pressburger Rav to the Yeshivas Chayei Olam in Yerushalayim. A group of homeless people sat nearby begging for tzedakah - charity. The Pressburger Rav approached one of the beggars and handed him a coin. The beggar thanked him profusely, and to everyone's amazement, the Pressburger Rav asked the beggar to bentch him.

The beggar started mumbling,, but the Pressburger Rav said: "This is not what I meant. Place your hands on my head and bentch me with the blessing of the Kohanim". The beggar proceeded to do so and bentched the Rav.

The Pressburger Rav told Reb Yitzchok Shloime: "If I am worthy to bentch the Belzer Rav, then the beggar can bentch me!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5785 email of the World of Belz.

Basic Training

By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman



The year was 1951, and America was at war in Korea, when the draft notice arrived. Understandably, Daniel was more than a bit apprehensive. Daniel lived in Farmingdale, New Jersey, near Lakewood, where Daniel would study nightly.

Soon after the draft notice arrived, Daniel went to see R' Aharon Kotler. After being told of the notice, R' Aharon spent some time trying to allay the young man's fears, even telling him of friends of his who had been drafted into the Russian Army during the First World War and had returned home safely

Requesting a Blessing from the Rosh Yeshiva.

As their conversation drew to a close, Daniel asked, "Could the *Rosh Yeshivah* please give me a *berachah* (blessing)?"

R' Aharon, after a thoughtful silence, said, "Accept on yourself that throughout your army service you will study Torah every day without exception."

Daniel was taken aback by the suggestion. Study Torah every day - in the army? It seemed impossible. There might be days when it would simply be impossible to open a *sefer*.

Daniel attempted to explain his views on the matter, but R' Aharon was persistent. No, he contended, it was possible to fulfill such a commitment.

Thought that the Rosh Yeshiva's Request was a Pre-Requisite for the Desired Blessing

Bowing to R' Aharon's wisdom, Daniel committed himself to daily study. Certain that R' Aharon had intended this as a precondition to granting his request, he said, "Now, can the *Rosh Yeshivah* please bless me that I should return home safely?"

R' Aharon responded with emotion, "You don't understand - this itself is the *berachah*! Once you have accepted to study Torah daily, there is no need for any further blessings."

Daniel reported for induction with a duffle bag which contained, among other items, his *tefillin*, a *siddur* and a few *sefarim*. He endured weeks of grueling training as part of an infantry battalion. He kept to his word; no matter how exhausted, he would not retire for the night without first studying from his *gemara*.

When their training was completed, Daniel's group was assembled and told their assignments. Out of two hundred soldiers, one hundred and eighty were sent to fight in Korea. Daniel, however, was sent to Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, where he was assigned to a desk job. For the next two years, until his honorable discharge, he handled paperwork for a few hours a day and spent the remaining hours at his desk studying Torah. As he jokes about it now, "I was studying in *kollel*..." (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "More Shabbos Stories")

Reprinted from the Parashat Toldot 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Tzadok Gets Ready

By Aharon Spetner



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

Tzadok “Hatzadik” sat on the floor of his cell with five small brass cubes in front of him. He picked up one of the cubes, tossed it in the air, and with a sweeping motion attempted to pick up the other four cubes before catching the first cube. However, he missed and one of the cubes flew across the cell and disappeared under the bed.

“Good afternoon, Tzadok,” Rav Volender, the prison rov, said as he approached.

“Ah, hi rebbi,” Tzadok said, reaching under the bed to retrieve the cube.

“Tzadok, did you take a look at that paper I gave you earlier?” asked Rav Volender.

“No, rebbi,” responded Tzadok, spreading the cubes on the floor again. “I’m busy practicing chameish avanim so I can be the best player in the whole prison.”

“Tzadok, it’s an important paper.”

“Just one more game, okay rebbi?”

“Tzadok, stop playing for a second,” ordered Rav Volender. “This paper is an application for the early release program. If you get approved, you might be able to get out of prison early.”

“Really???” exclaimed Tzadok.

Tzadok got to his feet and picked up the slightly crumpled application form that was on his bed. He grabbed a pen and quickly scribbled the answers to the questions before handing it through the bars to Rav Volender and returning to his game.

