

# SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS VA'ERA 5786

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## Kindness that Brings Joy



**The Kever, burial place of the Apter Rov, Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel, zt"l**

Reb Shalom was a poor man. He made his living doing occasional repair and renovation work in his hometown of Afta: patching a leaky roof here, plastering a crumbling wall there, or fixing a cabinet on the verge of collapse. With such work, some-times there was work, sometimes not—and so it was with his meager livelihood.

Now, his eldest daughter had reached marriageable age. Reb Shalom had not a single coin for her dowry, and without a dowry, the chances of finding a suitable

match were slim. The daughter quietly endured her pain, as a virtuous Jewish girl with good character, never complaining or pressuring her father. Her mother, however, did not relent. Not a day went by without reminding her husband—though he needed no reminder—that a father's duty to his children is not complete until he brings them under the chuppah.

Coming to the Tzaddik One day, while agonizing over his daughter's unmarried status, Reb Shalom's feet carried him to the home of the tzaddik, the "Ohev Yisrael" (Lover of Israel) of Apta (Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel, 1748-1825).

"I am poor and have no money to marry off my daughter, who is kind, modest, and pious," he poured out his troubles. The tzaddik looked at him with compassionate eyes and recognized a hardworking man, not one who begs from wealthy patrons. He thought carefully and then spoke.

"Truly, you have nothing? No savings, no valuable jewelry to sell?"

"No," Reb Shalom replied.

"And what about a loan?" the tzaddik asked. "How much do you need?"

"One hundred rubles," said Reb Shalom.

"And why do you not borrow it?" asked the tzaddik.

Reb Shalom lowered his eyes in helplessness. "One hundred rubles is too large a sum, and I know no one who would lend me that amount. Besides, I truly don't know how I could ever repay it," he said.

"G-d helps," the tzaddik waved away his concerns. "When a Jew takes a loan for a holy purpose, G-d helps him repay it," he said. "Think a little more," the tzaddik encouraged. "Perhaps there is something of value in your home that you could pledge?"



Suddenly, a spark of hope lit Reb Shalom's eyes. "I have a printed shas (full set of the Talmud) from Slsvita," he said.

"Bring it here," said the tzaddik.

Within an hour, the shas was in the tzaddik's home.

"This is a very precious shas, far more valuable than one hundred rubles," said the tzaddik, with admiration. "If you pledge it, you can receive a loan of two hundred rubles!"

Moments later, he opened his desk drawer, took out two hundred rubles, and handed it to Reb Shalom. Stunned, Reb Shalom could hardly contain his shock. After regaining his composure, he thanked the tzaddik warmly and returned home joyous.

Before long, Reb Shalom's daughter was engaged. Some-time later, a messenger arrived at Reb Shalom's home, carrying the shas back from the tzaddik. "The Rebbe said that this shas is very valuable and he does not want to bear the responsibility of guarding it from damage or theft. Thus, he believes it is best that it remain in your home, where you will care for it properly," said the messenger, and departed.

The day of Reb Shalom's daughter's wedding finally arrived. It was customary for the bride and groom and their families to visit the tzaddik for his blessing. Reb Shalom, his wife, and their children came with the bride. After receiving the tzaddik's blessing, Reb Shalom was asked to remain for a private moment.

"With this," the tzaddik said, "I forgive you the repayment of the loan. The two hundred rubles you borrowed from me are now a complete gift."

Reb Shalom, overwhelmed, could barely respond, stammering, "Why... I mean, for what reason...?"

True and Complete Joy A broad smile spread across the tzaddik's face. "Listen carefully," he began. "As you know, G-d created the world entirely for the sake of the Jewish people. In theory, one might think that the world should operate openly to show that all existence is for the Jewish people. In practice, however, we live in exile, with Jews oppressed and immersed in the burdens of the world.

