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In the Face of Terrible Communist Persecution



Rabbi Dov Berish Weidenfeld

An immigrant arrived from Communist Russia at a time when its evil regime was in full power, both in strength and in virulent hatred of the Jewish religion. It was a sealed country. Nonetheless, this man was able to leave, and Eretz Yisrael was his destination. A group of yeshivah students who heard of the man's arrival went to visit him. They were amazed that he was able to leave, and they peppered him with questions about the country and the persecution to which everyone, especially Jews, was subjected.

During one of their conversations, the man mentioned that he had a childhood friend, a brilliant boy whose life revolved around learning. Indeed, everyone in their community presaged his emergence one day as a Torah giant without peer. He

pondered, "Who knows in what miserable corner of accursed Russia he ended up? Such brilliance to have succumbed to the misery that was our daily fare."

When the bachurim

heard him describe this extraordinary young scholar, they asked him his name. "His name was Dov Berish Weidenfeld," the man said. When they heard this, they became excited, "Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeldis the Tchebiner Rav, one of the gedolei hador, Torah leaders of our generation. He resides here in Yerushalayim. We will take you to him."

He Began to Weep Bitterly

When the man heard this, his entire countenance changed. He began to weep bitterly, as he reiterated over and over, "Oy, Berish, we learned together; we were best friends. Look what became of me, and look what became of you." After the man calmed down he said, "We were both together when the terrible, cruel decrees against the Jews reached our ears. Our reactions were dissimilar. The pressure, fear and pain were too much for me. I maintained my observance to the best of my ability.

"My friend, on the other hand, threw himself into learning with increased vigor. He withstood the persecution with Torah study as his salve. At first, I attempted to maintain our original schedule of learning, but it was too much. I lost hope and caved in. Now, it is too late. See what became of him and look at how I contrast him."

No one would blame this man for succumbing to the pain and persecution. How did the Tchebiner Rav overcome the adversity that broke so many others? Sheifah. He strived for greatness and never gave up hope of reaching the top of the ladder. In the beginning, standing on the first rung and looking up the climb appears impossible, but, with resolution and perseverance, one can make it.

Reprinted from the Parshas Nasso 5783 edition of Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum's Peninim on the Torah.

The Rebbe and the Burgomaster

Reb Aryeh, a Chasid of the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism), had been appointed by the authorities as "burgomaster" of his town. As chief magistrate and official record keeper for the government, Reb Aryeh was responsible for keeping track of all marriages, births and deaths (G-d forbid) in the Jewish community, entering them in a special register.

It happened once that a local gentile converted to Judaism. This was a grave offense in those times and in that place. Anyone even remotely suspected of having helped in the conversion process was subject to stiff penalties. This being so, Reb Aryeh was asked to conveniently "forget" to record the name of a certain Jew who had just died. The convert, who was approximately the same age as the deceased, would be given the dead man's papers and assume his identity.

The Rebbe Advised Him to Postpone the Trial Date

It was a clever plan, and it might have worked if not for the informer who brought the plot to light. The burgomaster was caught and a trial date was set. Reb Aryeh was in grave danger. Being a true Chasid, he went to the Alter Rebbe and explained his predicament. The Rebbe advised him to postpone the trial, and it was rescheduled for a later date.

When the second trial date rolled around Reb Aryeh returned to the Alter Rebbe. Again, the Rebbe advised him to defer it. This happened several times, until finally Reb Aryeh was unable to push it off any longer. At long last the burgomaster would be tried for his "crime." The Chasid begged the Alter Rebbe to save him.

Oddly enough, the Alter Rebbe responded by inviting Reb Aryeh to his grandchild's wedding, which was about to take place in the town of Zlobin. It was a union between two rabbinical dynasties: The Alter Rebbe's grandchild was marrying the grandchild of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. "Why don't you come and present your problem to Reb Levi Yitzchak?" the Alter Rebbe suggested. "I'm sure that he can help you."

A Most Interesting Experience with Reb Levi Yitzchak

Reb Aryeh traveled to Zlobin, but getting in to the see Reb Levi Yitzchak was very difficult, as thousands of other people had arrived with the same idea. Unwilling to give up, Reb Aryeh decided to come back in the middle of the night and stand outside Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's door. The following morning, he would be first in line.

