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The \$180 Million Mitzvah!



Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv

Working on our Middos Rav Dovid Nakash shared a story. When Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zt"l, the Gadol HaDor, had a heart attack, one of the first men at the scene was able to revive him, and with Hashem's help, Rav Elyashiv went on to recuperate, and live for many more years.

Imagine the Zechus, the special merit of saving the Gadol HaDor. The greatness of Rav Elyashiv, whose Torah learning held up the world, and whose

guidance was sought the world over, cannot be measured. The value is incomprehensible.

A Philanthropist Considers the Idea of Buying the Zechus of Saving Rav Elyashiv

Hearing how this one individual was the first to be at Rav Elyashiv's side and helped resuscitate him, a certain philanthropist considered an idea. Could he possibly purchase this man's Zechus? Perhaps, for a hefty sum, he would be willing to sell his share of the reward in Olam Haba.

This philanthropist sent a letter and a check for \$180 million to this man. He explained that if he were to cash the check, it is on the understanding that the S'char for saving Rav Elyashiv would be purchased by this philanthropist, and would forever be his. It was a seemingly exorbitant sum to pay for a Mitzvah, for something that cannot be touched or held.

Seemingly a Simple Question with a Simple Answer

Many people may actually jump at the opportunity to sell their Mitzvah for \$180 million. It would seem to be a simple question with a simple answer. One could reason that if they sell a Mitzvah, more Mitzvos could be done in the future, and many good deeds could result from earning \$180 million! Imagine how much Tzedakah could be donated to Shuls, how many people's lives could be saved, and how many other Mitzvos could be performed from those funds!

Faced with this question, the man went to none other than Rav Elyashiv himself. Laying out the details of the scenario, Rav Elyashiv responded, "We do not sell Mitzvos." Rav Elyashiv continued to repeat this line over and over. We do not sell Mitzvos.

The Temporary Verses the Permanent

But what about the \$180 million? We may look at a Mitzvah as simply something good to do, yet, such a perspective lacks a true appreciation for what is real and what is fake. Money, no matter the amount, even \$180 million, is temporary. A Mitzvah, no matter how big or small, is permanent. Why would one ever sell something that is permanent for something that is temporary? Never underestimate the value of any Mitzvah!

Reprinted from the Parshas Korach 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Rainbow of Klal Yisroel

By Rabbi Hillel Eisenberg

There was a young boy named Rafi, a child with special needs, who absolutely loved being in shul. He showed up early for davening, stayed late to help put siddurim back on the shelves, and offered assistance wherever he could. Though he couldn't speak clearly, wasn't always sure how to hold the siddur, and didn't know the words, he showed up day in and day out with the consistency and devotion of a soldier. Years ago, before specialized schools were widely available, Rafi had no choice but to attend public school. And so, he made do.

As the winter season approached one year, Rafi's school announced an upcoming holiday concert. Each student would go on stage in front of the entire school—faculty, students, and parents—and perform a seasonal song. Rafi was thrilled. He came home beaming and asked his parents if they could attend. They looked at their schedules and gently told him they'd be unable to come that day.

Rafi, disappointed but undeterred, went to shul that evening and approached the rav, Rabbi Shapiro.

"Rabbi," he said with excitement and vulnerability, "my school is having a holiday concert and my parents can't come. Can you come watch me?"

Rabbi Shapiro, who had a full plate—shiurim to deliver, speeches to prepare—replied, "Rafi, I'll try. I'll see what I can do."

The day of the recital arrived, and Rabbi Shapiro, running late, rushed to the school. As he passed security, the guard looked up and asked, "Are you Rabbi Shapiro?"

Surprised, he replied yes.

"Good," the guard said, "Rafi's been asking for you."

In the front office, the secretary stopped him again. "You're Rabbi Shapiro? Rafi's been telling us all week that you're coming. He's very excited."

Rabbi Shapiro walked into a packed auditorium. The room was filled with hundreds of students, teachers, and parents gathered to watch the children perform one by one. Each child stepped up, sang a familiar X-Mas song, and received a round of applause. And then, it was Rafi's turn.

