

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS VAYERA 5783

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More than Just Your Logical Arguments



I recently came across an article about the spiritual act of listening. The author cited a powerful and (I think) frightening story which was related by Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and creator of logotherapy, a form of therapy which focuses on man's search for meaning.

He tells the story of a patient who called him in middle of the night to inform him that she was at the verge of immediately ending her life. She was neither hysterical nor did she seem to have taken leave of her faculties. She calmly stated that she had reached the end of her rope. It was over.

Dr. Frankl kept her on the phone for two hours, explaining how her life was important, her value to her family in particular and her community in general, was meaningful. G-d loved her and wanted her to live. He enabled her to realize that her life had meaning.

After two hours of arguments, the woman just as calmly declared that she had changed her mind. She was willing to go on living. When Frankl saw her next, he

asked which one of his reasons for living convinced her to change her mind. She replied, “It was none of your arguments. It was the fact that someone was willing to listen to me in middle of the night for two hours that convinced me that my life was worth living.

Reprinted from the Parshat Haazina 5783 email of Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum's Peninim on the Torah.

Do They Tell Such Stories about You?



Rav Yerachmiel Krohm relates that the Chofetz Chaim, zt”l, was once summoned to testify in court as a witness for one of his students. This occurred during World War I, and the student was suspected of spying for the German government. The charges were made up, but that was the way of life in Eastern Europe back then.

The Chofetz Chaim Davened fervently that his Talmid be spared, and the entire Yeshivah fasted and Davened as well on the day of the court case. The Chofetz Chaim was called before the judge and asked to offer testimony concerning the character of the suspected spy.

The Chofetz Chaim spoke the truth. He said, “This is a young man who spends his entire day engrossed in Torah study. There is nothing else that matters to him, certainly not spying for the enemy!”

Then the prosecution contended that there was no proof concerning the truth of what the Chofetz Chaim said. “How can the court determine that what the Chofetz Chaim had claimed was, in fact, true?”

One of the student's defense lawyers asked to speak. He said, "I would like to relate an incident to the judge that occurred concerning the Chofetz Chaim, and then I will allow his honor to be the judge of whether this sage can be believed or not. One day, the Chofetz Chaim was in the railroad station in Warsaw, when a thief came over and stole his briefcase. Do you know how the Chofetz Chaim reacted? As the thief was running away from him, he declared loudly, 'I forgive you for what you did! You may have the briefcase as a gift!'"

When the judge heard this, he looked at the defense attorney with skepticism, and asked, "Do you really believe that story?"

The attorney looked right back at the judge and replied, "Judge, it makes no difference whether I believe it or not. The question is, would anyone say such a story about you?"

The judge reflected on that comment and announced that the court is to believe everything the Chofetz Chaim has said, and the charges were dropped against the student!

Reprinted from the Parshas Shlach 5781 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Unusual Jewish Burial

An elderly woman (whom we will call Mrs. Goldman) was a resident in a health care facility for the aged. For all intents and purposes, she was in good health. Thus, it was a shock to her son (who made a point to visit her twice weekly) to receive a call from the director of the home to report that, sadly, his mother had passed away during the night.

Shimon (also a random name) was bowled over. As the only son, he had had a special relationship with his mother. With great sadness, he made arrangements to have his mother's body taken to the local funeral home where a proper taharah, purification, would be made by the Chevra Kaddishah, Jewish Burial Society, followed by burial in the family plot.

His mother had been a private person, so a large crowd did not attend her funeral. Only her few remaining friends and members of the community who either knew her or were close to Shimon's family were present. During the shivah, seven-day-mourning period, Shimon's cell phone rang.

Lo and behold, it was his mother, "Where have you been these last few days: no visit, no phone calls?"

Words cannot describe the shock and relief, the low and high, experienced by Shimon during that phone call. His first call was to the director of the home. First of all, how could this have happened? The people in charge were intelligent and quite capable of reading. Such an error was almost unforgivable. Second, if the deceased was, in fact, not his mother, then someone else with a similar name had passed away. Her next of kin must be notified.

The Similarity of the Two Women's Names

The director explained the apparent similarity in the names of the two women, who incidentally had been housed in the same wing, two rooms from one another. He now had the difficult task of conveying the sad news to the son of the “real” deceased.

