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The 15-Minute Shabbos Observer

By Rabbi Mordechai Levin



Mayor Yehoshua Rabinovitz of Tel Aviv

Mr. Yehoshua Rabinovitz (Mayor of Tel Aviv from 1969 to 1974) was originally a student of Telshe Yeshiva in Lithuania. Unfortunately, when he arrived in Israel, he became irreligious.

The Rav of Tel Aviv, Rav Shmuel Follman, ZT”L, maintained a friendship with the mayor that began in Telshe. Rav Bentzion Follman, the Rav’s son, used to meet the mayor walking his dog and inevitably the mayor would engage him in conversation. Mr. Rabinovitz remembered well that which he had learned in Telshe, and loved to “talk in learning.”

One day, a member of the Shul came to Rav Shmuel with a troubling story. He had a large family in a tiny apartment and they could not manage. They had expanded the apartment illegally. The neighbors resisted, filed a complaint with the city, and now they had received a demolition order. The congregant tearfully asked the Rabbi to intervene with the mayor. Rav Shmuel spoke with the mayor, who regretfully responded that his hands were tied - illegal construction, neighbor complaints, nothing could be done.

Begged the Mayor to Tear Up the Demolition Order

Rav Bentzion heard the story and his heart went out to the plight of this family. He waited to meet Mr. Rabinovitz walking his dog and enthusiastically involved him in a deep Torah discussion. He then begged the mayor to tear up the demolition order but received the same negative response.

Rav Bentzion began crying and pleading the case. The mayor's pity kicked in and he made a deal. He would get the order annulled if Rav Bentzion were to learn 15 minutes extra every day as a zchus (merit) for Mr. Rabinovitz.

Rav Bentzion countered with a yes, but only if the mayor were to keep Shabbos for 15 minutes. The negotiations began but the mayor said, "I cannot keep Shabbos as I need to smoke - no deal."

"Ok, I will get up at 6:45 am instead of 6:30 am, and I will keep Shabbos when I sleep."

"No, it must be when you are awake."

They settled on 9:00-9:15 am every Shabbos, on condition that Rav Bentzion began a new seder in Gemara Shabbos in his zchus. The demolition order was canceled without explanation. Mr. Rabinovitz would tell acquaintances over the ensuing years that he kept Shabbos every week for 15 minutes, just like he used to keep Shabbos in Europe.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5783 email of Torah Sweets.

The "Hypocritical" Office Manager

Our entire office was buzzing with the news. A new manager had been hired, and was going to take over any day. Change is always difficult, and we were, understandably, somewhat apprehensive about the change. On the first day that the manager came in, our tension dissipated somewhat. He seemed very friendly, very practical, very understanding.

Except he was a big stickler about attendance and punctuality. He let us know pretty clearly that it was important to arrive at work on time, and to keep absences to a minimum, only taking off if we were sick or for real emergencies. The manager himself seemed to be an example of ‘practice what you preach’. That helped boost morale quite a bit, in adjusting to the new stress on attendance and punctuality.

A week or two went by, and all seemed to be going rather smoothly. And then, after about three weeks, our new manager started coming late, and there were quite a few no-show days for him.

Everyone Was Quite Resentful at the New Manager

We started thinking, “Yes, he was an example to us only for a short while, and now he’s demanding of us what he himself doesn’t even do! He’s now taking advantage of his new position, and doing whatever he pleases!” You can imagine the new buzz in the office. Nobody was happy, and everyone was quite resentful at having to follow his new rules, while he himself just “relaxed” and did whatever he pleased.

Well, so we thought... until one day, the new manager came to work after having been out for around 3 days. We noticed a difference. His hair seemed thinner, and he looked quite pale. Were we in for a humiliating, self-reproaching moment when we found out that he had been diagnosed with the dreaded illness shortly after he started his new job, and had been late and out of the office because he had started treatments!

We were glad that we had not voiced our thoughts to anyone of authority, but we felt mortified that we had even thought negatively about him, and discussed it amongst ourselves. Who would have ever imagined?!?

