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Celebrating Our Hard Work and Sacrifice

By Rabbi Joey Haber



Rav Shalom Schwadron, who was known as “the Maggid of Yerushalayim,” once worked as a teacher in a yeshiva, and he noticed that a certain student did not attend the shiur for several nights in a row. He decided to go to the young man’s house and ask him why he had not been in the class, if perhaps he was ill or had some other problem.

The boy explained to him that the World Cup soccer competition was going on at that time. He was not attending the shiurim because he needed to watch the games... The boy assured the Rabbi that the following week, once the World Cup was over, he would come back to the shiur.

Rav Schwadron asked the boy what soccer was. The boy explained that there are two goals on both sides of the field, and each team has to try to kick the ball, without touching it with their hands, into the opposing team's goal.

The Rabbi Thinks He Can Also Kick the Ball into the Goal Post

"Ok," the Rabbi replied. "That doesn't sound too difficult. I could do that."

"No, Rabbi, you don't understand," the boy explained. "The opposing team has a goalie that stands in the goal and blocks the ball so it won't go in."

"I see," the Rabbi said. "I assume that if we go right now to a soccer field, there won't be any goalie there. So why don't we just go right now, and we can kick the ball into the goal all we want!!"

The boy laughed. "What would be the point?!" he said. "The whole fun is struggling against the opposing team to try to score goals."

Understanding that the Real 'Fun' is the Struggle

"Exactly!" the Rabbi exclaimed. "The point is to struggle. Attending shiur next week, after the World Cup is over, is simple. The real 'fun' is to struggle to attend shiur this week, when it's not easy, when you have to make a sacrifice for it."

Hashem created the world and our lives in such a way that we have to work hard to achieve. He intentionally did not make things easy – because if things were easy, then there would be no point in "scoring." We achieve and grow through struggle and hard work.

Reprinted from the iTorah.com website

With Brilliance and Compassion

By Shmuel Botnick



Rav Nota Greenblatt

Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Mandelman's relationship with Rav Nota had a unique genesis. Long enamored by the great gaon tucked away in southwest Tennessee, Dr. Mandelman made it his mission to receive semichah from Rav Nota. This was an ambitious goal; Rav Nota seldom conferred semichah.

An Appointment with Rav Nota

Nonetheless, Dr. Mandelman traveled to Memphis and made an appointment to speak with Rav Nota. He arrived at the given time and waited in the study. Rav Nota entered and shared a recently developed Torah thought. Dr. Mandelman responded in kind and the two engaged in conversation, sharing Torah thought after Torah thought for a whopping eight hours.

None of this followed the protocol of a typical semichah exam, but that didn't seem to be a problem. Rav Nota pulled out pen and paper and drafted the coveted certificate.

"Now, what is your mother's phone number?" Rav Nota asked.

Dr. Mandelman's eyebrows furrowed. "Uh, why does the rav need her number?"

“Well,” said Rav Nota, eyes twinkling, “I’m sure you caused her enough headaches. It’s time to give her some nachas.”

Dr. Mandelman had admired Rav Nota’s prowess as a posek, but, in a later encounter, he also came to recognize his ocean-deep compassion. It happened when Dr. Mandelman placed a call to Rav Nota on Erev Yom Kippur. His wife was expecting and there were complications. The question for Rav Nota centered on if and how his wife could break her fast should the need arise.

Forbids the Husband from Going to Shul

Rav Nota, before addressing the question, issued an unasked-for ruling: “You have no permission to go to shul,” he said with no uncertainty. “You will daven at home.”

They then discussed the question, reached a halachic conclusion, wished each other a gemar chasimah tovah, and ended the conversation. Yom Kippur came and went, and all was well in the Mandelman home. After nightfall, they made Havdalah and, sometime later, Dr. Mandelman’s phone rang. He glanced at the screen:

Why was Rav Nota calling? It turned out to be a brief conversation. “Reb Shmuel,” said Rav Nota, “how did Yom Kippur go? How is your wife doing?” Dr. Mandelman assured him that all was well and hung up the phone. It took some time before he realized that Memphis was an hour behind Eastern Standard Time. Rav Nota had called just moments after his own Havdalah.

This was an ongoing facet in Rav Nota’s model of issuing halachic rulings; he provided the relevant answer, but was always sensitive to the circumstances that lay behind the question.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayeishev 5784 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “Rav Nota – The Story of Rav Nota Greenblatt” by Shmuel Botnick.