That night, Reb Aryeh positioned himself outside Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's room and peeked inside. What a strange sight met his eyes! On one side of the tzadik's bed stood a gabbai (synagogue official) with a volume of Mishnayot; on the other side stood a second gabbai with the holy Zohar. Both men were reading aloud – at the same time – while Reb Levi Yitzchak appeared to be sleeping. Yet when one gabbai mispronounced a word, the tzadik turned and protested, "Nu! Nu!" This continued for some two hours, after which Rabbi Levi Yitzchak arose from his "nap" and Reb Aryeh was allowed to enter.

The first thing Reb Levi Yitzchak asked Reb Aryeh was who had sent him. "My Rebbe," the Chasid replied.

"And who might that be?"

"The Alter Rebbe," Reb Aryeh answered.

"Ah, him!" Reb Levi Yitzchak exclaimed. "My in-law is your Rebbe? Such a tzadik and scholar, such a holy man of G-d!" He continued in this vein for some time, praising the Alter Rebbe to the skies. "So, tell me," he said fondly, "what can I do for you?"

"What Does that Mean?"

Reb Aryeh explained that he was the burgomaster of his hometown. "A burgomaster?" the tzadik repeated after him. "What does that mean?"

The Chasid described his various duties and responsibilities.

"You mean to say that a Jew is in charge of the whole town?" Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asked, duly impressed. "How can that be?"

"To tell you the truth," Reb Aryeh replied, "the only reason I took the job was that the Alter Rebbe urged me to do so."

"Ho!" the tzadik declared emphatically. "My in-law – the sage, the saint, the learned scholar, the righteous one - guided you to take this position. In that case you have nothing to worry about. G-d will surely help and guard you from all harm."

Reb Aryeh went back to the Alter Rebbe and related his conversation with Reb Levi Yitzchak. "So, what do you think?" the Alter Rebbe asked. "Did I give you good advice?" He then repeated the question. "I gave you good advice, didn't I?"

On the day before the trial was due to begin a fire broke out in the courthouse. All the important documents in the building were completely burned – including the official indictment against Reb Aryeh. With no other record the case was dropped, and that was the end of the accusation.

Reprinted from the Parshat Bamidbar 5783 edition of L'Chaim

The Packed Suitcase





It was *erev Rosh Hashana*, when I ended the call that I dreaded to receive, my mind whirled with flooding cherished memories, my heart aching with profound sadness that's unique to losing a loved one.

My Aunt Phyllis, *a*"h, was truly, an amazing woman. I was blessed to have known her so closely! She was one of the kindest, sweetest people I'd ever met! In all the many years I'd known her, from my earliest memory, to now an adult, I can never remember her angry. She embodied a special gentleness that came from her *neshama*.

Both Made Time for a Lonely Little Girl of Ten Years Old

Aunt Phyllis, along with her husband, my Uncle Maury, both made the time, to make a personal relationship with me, a lonely little girl of ten years old! Their efforts, as the years continued, left a lasting seed in my turbulent childhood.

I didn't grow up in a *frum* or stable household. My mother, *a*"h, a child survivor of the Holocaust, had severe untreated mental illness. My childhood was filled with a tremendous amount of stress and abuse. By the time I was three years old, that stress had manifested in a physical illness, Crohn's disease. In the 1970s doctors knew very little about how to treat it in children. Thus began a childhood filled with continuous painful hospitalizations, and treatments with awful side effects.

Years later, after drifting apart, I found myself living within walking distance to my aunt and uncle. I had long since become *frum*, had my own family, yet I was lonely for functional family. So, I reached out for the love my aunt and uncle had planted many years ago. They lovingly embraced me back, no questions asked! I gained family, and my children, healthy loving pseudo-grandparents!

Admired Her Spirituality and Connection to G-d

Aunt Phyllis and I began our truly meaningful relationship. She saw that I needed a mother in my life, and simply filled the role! We talked weekly, if not more! We laughed a lot. We talked a lot. We shared a lot. We never ended a conversation or visited without exchanging I LOVE YOU's. Her spirituality and connection to G-d was something to admire! Though her and my uncle lived their lives as traditional Jews, she told me many stories about her growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home.

