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Continuing Her Family's Legacy

By Yitta Halberstam & Judith Levantl



There's an amazing story from the book "Small Miracles for the Jewish Heart" that took place in the early 1900s. It became common for Eastern European Jews, tired of pogroms, poverty, and despair, to send their children to the United States, where there were opportunities for a better life. Because it was very expensive, the parents usually sent their children one at a time as the money for passage became available. The children would stay with relatives in America until the rest of the family arrived.

In 1930, Anya Gold, the oldest of eight children, was sent by her parents to the United States. Having saved only enough money for one ticket, her parents told her they would all soon follow, but they never did. It took them years to accumulate enough money, but by that time, the Holocaust had already begun.

Anya was raised by her aunt in Baltimore. Eventually, around the year 1946, a few stray survivors from her hometown in Poland arrived in Baltimore and brought with them the news that she dreaded to hear: Her entire family had been wiped out. It was hard for her to go on. She knew, however, that the best way to commemorate her family's legacy was to build a family of her own. She wanted to get married, have a lot of children, and name them after her family members.

The Couple Began to Contemplate Adoption

Shortly afterward, she married her wonderful husband, Saul, and they began to build their lives together. A couple of years went by, and they were still childless. The doctor informed them that there was a problem that would make it impossible for them to ever have children. They began to contemplate adoption, but Anya was hesitant. She had so hoped to have children to continue her family's legacy.

Finally, they decided to adopt. The Jewish agency they contacted in New York told them that an infant had just been put up for adoption. They became very excited and traveled to New York. When they arrived, their hopes were shot down; the family had reconsidered and taken their baby back.

"We traveled all this way," they pleaded with the agency official. "Isn't there something else you can do for us?" The agent said, "Yes, we do have a wonderful little girl named Miriam, who is in desperate need of a home." Miriam was adorable, but she was already eight years old. Anya and Saul wanted a newborn. Dejectedly, they returned home.

An Infant was Very Hard to Find

Another year passed with no prospects. They contacted many agencies across the United States, but an infant was very hard to find. Anya's intense longing for a child consumed her. "Let's see if we can still adopt that little girl, Miriam," she told her husband. They called the agency, and the official said the girl was not yet adopted. "Not too many people want a nine-year-old," she admitted. "But now there is a bit of a complication. Her little brother has been found in Europe and has joined her in our home for war orphans. The siblings are inseparable, and we promised them that they will be adopted together."

The couple went to New York and saw the children. Miriam had a sweet demeanor, and her six-year-old brother, Moshe, was adorable as well. Anya and Saul brought them home to Baltimore, happy to finally fill their home with children.

Miriam looked around her new home. Suddenly, she pointed to a picture on the piano and asked Anya, “why do you have a picture of my grandma here?” Anya stared at the picture of her late mother. What was the child talking about?

Miriam ran to her suitcase, took out a faded picture, and showed it to Anya. “See?” she cried. “I have that picture, too. That’s my grandma” Then she took out a picture of her mother. Anya was shocked to see that it was Sarah, her sister! Unknowingly, she had adopted her sister’s two children! She did have the merit to continue her own family’s legacy. Anya and Saul had an extremely difficult life, but they saw the Yad Hashem guiding them which brought them much comfort.

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

Realize Its True Value

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

Reb Shmuel Schmelke of Nikolsburg was known for his charitable ways. Whenever a poor person would come to his home, he would give him the small amount of money that he had. Oftentimes he had no money, so he would search the house for an item of value, so as not to turn the poor person away empty-handed.

His wife owned a very expensive piece of heirloom jewelry, and she was fearful that her husband would give it to a poor person. Therefore, she decided to find a secure hiding place with the hopes that he would not find it.

One day, a poor person knocked on the door and requested some help. Since there was no money in the house, Reb Schmelke began searching for something of value. After a thorough search he found this precious jewelry. True to his nature, Reb Schmelke gave it to the poor person and wished him well. The poor person thanked him and walked away from the house smiling.

