

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM 5783

Volume 14, Issue 33 – 8 Iyar 5783/April 29, 2023

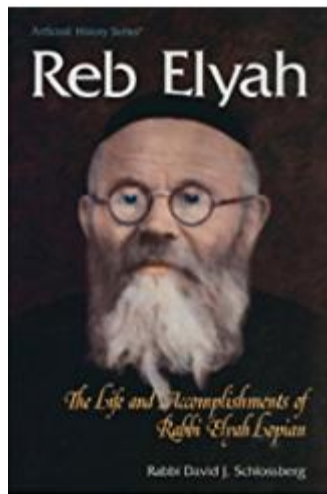
Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

For a free subscription, please forward your request to keren18@juno.com

Past emails can be found on the website – ShabbosStories.com

The Gift of Shabbos

By Rabbi Mordechai Levin

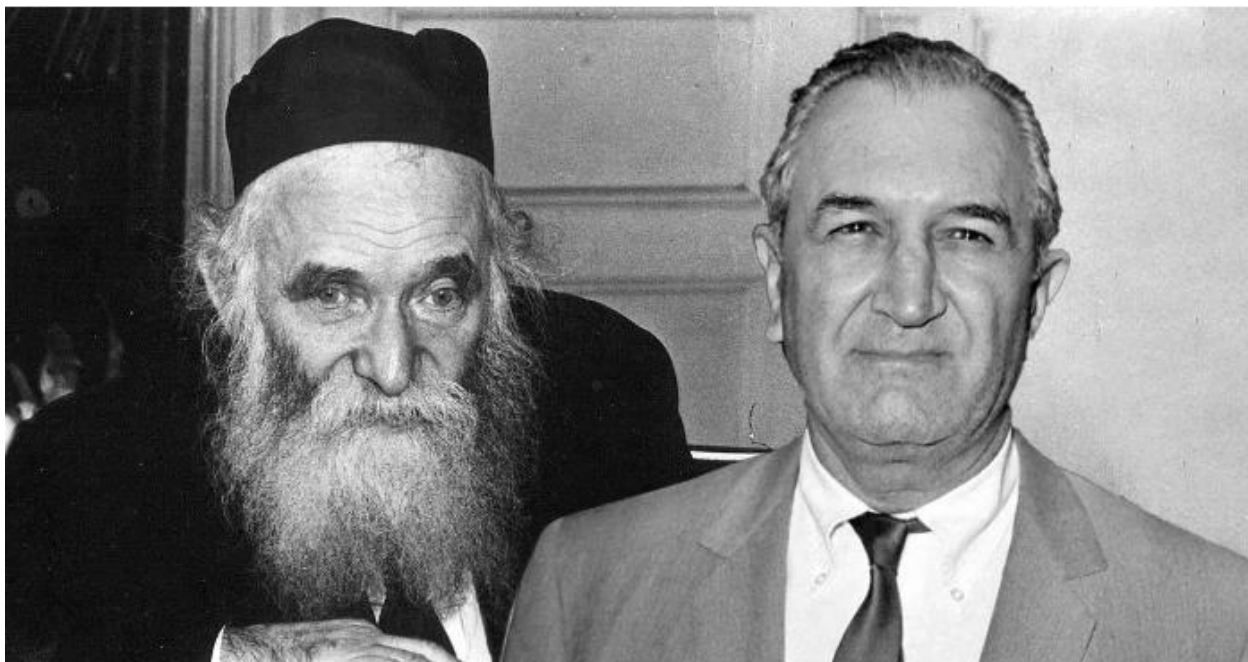


Rav Elyah Lopian, ZT”L, (1872-1970), a great Rosh Yeshiva and Mashgiach, was himself a disciple of the renowned Yeshiva of Kelm in Europe. As Rosh Yeshiva in Kfar Chassidim in Israel, Rav Elyah considered Shabbos a time for growth in spirituality rather than simply a day to rest. He would complain about the fact that some students were often absent from the Yeshiva on Friday, claiming that they needed more time to prepare for Shabbos.

