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The Bitter Cold Winter Nights



One freezing cold winter day the elderly Ridbaz (Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky, 1845-1913) made his way to Shul. It was his father's Yahrzeit. The Ridbaz was the Chazzan and said Kaddish. He was very emotional during his prayers. After he finished the men who davened together with him asked him what happened.

The Ridbaz explained that it wasn't the calendar date, the yahrzeit that had brought him some vivid memories but it was the freezing cold weather.

"When I was a young boy I had a private Rebbi who taught me. My parents weren't rich but they paid for me to have private Rebbi. They cut back on many basics in order to pay my Rebbi. One year the winter was very cold and my father had no work. No work meant no wages. I kept on studying with my Rebbi every day.

One day he sent me home with a note. It was already three months that he hadn't been paid. If he wasn't paid immediately he was going to stop learning with me."

"My parents were devastated. My father went to Shul to daven Mincha. He came back all happy. The president of the Shul had asked him to build him a fireplace for his daughter getting married next week. No one could do the job as the transportation had come to a standstill and there were no bricks to be found. He told the president that he could accept the job.

"My father came home and took apart our brick fireplace carefully. He gathered the stones and went off to the home of the new couple and built them a fireplace. The money he earned went straight to the Rebbi."

"That winter was exceptionally cold. We were all shivering under our blankets. But my parents made clear that it was a worthy price to pay for my studies. Today is such a cold day and I am no youngster. But when I remember how my parents shivered for my Torah study I felt I had to make the extra effort to come and say Kaddish for my father."

Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5784 edition of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.

Angels in the Super Market

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

Chaim Teitz was on his way home after his morning study session at his Kollel. His wife called him on his cell phone and asked him to pick up some groceries. Chaim and his wife Rina always shopped at Mendel's Grocery, even though they knew that his prices were a bit higher than the local supermarket.

Mendel Dorfman was a kind, sweet man, who went out of his way for every customer. Mendel's loyal customers remained with him because they knew he

needed the livelihood and because no supermarket could match the individualized attention Mendel dispensed – not to mention his nice thought on the parashah of the week at the check-out counter.

“You Haven’t Paid Me Any Money in Months”

As Chaim finished gathering the items he needed, he approached the check-out counter where three men were waiting in line. Mendel was on the telephone. “Listen, Mrs. Margolis,” Mendel was saying, “I will be happy to send your order over, but is there any way you can pay me at least part of your bill? You owe over \$1000 and you haven’t given me any money in months.”

Mendel was quiet as the lady on the other end of the line was talking. He let her finish and then said, “Yes, I understand, but I have suppliers to pay, I have workers to pay, you know I am not a rich man.”

Once again, he was quiet as the lady on the line was responding. “No, no,” Mendel interrupted her. “Don’t worry. I’m sending your order. I was just hoping for some payment, but don’t worry, you will get the order. There is no need to cancel it.”

Marveling at Mendel’s Kindness

The four young men looked at one another marveling at Mendel’s kindness and sensitivity. While he was still on the phone, they huddled together. “Imagine the pity on that poor woman,” said one of the men.

“And it’s a pity on Mendel as well,” said another. “He’s not rolling in money and he’s entitled to something, wouldn’t you say?”

“So shouldn’t we do something?” the third man said, expressing what was on all their minds. “Think we could each manage \$250?” the fourth man asked.

They all nodded and smiled. Two of them had checks and two of them had cash. Within a minute they put their money together and handed it to Mendel while he was still on the phone. He looked at the money in amazement and understood what had transpired. “Wait, wait, Mrs. Margolis,” he practically yelled into the telephone. “There is no need to worry. Your bill has just been paid. You don’t owe me a thing!”

The men smiled though they could not hear what Mrs. Margolis was saying. “Really, really,” Mendel said, “Hashem just sent angels to my store. You’ll have the order within the hour. Mrs. Margolis, you’ve got a new slate. Don’t be embarrassed. Hashem takes care of His people!” (In the Spirit of the Maggid)

Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tesse 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “In the Spirit of the Maggid” by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn.

The Art of Religious Life

By Rabbi Joey Haber



Rabbi Joey Haber

The story is told of a man who once approached a Rabbi and asked a question which we have likely all asked ourselves at one point or another, in some form or another.