She was an only child when her mother had a later-in-life baby – a little sister that my aunt just adored! Their mother tragically died young, so when Aunt Phyllis' sister was just twelve years old, my aunt, already married, wound up taking her sister and raising her from bat mitzvah to *chuppah*, being both mother and sister! Apparently, being a foster mother to motherless *neshama's* came naturally for her. No wonder she took me under her wing seemlessly!

She always impressed me how close to G-d she was, how she firmly believed that Moshiach was coming, and she anxiously awaited his arrival. Since she was little, she'd always kept a packed suitcase under her bed, waiting to go to Eretz Yisrael. She couldn't wait to hear the *shofar* blow around the world, heralding Moshiach. I admired her steadfast amazing faith! Even me an Orthodox Jew, hadn't quite reached that level of faith to have a packed suitcase on hand – ready!

Once, a few hours before Rosh Hashana, our areas weather siren went off, the radio alerted us that there was a tornado spotted, we were advised to take cover! As I stuffed my kids into the tiny basement bathroom, I called my aunt and uncle to make sure they knew to go down into their basement to be safe. Aunt Phyllis, answered the phone oddly happy.

She Thought the Siren was the Shofar of Moshiach

"Amy!" She cried excitedly, calling me by my English name. "Do you hear the *shofar*? Moshiach is on his way – I have my suitcase!"

I was taken aback at first. I expected them to have simply not heard the siren. I was horribly sad to be the one to let her know that Moshiach wasn't here yet! That the "shofar" she heard was a weather siren alerting us to a tornado. My aunt's amazing faith never ceased to astound me.

Our connection was so strong, all I needed to do was think about her or need to talk to her and she'd call me! And vice versa! We talked about it and qualified we must have a special intuitive connection together – an unbreakable bond between us. We never ever argued or fought. There was just pure love and friendship between us!

A Brilliant Garden Filled with Rows of Red Roses

Shortly after she died, I had an amazing dream about her. I was in the most brilliant garden filled with rows of red roses. I met my dear aunt in one of the rows, with another woman I'd never met in life. She introduced me to her mother! I was embraced by her, then by my aunt. The absolute love I felt from both of them was so pure! It was serene and peaceful there, they both looked happy and content together. I had no doubt I was in a level of *shamayim*, being assured my aunt was okay and at peace. I woke up after the embrace.

I miss my dear aunt tremendously. I will miss her as a mother, as an aunt, and as my friend. The special and unique relationship I had with her, is one I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I know in my heart I will see her again, as it's promised in the Torah, when Moshiach comes there will be t'chiyat hameitim (resurrection of the dead) and we will be reunited with our loved ones! So, until then, as I pack my suitcase, to store under my bed - in her honor, as we all wait

for Moshiach to take us to Eretz Yisrael, I will savor all that I learned from her and all the love she gave me.

For Penina bat Frieda V'Chaim... May her neshama have an aliyah!

Reprinted from the May 21, 2023 website of The Jewish Press.

A Dance for a Chiddush



Rabbi Sholom Schwadron (left) and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach

It was late at night in the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood in Yerushalayim. Most of the early-rising residents had already retired for the night. One lone figure, however, was seen walking jubilantly through the quiet streets. Walking? No, it was more like dancing! It was the famed Maggid, R' Sholom Schwadron, who was making his merry way to the home of his revered brother-in-law, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

R' Sholom had just grasped the meaning of a sugyah in Gemara, and had realized that the explanation of his grandfather, the Maharsham, constituted an

awesome chiddush. He was so elated with his precious find, that he could not contain himself; he had to share his great happiness with his brother-in-law.

R' Sholom climbed – or rather floated – up the stairs of R' Shlomo Zalman's house. He knocked excitedly, not realizing that most of the lights were out in the apartment. R' Shlomo Zalman's son answered the door and softly told R' Sholom that his father had just gone to his room to lie down, but he was not sleeping yet.