In Kelm, Rav Elyah explained, this problem was alleviated by giving the students time to tend to their needs on Thursday afternoons. Boys took haircuts, did their laundry, wrote letters, and tended to all their other Shabbos preparations a day in advance.

The logic in doing so was that on Thursdays the Yetzer Hara to waste time is not as strong as it is on Friday. In Kelm, the learning schedule on Friday was extended until shortly before Shabbos, leaving just enough time for the students to bathe and change their clothes. (Rav Elyah, ArtScroll) *Reprinted from the Parshas Tazria-Metzorah 5783 email of Torah Sweets.*

The Rabbi and the Mafia Godfather



It was during World War II when twenty-four rabbis were being held in Italy and faced being returned to Nazi-occupied Europe and certain death.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler, prominent Jewish leader and founder and Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of Beth Medrash Govoha Rabbinical College in Lakewood, New Jersey, turned to the well-known activist and subsequent author of 'Ethics From Sinai', Mr. Irving Bunim, and asked him who could intercede on behalf of these 24 rabbis. Having nowhere else to turn for help, Irving Bunim suggested the Italian Mafia. Rabbi Kotler urged Mr. Bunim to contact them immediately.

Meeting the Mafia Godfather

After contacting them, he asked Rav Aharon, "Who are we sending to the meeting?"

Rav Aharon replied, "You and I are going."

Off they went to meet the godfather of the Mafia, Joe Bonanno.

Rav Aharon did not speak English. Rav Aharon in Yiddish, asked this Mafia Chief to do something on behalf of these imprisoned Yeshiva bochrim and his tears moved the listener. .

The Mafia chief asked Mr. Bunim, “Who is the elderly man sitting next to you?”

The Godfather of the Jewish People

He told him, “His name is Rabbi Aharon Kotler. He is the godfather of the Jewish people.”

“Really?” asked the Mafia chief.

“Yes!” replied Mr. Bunim emphatically.

“Tell him I want a blessing.”

So, Mr. Irving Bunim turned to Rav Aharon and in Yiddish told him, “Ehr vill a brocha fun dem rov. (He wants a blessing from the rabbi).” “Zog em ehr zol leiben lang un shtarben in bet.”

Irving Bunim turned back to the mafia chief Joe Bonnano and told him, “The rabbi blesses you with long life and you should die in bed.” [Mob bosses were often assassinated on the street and never reached old age.]

Upon hearing this, the Mafia chief laughed and replied, “I like that,” and promised within 2 weeks to arrange the freedom of the 24 rabbis stuck in Italy, which he did indeed accomplish.

There is a Sequel to this Story.

Twenty-something years later, in 1968, a shiny black stretch limo pulls up in front of the Lakewood Yeshiva. Two fancy-dressed men get out and walk up to the office. They say are looking for Rabbi Kotler.

Out comes a man who introduces himself.

“No, not you,” say the two Italian guys. “We are looking for an older man.”

“That was my father,” says the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Shneur Kotler, “but he passed away a number of years ago.”

The Italian men explain that they are the Bonanno brothers, and that their father always “attributed his long life to your saintly father’s blessing. Now that he has just retired, we are taking over the business and we came here for the same blessing.”

“I’m sorry,” says Rav Shneur, “my father could do that, but I am not on that high level.”

Disappointed, the new Mafia chiefs bid farewell to Rav Shneur and left.

In his autobiography, Mr. Bonanno said that in 1968, at the age of 63, he voluntarily retired to Tucson. He offered this explanation: other bosses and members of his own family had become greedy and no longer respected the Mafia's codes of behavior.

In his years in power, Mr. Bonanno shunned the flamboyant styles favored by many contemporary mob bosses, including Charles (Lucky) Luciano, Thomas (Three Finger Brown) Lucchese and Frank Costello, who delighted in wearing elegant clothes and being the hosts of lavish parties in nightclubs in Manhattan and Miami Beach.