“Wait, Tzadok,” Rav Volender said. “You filled out this form in less than ten seconds.”

“Well yeah, I’m very busy,” Tzadok responded.

Tzadok, you need to take this seriously. This is an opportunity for you to be a free man again.”

“But I answered all of the questions,” insisted Tzadok.

“Where it asks what type of job you plan on getting, you wrote ‘gadol hador’,” Rav Volender said, reading the form.

“Yeah, I think that’s the perfect job for me,” replied Tzadok, not looking up from his chameish avanim.

“Job? ‘Gadol hador’ isn’t what I’d call a job. How are you going to support yourself? And besides you can’t just walk out of jail and become the gadol hador.”

“Why not?” Tzadok asked as he successfully swept up the brass stones and caught the one he had tossed in the air. “All I would have to do is give people brachos and advice all day. I’m very good at that.”

“Tzadok, do you know what this week’s parsha is?”

“Um... Parshas Vayigdal?” Tzadok guessed.

“Vayigdal??? There’s no such Parsha. This week is Parshas Vateitzei.”

“That’s perfect!” said Tzadok excitedly. “‘Vateitzei’ means ‘and he left’ - what a perfect week for me to leave prison!”

“In Parshas Vateitzei,” said Rav Volender, ignoring Tzadok’s comment, “Yaakov Avinu heads to Charan to find a wife. But in order to prepare himself for marriage, he made a stop to learn in Yeshivas Ever.”

“Like for a whole day?” Tzadok asked.

“No,” said Rav Volender. “He spent fourteen years in yeshiva, learning and perfecting himself so he would be ready to build Klal Yisroel.”

“FOURTEEN YEARS?” asked Tzadok, shocked. “What took him so long? It sounds like he wasn’t so interested in getting married.”

“No, no, Tzadok. Yaakov Avinu was very interested in getting married and building the Jewish nation. But before doing something so important, one must prepare himself properly. Doing something without the proper preparation is a recipe for failure.”

“Ah, so you’re saying I need to learn for fourteen years in order to become the gadol hador.”

“No, Tzadok, it takes a lifetime of work to get to the level of our gedolim. There is no way someone can just walk out of prison and be the gadol hador.”

“Oh, maybe I should choose a different job,” said Tzadok thoughtfully.

Rav Volender smiled and handed Tzadok a fresh application form. “I’d be happy to help you fill out this form, Tzadok. But just like anything important in life, you can’t just rush into it. And not only should you think about these questions carefully before answering them, but you need to start preparing yourself for life as a free man.

“B’ezer Hashem, your application for the early release program will be approved and you will be heading out into the world once again. But are you ready? You need to start preparing yourself for life on the outside so you can be set up to succeed - otherwise you might chas vechalila find yourself back here in a few weeks.”

“So how do I prepare?” asked Tzadok.

Rav Volender smiled again. “Why don’t you start by coming to my Mesilas Yesharim shiur instead of playing chameish avanim? Learning mussar is the absolute best way to prepare yourself for living a healthy life.”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeitzei 5785 email of Toras Avigdor Junior based on the Torah teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l.

Paying the Shadchan in Advance for the Match

By Rabbi David Ashear

A man named Binyamin* came to a Rav and gave him a very large sum of money to disburse to tzedakah. The Rav knew of several good causes in need of funds, but first he asked Binyamin why he had brought him this donation.

“I have an older single daughter at home,” he said. “The shadchanim haven’t been successful, and I came to realize that Hashem is the only true Shadchan. I decided to pay the Shadchan in advance for the eventual shidduch of my daughter, by giving the money to tzedakah.”

The Rav was inspired by Binyamin’s Emunah. Exactly forty days later, a man from Europe came to the United States for two days and was staying in Binyamin’s

neighborhood. His host met Binyamin in shul and said, “I heard you have a daughter trying to get married. There is a man staying in my home who came to the States for shidduch purposes. I think it might be a good idea for your daughter. If you’d like, I could arrange for them to meet.”

