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The Air Conditioner



On a scorching summer day in 2021, when the sun was beaming down so strongly that many people remained indoors, Reb Hillel Litwack, who runs a gemach, received a call from a widow that her AC was no longer working and that she needed a new one.

“The cost of a new one would be \$598,” she told him. “People regularly give you tzedaka money to distribute, so I want to know if you have any extra funds.”

He answered in the negative, but he assured her that he would send her the money once he got it. She thanked him, and they hung up.

After rethinking the conversation, he thought to himself, “How can I leave a widow with eight unmarried children closed up in their apartment, waiting for salvation? I’ll lay out some of my own money, and we’ll get the funds afterward.”

He immediately called her back with a credit card number, which she used for the purchase, and within a day, their new AC was installed and was cooling them down. Five days later, as Reb Hillel was leaving Shacharis, a man came over to him

with an envelope, “I know you run many tzedakos. Here’s some money for you to use toward anything you see fit.”

After departing, he opened it and found a total of \$600 cash! He knew for what it was for.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayishlach 5785 email of Rabbi Moshe Hirschberg’s Zichru Toras Moshe.

One Small Kindness

By Rabbi Yosef Weiss



R’ Aharon Kotler

In the 1950’s, the philanthropist Mr. J.C. Cohen of Florida, established a charitable foundation. One man was appointed to oversee his contributions and serve as a gatekeeper for the various collectors. It was thus practically impossible to directly approach Mr. Cohen. Each time R’ Aharon Kotler traveled to Florida, he would pay a visit to Mr. Cohen’s secretary, hoping to raise money for the Lakewood Yeshiva; and each time he came away without success.

Mr. Cohen’s secretary was polite, but firm in his refusal to commit funds to the Yeshiva. On one fundraising trip to Florida, R’ Aharon took R’ Y. Yitzchak Spiegel along. One afternoon, R’ Y. Yitzchak davened mincha in a local shul where he spotted a young boy reciting kaddish after davening, obviously struggling with

the pronunciation of the words. Feeling pity for the poor young orphan, he introduced himself and gently offered to teach him how to recite the kaddish.

The boy's eyes lit up as he gratefully accepted the offer. He explained that he had recently lost his mother and had trouble reciting the kaddish properly. R' Y. Yitzchak sat with him and patiently went over every word of the kaddish until the boy felt confident that he could recite it clearly. The boy thanked R' Y. Yitzchak profusely.

"You know," said R' Y. Yitzchak, "I didn't catch your name." The boy replied, "My name is Cohen." "Are you related to Mr. J.C. Cohen?" asked R' Y. Yitzchak. The boy confirmed that J.C. was indeed his father. When R' Y. Yitzchak asked if he could introduce him to his father, he eagerly obliged. As they entered the Cohen home, J.C. looked inquiringly at R' Y. Yitzchak.

His son exclaimed, "Dad, this man just taught me how to say kaddish!"

J.C. thanked R' Y. Yitzchak, explaining, "I recently lost my wife, Dora. I didn't realize my son was having such a hard time with the kaddish. It was very kind of you to take time from your trip to teach a child you don't even know."

J.C. then inquired why R' Y. Yitzchak had come to Florida. He explained that he had come with this rebbe, R' Aharon Kotler, to raise money for a new building for the Yeshiva. J.C. agreed to meet with R' Aharon, saying, "I usually let my secretary take care of my donations, but this time, I am anxious to meet your rebbe. Thanks to your great kindness to my son, you've certainly caught my attention."

The result of that meeting was a \$72,000 donation (then a huge sum) towards the purchase of a new building for the Lakewood Yeshiva... in memory of J.C.'s wife, Dora. Until today, when walking into Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, one can see a sign "In Memory of Dora Cohen." (Excerpted from the book – "Visions of Greatness, Volume 7").

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

Seeing the Yad Hashem

By Aharon Spetner

"Hear ye, hear ye!" a loud voice proclaimed, causing the chassidim in the village of Horki to look up.

"It is with great sorrow that we inform you of the untimely death of King Kostadin," announced a royal messenger riding a horse into the village square. "All villagers are ordered to bow their heads in a moment of silence for the loss of our beloved ruler!"

“Attention!” the man commanded after about three seconds of silence. “Prepare to greet your new ruler, King Kresimir!”

Everyone looked on as a royal chariot rode into sight, flanked by a dozen knights riding on jet black horses. The chariot came to a stop and King Kresimir stepped out.

The Horki Rebbe humbly stepped forward and bowed to the king.



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

“Who are you?” demanded the king.

“I am the Horki Rebbe,” the rebbe said modestly. “I am the rabbi of this village.”