"I considered this deeply and concluded that there must be a special moment in a Jew's life when his heart is completely joyful. When is that? Every day he is preoccupied with livelihood, raising children, and other challenges. Years pass, and finally comes the happiest day: the day he brings his children under the chuppah. In that moment, all suffering is forgotten, and his spirits soar as he thanks G-d for His kindness. This is true and complete joy."

The tzaddik paused, then continued: "I realized that if, on that happy day, you remembered the precious shas you pledged and thought of the two hundred rubles, it might disturb your joy. And was not the world created for the Jewish people? Therefore, I decided to transform the loan into a full gift. Mazel tov, mazel tov!"

Thus, was born another story illustrating how truly deserving of his name was the "Ohev Yisrael" of Apta.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayigash 5786 edition of Living Jewish edited and compiled by Aharon Schmidt.*

# Two Inspiring Stories of the Saintly Alesker Rebbe

By Yehuda Z Klitnick

Harav Chanoch Henach Dov Mayer of Alesk (Olesko) was born in the city of Belz to Reb Shmuel in 1800. He was a brilliant boy and became the son-in-law of Harav Shalom of Belz Zatzal. The two were a bond and learned together countless hours. He authored the famous Siddur Lev Sameach and Lev Sameach on the Torah. He became known as the Lev Sameach of Alesk.

## Would Not Allow His Rebbetzin to Get Upset

After the wedding, his Rebbetzin Fraidel, daughter of the Belzer Rov, operated a business that provided a good living for the couple. On one occasion, when the Lev Sameach prepared to travel to Lemberg to buy Seforim, the Rebbetzin asked him to also buy merchandise for the business.

On the way home, while the Lev Sameach was staying over at an inn, the wagon filled with merchandise was stolen. Greatly pained by this catastrophe, the Lev Sameach returned to Lemberg to repurchased the same amount of merchandise that had been stolen, and warned the driver not to reveal to the Rebbetzin about the unfortunate robbery, as not to cause her any agony!

This ordeal would have stayed hidden, until several days later, when a Jewish man who's hand suddenly became tragically paralyzed, came to the Sar Shalom of Belz, tearfully admitting that he had stolen merchandise from his daughter and had subsequently become paralyzed.

The Sar Shalom summoned his daughter about the incident, but she had no clue of any robbery. The Belzer Rov, brilliantly figured out what happened and the Lev Sameach "admitted" that his merchandise had been stolen during his business trip, and that he had hidden the matter from his Rebbetzin so that she would not get upset.

The Sar Shalom advised the admitted thief to visit the Lev Sameach, plead for forgiveness and entreat the Tzaddik to pray for his recovery from the paralysis that had beset him. The Sar Shalom assured the confessed thief that the Lev Sameach was extremely righteous and his prayers on behalf of the man would surely be accepted.

## The Ruach Hakodesh

Once it came the time to build a new Shul in Alesk, the builder had to excavate a deep hole for the foundation. The Lev Sameach was to have the honor on Erev Shabbos in the morning to perform the Hanachas Even Hapina, laying of the cornerstone. The builder strengthened the walls of the hole, and the Lev Sameach would dig a few holes to find a nice cornerstone for the Shul.

The whole city came and waited for the Alesker Rebbe to go down in the hole and find a nice cornerstone. But as the Alesker Rebbe neared the hole, he surveyed the area for a long while, and said I will not enter the hole, as I am sure that the walls will collapse on me and Chas Vashalom the earth will bury me alive!

The builder pleaded with the Rebbe not to cause him embarrassment, as he would never ask the Rebbe to enter a danger zone. He said my builders took extra caution to make sure that the walls were safe and sturdy. Besides, my workers are being paid, and want to get to work on the the new Shul!

The Alesker Rebbe was adamant and answered, I am sure you did the right work to the walls, however, I am afraid to enter the hole, as it is a danger zone. But the Rebbe said, if you insisist that I do it, I ask that you let me go to the Mikvah Lekavod Shabbos, and after going to the Mikvah, I will survey again the hole!