At that moment, Reb Schmelke’s wife was returning home and saw the poor person leaving the house with an expression of joy on his face. Knowing that there was nothing of value in the house besides for her hidden piece of jewelry, she was gripped with apprehension that her husband found it and gave it away to this poor person. Upon entering her home, she immediately went to her secure hiding place. Sure, enough it was missing, and she realized that her husband must have found it and gave it away.

Going over to her husband, she told him “The ruby on that piece of jewelry was worth at least a few thousand rubles!” Hearing this, Reb Schmelke rushed out the door running after the poor person. Seeing that Reb Schmelke was chasing him,

the poor person was fearful that he regretted giving him the piece of jewelry and was going to ask for it back.

So, he started running away. However, after a long chase, Reb Schemleke finally caught up to him and said, "I want you know that what I gave you is very expensive. I believe you are going to go to a pawn shop and exchange it for money. Make sure that you get at least a few thousand rubles for it because that is its true value!"

Reprinted from Rabbi Avtzon's Weekly Story for Parshas Mikeitz 5783. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran Mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Lubavitcher Rebbeim and their Chassidim. He can be contacted at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

Motzei Shabbos Nights Are for Grandfather

Rav Dovid Goldwasser was giving a class to a group of seminary girls on a Wednesday night. He was approached at the end of the shiur by a young lady who told him that she had the tremendous merit of spending Saturday nights with her grandfather. She explained that her grandfather was getting on in years and the family felt it wasn't good for him to remain alone at night, so seven grandchildren volunteered to each take one night per week and sleep at their grandfather's house so they could assist him.

The most difficult night to get a volunteer for was Saturday night, but she was happy to do it. Now, the time had come for her to begin dating and she realized that Saturday night was the time most young men would set aside for going out, but she was reluctant to give up her Saturday nights with her grandpa. All the other nights were taken, what should she do? Would giving up Saturday night be a necessary part of her Hishtadlut - personal effort/drive (vs. Bitachon as trust/faith) in seeking her Basheret?

"I told her that she should absolutely not give up the zechut, the merit of being with her grandfather. Who knows what Nachat Ruach, what comfort she is bringing to him by being there". But suggested she speak with her parents, tell them what I said and make sure they are on board.

What kind of girl will ask that question? The girl who comes from parents who tell her that if she received this advice and daat Torah, then she should certainly follow it and continue to be with her grandfather and Hashem would surely bless her.



A couple of months down the road, a very fine young man from a wonderful family would like to go out with her. The shadchan sets things up and the boy calls her. He asks if she can go out with him Motzei Shabbat as it's the only night he is free from learning and the most convenient. Without explaining why, she apologizes and says she would love to go out with him, but she is busy on Saturday night.

He calls back the following week and they speak for a bit and he again asks if she can go out on Saturday night. Again, she apologizes advising him that again she's busy on Motzei Shabbat. So, he calls a third week. Again, they talk and again he asks her to please go out with him Saturday night. She apologizes and says, I know you've asked me three times and three times I told you I am busy and I apologize. So, he tells her not to worry, and says, how about Sunday night? And she accepts.

He comes to pick her up Sunday night. The first thing he asks her in the car is, "OK, so you need to tell me, what's up with Saturday night?" She is Senua – Modest – and doesn't want to say. He presses her. Still, she refuses. He tells her, please, I really need to understand and I promise I won't tell anyone, why wouldn't you go out Saturday night.

So, she, although embarrassed, answers him. "I have an elderly grandfather and each of his grandchildren have a night we stay with him and take care of him, and my night is Saturday night, so how can I give that up"?

When this young man hears this, he turns to her and says, "I know we have only spoken on the phone three times and this is the first time we are meeting, and I am willing to go out with you for as long as it takes, but I need you to know something, my mind is made up. A Baalat Chesed, someone who acts so kindly, and does what you do and puts someone else before themselves and who didn't even

explain these past three weeks, I would like to have the zechut of partnering and B'H of getting engaged to such an unbelievable bat Torah."

And so it was that a while later they were engaged and then married.

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayeshev 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Law and Order

By Rabbi Yechiel Spero



The following story took place on a moshav (settlement) in Israel that was comprised mostly of shomer Shabbat families. All workers in the moshav knew that they had to stop their work before Shabbat. Working on Shabbat was simply not an option. One Friday evening, however, one of the members of the moshav ran into the shul in a frenzy.