They met, and in time they married. Hashem was the Shadchan. He brought the shidduch from overseas practically to their doorstep. (Excerpted from “Living Emunah on Shidduchim”)

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeitzei 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Disheartening Response Of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles



Mr. Louis Gavin and the Lubavitcher Rebbe

My history with Chabad goes back to the mid-1970s, when the Rebbe’s emissaries — Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, Rabbi Shalom Ber Groner and Rabbi Yossi Goldman — first came to Yeoville, a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, where I was born and raised. I was part of the post-hippie generation trying to find spiritual answers.

This search drew us to Chabad where we found Chasidism and rediscovered the depth and beauty of Judaism. Although I counted myself part of the Chabad community back from that time, I did not get to meet the Rebbe until nearly ten years later — when I was already married, and my wife was having problems conceiving.

In 1983 I joined a special raffle being held to select a representative of the community to travel to the Rebbe. I won, and I travelled to New York for Passover, where we were hosted by Rabbi Goldman's parents. I finally met the Rebbe in person during *kos shel bracha*, when the Rebbe would distribute wine from his cup immediately after the holiday.

When I told him that I was from South Africa, he gave me a huge smile, handed me a small bottle of vodka, and said, "My views about South Africa are well known. You should go back and celebrate, and remind everyone that I said it will all be good." The Rebbe was referring to his previous pronouncement that the change over from the apartheid government would be peaceful and that the Jews of South Africa had nothing to fear.

The next day, there was a group audience for about thirty people and we had been advised to wait until everyone had left the room, and then to go up to the Rebbe and request a personal blessing. So, we did exactly that. My wife Maureen spoke. She introduced herself and said, "I've written to the Rebbe a few times that I cannot have children. The prognosis from doctors is very bad — they all say that it is hopeless. Yet I'm asking the Rebbe for a blessing for children."

The Rebbe looked at her for a long time. From the videos of the Rebbe that I have seen, I know that his habit was to respond quickly, but this time he didn't. He must have stared at Maureen for at least 20 seconds, paying no attention to me.

The Rebbe's secretary, Rabbi Leibel Groner, seemed to sense that something was wrong because he started to pull my wife away. He actually grabbed onto her coat and was urging her to move. That's when the Rebbe said, "*Gam zu l'tovah*" — a phrase from the Talmud which translates to "This, too, is for the good."

With that we left but my wife, who is fluent in Hebrew, was very upset. It took me about two hours to console her. I kept saying, "You got a blessing from the Rebbe," but she kept saying, "When I told the Rebbe I couldn't have children, he said to me 'this, too, is for the good'."

It was a statement that could be interpreted in two different ways — that good would eventually come from this situation and she would become pregnant, or that her inability to get pregnant was from G-d and therefore it must be seen as a good thing.

Soon, the Rebbe's meaning became clear. When we returned to South Africa — it couldn't have been more than two or three weeks later — we were contacted by a social worker concerning an adoption. We were told: "A Jewish mother is

expecting and cannot keep the child, so we are looking for Jewish parents. Would you be interested?"

Needless to say, the Rebbe's words suddenly became obvious, and we immediately agreed to the adoption. A baby boy was born a few months later, our adoption went through, and it was indeed a tremendous blessing. A year later, we received another call from the same social worker. Again, there was a Jewish mother and baby on the way in need of a home — would we be interested in adopting? Of course, we agreed immediately again, and ended up adopting another baby boy.

Another year went by, and the same thing happened for the third time in a row. This time, we adopted a baby girl. Over the years, as our children grew up, the Rebbe's blessing has remained with us and, at each milestone; we could happily say Gam zu l'tovah — this, too, is for the good, whether at a Bar Mitzvah, when my oldest recited an entire discourse by heart in Yiddish, or at our children's weddings. On so many happy occasions, I have told this story, which usually brings tears to the eyes of everyone in the crowd.

* * *

Focus on the Good

There is one more story about the Rebbe that I would like to share — this story is about his behind-the-scenes influence on South Africa, which has been well documented.

In 1990, I was contacted by Nelson Mandela's organization, the African National Congress (ANC), which was looking for an advertising agency to help reposition the organization from being a liberation movement towards being a political party. Furthermore, they then wanted to hire us as their ad agency for the upcoming general election, the first democratic elections held in South Africa.