He made the call and explained to the son, whose impatience was evident from the tone of his voice, “Why are you bothering me with news about my mother?” he asked. “I am a busy man, and I do not have a premium of time to waste.”

Clearly, this man did not harbor an abiding love for his late mother.

The director continued, “About ten days ago, your mother became ill and, despite the efforts of the physician and staff, your mother passed away. Another woman in the same wing bore a similar name. By mistake, we buried the right person, but with the wrong name. Veritably, nothing can be done; your mother received a fine, traditional funeral and burial. We are sorry for your loss and for the unpleasant manner in which the news has been conveyed to you.”

The Unexpected Son's Reaction

The son's reaction was totally unlike what the director had expected. No screaming; no finger pointing; just seething anger. Shockingly, the anger was not directed at the facility's administration, but rather, at the deceased.

“Tell me something,” the son asked. “Was she buried in a Jewish cemetery?”

“As I told you earlier, she was availed a traditional funeral and buried in a Jewish cemetery,” the director said, hoping to assuage the man's anxiety.

“Did they say Kaddish for her?”

The director replied, “Of course. Everything was carried out in a halachically correct manner. She was even lovingly and admirably eulogized. They even sat Shivah for her.”

Suddenly, the son began muttering to himself, “She won. She was right, and I was mistaken. I thought I would have the last word, and, ultimately, she did.”

“Is something wrong?” asked the director.

“Let me explain,” the son replied bitterly. “From the moment that my mother became a resident in the nursing facility, the two of us fought. I informed my mother that I believed in nothing – not in G-d, not in religion, not in an Afterlife. I promised

her that if I have my way, she will not be buried in a traditional manner and in a Jewish cemetery. I would have her corpse donated to the local medical school, so that science can benefit from her death.



She begged me to reconsider. I said, ‘No way. Religion has no place in my life.’ One day, she cried out to me, ‘Fine, if you will not concern yourself with me, then our Heavenly Father will take care of me! He will see to it that I receive a proper burial in a Jewish cemetery.’

I guess I erred, and she was right. She won,” the son said, this time quite shaken. He hung up the phone as he muttered, “I will have to reconsider my life.”

Reprinted from the Parshat Haazina 5783 email of Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum’s Peninim on the Torah.

The Beauty of Mesiras Nefesh



Rav Shlomo Brevda related a story he heard from Rebbetzin Greineman, who was the Steipler Rebbetzin's sister, and both women were sisters of the Chazon Ish. Rav Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, zt"l, the Steipler Gaon, was about to become engaged to the Chazon Ish's sister, but before the Shidduch was finalized, he felt that it was important that he share with her an incident that had taken place while he was in Siberia.

Backbreaking Forced Labor in Siberia

The forced labor in Siberia was backbreaking. In addition to the bitter cold and blinding snow, the actual labor required extreme exertion. The Steipler Gaon had been inducted into the army against his will, and yet, regardless of the terrible conditions and the impossible work, he knew in his heart that only one task mattered—serving Hashem.

One of the first obstacles the Steipler had to overcome was the army system itself. The army dictated that everyone must work seven days a week. To the Steipler, that was absolutely unacceptable. He approached the officer in charge, an evil anti-Semite, and asked that he be granted permission to not work on Shabbos.

The official paused for a moment and answered that he would grant the request on one condition, that the Steipler would first have to prove himself to be a

valiant warrior. The Steipler would have to 'run the gauntlet'. The officer quickly ordered 100 soldiers to form two facing rows, and arm themselves with sticks.

The Steipler watched the soldiers move into formation and heard these words of the evil officer, "Kanievsky, here is the deal. If you are able to make it through these lines and survive the blows from my officers, then you may rest on your Shabbos. However, if you don't..." His voice trailed off, and he laughed. Clearly, he was enjoying his little game. Usually, the victim did not reach the end of the gauntlet alive, from the blows, kicks, and punches of the vicious soldiers.

Asking Hashem to Help Him Survive a Difficult Test

The Steipler did not flinch. Instead, he whispered a heartfelt Tefilah to Hashem to help him survive this difficult test. He knew that he could give up and the game would be over. But if he admitted defeat, then his attempt to be released from working on Shabbos would be over as well.