“Rabbi?” the king said rudely. “I don’t want to speak to the rabbi. I want to speak with the poritz. Where is he? Why hasn’t he come to greet me?”

“Your majesty,” said the rebbe softly. “When the poritz died, your dear father put me in charge of the village. As your humble servant I am honored to continue to serve under your reign.”

“A JEW???” the king spat. “We can’t have a Jewish poritz!”

The king looked around. “Nikolev!” he yelled at one of the knights. “You are the new poritz of Horki! This mansion is now yours! Take the rabbi and lock him up in your dungeon!”

The chassidim looked on in horror as Nikolev dismounted his horse with a sneer and slapped iron chains on the Horki Rebbe, before leading him off to the dungeon.

“Come, let’s go!” the king said to the other knights. “We must arrest my brother Miloslav! We’ll think of a reason on the way.”

* * *

The next few days were some of the darkest days in the history of the village of Horki. The poritz had confiscated Aharon the fish man’s fishing nets and now poor Aharon had to catch fish with his hands. Anshel the carpenter was only allowed to build furniture out of small twigs and Berel the innkeeper had to serve his expensive whiskey to the poritz and his drunken friends for free. But the worst thing of all was that their beloved rebbe was locked away in the poritz’s dungeon, unable to give his chassidim the chizzuk they so desperately needed.

Meanwhile, in the capital city of Koleslav, King Kresimir was holding a lavish ceremony in front of his palace.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” the King cried from his royal balcony. “Two hundred and fifty years ago, a giant rock fell from the sky on the country of Grendelheim. But I want to protect our precious nation! So, I have spent ten million rubles to build a giant shield over my palace so that your dear ruler will not be harmed if a giant rock shall fall from the sky!”

The people in the crowd looked at each other. Was their new king crazy? Just last week he spent five million rubles painting the leaves on all the trees so they would stay green in the winter, and now this?

The royal guards rolled out a giant iron shield in front of the palace.

“Okay, guards!” called the king. “On my command, you will raise the shield over my palace, to protect your dear ruler from falling sky rocks! Three! Two...”

The king’s voice trailed off as a large shadow appeared. A giant meteorite came barreling out of the sky and smashed into the king, leaving a giant crater in his place.

* * *

“Guards!” said the newly crowned King Miloslav after he was released from prison. “Quick! We must go visit the village of Horki!”

King Miloslav arrived in Horki and went straight to the poritz’s house.

“Nikolev,” he said to the poritz. “You’re fired.”

King Miloslav then personally went to free the Horki Rebbe for the dungeon. He said he believed that it was in the rebbe’s zechus that Hashem got rid of his crazy brother Kresimir before he could waste the rest of the kingdom’s money.

“I’m terribly sorry for everything that happened,” said King Miloslav. “My father knew what he was doing when he put you in charge of your village. Here, take ten million rubles for your troubles.”

“Thank you Hashem for everything that has happened!” said the rebbe as King Miloslav rode off into the distance.

“Rebbe,” said Berel the innkeeper. “I understand thanking Hashem for being saved. But thanking Hashem for everything sounds like it even includes being thrown into the dungeon.”

“Ah, yes it does,” the rebbe said. “But think about something. Why did Yaakov Avinu love Yosef so much? Because it took so long for Rochel Imeinu to have a child. Sometimes Hashem makes a situation so bad, so desperate, that when the yeshua finally comes it is clear to all that it is yad Hashem and nothing else.

“I was thrown into a dungeon by the new king and a terrible poritz was ruling over us. None of us could have imagined how we would escape that situation. But Hashem did this to show us that only He is able to save us. And that alone is worth thanking him for.”

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

The Fall and Rise of a Grieving Teenager

As Told by Daniel Levine

I met the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe [Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson] when I was nineteen years old, not long after the death of my father in a tragic car accident. At the time, I was still coping with the aftereffects of that traumatic event and was confused about what course in life to follow. And then I remembered my father telling me when I was a small boy, “The Rebbe is a great leader of world Jewry, and if you ever find things too hard to manage, write to him or go to him for advice.”

So, in December of 1976, I made the trip from Sydney, Australia — where I was born, raised and educated — to see the Rebbe in New York. In preparation for the audience, I had written a two-page letter in which I detailed my situation in life and posed half-a-dozen questions for the Rebbe:

My number one concern was my mother, who’d had a hard time ever since my father was killed. The accident happened in front of her eyes and, as a result, she

suffered a nervous shock, what today is called PTSD. So, my first question was what should I do to help my mother and if there were any words of comfort from the Rebbe that I could convey to her.