Mr. Bonanno was rarely seen carousing in public places; he preferred meeting with his mob cronies at his home in New York or in rural retreats, where he helped prepare pasta and steaks for his guests and associates.

For saving 24 rabbis from the Nazis, and with Rav Aharon Kotler's blessing, Joe Bonanno - the Mafia godfather - lived to 97 years old and died in bed in May of 2002.

Reprinted from the Tazria-Mesora 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

An Unconventional Kiddush Hashem

By Rabbi Reuven Semah

Knowing how detrimental unkosher food is, we can appreciate the following amazing story told by Rabbi Yitzchak Hisiger.

When Mrs. Porter heard a knock at the door of her Baltimore home one evening at dinnertime, she had no idea that she would be handed an opportunity for a monumental kiddush Hashem.

One her doorstep stood Mrs. Brown, an African-American woman who had moved into the house next door along with the rest of her family several months earlier. The Porters had been apprehensive about the new family when they first met them, but they did their best to welcome the Browns to the neighborhood and to make them feel comfortable. Apparently, Mrs. Brown felt comfortable enough to approach her neighbor and ask for an urgent favor, with a note of desperation in her voice.

Hosting the Football Coach

"I am hosting a very important person for dinner tonight," she confided in Mrs. Porter. "Our guest is the football coach for Virginia Tech. My son, Roger, is going to be starting college soon and is trying out for the football team, and he invited the coach for dinner. I prepared a special meal of crab for our guest, but my oven

broke down before I could finish it. I need to put some cheese on the crab and then use a broiler for about ten minutes, and then it will be ready. May I please use your oven? It's very important to me," she added.

Mrs. Porter looked at her non-Jewish neighbor, who couldn't possibly have understood the complex halachic issues that were involved in her request. It took her a little more than a split second to understand the woman's desperation and to realize what her answer had to be. "Sure," she said brightly. "Bring it right over!" She would need to kosher her oven after this treif cooking session, but Mrs. Porter knew that it was worth the hassle in order to maintain a good relationship with her neighbor.

Enormous Dividends and the Jewish Community

Her quick thinking and the resultant kiddush Hashem yielded enormous dividends for the Porters and their community. Their son, Roger Brown Jr. became a star football player and went on to play in the NFL for the Giants and Patriots. His father was a prominent judge and quickly developed sympathies for the Jewish community surrounding him. He was happy to serve as a Shabbos goy for the Porters and others. He also used his influence with the city's sanitation dept. to help Mr. Porter in a dispute.

On the fateful day many years ago, Mrs. Porter succeeded in creating a very unique kiddush Hashem with an act that would have been extremely difficult for most of us. However, that is often what is necessary in order for us to live al kiddush Hashem.

Reprinted from the Tazria-Mesora 5783 email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

The Dreaded Yossel Drudick

The Koznitzer Maggid, zl, had a chassid who was a well-respected Rav in Cracow. He was a halachic decisor of note, loved and admired by all of Cracow. Everything seemed to be going well, except for one dark cloud in his life which plagued him. He and his wife had yet to be blessed with a child.

The Rav made numerous trips to petition the Maggid's blessing for a child. Sadly, the Maggid averted his request. Finally, the Rav broke down and asked, "Why can the Rav not bless me? Am I different from all the others who have been blessed, and who are today embracing their child?"

When the Rebbe heard this, he looked deeply into his chassid's eyes and said, "My dear friend, I would do anything in my power to help you. Alas, all of the gates

in Heaven are sealed to your blessing. I have tried and tried, but I have been unsuccessful in opening them.”

When the Rav heard this, he was visibly shaken. “Does this mean that there is no hope for me to have a child?” he asked dejectedly.

“No, there is one person whose access to Heavenly favor is great. His name is Yosef Drudick. Go to him and petition his blessing.”