The guards motioned to their commanding officer that they were ready, and the officer and his comrades stood back to watch the fun. The Steipler approached the path and murmured one last plea to Hashem. He held his hand over his head and ran between the rows of guards. With all their might they began to pummel him and beat him incessantly. The pain was unbearable, but the Steipler persisted and kept trudging forward. Blood trickled into his eyes but he continued to move forward. Step by step he inched ahead until finally, he reached the end of the treacherous path. He collapsed at the finish line.

Shabbos was Still Holy Despite the Incredible Pain

With Hashem's compassion, the Steipler came out of the ordeal alive. No one offered to help the Steipler get up from the ground, but it did not matter because he had survived. As he lay there, a smile formed on his lips. He had won. He was in incredible pain, but the Shabbos was still holy, and he would be able to observe it!

The commanding officer grudgingly informed the Steipler that he would not have to work on Saturday. From the repeated blows to his ears, the Steipler suffered an 80% loss of his hearing for life. When the Steipler finished recounting his tale to his soon-to-be Kallah, he explained that this was his level of Mesiras Nefesh, self-sacrifice.

"The blows hurt, but I was happy to have the privilege to suffer for the sake of Shabbos." He then asked her if she was prepared to join him in his continuous sacrifice for the Torah. She relayed that indeed she was, and they then became Chassan and Kallah.

Incidentally, many years later, when the Steipler Gaon was older, a young Rav asked the Steipler what the best day in his life was. The Steipler answered, "The day I 'ran the gauntlet' in the Russian Army. I imagined that with each blow, I was

offering my life for the Kedushah of Shabbos. Nothing is sweeter than Mesiras Nefesh, dedicating one's whole life to the fulfillment of Hashem's Mitzvos!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Shlach 5781 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

Story #1298

Found in a Chengdu Cosmetic Store

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles
editor@ascentofsafed.com



Rabbi Shimon Freundlich of Beijing and Rabbi Dovi Henig of Chengdu

In spring 2021, I [**Rabbi Shimon Freundlich**] and my wife arrived in Chengdu [1] from Beijing. We were very warmly received by the local *shluchim* (emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe), Rabbi Dovi and Sara Henig. [2] They were celebrating the *Opshernish* [traditional first haircut and *peyot*-leaving] of their three-year-old son Mendel the next day, and we had come to spend this special occasion with them.

In the afternoon, both of our families went to the famous and gigantic New Century Global Mall in the city, which has an Intercontinental Hotel and indoor

beach along with a water park and many other different entertainment facilities for kids.

While walking in the mall, Rabbi Dovi mentioned to me that there is a French cosmetic store that has a single volume of *Shulchan Aruch* “The Code of Jewish Law” authored by Rabbi Yosef Karo in Hebrew and French as part of their display design since the mall opened in July 1, 2013.

Tried Unsuccessfully Tried to Get that Shulchan Aruch

He further told me that he had tried a number of times to persuade them to give it to him, but was unsuccessful. They very politely and respectfully told him that they have a retailer franchise from the international Kiehl’s Cosmetics conglomerate and the store’s display is sent to them from the main office in France, including the book.

Hearing this, I said to Dovi, ‘Please take me to the store. I would like to try.’ We all entered the store and saw an extensive display with multiple books on Jewish literature (not holy books) and then the lonesome volume of *Shulchan Aruch*. My heart sank as I saw this holy book lying under a porcelain bowl of dried slices of lemons.

As I stared at the *Shulchan Aruch*, the woman at the counter walked over. I asked her in Chinese if she had a business card (thinking I would contact the boss to ask if I could have the book).

She responded, ‘We don’t have a business card but if you want I can give you our story WeChat.’

After scanning my code, she sent me a message in Chinese asking what I wanted. I explained that I am Jewish and the Rabbi of the Beijing Jewish community. ‘This book is one of our holiest books and it is very hard for me to see it as a display piece and unused,’ I wrote. I added that I would be willing to pay for it.

“What Will You Do with it?”

She looked at me and said, ‘If I give it to you, what will you do with it?’

‘I will learn and teach from it.’

‘Is it for you?’ she asked.

“No, it is for the Jewish community in Beijing.”