Rafi couldn't walk on stage by himself. He was escorted by teachers. He couldn't sing with clarity. He couldn't play the guitar he held. But he stood on that stage, strumming as best as he could, and with passion and pride, he sang:

"I had a little dreidel, I made it out of clay. And when it's dry and ready, oh dreidel I shall play..."

He sang the song with a glowing smile, with joy, and with all the heart he had. When he finished, the room fell silent. No one knew the song. No one quite knew how to respond. And then, from the back of the auditorium, Rabbi Shapiro leapt to his feet and shouted: “Way to go, Rafi! That was amazing! Great job!” He clapped loudly, alone at first, until others joined in.

Now let’s pause and reflect for a moment. Did anyone else in that auditorium grasp the depth of a Jewish soul? Did Rafi fully understand the meaning of the dreidel? Did the audience know that the holiday they were celebrating is, at its core, a rejection of the Jewish people’s chosenness, while the dreidel represents our refusal to abandon who we are? No.

Did anyone there understand Rafi’s inner world—his fears, his pain, his doubts, his disabilities, his challenges? No.

But in Shamayim, in the heavens above, Hashem knew, and the angels understood. They listened to every word Rafi sang. They wept with emotion at his courage. They celebrated his performance, projecting it across the skies of Gan Eden for all the souls to witness.

People often make a painful mistake. They tell themselves: Who am I? I have dyslexia. I come from a broken home. I take fifteen pills a day. I was expelled from six high schools. I can’t sit through a shiur. I can’t focus on tefillah. I haven’t opened a siddur in a decade. I’m nothing.

That is a lie.

Every single soul in Klal Yisrael has a song. And the angels gather around to hear it. They don’t compare your voice to anyone else’s. They cry with you, they cheer with you, and they record your song in the heavenly archives. Because at the end of our lives, Hashem will not ask us how high we climbed up someone else’s mountain. He will only ask: did you climb yours?

He won’t ask how far you got compared to your neighbor, your friend, your rebbe, your sibling. He will ask, "Did you climb the mountain I gave you? Did you carry the load I placed on your shoulders? Did you fight through the obstacles I gave you?"

That is the only measure that matters.

Every person in Klal Yisrael is a soldier in Hashem’s army, tasked with a mission only they can fulfill. Every person is a unique star, illuminating the night sky that our ancestor Avraham was shown. Every melamed, every shoemaker, every mikveh attendant, every eruv checker, every sukkah builder, every shochet, every gabbai, every baal tokeia, every fundraiser, every struggling soul, every triumphant one—each one of us plays an irreplaceable role in the vast mosaic of the Jewish people.

We are the rainbow of Klal Yisrael. Each color essential, each shade divine. And we must live our lives with the awareness that in the eyes of Hashem, each of us is His only child. Because to Him—we are.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shlach 5785 email of The Torah Anytimes Newsletter.

The “Still Small Voice” in Political Activism

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles



Senator Mayer Jacob Hecht, the Lubavitcher Rebbe and President Reagan

I [Mayer Jacob “Chic” Hecht] was elected as the United States Senator from Nevada in 1982. A couple of years later, my brother, Martin Hecht, and nephew, Dr. Chaim Hecht, took me to Brooklyn to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe at a farbrengen. The Rebbe spoke to me and said, “your top priority should be to get the Jews out of Russia.”

I replied that my late mother was an immigrant from Russia who had to flee with her family to escape death at the hands of the Russian Cossacks.

“The key,” the Rebbe said, is “quiet diplomacy.”

At that time, the Cold War with Russia was still on. In 1985, a very important vote came before the U.S. Senate. President Reagan needed my vote to break a tie. The vote was very important to the President. I had been a top supporter of President Reagan; I felt he was the best friend Israel ever had in the White House. So, I met personally with him and told him of my decision to back him with my tiebreaking vote.