The builder agreed and the Rebbe went to the Mikvah, and as the Rebbe was immersing in the water, a loud thunder sounded and the huge hole collapsed as the Rebbe feared! The builder was shocked and couldn't believe what had happened! The miracle spread and the whole city began to speak of the Ruach Hakodesh of the Rebbe. That Shabbos, the Rebbe heard the flying rumor of Ruach Hakodesh being discussed, decided to deliver a Drasha to clarify what happened.

The Rebbe stood at the Drasha and began: What happened had nothing to do with Ruach Hakodesh. It happened when I surveyed the hole. I noticed a nice big stone praying to Hashem, that he merit to be part of the Shul. Hashem answered the prayer, and the only way that stone would be able to be part of the Shul. is if the wall collapses, and when they would dig again, they would come across the nice large stone. That's exactly what happened after Shabbos, the builders dug up the hole and they noticed that stone and decided to use that as the cornerstone for the Shul.

The crowd heard what the Rebbe said, but they knew that being able to hear a stone pray is also Ruach Hakodesh. They knew the Rebbe was humble and held himself in low esteem. His Yahrtzeit is the 1st day of Elul 5644. The Rebbe was survived by his son Harav Shlome, who became the Rebbe in Sassov. His Yahrtzeit is 12 Adar II 5679.

*Reprinted from the Vayigash 5785 email of Pardes Yehuda.*

# The Legacy of Doing a Mitzvah in a Mehudar Manner

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon



During Chanukah I reached out to numerous people that I have contact with and tried to encourage them to continue their good deeds. One of them (whose real name is Avi) thanked me for the call and informed me about the progress of his oldest son, whose Bar Mitzvah was last year Chanukah. He proudly related that he has been reading the Torah every Shabbos afternoon by Mincha, so this week he has read every Parsha in the Torah until Sheini.

He then added every time his son reads the Torah, and every morning when the children run to yeshiva with a desire to learn, and Boruch Hashem they all are doing extremely well in their learning, I think it's all because of what happened between you and me on day of my wedding more than 16 years ago.

I used to visit him in his store almost every Friday afternoon on my mivtzoyim route, as a bochor and then I continued doing so for quite a few years after I was married.

When he informed me that he is engaged and getting married I spoke to him about the importance of placing Mezuzos on the doorways of his new apartment, as

well as that it is time that he should have his own pair of Tefillin and begin putting them on every day.

He agreed to purchase Mezuzos for the apartment and then he asked me how much the Tefillin cost.

I told him that presently [meaning at that time], a kosher pair is around 450 dollars, however, I want him to buy a one that is a better quality.



He asked me if I could buy one that is Kosher for 450 dollars, why should I spend \$200 more?

“How much are you spending on the flowers that are going to last only for one evening, I asked him? And how much are your family members going to spend on their shoes, suits, dresses and accessories which are going to be worn only once, I asked? You know that they're going to spend a lot more than \$450 and even \$650, and that's only for one evening. In fact, you have some very nice dresses in your store, why don't they wear one of them? But the answer is simple, for the wedding you need a dress that is more than nice and beautiful.

“So, when we are discussing Tefillin that are supposed to last you for your entire life, and you will be using them tens of thousands of times, of course they should be something that you consider very valuable. If you're going to buy the cheapest pair, that means you're not considering it important, so you just want to put

on the tefillin for that one day, just as you put them on one day a week, when we meet.

“You know what, if money is a problem, I'll save you even the \$450. I will lend you my pair for that special day and you can use my tefillin.”

“After thinking it over, a week and a half before his wedding, he told me, you are right, and I should buy him the better (more mehudar) pair. However, he won't be in the store the following week, so I could mail it to him.

However, I decided that if I mail it, who knows if he will get around to put it on, so being that he gave me an invitation, I decided I am going to bring it to him on the day of the wedding to the hall.

The drive to the hall each way was over an hour and a half but being that it was a summer wedding I had time. So around five in the afternoon I got into my car and drove to the fancy hotel hall where the wedding was taking place. I arrived at the hotel at around 6:30 shortly before the reception was going to begin.