R' Sholom said, "If he is not asleep yet, allow me to make him happy." As he approached the bedroom door, he called, "R' Shlomo! It's worth your while to get up!"

R' Shlomo Zalman came out to greet his brother-in-law. R' Sholom triumphantly offered the Maharsham's explanation as R' Shlomo Zalman listened intently, his eyes joyously drinking in this gem of Torah.

"Nu, that's some chiddush, isn't it!" R' Sholom said eagerly. "Isn't it gevaldig? Let's dance!"

Hand in hand, these two Torah giants circled the room – one, two, three, four times – in a joyous mitzvah dance. These two giants, who had amassed innumerable Torah gems, rejoiced over a precious morsel of Torah as if they had discovered a priceless treasure. (Voice of Truth)

Reprinted from the Shavuos 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Wormy Wheat Seeds

By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

There are many stories of farmers who, with tremendous sacrifice, kept the laws of shemitah, and received great blessing from Hashem as a result. One such story occurred in a place called Komemiyut, one of the first farms to keep shemitah in modern-day Israel.

About 70 years ago, in the year following the shemitah, the farmers of Komemiyut wanted to plant a new wheat crop, but no good seeds were available, because they would not use seeds from wheat that was grown during shemitah the previous year.

In the end, they managed to locate seeds from before shemitah, but they were wormy and in poor condition. With no other choice, they bought those seeds, trusting that Hashem would bless their efforts because they were so careful with the laws of shemitah. All the people from the neighboring farms were laughing at them but that did not break their bitahon.

A Major Drought Struck the Country

After the normal planting season ended and the rainy season was due to begin, the country suffered a major drought. Any seeds that were planted at the normal time rotted due to lack of rain.

But in Komemiyut, things were different. Since they didn't begin plowing or planting during the shemitah year, and they even waited until after the holiday of Succot (in order to avoid working the land on hol hamo'ed), their planting took place much later than usual. As soon as they finished planting their rotten, wormy seeds, the rains began to fall in abundance. Their crops grew beautifully, while the neighboring fields produced a very poor crop.

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian comments that Hashem uses this system not only by shemitah, but with each and every one of us. The more a person has true bitahon in Hashem, the more Hashem will send him berachah – exactly in proportion to the level that he is on.

As it says in Tehillim, "Hashem is your shadow." Just like a person's shadow will resemble his own form, the more a person has total reliance on Hashem, the more Hashem will help him. May we all strengthen our bitahon in Hashem and merit to receive the greatest levels of berachah and success in this world and in the Next World.

Reprinted from the Parashat Behar-Behukotai 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace and the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

The Man Who Took a Phone Call While Davening the Shemone Esrei

We had traveled out of town to a simcha and decided to extend the trip a little, transforming it into a family vacation. We enjoyed the simcha, and looked forward to some quality family time together.

I found a shul in which to daven during my stay. I did not know the people there, but I soon felt comfortable, as they were most welcoming. I thought that the people davening there were pretty much on the same wave-length as I am. They were careful not to talk during davening, and I noticed a schedule posted of numerous shiurim that took place in the shul.

Then, one day while davening Mincha, I saw it from the corner of my eye, and just couldn't believe what I was seeing. One of the men, who was in the midst of davening Shemone Esrei, took his phone out of his pocket, stepped away from his Shemone Esrei, and walked into the hallway to take the call.

My first reaction was, "Who on earth is more important to talk to than the Ribono Shel Olam? What chutzpah you have! You're so addicted to your phone that you can't control yourself, even during Shemone Esrei?!?"

I tried to concentrate, as after all, I was also in the midst of talking to the Ribono Shel Olam, and perhaps I should practice what I was preaching in my thoughts. But the audacity of that man caused me to boil inside. Until I put the brakes on my runaway thoughts, and decided to judge him favorably.

Turns out that my efforts hit the bullseye. The man was a member of Hatzolah, and in that small community, with a smaller team of Hatzolah members, he was needed to respond to a call – even during Shemone Esrei!

Reprinted from the Shavuos 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.