The Most Feared Person in the Community

When the Rav heard the name Yossele Drukick, he was bowled over. Who did not know the elusive Yossele? Rather, nobody knew him because he refused to interact with people. He was the most feared person in the community. He was introverted and wanted nothing to do with anyone. Children ran from him in terror. How could such a person be his only option for a blessing?

But when the Koznitzer spoke, it was not to be questioned. He would make it to Yossele’s broken-down shack on the outskirts of town and petition his blessing. No one had ever seen the inside of the shack that Yossele shared with his wife and children. It was where Yossele remained enclosed in his own world, isolated from everyone.

During the week, however, he would go out and travel from village to village repairing pots and pans. The Rav figured that he would just show up at Yossele’s door Erev Shabbos and say that he had nowhere to spend Shabbos. Could he be their guest?

Met by a Woman who Opened the Door

The following Friday he implemented his plan, arriving at Yossele’s house just before Shabbos. He knocked on the door and was met by a woman who asked what he wanted. He related his tale of woe and pleaded with her to allow him to stay for Shabbos.

Her response was an emphatic, “No.” “My husband does not allow people into the house.” After tearful begging, she said, “You can stay in the back with the horses, but the house is strictly off limits.”

He went to the back and made himself comfortable with the two old horses that would pull Yossele’s wagon. This was not his idea of Shabbos, but he must listen to his Rebbe. Just before sunset, as he was about to usher in Shabbos Kodesh, he heard a loud knock at the door.

He opened it to come face to face with the dread Yossele. “What are you doing here?” he asked. The Rav began to stammer out his story. “You can remain here, but under no circumstances may you come to the house,” Yossele warned.

That Shabbos was one to remember. The Rav had some challah that he brought with him. It was to be his meals, which he ate in solitude together with the

horses. On Friday night, was fitful, as sleep was hard to come by between the odor of the horses and the cold that seeped through the old broken walls.

Shabbos morning was no better. Indeed, he was counting the minutes until he could escape from this misery. All day, he was disconcerted by the thoughts coursing through his mind. Why was he here? To get a brachah from a man whom he had (like so many others) shunned and reviled. He had erected a wall between himself and the Yosseles of this world –and now he needed him. It was the Yossele whom he had avoided that held the keys to his becoming a father.

Neither Accepted nor Welcomed

He introspected on this: “I have erected a wall between me and ‘them’. They have neither been accepted nor welcomed, because they were different.”

The Rav said to himself, “I am really not deserving or worthy of Yossele’s blessing. I have shunned him, and now I ask for his favor? This is hypocrisy!” When he realized his shortcomings vis-à-vis those who did not fit in his “circle,” he broke down in bitter weeping.

It was at that moment that he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to behold a man with a silver-white beard that seemed to glow. His eyes shone brightly and (he felt) bore through him to the core of his soul. The image was metaphysical. “Come into my home,” the man smiled. “Let us wash for shalosh seudos.”

Table Covered with a Clean, White Tablecloth

He walked into the house as if in a trance. There was a table covered with a clean, white tablecloth. There was challah, wine and gefilte fish, but above all, it was a welcoming, although other-worldly, scene.

The Rav just sat there and listened to the beautiful melodies emanating from Yossele’s mouth. Suddenly, Yossele stopped singing and moaned, “Oy, Srujtche Koznitzer ken mir shoin oichet, “Oy, the Koznitzer Maggid also knows about me.” (Apparently, Yossele was one of the lamed vav, thirty-six, holy tzaddikim, who grace each generation. They seek neither recognition nor acclaim. They devote their lives to unblemished devotion to Hashem.)

Yossele asked the Rav, “How can I help you?”

“I request a brachah for a child.”

“You will be blessed with a child” was Yossele’s immediate response. “There is one condition. You must name him Yossele.”

The lesson is quite clear: If we bond with others, we will not speak negatively. Hashem will then listen to our prayers.