When Avi saw me walking in, he was astounded. The invitation was a courtesy, and he never expected me to show up, and he for sure didn't expect me to be coming just to bring him his new pair of tefillin that he should have it available for every day from now on.

Opening the bag, I pulled out the Tefillin and asked him to put them on, and say Shema and whatever other tefilla (prayer) he wishes to say before the Chuppa begins. To everyone's amazement he rolled up his sleeve, put on the Tefillin and davened his Tefilla. Being that he did so, his father and father-in-law did so as well.

Then he emotionally said, Sholom, "By driving from Brooklyn all the way here, you showed me how important Tefillin is, therefore, I will begin putting them on every day. That changed his life. Once he began putting tallis and tefillin on at home before going to work, his wife, who was raised in a much more traditional Sephardic home, encouraged him to stop going to the store on Shabbos, because we have to give the children that Hashem will bless us with, a clear message of what Judaism is and he did so.

Going back to our conversation on Chanukah, after wishing him a freilichen Chanukah, I asked him how everything is going. He proudly replied, my oldest son became Bar Mitzvah last Channukah, and every Shabbos by Mincha, he reads the beginning of the next weeks parsha. So this Shabbos, he completed reading the beginning of each Parsha of the Torah. Sholom, you don't know how much happiness our children give us every day, from that and from their enthusiasm in Yiddishkeit. They are eager to go to yeshiva, and are Boruch Hashem getting excellent marks.

Every day I thank Hashem for this this amazing Brocha He gives us, and it all came about because you brought me the pair of Tefillin to my wedding. That showed me how important a Mitzvah is!

Hearing this got me thinking. Very often when I and probably many of you hear the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe's words to add on an additional light, do another mitzvah, we think the message is. We should give more tzedoka, say an additional chapter of Tehillim, learn for a longer period of time, etc. In other words, we think in the prism of quantity.

But Avi was telling me, that quantity is not always the solution, it is the quality in which it is done that often makes a stronger impression. I came to him almost every Friday for a few years. While he always willingly put on Tefillin, that didn't impress him, but when I went out of my way to bring him his new pair, that inspired him to realize that Tefillin means a

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# The Quiet Art of Preserving Dignity

By Avrohom Barash



**Rav Yechezkel Sarna**

One man in the Chevreon Yeshiva *kollel* was a great *talmid chochom*, yet lived in dire poverty, having failed in every business attempt. Someone suggested to R' Yechezkel Sarna, the Rosh Yeshiva, that he be hired to say *kaddish* for donors who paid the yeshiva for this service. R' Yechezkel refused. *Kaddish*, he explained,

was usually said by the *shamash*, and giving such a task to a *talmid chochom* might be demeaning.

Instead, R' Yechezkel astonished everyone by announcing that he himself would say the *kaddish*. No one questioned him. Four weeks later, the reason emerged:

R' Yechezkel asked the secretary to tell the impoverished *talmid chochom*, "The Rosh Yeshiva has been saying *kaddish* but no longer has the strength. He would like you to take over."

Since R' Yechezkel had done it first, the role carried no shame—only dignity. (Gut Voch)

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## The Abandoned Father

The Sefer Ahavas Chaim tells the following story.

In the city of Lemberg, there lived a wealthy merchant who made his living selling expensive furs. He had an only son and an only daughter, and he married them off to wealthy families, lavishing a great deal of wealth on them. With their father's help, they too became very successful and wealthy, and they became known as philanthropists.

In his old age, his wife died. Later, his fortune declined and he lost his assets. The son and daughter did not want to support their poor father, and he was left alone, without anyone helping him. Since during his time of wealth he had been a supporter of the Rebbe of Ruzhin zy"va, he now traveled to him to seek his holy advice.

The Rebbe consoled him and said, "I am giving you a letter to show my chasidim. They will help you and provide you with the means to restart your business. With Hashem's help, you will be successful again. The only thing I ask of you is that as soon as you return home, you should remarry. Your new wife will be good to you."