In Honor of Your Son

By Rabbi Joey Haber

One Chabad rabbi tragically lost his son on October 7th. The rabbi was living in America, and his son was living in Israel. After receiving the news, he booked a flight in an attempt to arrive in time for his son’s funeral.

Seated on an EL AL flight, he began wondering what he could do in memory of his son. He was sure that something positive could be done over the course of the next hours. And so, he began.

Turning to the man seated next to him, he broached the question. “Would you like to put on a pair of *tefillin*?” “No, I’m sorry,” responded the man, “I don’t really do that.” Not being deterred, the rabbi proceeded to ask the same question to the man seated just one seat farther. “Would you like to put on a pair of *tefillin*?” “No, it’s not my thing,” came the similar sounding reply.

The Rabbi Asks a Third Person

Still determined, the rabbi asked a third person. “Could you put on *tefillin* in honor of my son who just passed away? It will be an elevation for his soul.” The man was taken aback. “Yeah, of course. It would be my honor to do so.”

It didn’t end there though. The man sitting one seat closer chimed in. “In memory of your son? I’ll do it too.” The next man sitting even a seat closer spoke up as well. “In honor of your son? Yeah, I’ll do it too.”

The rabbi proceeded to help these three men put on *tefillin*, all the while remaining oblivious to what was happening right behind him. Only when he lifted his head and turned around did he see it.

A full line had formed along the entire aisle. Every man on the plane wanted to put on *tefillin* in memory of his son.

The Pilot also Wants to Put Tefillin on

After every single man had finished, the pilot told the co-pilot, “Do me a favor. You take over the plane... I want to put the *tefillin* on too.”

Am Yisrael is incredible. During this past month, we have seen what we look like when we are inspired to grow. All around the world, people are putting *tefillin* on for the first time in their life. People too are suddenly wearing *tzitzit*, though they normally don’t. Hundreds of thousands of pairs of *tzitzit* have also been delivered to Israel.

One young man who works in a pizza shop in Toronto wanted to do something. He took all the money he had made—\$2100—and spent it all on *tzitzit*. He then told any customer who entered the store, “If you’ve never worn *tzitzit* before, you can have a pair for free.” And in fact, nearly eighty students from the University of Toronto visited this pizza store and took a pair of *tzitzit* for themselves.

The Torah tells us that Hashem blessed Avraham Avinu with “everything” (*Bereishis* 24:1). What does ‘everything’ mean? Rashi explains that he was blessed with a son (Yitzchak). How can one child be everything?

Because through that one child the entire Jewish nation would come into existence. And the Jewish nation is everything. We are kind, compassionate, self-effacing, generous, creative, smart, tenacious, focused. Out of that one son, Yitzchak

Avinu, a nation would come to be born which possesses every possible trait and trace of goodness.

The question for us all is therefore this: what have we personally done to ensure that we are growing and uniting with other Jews around the world?

With that answer, we can light up the world and change it. Forever.

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayetzei 5784 email of the Torahanytime.com Newsletter as compiled and edited by Elan Perchik.

The Lifesaving Rashi Flash

By Rabbi Yosef Weiss

Avraham Krupnik was among the thirty students in the Kaminetz Yeshivah who managed to escape Shanghai with the students of the Mir.

Young Avraham was in Moscow with friends, trying to obtain travel visas. A sudden knock on the hotel door one evening turned out to be two intimidating NKVD officers. Avraham was whisked to headquarters.

“Do you speak Russian?” asked the interrogator harshly.

Rashi’s Advice Based on Yosef HaTzadik

Avraham didn’t know what to say- which answer would please the officers? The words of Rashi suddenly flashed through his mind. When the ten brothers appeared before Yosef, there was an interpreter between them. Rashi explains that the interpreter’s presence indicated that Yosef did not understand their language, so the brothers spoke freely before him.

Avraham realized that if he feigned ignorance, the officers would reveal secrets in their native tongue. “I do not know Russian,” he answered.

The NKVD’s Attempt to Trap Avraham

The NKVD officers discussed their next question- conversing in Russian. “Let’s ask him what he’s doing in our country. If he’s just passing through, we’ll scream at him for his gall to leave such a beautiful country. If he says he’s here to stay, we’ll tell him ‘You’re a foreigner! Who invited you to come?’ Whatever he says, we’ll trap him.”