She then removed the *sefer* (book) from under the bowl and handed it to me. “How much do you want for it?”

“Nothing,” she replied, “it is a gift for your community.”

I thanked her profusely and then suggested to my wife that we should buy something as a show of appreciation. The items were pricey but it was worth it. I think this is the most I ever “paid” for a single *sefer*, and it will be one of my enduring favorites.

After leaving the store I turned around to Rabbi Dovi and exclaimed, “What *hasgacha pratit* (Divine supervision)!”

He looked puzzled and asked me what I was referring to. I said that I had just remembered what happened on this date in Jewish history.

In 1509, Emperor Maximilian of Germany ordered that all Jewish books in the city of Cologne and Frankfurt-am-Main be destroyed, as a result of a claim by Pfefferkorn, a baptized Jew, that Jewish literature was insulting to Christianity.

The Jews appealed to the Emperor to reconsider this edict, and Maximilian agreed to investigate the matter. Appointed to conduct the investigation was Johann Reuchlin, a famed and highly respected German scholar.

The Scholar’s Positive Report on the Jewish Book

His report was very positive. He demonstrated that the books openly insulting to Christianity were very few, and anyway viewed as worthless by most Jews themselves. The other books were needed for Jewish worship and contained much value in the areas of theology and science.

The Emperor rescinded his edict on the 14th of the Jewish month of Sivan, 1510.

From **Tzfat** (where the code of Jewish law was written), to *France* (where this volume was printed), to *Chengdu* (where it was sent as a display piece), the Shulchan Aruch was redeemed on the 14th of Sivan 5781 (2021: 511 years later), and found a home in Beijing, where it will be studied reverently.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a report by Rabbi Shimon Freundlich, Director of Chabad of Beijing. First published on ColLive.com on 14 Sivan 5781 (May 25, 2021). Submitted by C. R. Benami, long-time editorial assistant for [www.AscentOfSafed.com](http://www.AscentOfSafed.com).

*Connection:* Weekly Torah Reading of Noach (the universal Torah commandments for Non-Jews, commonly referred to as “*(Do the Seven, Go to Heaven).*”

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[1] Capital of southwestern China's Sichuan province and China’s 5th largest city with an estimated population (as of 2020): 16 million.

[2] See story #1182 from two years ago on this email list.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Noach 5783 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed in Israel.*

# A Failure or an Opportunity?



Rabbi Yoel Gold told a story in his video series What You See Tells Only Half the Story about a minyan celebrating Simchat Torah in Jerusalem. A group of about 30 families was in the middle of hakafot when the man holding the Sefer Torah bumped into someone, and the Torah slipped out of his hands and landed on the floor. There was complete silence; everyone was in shock. They went from Simchat Torah to Tisha B'av in one second.

## **The Man Was Distraught and Near Tears**

They picked up the Torah and wrapped it up. The man who was holding it ran outside, distraught and near tears. No one knew what to do. People were trying to figure out if they really witnessed it falling—if they would have to fast. The chazzan tried to rally the crowd and start hakafot again, but no one was really interested anymore; they were too shaken up. The baal koreh decided to try and give this Torah some dignity and honor. He opened it up to read the parasha, starting with “Beresheet bara Elokim.” He said Noten haTorah, everyone answered amen, and then... Nothing.

“Hefsek hefsek, nu? Start!” the men from the shul said. The baal koreh pointed to the Torah and showed them. The words “Beresheet bara Elokim,” the very first words in the Torah were missing! It wasn’t a Sefer Torah! They were never filled in! The men ran out to console the man who had dropped it and told him that Baruch Hashem it was not a Sefer Torah, it was basically a chumash. It turned

out that the sofer had left out the last few words, as was the custom, but he had told the person who bought it that he was going to leave the first few in the beginning out as well, because some people had the custom to bookend the Torah by filling in both ends.

When the man realized that because of the fall, because of his blunder, a Sefer Torah will actually become kosher, he was so relieved. Life is a work in progress. Instead of being devastated that we fail, we must take all our mistakes and utilize those “failures” to become something more kosher. Each time we fall is an opportunity to become even better.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Noach 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

# Lighting Up the Darkness

**By Rabbi Yechiel Spero**

As Refael and Chani Mendlowitz were flying over Connecticut on their return trip from Eress Yisrael, they sensed that something was terribly wrong. The stewardesses were whispering and running to the front of the cabin. What the passengers didn't know was that most of the Northeastern United States was in the same panic; a huge blackout had struck many states, and most citizens were sure that this was another terrorist attack.