The old man took the letter from the Rebbe and brought it to the chasidim in his city. When they saw the letter from their Rebbe, they immediately held a meeting and collected among themselves a total of 500 gold coins, which they gave to the old man. The old man began to buy and sell once again. At the same time, he visited the matchmakers and asked them to propose a shidduch for him. After a few days, they suggested a woman for him with a dowry of 300 gold coins, and he married her.

From then on, he experienced success, eventually becoming even richer than before. When the son saw that his father was successful and his wealth was growing

by the day, he began to visit his home often. He also began to find fault with the behavior of his father's wife, and he tried to convince him to divorce her, saying that he would take care of him instead.

When the son saw that his words were being ignored by his father, he also sent his sister to tell him that he should divorce his new wife and come live with his children, who would care for all his needs. The old man knew from the beginning that his children didn't really care about him, and that they only were pretending to because they wanted his wealth. But since he did not want to get into a fight with them in his old age, he endured their words in silence.

Sometime later, he needed to travel to Leipzig for business purposes. While there, he invested all his wealth in a large deal, and he made a fortune in profit. On his way home, he went to see the Ruzhiner Rebbe and told him everything that had happened. He related that Hashem had blessed him with a lot of success, but he had a lot anguish from his son and daughter, whom he loves as a father loves his children but who wouldn't give him any peace. He related how they bothered him every day by trying to convince him to divorce his wife and move in with them.

The Rebbe told him, "Chazal say (Yevamos 65B) that it is permitted to lie for shalom bayis. Therefore, you will write three letters - one to your son, one to your daughter, and one to your wife. In these letters, you will tell them that on this journey, you lost all your wealth and possessions, and suddenly became a poor and destitute man, to the point that you no longer even have enough money to cover the return trip. Ask each of them to send you money for the expenses of the return trip, and you will wait here with me until you receive a reply from all three of them."

The man did as the Rebbe said. He wrote each of them a letter, saying that all the merchandise had been ruined on the way through various issues, and that he had no choice but to discard it all. He wrote that he had no money left, to the point that he was even forced to sell his clothes, and now he is poor and destitute and dressed in rags. He wrote that he had made it to town of Ruzhin, where the Rebbe was giving him a bit of tzedakah so that he doesn't starve. Therefore, he asked them to come to his aid and send him a little money for the expenses of the journey back home.

A few days later, he received replies from all three of them. He first opened his son's letter, in which he wrote: "Dear father, I received your letter and was sad to learn that you have lost all your wealth. But please forgive me for not being able to help because I don't have any spare money right now. I am unable to send you money for the journey, nor am I able to host you in my home. My advice is that you remain there with the Rebbe, who will feed you at his table."

The daughter also wrote to him in the same way, but she added that she had just done a shidduch with a very wealthy family and she had to provide a very large dowry. Therefore, she said that she had no available funds to send him. She also advised him to stay with the Rebbe, saying: "There is no reason why you have to

come back to your old wife. Since you are now poor, you won't be able to support her anyway."

After the old man read the letters from his son and daughter, he opened the letter from his wife. She wrote: "My dear husband, I received your letter. Do not worry about anything. Hashem has helped us so far, and He will certainly not abandon us now. Therefore, do not lose heart. Trust in Hashem and be strong. I will sell my jewelry, and in a few days, I will send you money for the expenses of the trip. You will be able to come home soon without worry because Hashem will surely help us. I will do everything I can to support us, even if it means standing in the market and selling baked goods. Perhaps it was Hashem's will for us to lose the business, so that in your old age you will sit in the bais medrash and study Torah, and this will also be a source of comfort for us in our poverty. Now, just be patient and, hopefully, you'll get the money send in a few days."

The man immediately showed the three letters to the Rebbe, who read them and told him, "In a few days you can go home, and you will know yourself what to do."

The old man lingered in Ruzhin for a few more days, and, in the meantime, he received a second letter from his wife. She sent him 25 rubles for travel expenses, with an apology that she had not been able to send more, and she asked him to return home immediately and not to worry about anything.