Thanks to Rashi’s foresight, Avraham was prepared. When they shot the question at him, Avraham responded, “Doesn’t Comrade Stalin write that Russia is a light to all nations, that everyone should come see its beauty? I listened to Stalin!”

The surprised officers were forced to admit the accuracy of his response.

And so, the interrogation continued. The two officers discussed the next question and Avraham answered accordingly. Eventually they were forced to release him.

“You’re back?” his friends asked in astonishment when he returned to his hotel room. He reported the evening’s events, and his friends congratulated him on a well-played game of chess: “Krupnik won that round!”

Plans to Buy Train Ticket to Vladivostock

But Avraham knew that if they came once, they would come again. He needed to get out of the danger zone. Early the next morning, he headed to the travel office to purchase a train ticket to Vladivostock.

No one was at the desk. Avraham banged loudly until a grumpy man appeared from the back. “Why are you making so much noise?” he screamed at the young visitor.

“I want to buy a ticket to Vladivostock,” Avraham said urgently. “I have money.”

The man wrote out the papers and threw them at Avraham. “Take it and go!”

When Avraham returned to his hotel, the two NKVD officers were waiting for him. “We have a one-way ticket for you - to Siberia.”

“But I already have a ticket to Vladivostock,” protested Avraham.

Taking the ticket from his hands, the officers laughed cruelly. “We are the NKVD! We tell you where to go.”

Recognizing The Signature of a Fellow NKVD Officer

And then one officer noticed the signature on the papers. “Do you think he knows who signed these?” he asked his comrade in Russian. The second officer studied the official signature. “It’s a fellow NKVD officer,” he muttered.

Avraham listened carefully to the conversation. “Excuse me,” he interrupted them. “Do you realize who signed my ticket?”

The officers looked up in surprise and disgust. “Take your ticket and get out of here. If you’re still here in a couple hours, we’re coming back for you!”

Avraham fled, heading for Vladivostock. His friends joined him shortly afterward, and the entire group escaped to Shanghai- where they survived the war. The words of Rashi had saved Rav Avraham Krupnik’s life. (Excerpted from “Visions of Greatness IX”)

Reprinted from the Parshat Mikess 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

My Personal Hannuka Miracle

By Rabbi Yosef Farhi



A little personal story that just happened to me. I prayed at the Kotel Sunday, Rosh Hodesh, the 7th day of Hannukah, at Sunrise Minyan. The Kotel is full on Hanukah, and fuller on Rosh Hodesh. After Amidah of Shaharit, I needed the restroom badly, so I quickly took off my tefillin, and without wrapping them, just placed them in their bag, amongst the many Tefillin bags that were on the mini Bimah/stand. When I came back, the Tefillin were not in the bag, but outside the bag. Strange. I figured that they must have fallen, as there were a lot of tefillin on that stand, and maybe someone pushed them and they must have moved.

Asked by Someone at the Kotel to Use His Tefillin

Being that it was next to the Tefillin station of Chabad at the Kotel, for those who don't have with them Tefillin, and the tefillin station was not yet open so early in the morning, someone comes over and asked me, if they can use my Tefillin. For sure! Especially because I wanted to put on my second pair, my pair of Rabbenu Tam.

Wearing my Rabbenu Tam Tefillin, I finish up Hallel and Torah reading, and I then came back to take off and wrap up my second pair of Tefillin. By that time, the person who used my Tefillin, wrapped up my first pair and put them on my bag. I wrapped up my second pair, and put my two pairs and my Tallit in my bag, and continued on my way.

The next day, on the 8th day of Hannuka, by Sunrise Minyan by the Kotel, it was pouring rain. Everyone who could, packed inside the tunnel, by the Kotel. I finished praying, and after all the moving around, I noticed as I wrapped my first pair of Tefillin, that the Tefillin straps of the Tefillin shel Rosh, looked strange! My straps are black on both sides, and this one's tefillin were black only on one side, but white on the other! It must be that someone switched my Tefillin shel Rosh, of my first pair!

Did I Lose a Mitzvah by Using Another Person's Lost Tefillin?

But it can't be! I did a mitzvah, letting someone wear my Tefillin, and now, ... this is what happens? Whose Tefillin is this anyway? Did I even get the Mitzvah wearing this other person's tefillin? What Kashrut standards on his Tefillin does he have, anyway?