Daniel Levine and the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In reply, the Rebbe spoke for several minutes about the mitzvah of honoring one's parents. He cited various instances where this subject is mentioned in the Torah, in the works of the Prophets and in the teachings of the Talmudic sages. Then he said, "When you return home, you should tell your mother that you came to see me and I advised you that the greatest comfort a mother can receive is to see that her son is following in the footsteps of his father and adhering to the tenets of Jewish law. When you do so, it brings comfort to your father's soul and comforts your mother in her grief."

My second set of questions pertained to my education and future livelihood. My father had owned a pharmacy, so I wanted to know if I should enroll in university and become a pharmacist — a path neither of my parents had favored — or learn in yeshivah? Or, since a number of people seemed to think I had a good singing voice, should I perhaps become a cantor (chazan)?

Before answering those questions, the Rebbe said, "I would like to ask you about the death of your father. I realize that you might find it somewhat upsetting, but I think it's necessary for you to speak about this."

I told the Rebbe that it happened on a Saturday night, when my father — who typically took my mother out for coffee then — had stopped by the pharmacy on the way home. He was just returning to his car, when a driver, traveling in excess of 90 mph, smashed into him. The driver then hit eight other cars and a bus.

I had heard all these details in the Coroner's Court and again in the Magistrate's Court, but retelling them to the Rebbe was very painful, as I had not

spoken about any of it with anyone. I had loved my father dearly and I missed him terribly. Truth be told, I did not realize until later that when I came to see the Rebbe, I was actually in a state of depression. The Rebbe must have sensed this and that is why he wanted me to talk about what had happened in order to alleviate the trauma I had suffered.

This is not easily accomplished. The traumatized person needs someone who will listen patiently, someone he can trust, someone to whom he can speak from the heart. I had not been able to do this until that m

oment and had instead deflected my feelings by focusing on my mother's needs. The Rebbe said the most immediate need was the livelihood of my family which came via our pharmacy, and so I should enroll in pharmaceutical studies at the university. I followed his advice, and although I never fully completed the course of study to become a pharmacist, I managed the family business for some ten years after my father's passing.

The Rebbe further said that while he could not advise me to take time off from earning a livelihood to study in yeshivah, that did not mean I could forgo fixed times of Torah study. "What is required of you is to know and observe all the directives of Jewish law." As he was saying this, I was despairing at the thought of how many volumes that included, but the Rebbe seemed to be reading my mind.

He took a Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law abbreviated into a single volume, out of his drawer and held it up. "Do you have a copy of this?" I did have it and I had studied it multiple times. Still holding the book in his hand, the Rebbe said, "As you go through life, remember that this book tells you exactly how you should conduct yourself. Just learn its contents well and live accordingly."

Forever after, the image of the Rebbe holding up the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch has stayed in my mind and kept me on the straight and narrow. In conclusion, the Rebbe said, "You have told me all the advice you received from others — your parents, your brother, your mentors and friends. And now you have received my advice. But nowhere have you mentioned what you yourself want. Is there anything that you particularly need or want that I can assist you with?"

His encouragement led me to speak from the heart. I said, "The only thing I want is to see the arrival of Mashiach, because there is too much suffering in the world." I continued in that vein, concluding, with emotion, "And when the great day of Resurrection of the Dead arrives, I want to see my father and run toward him as fast as I can and hug him and kiss him, and tell him how much I love him and how I miss him. That is all I want."

As I finished these words, I was so overcome that I collapsed to the floor, because I apparently fainted. When I opened my eyes, Rabbi Leibel Groner, the Rebbe's secretary, was helping me up. As I stood up, I saw that the Rebbe was sitting

at his desk with his head down — I could not see his face, but he seemed to be shaking.

Finally, he looked up and wiped his eyes. I was shocked to realize that the Rebbe had been sobbing. It was very painful for me to see that I had caused him to cry. I tried to apologize, but the Rebbe said, “No apologies are necessary. This is the first time in my life that I’ve heard another Jew say that the only thing he wants is for Mashiach to come.”

When the audience was over, the Rebbe’s final words to me were, “May the Almighty bless you.” And then he rose slightly from his chair and said again, “Yes, may the Almighty bless you.”

(Daniel Levine divides his time between Sydney and Jerusalem. He was interviewed on the 50th anniversary of the passing of his father, Eliyohu ben Yehuda Leib Levine, in July, 2024.)

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayeishev 5785 edition of “My Encounter with the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe, a project of JEM, the Jewish Educational Media.

The Reason for the Radiant Smile

By Rabbi David Ashear

Michal*, a Sephardic girl from Canada, had been trying to find a shidduch for quite a few years. Her mother, who was not as religious as her daughter, kept telling Michal that the reason she was not getting married was because she was dressing too modestly, and no one was noticing her. On one occasion, her mother pushed so hard that Michal finally caved and went to a wedding dressed immodestly.