I then asked if I might bring up a concern on my mind. President Reagan graciously agreed. I told him that my late mother was an immigrant from the Soviet Union, and only by the grace of G-d am I standing before you today in the United States Senate. I urged the President to place increased emphasis on the release of tens of thousands of Soviet Jews before the next summit conference.

“Those who are allowed to leave the Soviet Union, Mr. President, should not be just elderly, but children, teenagers, doctors and scientists. All should be allowed the basic human right of freedom.”

President Reagan expressed tremendous concern. I was President Reagan’s last appointment before leaving for the Reykjavik, Iceland Conference which took place in early October 1986. At that meeting I presented him with a list of names of 1,200 Soviet Jews who had applied to emigrate from Russia. I reminded the President that the numbers could reach in the millions, but this would be a start. I used “quiet diplomacy” as the Rebbe had recommended; only he, an aide of his, and myself were in the Oval Office.

President Reagan gave the list of 1,200 names to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev at the Reykjavik Conference and spoke of its importance. Within weeks a trickle of Jews began to leave Russia. Soon the trickle mushroomed into tens of thousands.

After President Reagan left office and I became Ambassador to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, he and Mrs. Reagan came to the Bahamas to vacation. They invited my wife and me to a cocktail party for a few friends. I told the President what a wonderful service he did for the Jewish people in getting the Jews to leave Russia and I asked why he never mentioned the act in public.

Mrs. Reagan said that Mr. Gorbachev told them that there were many around him that did not want the Jews to leave Russia. If we made it public, the exodus would stop. So, President Reagan used “quiet diplomacy” with Mr. Gorbachev.

The story continues with a human touch. My brother, Marty, who has had trouble with his feet, went to Scripps Clinic in La Jolla, California. He was assigned a doctor who referred him to a specialist. The specialist examined him and asked a question, “As your name is Hecht, would you know a Senator Hecht?”

Marty answered with a smile, “He is my brother.”

The doctor became very emotional and replied that I had saved his wife, mother and father-in-law. They were on the list and told to be at the airport at a certain time. They did not know what to expect. They boarded the plane and took off for Vienna. With what money they had, they sent a telegram of thanks to President Reagan.

Since that time, I have met many more Jews that were on that list. The Rebbe’s advice and instructions on using “quiet diplomacy” resulted in the saving of hundreds of thousands of lives, and a stronger Israel where the majority immigrated.

Source: Excerpted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from TheRebbe.org, as told by Senator Hecht.

Biographic note: Senator Meir-Yaakov “Chic” Hecht [Kislev 5688 - Iyar 5766 (Nov. 1928 – May 2006)]; served as U.S. Senator [Republican] from Nevada from Jan. 3rd, 1983 - Jan. 3rd, 1989, and as U.S. Ambassador to the Bahamas from 1989-1993. In 1988 was inducted into the Army Intelligence Hall of Fame, due to his service as a counter-intelligence agent in Berlin during the Korean War (early 1950’s). The “quiet diplomacy” he used to help Soviet Jews gain permission to emigrate was perhaps his greatest accomplishment as a U.S. Senator.

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

A Baal Shem Tov Story

It was a bitter winter in a village near Mezhibuzh. The wagon driver Mendel, bundled in his patched coat, arrived at the home of the Baal Shem Tov. He was a simple man, not learned, but deeply pious. His daughter, Chaya, had turned eighteen — already older than most girls in her village — and shidduchim were not coming. He had no dowry, no yichus, no status, and few connections. What could he offer? He had tried to make matches, but was refused time and again.

Mendel approached the Baal Shem Tov with tears. “Rebbe, my daughter is a good girl. Modest, kind, devout. Why does no one want her? Please give me a bracha.”

The Baal Shem Tov closed his eyes. “Your daughter is destined to marry a great talmid chochom,” he said. “But he is far from here. Don’t worry — when the time is right, Hashem will send him.”