His Tefillin looked old. They looked worn out. But before going to my Sofer to check them out and tell me what I should do, I went immediately to the lost and found of the police of the Kotel to report the story. I went to the lost and found of the Moreshet HaKotel to report the story and left my phone number. I went to all the leaders of the Sunrise Minyanim in that area of the Kotel to take down my number if anyone contacts them, noticing that their straps are not identical. It was raining really hard, and I was soaked and cold!

A Higher Level of Kashrut

My Sofer said, not to worry. The Tefillin Shel Rosh, that I see here are old, but they are an even higher-level standard of Kashrut than yours! From the way the Shin is, the person's Tefillin are Ashkenaz, and yours are Sefardi. From the look of the straps, the Tefillin are of an elderly man.

But you don't have to wear another pair, for today. Wait a couple of days, don't buy a new pair for 4500 shekels just yet, because I guarantee you, that person is going to be hunting after his Tefillin once he recognizes the straps, that they are not the same! He invested so much in his Tefillin, he will be looking for them, more than you are looking for yours! Unless, one thing. Because this person is an older man, he may not notice that the straps are not the same!

I was broken. These are my Tefillin from my Bar Mitzvah, and the Tefillin cases were new, and were from the highest levels of Hidur! My Tefillin's standard

is one of the things I am proud about, and now, I don't have my Tefillin Shel Rosh, of my Rashi Tefillin! Because of doing a mitzvah!?!

I called my Rabbi, and he said, that in the meantime, it was okay to wear that person's tefillin every day, as he is probably wearing mine, and is forgiving me to use his, just like I am forgiving him to use mine.

Kept Returning to the Kotel in Hopes of Finding His Tefillin

Every day that I could, for the week, I came back to the Kotel for Sunrise. I would call out, in the area of the switch, if anyone heard someone coming to that spot, looking for the person who switched his Tefillin. No one knew. I would look at people praying in the area, seeing if the straps of their Tefillin of the head and the ones of the hand, were not the same. People got annoyed at me for staring at them and their Tefillin, asking what I want from them. I was looking foolish. And I was frustrated. People took down my phone number, and told me they would call me, if someone does come by looking for his. I kept checking my phone every day, but no phone calls.

I turned to Hashem at the Kotel, knowing that he never leaves that place, saying, I know that You know what happened here, as it happened right under "Your Nose". I know that you saw me do that mitzvah of letting that boy wear my Tefillin. And I know that everything that happens is for the best. I did all that I could to get back my Tefillin. And I feel bad for that person, who I have his. Please Hashem, give him back his Tefillin, and give me back mine!

Sometimes a Person Gains More than He Lost

And then I remembered how, when someone loses something, G-d has something that the person gains more than he lost! The first day when I came to Israel as a Yeshiva student, I lost my watch in the Minyan Factory in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, next door to the Yeshiva I attended. I must have left it on the Bimah, and did not put it on after putting my Tefillin in their bag. I came back and noticed then, 20 years ago, a sign on the wall, that read "We found your watch! Come and claim it with Simanim! If you know the signs, that will show that it is your watch, we will return it to you!"

I came over to that family, and gave them the signs, and they gave me my watch. Over the next year and a half, they invited me for Shabbat meals often, and before I returned to America for Pesach a year and a half later, they asked me if I would date anyone, when back home for Pesach break. When I told them that if something came up I would consider it, they offered my Dolly, my wife, from Bayit Vegan. I dated her, and two weeks later, we were engaged.

I pretty much was ready to give up on my Tefillin, after a week of waiting. And then, Sunday morning, I got a phone call. “Is this Farhi? Did you pray on Sunday morning by the Kotel, by sunrise? Are your Tefillin Shel Rosh switched?... I am the relative of the person who switched Tefillin last week with you, accidentally at the Kotel. My relative lives in Monsey. He was here in Israel, for his father’s yahrzeit, but he had to run back. He noticed when he got back to Monsey, that the straps were not the same. We called the lost and found of the Kotel, and they did not remember anyone saying that they had their Tefillin shel Rosh switched. Sorry!... But before they hung up, they said, “Wait a second! You said Sunday, on Hannuka? Yes! There was someone Farhi... here is his number!”