When she arrived, she checked her coat and was left feeling very uncomfortable, insecure, and out of place in her immodest attire. She turned around to go to the reception – and there was her rabbi, who had just walked in! She flushed with shame and immediately spun around to retrieve her coat. Red-faced, she exited the wedding hall at a run.

She could not bear to remain there for another second dressed as she was. An hour and a half later, Michal returned to the wedding proudly dressed in her usual modest attire. She felt dignified, like a princess, and spent the rest of the night with

a huge smile on her face, proud to be a bas Yisrael. She felt an inner joy knowing she had just passed a test and done the will of Hashem.

The very next morning, Michal received a phone call from a shadchanis. “Were you at the Rosenberg* wedding last night?” she asked. When Michal replied affirmatively, the shadchanis said, “A woman there noticed you. She said that your smile was so radiant and you were walking with such confidence. You looked so happy. She’s asking about you for her son. Are you interested in hearing more?”

Michael thought to herself, “This is very funny. I originally went to the wedding last night dressed a certain way, thinking that would get me a shidduch. Turns out, what got me noticed was my happiness from going home to change and dressing the way Hashem wants me to dress.”

Michael agreed to meet the suggested young man. Shortly thereafter, they were engaged. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book- “Living Emunah on Shidduchim”)

Reprinted from Parshas Vayeishev 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Story of a Simple Unlearned Jew

The following story illustrate the heights of Bitachon—faith one may ultimately reach. The Alter of Novardok (see Madreigot HaAdam p.197 and Yalkut Lekach Tov vol.1 p.157) relates a famous incident about Rabbi Moshe Alshich - The Alshich HaKadosh.

There was a man living in Tzefat who was a simple, unlearned Jew. He made his living by transporting sand and earth in an old broken-down wagon that was hauled by his donkey. In a Derasha—speech one Shabbat, he heard The Alshich HaKadosh say that at the highest level of Bitachon no hishtadlut—contribution is necessary. “If one truly trusts in the Almighty, then Hashem will provide him with parnassah—sustenance.”

The man said to himself, “If this is true, why must I work so hard? If there is a level of Bitachon like this, then all my drudgery is unnecessary.” Then and there he made a firm decision to trust in Hashem with all his heart, and he proceeded to sit by the stove the whole day and recite Tehillim.

When his wife and family saw that he had stopped working, they demanded that he return to work and earn some money to support them. He, in turn, scolded them, and said, “G-d forbid! I heard The Alshich HaKadosh say explicitly that if a

person trusts completely in Hashem, his livelihood will come to him without any effort whatsoever. If so, why should I slave in the cold and heat when everything is going to come to me anyway? Come join me and say Tehillim, and you'll see that our parnasah will soon be here."

His wife finally gave up trying to convince him, and their situation worsened. The cupboard quickly became bare, and the household needed food. Soon she had to sell the donkey and wagon to a gentile so their family could survive.

The new owner used the donkey and wagon to travel around the mountains to dig sand and earth. One day, he happened upon a treasure of gold. He immediately filled his bags with the gold and loaded them on the wagon. Then he continued his excavation of the treasure. Suddenly, a loose boulder rolled down the mountain and killed him. When the gentile didn't come back, the donkey, hungry and not knowing where to go, lifted its feet and out of habit returned to its original owner. When the poor man's wife saw the animal, and the wagon loaded with the treasure, she excitedly ran to her husband. "Keep saying Tehillim! Your bitachon worked! We're rich!"

Upon hearing of this remarkable occurrence, the talmidim of The Alshich HaKadosh came to their Rebbe and complained, "Why is that man so much greater than us? We have been studying with you for many years and our bitachon is surely praiseworthy, yet we remain poor. Then along comes this simple Jew, and after hearing about bitachon only once, he sits by the stove and is given a treasure!"

The Alshich HaKadosh answered them, "When you thrust a stick into hard ground it stands up by itself. However, if the ground has been broken up, and is soft and loose, the stick will fall over. You have to push it in deeper in order to steady it. When this Simple Jew heard about Bitachon, he accepted it without any doubts or fears, as if there was no other reality. You, my dear students are different. You are too smart for that. You want to understand everything. So, you analyze and dissect the situation in order to understand it. This causes you to have some slight doubts and apprehensions. Therefore, you have not yet attained perfect bitachon.