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.

An Effort to Succeed

Rabbi Joey Haber told a story about a man whose effort proved to be invaluable. The man was asked to fly a Sefer Torah from one country to another. He got to the security line and was immediately confronted.

“Sir, what is this?” the TSA agent asked.

“It’s a very holy religious object.”

The agent said, “Well it’s going to have to go underneath the plane with the luggage. You can’t carry that with you.”

The man replied, “Absolutely not, please just let me through. This needs to stay with me at all times.” She saw it was important to him and answered, “Okay. You can try to go to the gate with it, but there’s no way they’ll let it on the plane.” And she cleared him through security.

When he approached the gate, the man at the gate stopped him. “Sir, what is that?”

“This is my Torah,” he answered.

The man at the gate shook his head.

“I was cleared through security, and it has to fly with me. I can’t separate from it; it’s really important.”

The man at the gate called his supervisor and after some deliberating, he said to the passenger, “If you want you can try to get on the plane but they’re going to stop you at the door again. I’m telling you there is no way they’re going to let you on that plane with that.”

The man happily went through and waited for his next hurdle.



As he stepped on the plane with the Sefer Torah, the head flight attendant said, “Uh sir, no you can’t bring that on this plane. You have to gate-check that. Otherwise we won’t be able to take off.”

The man stressed how important this holy article was and begged them to let him keep it with him for the flight. The flight attendant went to get the pilot to ask special permission, and the man braced himself waiting for the final answer.

The pilot came out and said, “What’s going on here?”

The man started rambling, “This is my Torah and it’s extremely important, and I need it to fly with me so I could make sure nothing happens to it.”

The pilot said, “Well you can’t keep it here, but no problem, you can keep it up in the cockpit with me, because that’s where I keep my tefillin.”

When we want to achieve something, we can't just sit back. We have to do everything in our power to succeed, just as B'nei Yisrael put their blood, sweat, and tears into trying to build the Mishkan. May we see many berachot and successes from our efforts. May we all learn to appreciate the Shabbat and keep it to the highest standards that we possibly can, because it is the true source of all our berachot. Amen!

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayakhel/Pekudei 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

A Kiddush Hashem at the Toronto Airport

By Rabbi David Bibi



Students and faculty of the Yeshiva Darchei Torah of Toronto

I would like to share with you a beautiful story I heard this week and which occurred very recently.

Rabbi Eliezer Breitowitz, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Darchei Torah of Toronto, sent the following bulletin to the parents of his school: This past week, the Yeshiva embarked on its most ambitious journey ever – a 48-hour trip to Vancouver/Whistler.

One episode has attracted some attention and interest. Our departing flight was scheduled for Tuesday morning at 8:00 am. That necessitated having Rosh Chodesh Shacharit in the airport. (Hallel, Keriat HaTorah, and Musaf continued in Vancouver.) Now it is one thing when an individual Davens in the airport, but a group of over 85 Rabbeim and Talmidim is something else entirely. So that morning, the D departure gates became “shtiblach” and three different lively Minyanim were held.

A Wonderfully Inspiring Email

What did people think? At least one person was inspired to the extent that she tracked me down and wrote a wonderfully inspiring email to which I responded upon returning to Toronto. I am sharing the two-way correspondence with you; I am certain you will find it most interesting.

“Hello Rabbi Breitowitz,

My pastor and I were at YYZ for an early morning flight to Vancouver this morning. We were flying out to meet with some pastors in Langley for a conference this week. We loved watching a significant number of young Jewish youth preparing to say their morning prayers. As born-again Christians, we deeply love the scriptures and we were so impressed by the commitment to faith these young men displayed. Having a glimpse into their preparation to pray was such a privilege. To watch them tie the scriptures on their arms and bind them on their foreheads brought a fresh meaning to Deuteronomy 6.