The man came home with a clear plan. He first stopped at a hotel, where he stored all his possessions. He dressed himself in some old rags and entered his house looking like a poor man. When his wife saw him, she was overjoyed. She comforted him with soft and kind words. Then the old man sent for his son and daughter to inform them that he had come home emptyhanded, but they did not even want to come to him to see how he was faring. After a few days, he brought his belongings home. He gave his wife expensive gifts and precious gems and pearls.

Later, it became known that the wealthy old man was about to buy a building in the city for his business. When the children learned of their father's great wealth, they again began to approach him with the same words, saying that it would be better for him to divorce his wife so that he could live with his flesh and blood.

He then took the three letters and said to them, "You rebellious and ungrateful children. You didn't care about your father when you thought I was poor. You did not even want to know how I was doing. You believed it would have been better for you if I had never returned home at all. And now that you smelled the scent of my wealth, you have come to me now to collect!"

The children left in shame, and the old man donated all his wealth, with his wife's consent, to the Ruzhin kollel. They remained the overseers of the money as long as they lived, and their lives were full of serenity and happiness.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5786 email of “The Way of Emunah: Collected Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Meir Isamar Rosenbaum.*

# The Pink Pearls

**By Rabbi Shraga Kallus**



There was once a young girl whose father gave her a small amount of spending money. With great excitement, she used it to buy a necklace of pink pearls. They were not real pearls, but to her they were precious. She admired them constantly and felt proud and happy wearing them.

One evening, her father came into her room, sat beside her on the bed, and gently asked, “My darling daughter, who do you love most in the world?” “You,” she answered without hesitation. “More than anything else?” he asked. “Yes. More than anything.” “Even more than the pearls?” he continued. “Yes,” she said confidently.

The father smiled, extended his hand, and said, “Then give me the pearls.” Her face fell. “The pearls?” she whispered. “Not that.” And so it went, night after night. Each time, the same question, and each time, the same hesitation.

One evening, her father asked, as he had so many times before, “Who do you love most in the world?” She answered, as always, “You.” “Even more than the pearls?” he prodded. But this time, the response was different. With a tear rolling

down her cheek, she slowly unclasped the necklace and placed the pink pearls into her father's hand.

At that moment, her father reached into his own pocket and pulled out a small red velvet box. Inside were genuine, radiant pink pearls that were real and far more precious than the ones she had given up.

"My darling," he said softly, "when I ask you for something out of love, you will never lose by giving it. You will only gain."

Hashem asks us to give up the synthetic pleasures of life, the illusions that glitter but do not last. And yet He promises that when we do, we make room for something far greater.

A person never loses by protecting their kedushah, by guarding their *neshama*. By choosing something of greater value, we open the door for real joy, real depth, and real blessing. And those are gifts that only Hakadosh Baruch Hu can give.

And we can be sure they are far greater and precious.

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## Emunah Creates Parnassah

Sefer Avodas Binyomin relates that a man once came to the home of Rav Binyomin Rabinowitz zt"l, Dayan on the Badatz of the Eidah Hachareidus, and told him, "I have a lot of bitachon, but I still have very little parnassah."

Rav Binyomin asked him, "When you were a kid, did you ever worry about whether or not you would have meat and fish for Shabbos?"

The man answered, "No. I knew my father would take care of that." Rav Binyomin continued, "Did you ever in your life not have meat and fish for Shabbos?" "Yes," the man said. "I once was sick and the doctor told me not to eat fish and meat until I got better, so my father didn't give me any that week."

"Think about what you just said," Rav Binyomin told him. "When your father knew that it wasn't good for you to eat fish and meat, he didn't give you any, and you understood. So too, if you ask Hashem for a lot of money and He doesn't give it to you, it is because your Father in Heaven knows that it wouldn't be good for you. Just have bitachon and trust that He is giving you what you need and withholding you from things that you shouldn't have for your own good."

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