The Baalei Mussar say that the best part of the story is how he reacted to his family when his family asked him to go back to work. His Bitachon didn't work at first, and the family needed to eat, but he said to them "Are you crazy? The Holy Alshich said that Bitachon alone will bring me sustenance, so why should I waste my time and energy working for no reason?!" Look at the way a real Baal Bitachon deals with negative "reality"!

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayishlach 5785 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

That Can of Tuna Fish

An amazing story was told by Rabbi Shlomo Landau. It's common practice in the army for Israeli soldiers to light a match and bring it to a can of tuna in oil when they're off duty. The oil ignites and the fire smokes the tuna. There was a group of soldiers at a refugee camp in Gaza, and one soldier lit his can of tuna, forgetting that during wartime, the circumstances are different.

A soldier next to him quickly reminded him of the live ammunition next to him. He tossed the tuna can about 200 feet away, and when it landed, it triggered a tremendous explosion! The soldiers on their lunch break all draw their guns and start shooting at that area.

When they stop shooting, they see a white flag rising from underground. A group of Hamas terrorists had been gathered near an opening to their tunnel, waiting to pounce on this battalion of soldiers. Assuming they had been attacked when the tuna set off all their live ammunition, they emerged from the ground, hands raised in the air.

This extraordinary story is a testament to the belief that sometimes, seemingly ordinary moments carry extraordinary significance. Once again, we see the Hand of Hashem is intricately woven into the fabric of this war.

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayishlach 5785 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

Giving a Piece of Yourself

By Shmuel Blitz

The Divrei Chaim, Rav Chaim Halberstam of Sanz, was the first Rebbe in the Sanz Chassidic dynasty. More and more people heard about his greatness, so the number of his followers grew.

One day, a young man approached him and said, "I am a chassid of your son, the Shinover Rav. You should know that he is truly a great Rebbe."

The Divrei Chaim was an extremely humble man. It was difficult for him to hear compliments about himself or even his son. "Why are you his chassid?" the Divrei Chaim asked. "There are so many other Rebbes to follow. Why did you choose him? Why do you think he is so special?"

"You must see how he davens," the man replied. "It is so moving to watch. I feel that he is connecting to Hashem."

“But many Rebbes daven with great kavanah,” the Divrei Chaim said.

“But he is a great talmid chacham,” said the man. “He is so learned. You should hear his shiurim.”

“No doubt,” the Divrei Chaim said again. “But so many Rebbes are great talmidei chachamim. I still do not understand what you find special about him.”

The man became surprised. He thought the Divrei Chaim would be happy to hear such wonderful things about his son, the Shinover Rav.



Illustrated by Rivky Neuhaus

Then he remembered something he saw the Shinover Rav do. “I was at the Shinover Rav’s house one day, and he did something truly amazing. It was a freezing cold day. A poor man came to his door asking for tzedakah. The man was covered with ice and snow. The Rebbe gave him some money. But as the man was leaving, your son saw that the man had no shoes. His feet were wrapped in rags.”

The man continued. “The Rebbe then took off his own shoes and gave them to the poor man, leaving himself without shoes.”

Now the Divrei Chaim was pleased. “Someone who takes what he has and gives it to someone else is truly a great Rebbe. You have chosen well.” What an act of chessed! Giving your own shoes to another person who does not have shoes to wear.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeishev 5785 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from Living Chesed by Rabbi Avraham Asher Makovsky.

The Controversial Handshake

By Yoni Schwartz



Rav Aharon of Belz, ZT”L, had a custom: whenever shaking hands with someone under Bar Mitzvah, he’d put a cloth over his hand. Once, as many chassidim were approaching him, a young child dressed up in a hat and jacket to fool the Rav into thinking he was over Bar Mitzvah.

The gabbai, realizing the boy's ploy, and publicly embarrassed him, screaming, “Sheigetz! Get out of here!”

Shaken up by the gabbai’s horrific behavior, Rav Aharon told him to apologize to the boy and ask for forgiveness. The gabbai did so, but when he returned, the Rav was still too agitated by the gabbai's horrific sin, so he called back the boy to make amends himself.

Upon returning, the boy received a wholehearted blessing from the holy Rav. However, the Rav still felt he hadn’t done enough, so he instructed the boy to write a note with a request from Hashem that he would pray for to be granted. As the boy was leaving, the Rav was still too disturbed about how someone could publicly embarrass another person so brazenly and said, “Just because I observe certain stringencies and don’t give my hand to a child who is under Bar Mitzvah doesn’t mean it’s right that the boy should be publicly shamed.”

He called the boy back one last time, and in front of everybody, removed the cloth from his hand, shook the boy’s hand, and gave him many more wholehearted blessings. Then the Rav was calmed.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayishlach 5785 email Torah Sweets.