If the Shoe Fits

By Rabbi Yosef Weiss



Rabbi Yosef Weiss, zal, author of the Vision of Greatness books

Yisrael Dashef of Lakewood, New Jersey, needed to have his shoes repaired. He set out toward the shoemaker one morning, thinking about the fact that many of the yeshivah students and their families patronized this specific store.

There were other shoemakers around, yet this non-Jewish man took most of the business. What had he done to merit fixing the shoes of Lakewood's Jewish residents, including yeshivah students and Torah scholars, for so many years?

Yisrael reached the store and went up to the counter with his shoes. The shoemaker examined the shoes, assessed the necessary repairs, and told Yisrael

when to come back to pick them up. Yisrael listened carefully as the man spoke. His accent sounded familiar, but he just couldn't place it.

"Excuse me," Yisrael said apologetically, "But I couldn't help noticing your accent. It sounds very familiar to me. Would you mind if I ask where you are originally from?"

"Not at all," the man said kindly. "I come from Cyprus."

"Really?' Yisrael couldn't hide his surprise. "My mother was in Cyprus after the war, in the detention camps."

The shoemaker turned ashen. He pulled Yisrael over to the side of the store and whispered, "I remember when the Jews were there. They looked so pathetic behind the barbed wire, caged in like animals. You could see they were literally starving to death. I passed them each day and my conscience didn't let me ignore their plight."

The man paused, his eyes looking tormented as his mind conjured those terrible memories back to life. "I felt so sorry for them that I would bring bits of food with me and throw it to them when I walked past. They were so desperate that they grabbed every scrap of food I brought. I always wished I could have done more to help. I will never forget the way they looked. It has haunted me ever since."

Yisrael listened in amazement. Surely it was in the merit of helping the tortured Jews in his hometown that this righteous gentile merited to continue to care for the needs of the Jewish nation. (Visions of Greatness IV by Rabbi Yosef Weiss, zal.)

Reprinted from the Parashat Behar-Behukotai 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace and the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

The Return of the Count's Friend

By Hillel Baron

R' Nisan was the beloved Torah teacher of the children in Charki, Belarus.

As a devoted disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, he was used to fulfilling missions for his Rebbe. At one visit, the Baal Shem Tov handed him a sealed envelope and instructed:

"When Count Radziwill comes to Charki for his annual hunting trip, you are to open this envelope and follow the instructions it contains. He is usually accompanied by his lifelong friend Pierre Louis, who was born a Jew. On the following day, after you've done what the letter tells you, you are to tell Pierre Louis he is a Jew and that his pious mother saw to it that he had a *brit milah* and was named after her grandfather, Pesach Tzvi. It was his father, on the other hand, who wanted him to grow up not even knowing he was a Jew and sent him to the French boarding school where he met Count Radziwill. You are to tell him it is time to return to his people."

R' Nisan returned home, and in due course the count arrived for his hunting trip which was the talk of town. On the first day, he and his entourage went out, but when they returned a terrible calamity occurred.

The count had stopped for a few drinks following the long day on the hunt, and upon entering his lodgings, he stumbled and tripped over the threshold. The gun he was carrying went off, and the bullet pierced his shoulder. All the doctors in the area were called to tend to him but to no avail. His condition continued to worsen.



Art by Sefira Lightstone

The next day, as promised, R' Nisan opened the Baal Shem Tov's envelope. Much to his surprise it contained instructions for treating a bullet wound, after which he was to tell the count that the cure had come from the Baal Shem Tov and that he should be kind and fair to the Jews of the region.

He quickly formulated the medicine per the instructions and made his way to the count's lodgings, informing them that he could cure the visiting noble. Pierre Louis refused to let him enter, questioning his credentials. The physician, however, said that whatever he tried couldn't hurt as there was nothing else the doctors could do to save the count.

R' Nisan proceeded to administer the medication prescribed by the Baal Shem Tov, and by afternoon the count was showing significant signs of improvement. The count and his entire entourage were full of gratitude. R' Nisan informed them that the cure was from the holy Baal Shem Tov and that he instructed the count to be good to the Jews in his jurisdiction. He then gave Pierre Louis the Rebbe's message: You were born a Jew, your name is Pesach Tzvi and it is time to return to your Jewish heritage.

When the count had fully recovered, they left Charki.