Preparing Their Hearts and Minds at the Airport

It’s one thing to see Jewish men head to the synagogue to pray, it’s quite another to see them prepare their hearts and their minds in the airport :

I messaged my friend Erika (and Rabbi Mordechai) Bookbinder and asked her if there was a Jewish Youth Convention happening in Vancouver. She told me about a youth trip to Whistler – so maybe that was what we saw this morning!

If these were in fact your students, I just wanted to share my observations and encourage you in your leadership of these young men. May you be blessed as you pass on the traditions and teachings of the faith and may these young hearts be open to the authentic love of G-d. Blessings,

Cathy Dienesch

Sanctus Church, Executive Assistant”

“Dear Ms. Dienesch,

Thank you for taking the time to write and thank you for your warm words of encouragement and blessing.

The boys you saw are students of our school – Yeshiva Darchei Torah of Toronto – The students had earned this trip by making a year-long commitment toward the religious ideals of purity and holiness by ensuring that their cellphones be disconnected from social media and other negative influences. Our entire student body of 84 boys enrolled in the international “kPhone” (Kosher Phone) program...

Not a Vacation from Our Religious Duties

Getting back to the trip: Although it was a “vacation” from school, it was not a vacation from our religious duties – including our three daily prayers whose times are precisely fixed by Jewish law. Those legal requirements sometimes necessitate praying in unusual places, such as the departure lounges of airports. When this happens, we often wonder how we must appear to passers-by. Do they perceive us as being strange? Should we be embarrassed? Your thoughtful letter gives us valuable support; at least two people – your pastor and you – understood, and for that we are extremely grateful.

You write, “To watch them tie the scriptures on their arms and bind them on their foreheads brought a fresh meaning to Deuteronomy 6.” Interestingly, in the Jewish tradition, the “default” assumption is that a verse should be taken literally rather than figuratively. Accordingly, we actually tie the Scriptural passages – encased in “black boxes” called Tefillin – to our arms and heads. The danger, of course, is that an often-repeated ritual can become automatic. We must always remind ourselves that wearing the Tefillin is not sufficient; their underlying message must truly penetrate into our very being. This way, both our thinking and our actions will be fully devoted to G-d’s service.

The Proverbial “Icing on the Cake”

On a personal note, I have had the privilege to lead our school for over twenty years. Of course, as would be expected, some days have their surprises; as the saying goes, “Boys will be boys.” But, all things considered, I consider myself exceptionally blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such fine young men. When their uniqueness is acknowledged by others, that is the proverbial “icing on the cake”. I will cherish your email for a very long time.

May G-d bless all your efforts and may we all live – in good health and prosperity – to behold the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (11:9), “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Sincerely, Rabbi Eliezer Breitowitz

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Darchei Torah”

We often speak of kiddush Hashem opportunities. Here, the boys made a minyan, Hashem joined them and in remembering that they were not alone, they made an incredible Kiddush Hashem.

Think about it! When you are praying with a minyan or even at home, do you feel the presence of Hashem? We should!

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei/HaHodesh 5783 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Greatly “Disrespected” Woman on the Bus to Meron



Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt”l

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a, relates that a young man once came to see Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt”l. He explained that he had been married for a number of years and had not yet been Bentched with a child, and he requested a Brachah from Rav Chaim.

Rav Chaim advised him to seek out a person who controlled himself during an argument, and though he suffered humiliation and pain, he still refused to respond with anything negative in the argument. Rav Chaim said that such a person, who has exemplary selfcontrol, would be able to give him an effective Brachah.

A while later, the young man returned to Rav Chaim and told him that he was able to discover such a person, but it was with great difficulty. He told Rav Chaim that he had asked this individual for a Brachah, and subsequently, he and his wife were Bentched with a baby!

Rav Zilberstein then shared a story with a similar idea. The daughter of a prominent Talmid Chacham in Bnei Brak was married for quite some time, and had still not conceived. She had undergone many painful and difficult tests and procedures, but nothing helped. The frustration led to depression, and she began to accept her fate in life.