Years passed. The girl remained single. People began whispering. But Mendel clung to the words of the Baal Shem Tov like a lifeline. One stormy evening, a young man knocked on the door of Mendel’s inn. He was thin, shivering, and drenched to the bone. He asked for shelter, offering no name.

Mendel, as always, gave generously, asking no questions. Over the next few days, the stranger lingered, grateful for warmth and food. Mendel’s son happened to be reviewing Mishnayos aloud, and the guest gently corrected him. Then another time, he made a comment that revealed astonishing depth in a pasuk. Slowly, the family realized this man wasn’t just a fugitive or wanderer — he was a talmid chochom, deeply learned and refined.

Mendel’s wife, eyes wide, whispered, “Could this be...?”

With great respect, Mendel approached the young man. “Tell me, who are you?”

The man admitted he had escaped persecution in his town. His yeshiva had been burned, and he was in hiding. He hadn’t eaten properly in weeks. Mendel said, “My daughter is of marriageable age. I believe you are the one the Baal Shem Tov spoke of. I have no money to offer — only a heart of blessing.”

The young man agreed. The wedding was simple. No fanfare. But word reached Mezhibuzh, and the Baal Shem Tov smiled.

“Yes,” he said. “That was her zivug. Exactly as it was written.” The couple raised generations of talmidei chachomim.

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

The Sixth Aliyah

Rav Elazar Shach, zt”l, related that in the Shul of Rav Meir Michel Rabinowitz, zt”l, in Vilna, there was a certain wealthy member who would give large donations to the Shul every Shabbos, when he received the Aliyah of Shishi, the sixth Aliyah.

Shishi was considered to be the most Chashuve Aliyah, and he received it every week because of his large contributions. After a while, he eventually lost all of his money due to a bad investment, and he could no longer contribute in the manner that he did before.

The Gabba'im who were in charge of giving out the Aliyos felt that there was no point to continue giving him Shishi, since he could no longer contribute the large sums he had donated before. However, Rav Meir Michel refused to listen to the Gabba'im. Instead, he insisted that this man receive his Aliyah of Shishi, just as before, despite his inability to contribute to the Shul, as he so generously did.

Rav Meir Michel said that since this man was used to receiving a certain amount of Kavod because of his previous financial position, he must be accorded the same honor as before. We must feel for him. He said that once a person has become used to a certain lifestyle, it is wrong to deprive him of his previous honors, and it must continue!

Reprinted from the Parshas Korach 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

Piercing the Heavens

By Rabbi Moshe Dov Heber



Recently, I walked into my afternoon sixth-grade class. As I did, a group of boys immediately called out, “Rebbe, we have to tell you what happened today!” I told them I was eager to hear.

“Rebbe,” they said, “we know what’s going on in Eretz Yisrael, and we decided that we wanted to do something. So, during first recess and again during second recess, six of us sat together and split the entire Sefer Tehillim. We finished it—every single kapitel—together, as a group.”

I was stunned. I turned to them and asked, “What inspired you to do this?” And their answer was so pure, so real. They said, “Rebbe, the truth is, nothing specific. We just keep hearing people talk about what’s happening in Eretz Yisrael. And we’re kids. We don’t have money to give. We don’t have any special resources. There’s not much we can do to help. But we can daven.”

So, they did. They took initiative. They chose to act. And together, they completed the entire Tehillim—during their own free time.

Children may sometimes feel small in the face of global events. But in shamayim, their voices echo with unparalleled strength. The koach haTefillah they possess is immeasurable. Their innocence, their sincerity, their emunah peshutah—it pierces the heavens.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shlach 5785 email of The Torah Anytimes Newsletter.

The New Shirt

By Yoni Schwartz



There was a young boy, Moshe, who had lost his father. His mother struggled to put bread on the table each week. In their neighborhood, most children received new suits for Yom Tov, and on the first night at shul, they would gather and compliment one another.

Moshe, also wanting a new suit, gently approached his mother a few weeks before Yom Tov. She turned around, eyes glassy from stress and exhaustion, bent down, and looked at him. With love, she rubbed his soft cheek.