It was a difficult decision for me because although I was left-leaning and had been brought up in a vehemently anti-apartheid family, it was a challenging situation since many senior members of the ANC were still 'banned' under South African law. The first time I went to the ANC's Department of Publicity offices, I literally came face-to-face with a massive poster of Yasser Arafat, which covered the wall facing the entrance.

This immediately made me question the wisdom of what I was doing, so I decided to ask the Rebbe's advice. I was able to do so with the help of Rabbi Levi Wineberg of the Torah Academy, whose father, Rabbi Yosef Wineberg, lived in New York and had a close relationship with the Rebbe. Rabbi Wineberg immediately went to inform the Rebbe that I had been working with the ANC and stressed that their connections to the PLO were making me question my decision.

The Rebbe didn't hesitate to give me a blessing for success and advised that I should use my influence "to focus on the good." There was a condition, however — that I should keep silent and say nothing about his blessing until after the elections.

I had many opportunities to convince the ANC publicity team to eschew all negative messaging and to focus on building a vision of hope, a vision of a better future, for all the people of South Africa. At the time there were members of the ANC leaders who were inclined otherwise. I remember a specific ad they had suggested. It read, "They stole your dignity, they stole your land; now they want to steal your vote."

Bearing the Rebbe's advice in mind, I was able to convince the decisionmakers at the ANC that we should not be wasting our resources looking back at past wrongs, but forward to a better future. Without much further debate, the ad was rejected as a bad idea. For the next four years I went into every meeting with a clear and powerful conviction of how to approach the campaign — "to focus on the good." _____

Source: Slightly modified by Yerachmiel Tilles from a weekly email of "Here's My Story," a part of JEM's superlative "My Encounter with the Rebbe" project. Mr. Louis Gavin is partner and Chief Creative Officer at The Open Collaboration, a company based in Benmore, South Africa. He was interviewed in August of 2014.

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayetzai 5785 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed in Israel.

‘The Almighty Helped Me Survive’: A Marine’s Tale from the Pacific Theater By Mordechai Lightstone

When Bernard (Baruch) Haller enlisted in the United States Marines in 1941, he had two goals: to serve his country and to survive. To accomplish these goals, he knew that he'd need the help of a Higher Power. And so, Haller, known to friends as Bernie, vowed then and there never to eat non-kosher meat and never to miss a day of tefillin.

So important was this commitment that before Haller passed away on June 29, 2009, he chose the words to be inscribed on his tombstone: “I served in the U.S. Marine Corp. in WWII as a Staff Sgt. I managed to put on tefillin every day even during combat in the Pacific and refrained from eating meat the entire time. The Almighty helped me to survive.”



The first U.S. flag to be planted on Guam, 1944, Bernard Haller to the right.

The epitaph, complete with the Eagle, Globe and Anchor insignia of the U.S. Marine Corps, is one that has gone viral in recent years. Each year, usually around Memorial Day, photos of the moving inscription are tweeted and forwarded on WhatsApp countless times.

“In many ways, I don’t know what my father would think about the attention,” said his son, Leibe Haller, “He always tried to stay out of the public eye.” Yet in his father’s story lies a powerful message of Jewish tenacity in the face of all obstacles.

Bernie Haller was born on March 10, 1919, in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, one of second-generation immigrants Wolf and Yetta Haller’s four children. Wolf, a tailor by profession, bucked the overwhelming tide of American assimilation and fought hard to keep Shabbat.

“The situation was such that if my grandfather had a job on Friday,” Leibe Haller relates, “they’d fire him when they realized he wouldn’t work over Shabbat, and he’d need to find a new job for the next week to come.”

Money was tight for the Hallers, and as a result, young Bernie couldn’t afford yeshivah tuition. Instead, Bernie used to head over to a local yeshivah after school

and sit outside the window to catch whatever bits and pieces of the Torah lessons he could.

Courage Under Fire

Despite the struggles, Bernie likewise remained committed to Judaism. When, in 1941, he enlisted in the Armed Forces along with 11 of his cousins, he took the Marine motto, *Semper fidelis*, Latin for “always faithful,” to heart, both in regards to his country and to his Jewish faith.