"Why does Hashem want me to perform *mitzvot*?" he asked. "He already has angels, who are perfect, pristine creatures. I'm just a human being. I'm very flawed. I make a lot of mistakes. I do a lot of things wrong. What are my *mitzvot* worth?"

The Rabbi replied by asking this fellow what he did professionally. The man said he was an artist, who drew paintings.

"What's your favorite piece of art that you've produced?" the Rabbi asked.

The artist explained that he painted a beautiful picture of the sunset over the ocean. It's considered an exquisite piece of art, and is worth an exorbitant amount of money.

"What makes it so exquisite? Why is it so highly valued?" the Rabbi wondered.

"Because it's perfect," the artist explained. "It depicts the ocean, the sun and the horizon in a manner that so closely resembles the real thing."

"So, tell me something," the Rabbi continued. "Why doesn't someone just take a good camera to the ocean and take a picture of the sunset? If he wants a perfect picture of the sunset, then surely a picture can provide a far more perfect replica than your painting, as good as it is."

The artist smiled and explained that the whole point of art is to depict the subject as accurately as possible given human limitations. With a camera, there's no challenge, and so there's no achievement in producing a precise replica. The beauty

of art lies in the ability to attain near-perfection within the limits of the human being's abilities.

"This is precisely why Hashem wants us to serve Him," the Rabbi said.

The angels' service of G-d is like the camera's depiction of the sunset. It's perfect and unflawed, without any struggle or challenge. Hashem created us flawed human beings so we can be "artists" – so we can create as beautiful a life as we can, with the understanding that we aren't going to be perfect. Religious life is an art, whereby we make ourselves as close to perfect as possible. Of course, we will never be perfect, and we should never expect ourselves to be perfect. We must, however, expect and demand of ourselves that we consistently work to get better.

Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Tavo 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Reward of Suffering - Emunah



Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of blessed memories

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky met Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the Rebbe the Rayatz, in Poland. He told the Rebbe that he was arrested by the Russians and sent to Siberia. He wasn't given any time to pack anything to take along. He woke up in the morning the first day on Siberia and started saying 'Modeh Ani'.

But then he started thinking to himself, why am I thankful for waking up this morning. What do I have to get up for. I have been torn away from my family and

am here in Siberia with nothing. No Tallis and Tefillin, no Sefarim. What do I have to thank Hashem for?

And then he caught on to the last two words of 'Modeh Ani', 'Rabba Emunasecha' - I have Emunah and that no one can take away from me. And with that he was able to say 'Modeh Ani' and be grateful for waking up and having the privilege to be a Jew and have faith in Hashem.

The Rebbe himself had been in the Communist prisons and suffered greatly, nearly losing his life. The Rebbe replied with a very sharp and deep comment. "It was worthwhile for you and me to go through such suffering to be able to come to that understanding and recognition."

We have a long way to go to reach such high levels of Emunah but we all have our challenges and on our level they are hard for us. But as we start the day with gratitude for waking up we all have something that no one can ever take away from us, our Emunah, our faith and trust in Hashem. If we start off our day with such gratitude and faith and decide that it will be our outlook gratitude and faith and decide that it will be our outlook the whole day, we will be a different person.

Reprinted from Parshat Ki Seitzei 5784 edition of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.

The Oil and the Perfume Merchants

As a boy (Rabbi Yehuda Leib Lowy, zt"l known at the Maharal Mi"Prague), the following story happened in the city he grew up. There were two stores next to each other. One was owned by a Jew and he sold oil. The other was owned by a non-Jew who sold perfumes.

The oil store was always bustling with customers as the store owner was known for his service and honesty. He was very successful. The other store was nearly always empty as he was known to be dishonest in business.

One night the perfume store owner came to his store and made a small hole through the wall to the oil store. When he was bored and his store was empty he would look through the hole and watch what was going on in his neighbor's store. One evening he saw the Jewish store owner counting a large sum of golden coins and wrapping them up in a red cloth.

The man started thinking how he could get his hands on the money. He ran in to the street, started shouting and crying that someone stole his money. The police were called and he told them that his money was wrapped up in a red cloth. They

asked him if he had any suspicion and he told them that the only person who saw him counting his money was his Jewish neighbor from the oil store.