Reprinted from the Tazria-Metzora 5783 email of Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum’s Peninim on the Torah.

Appreciating Hashem Yisbarach!

By Yisroel Besser

The Avnei Nezer, the Rebbe of Sochatchov, was traveling to a bris to serve as sandek. The chassidim were surprised, because the Rebbe's every moment was sacred, and he wouldn't generally travel elsewhere for a bris.

They checked who the baalei simchah were, and were surprised to learn that the new parents were relatively simple, quiet people.

One of the older chassidim asked the Rebbe directly why he was joining this particular simchah, and the Avnei Nezer explained his reasoning.

The new father, a tailor from a nearby village, had come to ask the Rebbe to participate a few days earlier, sharing his story. "Rebbe," he said, "my wife and I have been married for fifteen years without children, but now the Ribbono Shel Olam helped us and my wife gave birth to our bechor. Would the Rebbe come serve as sandek at the bris?"

"Do you hear?" the Avnei Nezer asked. "Today, everyone who gets helped tells you where they got helped — this one in Ger, the other in Radzimin and the third in Alexander...but this Yid made a kiddush Hashem, telling me that the One Who helped him was Hashem Yisbarach! I haven't heard that in a while, and out of appreciation, I am joining his simchah."

Reprinted from the Parshas Metzora 5783 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – The Haggadah of the Gerrer Dynasty.)

The Pecking Bird On the Windows

By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

There is a true story of a man who lives in Israel who recently had a very strange problem. One day, out of nowhere, a bird began to peck continuously on the windows of his house. Nothing he did succeeded in getting rid of the bird. He called all kinds of experts but no matter what they did, the bird kept coming

back. After weeks of this with no solution in sight, he went to the Kotel to pray and to beg Hashem to show him what to do to solve the problem. He understood that this was some sort of message from Hashem but he couldn't figure out what it was.

While he was praying and saying Tehillim, he suddenly remembered something. His family had a custom to learn two halachot of lashon hara every day, but they had recently had a wedding in the family, and with all the preparations and commotion, they had neglected to learn the daily halachot. Even after the wedding had passed, they never restarted their learning program.

The man remembered a very interesting Targum Yonatan on this parashah and was convinced that this was the problem. When the Torah describes the purification process of the mesora (who was guilty of speaking lashon hara), it says that he brings two bird offerings to the Kohen. One of the birds is slaughtered and the other is set free. On this pasuk, the Targum Yonatan comments that if the mesora sins again by speaking lashon hara, the bird that was set free will come to this man's house as a reminder to him that he should do teshubah.

The man rushed home, convinced that this was the answer, and the family immediately resumed their previous custom to learn two halachot of lashon hara every day. The first day, the bird came to the window, but it just sat there and watched, without pecking at the window. After that, it left and never came back.

Reprinted from the Parshat Tazria-Mesora 5783 edition of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

Story #1323

To Russia with Love

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com

I [**Eliezer Danziger**] am from Canada originally, and never had any connection to Russia growing up. When I look back at what brought me here, it's almost amusing. I was in *yeshiva* in Israel, and my roommate was planning on spending his summer volunteering at a camp in Russia.

At first, I had no interest in going - I already had my plans in place to spend my summer in California. But after much cajoling on my roommate's end, I gave in and agreed to join him.

It was 1998. We landed in Crimea - and neither of us spoke even a word of Russian. Just two 18-year-old boys, planning to run a camp for kids with whom we couldn't even communicate.

A Young Boy's Request for a Bris Mila

We had a bit of a rocky start, but eventually we found our groove. I remember a week into camp, a young boy came to me and asked for a *bris mila* (circumcision ceremony). Naturally, I was taken aback.

"Go... play some basketball," I said. "Your friends are all on the court."

A couple of days later, he came back with the same request. Again, I panicked. "There's candy, over there in the dining room!" I told him. "Go get some before it's all gone!"