Shortly before he was deployed, Haller married his sweetheart, Tziporah Malka Fried. Haller shipped out to the Pacific Theater in 1942, fighting in the Battles of Saipan and Guam. Later, he was stationed in the Philippines.

At one point, taking cover in a foxhole during the heat of battle, Haller counted 10 tracers flashing towards him. Tracers, used to assist in aiming, came on every tenth round of machine-gun fire, which meant that in total, some 100 rounds of fire had passed in the narrow space between his helmet and that of the Marine hunkered next to him.

Haller seldom spoke about his experience during the war, but his son recalls a time when, years later in the Bronx, his father awakened from a traumatic dream in the night and screamed for his rifle.

Haller’s religious commitment in the Marines didn’t come easy. When one cook found out that the Jewish staff sergeant was avoiding meat, he began adding lard to the vegetables he served out of spite. When Haller found out, he switched to eating only raw vegetables.

Harassment came in other ways as well. To avoid attracting undue attention from his fellow Marines, Haller would put on tefillin when no one else was around. Still, they taunted him with slurs, referring to him as “Benny the Heeb.” One evening, a group held him down and began to ruffle his hair.

“What are you doing?” Haller asked in confusion. “We’re looking for your horns,” came the retort. “Jews hide them during the day, but they come out at night.” But as time went by and they saw Haller’s courage under fire, the harassment faded.

Haller During His Service

Haller remained ever committed to G-d, recognizing His works and assistance in the many ways he survived. Like the time his platoon was to be sent to Iwo Jima in the winter of 1945. On the eve of the difficult, bloody battle—nearly 7,000 Americans lost their lives on the island—Haller’s entire platoon developed yellow eyes, a sure sign of yellow fever. Their commanding officer held the platoon back, only for it to later be discovered that the change in eye color was caused by something the platoon had eaten. Because of that, their lives were spared.

After the war, Haller returned to New York. He and Tziporah Malka settled first in the West Bronx, followed by the Pelham Parkway neighborhood and then Riverdale, all in the Bronx. The couple had three children (Leibe Haller attended Chabad-Lubavitch's Yeshivas Achei Temimim in the Bronx under the auspices of Rabbi Mordechai Altein) and Bernie worked hard to earn a living, first selling confectionery products and later detergent.



But each morning throughout his long life, he'd rise, put on his tallit and tefillin, and pray to the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — dedicated to the end to his family, his people, his country and to the Almighty, who sustained him through it all.

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeitzei 5785 edition of L'Chaim, a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

The Professor of Anipoli



One who knows the power of tefillah, will turn to Hashem in prayer whenever he faces any challenge. He won't place his faith in any patron or doctor. Rather, he will rely solely on Hashem and will ask Him for whatever he needs, as he will know that Hashem is merciful and compassionate and He helps all those who daven to Him.

Sefer Sipurei Tzadikim relates the story of a certain chasid who was very sick. He went to many doctors but they were unable to help him. Finally, he went to see Rav Mordechai of Neshchiz zy" a to ask for his blessing. The Rebbe told him, "My advice to you is to go see the professor who lives in the city of Anipoli.

He will provide you with your cure." The sick man wasted no time in setting off on the journey to Anipoli. There were no trains yet at that time, so he hired a wagon to take him on the long trip. After many days, he reached Anipoli and asked around where he could find the professor. Whoever he asked looked at him strangely and said that no professor lived in their city. He then asked, "Perhaps there is a doctor here?"

Again, he was told that there was no doctor in the city and no medical expert. The man couldn't understand it. Why would the Rebbe of Neshchiz send him on a wild goose chase? He was very upset that he had wasted so much time. He went right back to Neshchiz and told the Rebbe that there was no professor or doctor in Anipoli.

The Rebbe asked him, "If that's true, what do the people there do when they get sick?"

The sick man replied, "What should they do? Since they have no other choice, they place their trust in Hashem to help them."

The Rebbe then said, "That is the professor of Anipoli that I was referring to. You must rely on the same professor that the residents of that city rely on when they get sick. You must put your trust in Hashem."

Immediately after the man left the Rebbe and began trusting in Hashem, he started to feel better, and he eventually was fully cured.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayetztei 5785 email of The Way of Emunah from Rabbi Meir Isamar Rosenbaum.