A Knock at His Door

Several weeks later, R' Nisan heard a knock at his door. There, stood Pierre Louis, who introduced himself as Pesach Tzvi.

He told R' Nisan that he had not had any peace of mind since hearing the Baal Shem Tov's message. He shared this with his dear friend the count and they both agreed that he should return to the Jewish community in Charki. R' Nisan arranged for a personal tutor, and within a short time Pesach Tzvi had learned to pray as a Jew and could even study some Torah.

The count, for his part, gave a land grant to his friend and even gifted him the land upon which the homes of all the Jews of Charki were built, in fulfillment of the Baal Shem Tov's request. After this incident, the entire town of Charki became ardent supporters of the Baal Shem Tov. (*From Memoirs of the Previous Rebbe*, pg. 29-37)

Are we doing all we can to help our fellow Jews rediscover the sweetness of Torah?

Reprinted from the Shavuos 5783 edition of Chabad.Org Magazine.

The Jewish Singer's Visit to Sloan Kettering

Rav A. L. Scheinbaum related a story from Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz. Reb Yonasan Schwartz is a noted singer at Jewish weddings. His Grammen are words put to a song that is very moving, and it is done in a way that words alone cannot do. They leave an impact which lasts far beyond the wedding celebration. Reb Yonasan

also brings the power of song to hospital rooms when he goes to visit the sick. Together with his good friend, Reb Michoel Schnitzler, another well-known singer, they are often seen in the hospitals uplifting patients' spirits with their captivating melodies.



Reb Yonasan Schwartz and Reb Michoel Schnitzler

One day, the two of them arrived at Sloan-Kettering, a hospital noted for its treatment of patients suffering from dreaded diseases. They came to visit the patients, and in some way try to brighten their lives. As they were walking through the halls, they were stopped by someone who asked them to go to a certain room where an eighteen-year-old boy from Lakewood was a patient. He was very ill, R"L, and the doctors had told the family that there was nothing more they could do for him. They told the family that unfortunately, there was not much time left for this boy.

The two entered the room to see a young Yeshivah student lying in the bed, and they began their work. They sang songs and Grammen, and were even able to engage the patient, as he himself began to sing with them. After a short while, it was time to go.

Clearly, they had elevated the patient's spirits. As they were walking out, Reb Yonasan, not thinking of the ramification of his words, said, "Im Yirtze Hashem, we will entertain him at his wedding also!"

As soon as the words left his mouth, he realized the absurdity of his statement. The boy was no fool, and he commented, "Yes, Im Yirtze Hashem, in my next Gilgul." Reb Yonasan felt terrible, but what could he do? He had spoken without thinking.

Two and a half years passed, and Reb Yonasan received an invitation to a wedding in Lakewood that would be taking place in four weeks. He looked at the names of the Choson and Kallah and had no idea who they were. It must be a mistake, he thought, because he didn't know who these people were. Yet, he was curious, and he decided that he would show up to see if he knew any of the Baalei Simchah, and if not, he would leave.

No Idea as to Why He Had Been Invited

On the wedding night, he entered the Chasunah hall to see the Choson sitting on a chair in the middle of a circle of friends and relatives who were dancing around him. It was a very Yeshivish crowd, and Reb Yonasan, dressed in Chasidish garb, felt totally out of place. He still had no idea why he was there. The invitation had clearly been a mistake.

Suddenly, the Choson noticed him. He arose from his seat and motioned for Reb Yonasan to join him. As Reb Yonasan moved closer into the circle, the Choson grabbed him in an embrace. He began to dance with a level of passion and fervor that Reb Yonasan had not seen in a long time. Yet, Reb Yonasan still had no idea who the Choson was, nor the reason he had been invited to the wedding.

Suddenly, the Choson looked at him and asked, "Do you not know who I am? I am the young man from Sloan-Kettering about whom you said, 'Im Yirtze Hashem, we will entertain him at his wedding!' I never forgot what you said and the songs you sang. You completely changed my frame of mind, and gave me the hope and strength to fight the disease. So far, Baruch Hashem, I am winning! Now you understand why I invited you to my wedding. You are the biggest Mechutan!"

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