Right outside the limits of the moshav, a team of construction workers repairing the road were still working as Shabbat approached, and they appeared to be in no rush to leave. This member of the moshav had pleaded with the crew to wrap up now and return on Sunday morning but they would hear nothing of it. The bulldozers, dump trucks and other miscellaneous vehicles rumbled along, and a crowd of protesters quickly gathered. Something had to give, as the two sides were on a collision course.

Finally, the confrontation came to a head as a man in his late fifties, heavily tanned and sporting a healthy build, stepped forward. As foreman on the site, he declared that he would be more than willing to continue the job on Sunday as long as he received orders from the “Big Boss.” And as of yet, he had not. Hearing this, the uproar increased, with no apparent resolution in sight.

A Small Man Addresses the Foreman

Suddenly, a diminutive man stepped forward. Everyone knew Moshe, but he was a quiet person who rarely drew attention to himself. Moshe made his way to the front of the crowd and addressed the foreman, “You’re waiting for a notification? Is that what you’re waiting for?”

Moshe rolled up his sleeves and it appeared that he was preparing for a fight – although he was the least likely person to revert to physical assault. By now Moshe was standing front and center, staring at the foreman, passion in his voice and fire in his eyes. “Do you need a certificate that we are all Jews and that the Torah commands us to keep the Holy Shabbat?”

Bracing for the inevitable, the group prepared themselves for the battle of words to escalate into a full-blown fistfight. But suddenly Moshe thrust his arm forward, “Here it is! Branded into my arm! It is my membership number. It was burned into my arm in Auschwitz so that I would never forget that I am a Jew! No matter what, no matter when!”

Pain and Pride Joined Together

Pointing to his arm, Moshe screamed, “This is where it is written. Here it is! Is this not enough of a command from our Supervisor that we can never work on His Shabbat?!” Moshe, his eyes filled with tears, stopped; his heavy breathing could be heard by all. His pain and pride had joined together in one unforgettable moment. Then, slowly, Moshe rolled down his sleeve, turned, and walked away.

Suddenly the foreman ran after him and grabbed him, “I know! I also know!” He too rolled up his sleeve and bared the numbers tattooed on his arm. They stared together at their numbers, and then cried on each other’s shoulders. The entire assemblage watched the awesome sight of these two survivors sharing an eternal, unspoken bond. Members of the same “club,” the emotional foreman hugged his new friend and promised that not only would he stop working now, but he would never work on Shabbat again!

After all, the “Big Boss” had given the order. (Touched by a Story 3)

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayesheb 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Kindness of Strangers

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, a”h



In 1966 an eleven-year-old black boy moved with his parents and family to a white neighbourhood in Washington. Sitting with his two brothers and two sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition.

All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, “I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here...”

As he was thinking those thoughts, a white woman coming home from work passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, “Welcome!” Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him

realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colour-blind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it *Civility*.^[1] The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew.

A Chesed Called Kindness

“In the Jewish tradition,” he notes, such civility is called *chesed* – “the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of G-d.”

Civility, he adds, “itself may be seen as part of *chesed*: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard.” To this day, he adds, “I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever.”

I never knew Sara Kestenbaum, but years after I had read Carter’s book I gave a lecture to the Jewish community in the part of Washington where she had lived. I told them Carter’s story, which they had not heard before. But they nodded in recognition. “Yes,” one said, “that’s the kind of thing Sara would do.”

Reprinted of the website of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, a”h, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom (United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth).

Not Just a Drunkard

My holy ancestor, R' Eliezer Tzvi from Komarno zt"l, shares in his '*Sefer Zakein Beiso*', a story that he had heard directly from his father, R' Yitzchak Isaac from Komarno zt"l:

There was once a man who was going through a tremendously difficult time. He was suffering and he needed salvation. He decided to go to the Maggid of Mezritch zt"l and ask for a blessing.

"I cannot help you," explained the Maggid, "but I know of a man in a particular city who can offer you the salvation that you seek."