In his high-pitched voice, he gently asked if he could get a new suit. It broke her heart that she couldn't afford one. Nevertheless, she decided to start saving up for a new shirt. His mother cut back on some expenses and, each week saved a little money wherever she could. Slowly but surely, she scraped together just barely enough for Moshe's new Yom Tov shirt.

The first night of Yom Tov arrived, and little Moshe skipped to shul with a big smile, excited to show off his new shirt. However, when he got there, that smile quickly turned into a frown. Nobody noticed his new shirt! All the other boys had new suits, new hats, and new shoes, and they were all receiving so many compliments - but not one person noticed little Moshe.

After shul, pouty and glum, Moshe began walking back home. The Gerrer Rebbe, zt"l, surrounded by his entourage of followers, caught a glimpse of little Moshe and noticed his frown. Quickly, he ran to him, gently placed his hand on Moshe's collar, and said, "Moshe! Pssh! *Chultza chadasha!* What a nice new shirt! It's so beautiful!"

Seeing that somebody had noticed him, Moshe's frown flipped into a huge smile - and that's how he stayed: cheerful, for the rest of Yom Tov.

Reprinted from the Parshas Korach 5785 email of Torah Sweets.

Truth on the Line



Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, the Lodzer Rav was once confronted by two hysterical women who came to his home to seek a settlement of their argument.

The two women shared the same clothesline on which they hung their laundry out to dry. The line was stretched across a courtyard, from a hook outside one woman's window to a second hook outside the other woman's window. The two would normally take turns using the line, but this time there seemed to have been some confusion, and both women were claiming ownership of the laundry which had been hung out to dry.

Unable to resolve their argument, they decided to bring the whole load of laundry to the home of the Rav, and let him determine its ownership.

R' Eliyahu Chaim listened to the arguments of both women. After listening carefully, he instructed the women to leave the laundry on his table in a huge pile and go out of the room. He then called in his own wife, the *Rebbetzin*.

"Do me a favor," he requested her, "and please bring in a large batch of our laundry. First mark each item in a secret way so that the mark is not easily discernible, and then mix all of it together with the laundry that is on the table."

The *Rebbetzin* did as her husband requested, and brought in a recently dried load of laundry, which she marked carefully. She showed the Rav exactly where every item was marked and then she mixed her laundry together with the pile of

laundry that already was on the Rav's table. The *Rebbetzin* left the room through one door and the Rav called in one of the two women who had been waiting outside a second door.

"Please select from this pile the laundry that is yours," the Rav said. Carefully and diligently the woman picked out a shirt from this side, a sock from the second side, making sure to choose only those items she was positive were hers. She continued to select a good deal of what was on the table, but not one item that belonged to the *Rebbetzin*. The Rav told her to put everything back in the pile and mix it all up again. Then he called in the second woman.

The Rav told her, as well, to choose the laundry that was hers. As she picked up each item, she announced in a defiant tone that it was unquestionably hers. She went through the entire bundle of laundry, exclaiming that each article - even those put in by the *Rebbetzin* - was hers. The Rav realized that this was the woman who had been lying, for she was taking items that were definitely not hers.

He then called back the first woman and told her to select once again what was hers. The *Rebbetzin* then came in and took the marked laundry that was her own. And the lying woman finally left with what was really hers - a very small amount of the laundry.

Reprinted from the Parashat Bemidbar 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book - "Around the Maggid's Table.")

True Iron Dome Protection

A kollel youngster was about to pay for his order when a chaya behind him suddenly stepped forward and swiped his own credit card.

"I'm paying for that," the soldier said.

Surprised, the kollel fellow asked, "Why?"

The chaya replied, "I work on the Iron Dome system. I was sent to Ukraine to help train their teams. They're using the same system, with the same kind of personnel but their success rate is only 45%.

"Here in Israel, we have a 95% success rate. That extra 50%? It's because of you guys."

Reprinted from the Parshas Korach 5785 email of Rabbi Shraga Freedman.