The passengers' frantic attempts to contact relatives proved futile as cell phones were rendered utterly useless. The initial fear lasted only a short while, until they received word of what had happened and were assured that most likely terrorism was not involved. The more immediate problem was landing the plane without any guidance from on-ground lighting.

At first, airport traffic control intended to divert their El Al flight to Washington D.C., and while that was certainly closer to where the Mendlowitzes lived – Silver Spring – it did not help them because their car was in New York at a relative's home, awaiting their return. In the end, the passengers were told that theirs would be the last plane allowed to land at Kennedy Airport.

Once they landed, they were informed that airport security would not allow them to disembark for at least an hour. Hot, anxious, and very thirsty, they were finally released into a darkened airport, where finding their luggage was quite an adventure. Tired and exhausted, they finally exited the terminal and attempted to get a cab. And then the full impact of what had happened hit them. It was an eerie,

discomforting sight: All of New York was pitch black. No street lights. No building lights. Nothing!

The taxi line stretched for blocks, and since all traffic in the area was slowed due to the lack of traffic lights, they realized that they would be waiting for a cab for hours. While they were pondering their next move, a shuttle bus pulled up, offering to take them where they needed to go for \$18, a bargain compared to the \$100 the taxis had been charging. They were completely exhausted as they settled in for the short drive.



When they reached their relative's home they paid the kind driver and thanked him for his assistance. But when Refael tried the key he realized it did not fit; either he had been given the wrong key or had misplaced the right one. Now what would they do? It was midnight of this never-ending day, and they were at their wits' end. It was then that they noticed a car parked down the street with people in it. Maybe these people live on this street and will let me in so that I can make a few phone calls, he thought.

Refael cautiously approached the car. The sight that he beheld brought tears to his eyes. Inside were two men – a father and his son – learning together. They had a set time for their learning, and were determined not to let the blackout change their plans. They had decided that learning in a car, however dimly lit it was, was better than canceling. As for Refael, these men were a sight for sore eyes; and of course, they were more than happy to help the desperate couple.

For a long time afterward, Refael could not get the sight of this father and son out of his mind. Imagine, he thought to himself, in a world of utter darkness, a tiny light-shines through like a beacon – the light of Torah.

“Ki ner misvah veTorah ohr – A misvah is a candle, and Torah is light.”(Touched by a Story 3)

*Reprinted from the Parasheet 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

# A Lesson from the Baal Shem Tov

By Rabbi Mordechai Levin



Rav Meir Shapiro, ZT”L, the originator of Daf Yomi, also headed the historic Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. In 1924, almost 50,000 people came to the cornerstone laying for the magnificent new building that was to be built for the yeshiva.

Although Rav Shapiro was burdened by crushing debt, he maintained his faith that Hashem would help him in his holy mission, and always persevered.

On the day that the yeshiva moved into the gorgeous new facility, which still stands today, he spoke to his students about how he managed to keep pushing himself to raise the needed funds. He credited Chaikel the water carrier.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Noach 5783 email of Mendel Berlin's Torah Sweets Weekly.*

The Baal Shem Tov told a story regarding Chaikel. One day Chaikel passed by the Baal Shem Tov, who inquired as to his welfare. Chaikel answered sadly that he worked too hard and earned too little. The next day, Chaikel again met the Baal Shem Tov, who again asked him how he was doing.

This time Chaikel happily answered that thanks to Hashem he still had the strength to earn an honest living. The Baal Shem Tov explained that although a person's earnings are determined on Rosh Hashana, each day a person deals with his fate differently.

One day he is sad, the next day he is happy with his lot. Rav Meir Shapiro told his students that he was like Chaikel. There were days when the difficulty of his task, and the inherent setbacks, weighed heavily on him. Yet, the next day, he was encouraged when considering that he was constructing such a magnificent yeshiva, which re-energized him. (Story from Peninei Chein Al HaTorah)