Obviously, as soon as the police checked the store they found the money and the store owner was arrested. He couldn't understand what he had done wrong but his claims went on deaf ears. The case was brought to the local judge who couldn't decide who was telling the truth and who was lying. He therefore sent the case to the city governor.

The governor was in a similar dilemma. He couldn't decide who was the true owner of the money. He postponed the case for a few weeks. The strange story became the talk of town. One night the governor was walking through the city and overheard some Jewish kids playing a game of the upcoming court case about the money.

The governor was curious to see how it went. He heard a young boy who was playing the part of the judge calling the two sides to tell their story. The young Yehuda, the future Maharal listened carefully. After hearing both sides he said, "I want a bowl of hot water brought here."

When the water was brought the Maharal said, "let us put the coins into the water. If the coins belonged to the owner of the oil store then surely they were touched with oily hands and therefore the oil will rise to the top. But if the water is clean then it means that the owner of the perfume store is right.

The governor went home and called for a public hearing. He ruled exactly like the young Maharal and had the coins dropped into a bowl of hot water. Of course, plenty drops of oil started rising to the top. Everyone praised the governor but he told everyone that it wasn't his wisdom but it was the wisdom of the Jewish boy.

Rabbi Shmelke Reich from Worms took the Maharal as a son in law when he was fifteen years old for his daughter Pereleh. After the engagement he sent the Maharal to study in the Yeshiva of the Maharshal. During the next few years Reb Shmelke lost his money and wasn't in any position to support his son-in-law. Heartbroken, he sent his future son in law a letter telling him about his position and he wrote that since he cannot support him, he doesn't want him to have to wait and allows him to drop out from marrying his daughter.

The Maharal replied that he has no intention of backing out from his side. However, if he doesn't want his daughter to wait, he should get her engaged to someone else that way he will know he is free. The young Kallah decided to open a small bakery to help support her parents. This went on for over ten years. The Maharal and his Kallah remained engaged. The Maharal sat and learned diligently and was known as Reb Leib Bachur.

After ten years there was a war and a large group of soldiers passed through the city of Worms. One of them stopped by the bakery and stuck his spear into a bread to eat it. Perele begged him in tears not to steal the bread as she was from a

poor family and working to support her elderly parents. The soldier replied, "I don't have any money to pay you but I am riding a horse and sitting on two saddles. I will give you one of them." The horseman took a saddle and threw it into the bakery. When Pereleh picked it up she saw it was torn and gold coins started falling out. She ran home to tell her parents.

Reb Shmelke immediately sent a letter to the Maharal and told him that he can come to the Chassuna as he has funds for them to get married. Rabbi Yitzchak Katz, son-in-law of the Maharal told over this story that he heard from his father-in-law. He added that later as Av Beis Din when similar cases came to him of families that couldn't keep to the promised dowry he tried to convince them not to break the engagement. In very extreme circumstances he would tell the Dayanim to give a ruling in their home but not in his Beis Din room.

Reprinted from Parshat Ki Seitzei 5784 edition of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.

The Challenge of a Difficult Situation



Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz once related that there was a young man, who when he was young, he went through a difficult time. It was hard for him in Yeshivah, with friends, with his Rebbeim, and with the Rosh Yeshivah. He also felt that the people in his house did not understand him, and because of this, the way to the street was short.

One day, as he was wandering the streets trying to find himself, a man approached him. He had a strange look, and he was clearly unpleasant. He gently asked him, “What is a Yeshiva Bachur looking for in a place like this?”

He Tells the Man About What Was Truly Bothering Him

At first, the Bachur tried avoiding him, but when he saw that the man was only looking out for his wellbeing, he simply told him the truth, that things were hard for him, nobody understood him, and he could not find himself in the Yeshivah. To his surprise the man told him,

“You should know, that I too was once a Yeshiva Bachur, and the reason I look this way is because it was also hard for me, and I did exactly what you are doing now. I left the Yeshivah, and I went out to graze in strange fields, but to my great disappointment, I did not find happiness. However, when I realized this, it was already too late, and I had changed so much that I could not find the strength to go back.”

These words entered the heart of the Bachur, and he immediately returned to the Yeshivah, and in time, he worked on himself and saw great success. And soon after, he even merited to establish a beautiful family.