The Decision to Daven at the Kever of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai

As Lag B'Omer approached, this young woman's mother decided that she would travel to Meron to Daven at the Kever of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai for her daughter. Perhaps a mother's broken-hearted Tefilah might make an impression in Shamayim. Her daughter also went to accompany her mother on the trip.

It was 10:00 at night on Lag B'Omer, and the two set out for the bus station, among thousands of others, to take the bus to Meron. After a while, they were able to get seats on a bus. A woman, someone they did not know, sat down directly across from them. As the bus began to move, another passenger, a man, came over. He walked over to the seat occupied by this woman and began to shout and scream at her: "You are sitting in my seat!"

However, she calmly explained to him that he was mistaken, and it was in fact her seat. The man was adamant. He insisted that it was his seat, and he wanted it now. The woman never raised her voice, despite the man's anger and the verbal abuse he was putting her through. The man was clearly wrong, rude, and impossible to reason with.

The Passengers Were Upset at the Man's Ranting

Passengers sitting nearby came over and pleaded with him to leave this woman alone, but he would not back down. He kept on screaming at her, "Why did you take my seat?! Why won't you let me sit down in my seat?!"

During this entire time, the woman never responded with anger. She just suffered her humiliation in silence. Finally, after the man had another angry tirade, she stood up and left the bus.

The people who saw this were horrified by the man's behavior, and astounded by the woman's reaction. How could a person sustain so much abuse and not get even slightly upset?

The bus moved on, and shortly after, this man, who was now in the woman's seat, started to feel bad about what he had done. He went from passenger to

passenger, and explained that he was really not that kind of person who gets angry. He said he was a decent individual, but he was just overtired.

The bus pulled into a rest area, and the passengers went to walk around a little. Meanwhile, other busses pulled in, and the rest area quickly began to fill up with people who were on their way to Meron. The woman and her daughter noticed that getting off another bus was the woman who had originally been on their bus. Apparently, she had gotten on another bus, and she was able to get a seat there.

It was at that moment, when they saw her, they remembered what Rav Chaim Kanievsky had said about the type of person one should seek a Brachah from, and this woman clearly fit the description! The two went over to her, and the mother asked her if she would forgive the man for the hurt that he caused.

Requested from the Special Woman a Blessing

She replied, “Certainly. I forgave him immediately.” She then told her what Rav Chaim had said. She listened intently to the story, and the mother said, “Would you please give a Brachah to my daughter? She has not yet been Bentched with children.”

The woman smiled and said, “I would be happy to give her a Brachah!” She gave a warm Brachah for her to have a child, and within the year, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy!

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Dubno Maggid and the Wealthy Torah Scholar

The Dubno Maggid once went on a fundraising mission, and he came to the home of a particular Talmid Chacham, who was also quite wealthy. The wealthy man was honored to have the Dubno Maggid visit him, and he returned this honor.

Prior to asking for a contribution, the Maggid began with a Halachic discussion on the Halachos of Tzedakah. The man was very pleased to talk in learning, and he added his own thoughts to the conversation. This went on for a while.

Every time the Maggid presented a Torah thought about Tzedakah, the man added a thought of his own. The Maggid realized that while they were having a lively discussion, the purpose of his visit had not been fulfilled, and the man did not pick

up on the fact that since they were talking about Tzedakah, he should consider offering a donation to the Dubno Maggid.

Finally, the Maggid looked at his wealthy host and said, “Let me share a story with you. In a distant country, there is a community where the people had never seen an onion. One day, a traveler came to this community and brought with him an onion. The people were very excited with this wonderful discovery and thanked him abundantly. They presented him with gifts and money to show their appreciation to him. They took the onion and planted it, and soon, they were able to harvest many onions.

A Second Benefactor Offers the Community Poppy Seeds

Word spread that this community had generously rewarded the traveler that had introduced them to onions. Someone recognized this, and thought to himself that this might be a good way for him to secure some funds, and he looked to see if there was anything else that these people had not seen yet. When he realized what they were lacking, he traveled to this country and presented them with his new discovery: poppy seeds!