But when he came back a third time, I realized this was something I couldn't ignore. So, later that night, I brought up the issue at a staff meeting. The head counselor wasn't surprised.

"We have a *mohel* (a trained circumciser) come every year," he said. "Whoever wants a *bris mila* gets one on the last day of camp."

I was shocked. I couldn't imagine what that would look like. Groups of young boys, most of whom have never even heard of *matzah* or *menorahs*, all getting circumcised? I couldn't imagine someone developing such a strong connection to something they barely understood. But, lo and behold, on one of the last days of camp came, the *Mohel* arrived and performed a *bris mila* on many of the boys right there in camp.

Their Only Connection to Torah Judaism

That summer was my first real experience with *shlichus* (Chabad missions). I watched young men completely abandon the lives they came from for a much more spiritual one. I felt attached to these kids. I felt responsible for them. I called them up every week before Shabbos to ask about their journeys. I felt I was their only connection to Torah Judaism, and I couldn't imagine walking away.

I tried to return to my life in Canada, but I found that those boys were always on my mind. It was then that I made the decision to return the following year. But, somehow, that still didn't feel like enough. I was watching them turn their backs on 70 years of communism; on their parents' and their grandparents' lives. I watched them learn about Torah and *Tanach* (the 24 books of Jewish scripture) with such joy - it was inspirational.

These kids were gaining so much, after only getting a little jumpstart from camp. I wondered what things would be like if we made them a camp similar to the caliber of Jewish camps in the States. It was this thought that inspired me to start Camp Yeka.

“Yeka” was modeled to enrich the lives of Jewish children, both spiritually as well as physically. We planned fun adventures, daytime trips, and overnights, as well as Torah lessons and prayer. I gathered the best staff I could and poured my soul into this project.

It was never easy, but I know it was worth it. Yeka changed the lives of these children. Every summer was spent planning new ways to inspire and enlighten these young minds.

I truly felt these children were my calling - however, when I got married, my wife didn't feel the same. She preferred to settle down somewhere a little more stable, with a Jewish community and plenty of kosher food.



Rabbi Chaim Danzinger and his dedicated wife, Kaila

My wife and I spent a few years in California, had a baby, and settled into our traditional lives. But I wasn't really happy. I knew there was more for me out there.

One day, I got a call that there was no Rabbi in Rostov and the Jewish community was looking for someone desperately. My wife and I discussed it and she agreed to go visit and see what it was like.

We spent Shabbos there and *davened* (prayed) in the communities 150-year-old *shul*. The *shul* was built by Cantonist soldiers who felt rejected by the Jewish community after returning from 25 years in military service that started when they were young boys.

The community found them ignorant and disconnected, due to their large gap in Torah background and knowledge. But these men felt passionately about serving Hashem and decided to build a *shul* of their own. At one time Rostov had 12 synagogues but sadly they were all confiscated or destroyed. Interestingly, the Cantonist Shul is now the last one standing.

The few days we spent visiting Rostov were inspiring. We encountered countless individuals desperate for connection to Judaism. They felt so blessed to have us join them and begged us to stay long-term. When my wife and I eventually left for Israel (where we were continuing to after Russia) we both knew we had to go back.

“This is an incredible opportunity to really do something great,” she said. “We need to go back to Russia. It is our calling.”

That week, we sold our belongings in Pasadena, drove across the country to JFK, and boarded a plane to Russia. It’s been 13 years since then - and we’ve never looked back.

~~~~~

*Source:* Excerpted and edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from “*IllumiNations*” #11 [a weekly publication of DollarDaily.org, dedicated to publicizing the breath-taking work and sacrifices of Chabad emissaries around the world.

*Connection:* The fifth verse of the first half of this week’s Torah reading, *Tazria*, presents the Torah commandment for circumcision (in contrast to G-d’s personal instruction to Abraham in the Torah section of *Lech Lecha*, 500 years earlier).

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tazria-Metzora 5783 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*