The Power of the Merit of Just One Nice Act

Rav Gamliel said, “How many people can testify about themselves that because of one moment of difficulty or crisis, they lost their entire lives. As the Likutei Moharan said, that because of one small pleasure lasting 15 minutes, he can lose this whole world together with the World to Come. By the same measure, people can testify about themselves that all of their success was in the merit of one nice act, whether spiritually or physically.

The way of the Yetzer Hara is to confuse the person. We must be strong and remember that the challenge is only for now, but the rest of our lives and the lives of our children for generations depend on how we endure this challenge.

The very thought of this concept will give us the strength to withstand the challenge, as the Tanna said in Pirkei Avos (2:1), ‘Calculate the cost of a Mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of an Aveirah against its cost!’”

Reprinted from the Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

Your Unique Mission in Life

Rav Meilich Biderman related a story. When Rav Meir Shapiro, zt”l, was younger, he was a Rav in Sanik. One Shabbos, Rav Meir was visiting his Rebbe, Rebbe Yisroel of Chortkov, zt”l, and the Rebbe honored him to be the Chazan for Musaf, and also to Bentch Rosh Chodesh, as it was Shabbos Mevorchim.



The Chortkover Rebbe and Rav Meir Shapiro

After Davening, the Rebbe invited Rav Meir to eat the Shabbos Seudah together with him. Later, Rav Meir Shapiro related what happened at that Seudah: As soon as I came in, the Rebbe said to me, “Ah! Reb Meir! Your Tefilah! Your Rosh Chodesh Bentching! They were so beautiful!” The Rebbe repeated this several times during the Seudah.

I said to the Rebbe, “If the Rebbe enjoys my Davening so much, perhaps I should leave Sanik, and become the Chazan here?”

The Rebbe became serious, and told me a story of Rav Zusha of Anipoli, zt”l. Rav Zusha would occasionally go into Galus, and travel from one place to another. One time, he came upon the city where the Gaon Rav Yusfa, zt”l, lived. Rav Yusfa was a great Talmid Chacham, and he was an expert in all parts of the Torah.

Rav Zusha went to hear his Shiur. After the Shiur Rav Zusha went over to Rav Yusfa to tell him how much he enjoyed the Shiur. He said, “It was worth traveling the long distance from my home to come here, just to listen to this sweet Shiur!”

Rav Yusfa said to Rav Zusha, “I understand why you were happy with my Shiur, but I can’t figure out why I’m so impressed by you! At first impression, you look like a typical pauper, who goes from city to city to collect money. But I perceive that the spirit of Hashem rests on you. You are certainly a great Talmid Chacham.”

Rav Zusha answered, “Rebbe, I’m not a Talmid Chacham at all. I’m an Am Ha’aretz. But perhaps the Rebbe is picking up on something because I know how to Daven.”



The Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin that existed from 1930-1939

Rav Yusfa was surprised, “Who doesn’t know how to Daven? The people who live here don’t know how to Daven?”

Rav Zusha replied, “They know how to Daven, but I know how to Daven before the Ribon HaOlamim, the Master of the World.”

Rav Yusfa asked, “Maybe you can teach me how one Davens ‘before the Ribon HaOlamim’?”

Rav Zusha said, “I can teach you, but not in front of everyone else. Let’s go into a private room and I’ll teach you.” Rav Zusha taught the Rav the secrets of Tefilah, and how to Daven properly before Hashem.

Rav Yusfa was very inspired, “Perhaps I should leave my position as a Rav and leave my Yeshivah, just so I can always Daven properly!”

Rav Zusha told Rav Yusfa, “HaKadosh Baruch Hu created so many people in the world, and although everyone was created with the same two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth, everyone still appears differently. Chazal tell us, that just as their faces are different, so are their minds different. Why did Hashem do this? It is because Hashem wants each person to serve Him according to his own way, according to who he is, and in accordance with his strengths and talents. Therefore,

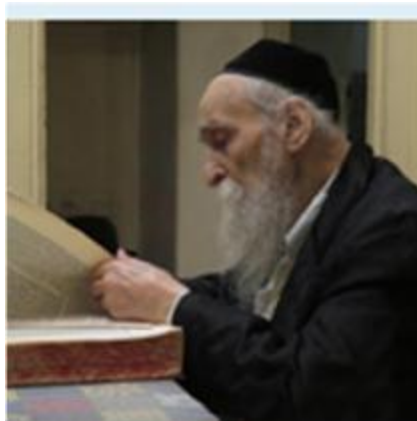
you should continue in your path of Avodas Hashem, to teach Torah to Yidden, and I will continue along my path, the path of Tefilah.”