Confirming that We Had Each Other’s Rosh Tefillin

I got in touch with this person in Monsey, and we exchanged pictures of the Tefillin to make sure, that we switched with each other, and not with a third person. This man had mine, and I had his. He said to me, “Know, that the Tefillin, are not mine. They were my father’s, who was a great man. He moved to Bnei Brak many years ago, and was from the closest people with R’ Chaim Kanievsky. He is buried right next to R’ Chaim, as he was very close to him. He bought the grave when R’ Chaim bought his. I am wearing my father’s Tefillin, as I know that his Tefillin were very important to him, and that my father had the highest level of Hiddur on his Tefillin. I was broken to find, that the day of my father’s yahrzeit, I lost his tefillin!

“It was almost as if, his tefillin were taken away from me, on his Yahrzeit! And I could not understand it! Being that I was standing next to the Chabad Tefillin stand, someone at the kotel asked me if they could use my Tefillin, and I let them use it, knowing that that was what my father would want me to do with his Tefillin... And now, after doing the mitzvah, my Tefillin were lost! But know this... you have been wearing Tefillin of my father, who was a great man!

The Man Had Supported Rav Chaim Kanievsky

I told my Rebbi the story, and who the man was who I was wearing his Tefillin, and my Rabbi said, “Sure! I know who he was! He was first close to R’ Chaim’s father, the Steipler, and when he asked the Steipler where to give his Tzeddaka money, the Steipler said, that he should support his son, R’ Chaim, which he did the whole life of R’ Chaim!”

I had just two more days, to wear that man’s Tefillin. I kissed those Tefillin, and thanked G-d for giving me the merit! Within 48 hours, I had a knock on my door! The man from Monsey already had my Tefillin sent back, and I gave him back his Tefillin to the messenger!

Reprinted from the Parshat Mikess 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Businessman and the Steipler Gaon



A businessman once approached a grandson of the Steipler Gaon, zt”l, gave him twenty thousand dollars, and asked him to give it to the Steipler Gaon to distribute to various Tzedakah purposes. However, when the money was brought to the Steipler, he refused to accept it. He said that the money was not Kosher, and he wouldn’t use it.

The grandson called the businessman and told him what the Steipler had said. The man replied that he would call back soon. About an hour later, he called back the grandson, and said he could give the money again to his grandfather. This time, the Steipler accepted the money as if nothing had happened, and he instructed his grandson to send his thanks to the businessman.

The grandson called the man back with the message, and asked for an explanation. The man said that he and his brother were partners in various businesses. Each year, they brought a large amount of money to the Steipler Gaon for Tzedakah. Lately, however, they had a falling out, and they hadn’t spoken to each other in a long time. He said, “I brought the money to you as I did every year,

but I did not consult with my brother about it. The Steipler sensed this, and he did not accept the money. When you told me that he said the money is not Kosher, I called my brother to reconcile with him. Once I did that, the money became Kosher again!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Mikeitz 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

Giving the Other Man the Benefit of a Doubt

Rabeinu Bachye writes in Chovos HeLevavos (Sha'ar HaK'niah 10) that someone once asked a wise man, “Why is it that you were able to become the leader of your entire generation?”

The wise man replied, “It is because I never met someone that I didn't see in him a quality that he is greater than me in. If he was smarter than me, I would say that he must have more Yiras Hashem than me, since his wisdom is greater than mine. If he had less wisdom than me, I considered that his final judgement at the end of our lives will be better than mine, and he will be held less accountable than I will be. This must be because my Aveiros were done on purpose, but his Aveiros were all done by accident.

“If he was older than me, I would reason that surely his Zechusim must be greater than mine, since he came to this world before me. If he was younger, I would think that he surely did less Aveiros than me, because he wasn't here as long as I have been. If we were the same age and we had had the same level of wisdom, I would say to myself that perhaps his heart is more devoted to Hashem than mine is, because I know of all my past Aveiros, but I don't know of any Aveiros that he committed.

“If he was wealthier than me, I would say that he can serve Hashem better than me because of his wealth, and he could give to various Tzedakah causes and support poor people more than I could. If he had less money than me, I would think that he was more-humble than me, due to his being poor, and he is really a better person than I am. And because of this, I would honor all people and humble myself before them.”

He explained that this was the reason he was appointed as the leader of all the people!

Reprinted from the Parshas Mikeitz 5784 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.