The people were overjoyed with this new gift. They realized that they must offer a reward for this great new find. What would be the best gift to give this man for his wonderful present? They could only give their most valued commodity, and they presented the man with a large box of onions!

Coming for the Money

The man was disappointed with the gift and said, “I did not come here for onions. I came for money.”

The Dubno Maggid told the man, “It is the same with me, my dear host. While I greatly appreciate the brilliant Torah thoughts that you have shared with me, I have come here, however, for something else. I am here to collect some funds. Can you please contribute generously?”

Indeed, the man gave a very generous donation!

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

From Good to Great: The Wisdom of Rebbetzin Denah Weinberg By Lori Palatnik



The trailblazing wife of Rabbi Noah Weinberg passed away last week.

Not a week goes by that I do not quote my spiritual “mother”, Rebbetzin Denah Weinberg, of blessed memory, the wife of the founder of Aish HaTorah, Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory. I met her at the beginning of my young adult Jewish journey in 1985. She passed away last week (March 12th) at the age of 85 and her death has hit me hard.

She was a powerful, regal woman who in addition to raising 12 children ran a seminary geared for Jewish women of all backgrounds. She impacted thousands of people with her strength, wisdom and personal model of what it means to be a great Jewish woman.

Here are some of the teachings I learned from her that reframed how I look at life.

“It’s not enough to be good, we must be great.”

No one wants the rabbi to say at their funeral, “She was...okay.” “He was pretty darn average.” Everyone wants the rabbi to say, “She was great and this is why.”

Bottom of Form

Rebbetzin Weinberg demanded from us not to settle for good, that the blessing of life requires us to strive for greatness. “Be a great Jewish woman” was her mantra. “None of you are going to ride on your husband’s coattails.”



Rebbetzin Dena Weinberg with her husband Rabbi Noah Weinberg of blessed memories.

“If 20 people are standing at a bus stop and the bus does not stop, there are 20 reasons.”

Everything happens for a reason, and everything is for your good. And everything contains a specific message from G-d to each and every one of you. Yes, everything. No one can tell you what G-d is telling you; only you can know.

“To know Him is to love Him.”

The more knowledge, the more love. The more you deeply understand the qualities of your Creator, the more you can emulate them, the more meaning you

will have in this world, and the closer your relationship with G-d will be. G-d is giving, loving, patient, merciful, slow to anger... and that's what you must strive to be. There is no such thing as, "That's just the way I am." That may be the way you were created — now work on yourself and change.

“G-d loves you.”

What is the importance of Monotheism? One-stop shopping? Multiple gods (think: Greek mythology) means each one has certain attributes and also certain lacks. One G-d means He has it all, no lacks. What can you give to someone who really has it all? Nothing. That means He can't receive. He can only give. He is perfectly altruistic. And the more you give, the more you love. G-d loves us more than our parents love us, more than we love our kids. G-d gives us these relationships to give us an inkling of His love.

“Your husband needs your respect.”

Your husband may be a CEO of a major corporation, but if he comes home and feels his wife does not respect him and what he stands for, it's not good. When I first heard this I pushed back, big time. But, just like we dismiss so much our parents tell us when we are growing up, and once we do grow up we realize how wise their advice is — what Rebbetzin Weinberg taught is definitely true and a pillar of a thriving marriage. (Bonus wisdom: "Treat him like a man you respect and he will become a man that you respect.)

With the passing of Rebbetzin Weinberg, I feel a deep ache that I was not expecting. I feel orphaned. The loss of great leaders creates a vacuum. How can their shoes be possibly filled?

They can't. But each of us can place our smaller feet in the footprints they made for us and continue along their path.

Thank you, Rebbetzin Weinberg — I know I was not an easy student, but I want you to know that you changed my life and the lives of so many others with your unwavering teachings, values and example. Thank you for never lowering the bar. I am still trying to reach it—it will likely take a lifetime, but as you taught us, that's what life is all about.

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