"But listen carefully," the Maggid continued, "this man is drunk all the time. You can usually find him passed out in the streets intoxicated like a homeless person. Therefore, you need to speak to him before he begins drinking. At first light, find this man before he starts *davening*, while he is still sober. Wait until he finishes *davening*, and immediately explain your troubles and ask for a blessing, before he has a chance to start drinking. Anything he says to you, will - without a doubt - come to fruition."

Meriting a Tremendous Salvation

The man did exactly as the Maggid instructed. He received the blessings, and immediately his suffering was alleviated and he merited a tremendous salvation from his troubles.

Afterwards, the man returned to the Maggid, to discover what was so special about that individual, that he was able to have his blessings materialize immediately, while the Maggid could not.

The Maggid proceeded to tell him the backstory about this drunk:

"At one point, this man was extraordinarily wealthy. But, he lived a life pursuing the sinful desires of his heart. In fact, he never passed on an opportunity to sin.

"He once heard that there is a woman in another town whose beauty is unmatched. She is willing to be with any man who would pay her 400 gold pieces. When he heard this, his *Yetzer Harah* flared up inside him, and he could not contain

his desire to be with this woman. So, he collected gold, hitched his wagon, and rode off to be with this woman.

"While travelling, he passed by a Jewish man in shackles being escorted along the road with some guards. 'What have you done?' asked the man. The prisoner explained, 'I had rented a tavern from a landlord, and I fell behind on my rent for three years. I owe the landlord 400 gold pieces, which I cannot afford. As a punishment, I am going to be thrown into a pit.'

"When the man heard this, he overpowered his *Yetzer Harah* and the desire to sinfully be with that woman, and he took the gold that he had been carrying to pay her, and he gave it to the non-Jewish guards instead. And they set the Jewish man free.

"When the Heavens saw this, there was an awesome commotion. Seeing someone like this who lived a life of sin - overpower his big desire to be with that woman, for the sake of another Jew's well-being, aroused a tremendous *Nachas Ruach* for *Hashem*. As a reward for this act, *Hashem* wanted to bestow upon this man the power to always have his prayers answered.

"And the man heard a proclamation from the Heavens, informing him, that for the remainder of his life, any blessings and prayers that he offers someone else will be answered immediately.

"However," the Maggid went on, "when the Heavenly Court saw this, they pondered: such a person, someone without any Torah knowledge, who doesn't have any idea about the way how *Hashem* leads his world, could be dangerous for the world if he has the power to overturn the decrees of the Heavens for the benefit of the world below!?"

"The Heavenly Court ruled, that everything *Hashem* has bestowed upon this man will surely manifest itself, but this person's spiritual capabilities needed to be concealed. Therefore, they decreed that this man become a drunk, someone the entire world overlooks and avoids. Someone that everyone would be embarrassed to even talk to. And so, it was.

"However," concluded the Great Maggid, "I knew about all of this. And, when you came to me for a salvation that I knew I could not provide, I sent you to this man, the man whose prayers and blessings *Hashem* answers immediately."

Change Our Will

The story illustrates the incredible esteem that the Heavens have for someone who overcomes their desires, who denies their *Yetzer Harah's* temptations, in order to fulfill *Hashem's* Will.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayigash 5783 email of The Kaliver Rebbe, shlita.

The Misplaced Cell Phone



Rav Paysach Krohn related a story that once happened to him. He was once in JFK airport waiting at a gate for a flight to Toronto, when suddenly, two TSA guards approached the gate. Everyone was wondering if there was a terrorist in the waiting area, or there was some other important reason for them to come there.

Rabbi Krohn was shocked when the two guards looked in his direction and walked right over to him! They held out a cell phone and asked, “Excuse me, Rabbi. Is this yours?”

Rabbi Krohn’s first response was no, as he thought his phone was in his pocket, but when he reached into his pocket and searched for his phone, he was surprised to see that it was missing. He looked at the phone that the officers were holding and after recognizing it as his own, he realized it was his. He had mistakenly left it at the security station, and they came to return it. He thanked them profusely, as the phone had some 700 numbers on it, and it would have been a very big ordeal to have to get all those numbers again.