The Chortkover Rebbe finished this story and said to Rav Meir Shapiro, “Hashem wants you to teach Torah to Yidden. That’s what Hashem has chosen for you. Therefore, He gave you the talents, the motivation, the intelligence, and all the other traits that are needed to succeed in that area. You should do your Avodah and teach Torah to Yidden, and I will do my Avodah, which is to Daven to Hashem.”

After this conversation with the Chortkover Rebbe, Rav Meir Shapiro decided to open Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, where he could channel all of his abilities to teach Torah to Yidden. He understood that this was his mission, and therefore, he invested all of his energy to succeed on his own individual path!

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The Powerful Joy of Learning Torah



Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik

R’ Dovid Soloveitchik explains with an incident from his youth. As a youngster in Brisk, R’ Dovid Soloveitchik observed a Jew who was perpetually happy. A wide smile always appeared on his face, and no situation would ever drag him down.

One day, R’ Dovid encountered this fellow in the mikveh. He was groaning deeply, with a sadness that seemed to emanate from the deepest parts of his soul. It was completely out of character for a man who never showed any despair, and

shocked R' Dovid to the core. Upon returning home, R' Dovid shared his astonishment with his father, the Brisker Rav.



The Brisker Rav

“But he is always so happy. What happened today that he couldn’t control his sadness like he usually does?” asked R’ Dovid.

“It wasn’t specific to today,” the Rav explained. “This fellow is a true scholar and he staves off his sorrow with the constant study of Torah. The joy it brings him keeps a smile on his face. In the mikveh, however, he is forced to stop. It is forbidden to learn there so his pain overwhelmed him.”

This Jew in Brisk merited to constantly reside with his Creator through the study of Torah. It enabled him to see the beauty of Hashem despite his difficult situation. Torah adjusts the lens through which we look at our personal difficulties and struggles.

Everything Hashem does carries incredible beauty, even in places where it is not apparent on the surface. Studying Torah enables us to always perceive that as an absolute truth. When we live with Him, we realize His sweetness.

Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Savo 5784 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “Steps to the Throne” by Rabbi Nosson Muller.

Jump at the Opportunity

Right before the outbreak of World War Two, the United Kingdom arranged the Kinder Transport to save Eastern European Jewish children from the hands of the Nazis. Nearly ten thousand children were saved and relocated into British foster homes and orphanages. One of these children was Beryl Gartner.

The Visit of King George VI to the Town of the Orphanage

Beryl lived in an orphanage with other Jewish refugees. One day his teacher announced that King George VI would be visiting their town. The next morning all the children got up early and put on their finest clothes and scrubbed their faces clean. They eagerly waited for the royal coach to appear. The king, queen and the two princesses waved majestically out to the cheering crowd. Everyone strained against the barricades to catch a glimpse of the royalty.

Eleven-year-old Beryl pushed his way through the barricades and jumped over the barriers. He ran as fast as he could and jumped onto royal carriage, banging on the windows. The carriage halted to a stop, and immediately the royal guards removed him. Suddenly, the carriage door swung open, and Beryl found himself face to face with king.

“I see you want to say hello,” smiled the king. Beryl looked deep into the eyes of the king, and tried to speak but he was overcome with tears. “Don’t cry now,” said the king, “we are not going to put you in the tower of London.”

A Plea to His Majesty for His Parents

“Your Majesty, please forgive me for banging on your car. But please help me. You’re the only one who can help me. Your Majesty I am a Jew from Germany. Through your kindness I was brought here by the Kinder Transport, but my parents are still in Germany. I am so frightened about what happened to them. Sometimes I think I will never see them again.” He burst into tears again.

The king inquired about Beryl’s family’s name and address and had an assistant write them down. “Let’s see what we can do.” He patted Beryl on the head, and Beryl hopped down from the cart.

A few weeks later the Headmaster called him into his office. “You seemed to make quite an impression on the king. In fact, he sent you a gift.” The headmaster opened the door and standing there were Beryl’s mother and father.

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