A Question to the Officers

As the officers were leaving, he said to them, “Officers, there are thousands of people in this airport. How did you know the phone was mine?”

They responded, “As you passed by us at the security check, you looked at us and thanked us for being here. You said you feel safer when we’re here. No one says ‘thank you’ to us. When we saw you accidentally left without taking your phone, we knew exactly who to look for, and we were determined to find you and return your phone to you!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

A Torah Solution To a Medical Issue



Rav Meilich Biderman once related that Rav Yitzchok Dovid Grossman, the Rav of Migdal Emek, would often come to visit his grandfather, Rav Moshe Mordechai of Lelov, zt”l. One time, he brought along a father and son from his community. The boy needed a particular surgery, and before going to the hospital, he and his father came to Rav Moshe Mordechai for a Brachah.

The Rebbe said to the boy, “If you accept on yourself to learn Gemara, you will not need surgery.”

The father responded, “All the doctors say that my son needs surgery, and we aren’t trying to get out of that. We are only requesting a Brachah that the operation be successful.”

The Rebbe ignored the father’s words, and once again said to the boy, “If you will start learning Gemara, you will not need surgery.”

Then the Rebbe gave him a Brachah. After receiving the Rebbe’s Brachos, they immediately went to the hospital. The doctors did another routine check before the surgery, and they were astounded to see that the young man was absolutely fine! The problem had disappeared and resolved!

The young boy was overwhelmed by the miracle, and understood that it was because he had accepted on himself to learn Gemara. This boy kept his word and began learning very diligently. When he was seventeen years old, he finished Shas, and today, he is an established Talmid Chacham!

Rav Yitzchok Dovid Grossman later commented, “This story has two miracles to it. Firstly, the boy miraculously didn’t need surgery, and secondly, he developed

into a great Talmid Chacham. However, the second miracle is greater than the first, because before this episode took place, this boy was not serious about his learning at all. The Rebbe, with his wisdom, turned this young man into a Talmid Chacham!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Brisker Rav's Choice

By Rabbi Mordechai Levin

As World War II ramped up in Europe, some Gedolim (great Rabbis) were able to procure precious visas that enabled them to travel to Eretz Yisroel or America. Rav Aharon Kotler, ZT”L, decided to go to America, and established the Lakewood Yeshiva. His powerful influence on Torah education in America is felt to this very day. The Brisker Rav, ZT”L, decided to attempt to emigrate to Eretz Yisroel. Those who chose America did so because it was far from the war front, while Eretz Yisroel did not seem safe as the Germans were about to invade Egypt.

Nevertheless, the Brisker Rav felt that of the two options, Eretz Yisroel was the spiritually-safer choice. He felt that in Eretz Yisroel it would be easier to keep Shabbos and raise one's children properly. Although there also were secular Jews in Eretz Yisroel, “in the holy city of Jerusalem there are G-d-fearing people who show mesirus nefesh (extreme dedication) in their battle for Hashem and His Torah”.

The Brisker Rav was uneasy about his decision. He decided to conduct a “Gorel HaGra” (the method used by the Vilna Gaon when seeking Divine guidance; done by opening a Tanach to a random Pasuk and following what it says). The Tanach opened to a Pasuk (Tehillim 104:8): “They will go up to the hills; they will go down to the valleys to this place You founded for them”. He then knew definitively that he should bring his family to Eretz Yisroel, “the place Hashem founded for them”. On their travels, as they made their way through the mountains of Turkey and Lebanon, he commented that he now understood the hint from the first half of the Pasuk, “They will go up to the hills; they will go down to the valleys”.

Comment: Yaakov Avinu was hesitant to travel down to Mitzrayim, as he feared that his family would be entrapped by its decadent society and spiritual wasteland. Hashem spoke to him and assured him (Bereishis 46:4) that, “I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up (out of Egypt)”. Only then did Yaakov agree to join Yosef in Egypt. (Story taken from “Reb Dovid Soloveitchik” by Rabbi Shimon Meller, 2022)

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email of Torah Sweets.