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Good Answer

By Esther Stern



Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky

R' Zalman Estolin spent many years as a slave laborer in the frozen desolation of Siberia, completely cut off from any Jewish community. He certainly never had the opportunity to pray with a minyan - something we take for granted. He never even had a chance to answer Amen to a fellow Jew's berachah.

When R' Estolin finally managed to leave the Soviet Union, he made aliyah to Eress Yisrael. It was late at night when R' Estolin arrived in Eress Yisrael. He headed straight to the home of his esteemed brother-in-law, R' Yaakov Galinsky, in Bnei Brak. How thrilled he was to reunite with his family! They, too, were delighted to see him, and did everything they could to assure his comfort.

In the morning, R' Galinsky showed his brother-in-law the way to a large shul close to his home. Though R' Estolin needed the assistance of crutches to walk, his face was aglow as he slowly advanced down the block. After all those years, he would finally be able to pray with a minyan - and in a shul, no less!

The Galinskys assumed that their esteemed guest would have no trouble finding the way home on his own. An hour passed, and then another quarter of an hour, and then even more. There was still no sign of R' Estolin. They began to worry.

R' Galinsky decided to investigate. He went all the way to shul without coming across any sign of his brother-in-law. Once inside, he looked upstairs and downstairs, checking every room. Finally, he found R' Estolin, obviously very weary, but still standing up - supported by his crutches, his face radiating joy.

“What happened? Why are you still here in shul?” R' Galinsky asked his brother-in-law with concern. “You must have finished Shaharit long ago; come home and eat breakfast. It's not Yom Kippur today!”

“I know, but I just can't leave,” answered his brother-in-law. “I finished praying some time ago, but then another minyan started, and then another. Each one offers me the chance to say Amen and Yehei Shemei Rabba and Kedushah again and again.

“Do you know how many years I've been waiting for this precious opportunity? Now that Hashem has given it to me, I can't bear to give it up just to go home and eat breakfast!” (Excerpted from the Feldheim book – “Just One Word”)

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5786 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Daniel's Mission

The following story is one that I heard. Unfortunately, I am unable to corroborate its veracity. So why write it? I do so because I am certain that this story and so many more like it have happened numerous times. We are a unique people, with a unique history and a singular destiny. We have a neshamah that is a chelek Eloki Mi'Maal, that has a deep connection with Hashem in the Heavenly sphere. Therefore, nothing concerning our people and their return “home” is beyond belief.

A young Israeli named Daniel grew up in a completely secular home in Tel Aviv. His parents had named him after his grandfather, but, to him, it was just a name – no deeper meaning attached. He lived as most of his peers did, with little connection to Torah or tradition.

After finishing his army service, Daniel traveled to South America, searching for adventure and meaning. One evening, in a small hostel in Peru, he struck up a

conversation with another Israeli backpacker who had recently become more observant.

The young man asked him, “What’s your name?”

“Daniel,” he replied casually.

His new friend smiled, “Do you know what Daniel means? Dan – Kel. It means, ‘Hashem is my Judge.’ In the Book of Daniel, your namesake was a prophet who stood proudly as a Jew in the court of Babylon. He refused to eat forbidden food, even when it was dangerous to refrain from eating. He risked his life in the lions’ den, rather than bow to idols. Your name carries the strength of Jewish faithfulness through exile.”

Daniel was taken aback. No one had ever told him that before. He had worn his name his whole life, but he had never thought about what it meant. That night, lying in his bunk, he repeated it to himself: Daniel... Hashem is my Judge. For the first time, he felt that maybe his life had a direction – that he was part of a story bigger than himself. That small spark became the beginning of his journey back to Torah. Years later, Daniel would say: “It all started when someone reminded me of my shem. I realized I wasn’t just another Israeli kid wandering the world. I was Daniel, with a mission that my name carried for me since birth.”

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5786 email of Peninim on the Torah as prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum.

Not Against, Only For

At told by Rebbetzin Channah Hecht



Rebbetzin Channah Hecht

I was born and raised in Australia, where my father — Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, a Chabad chasid — served as the chief rabbi.

When in 1965 I graduated Mount Scopus High School — a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school in Melbourne — my father felt that my education in Yiddishkeit needed a boost and that I should spend a few years in a seminary.

He consulted the Rebbe, proposing a list of possible options for me from which the Rebbe selected the Jewish Teachers' Training College in Gateshead, England, where my older sister Penina had been sent the year before. This was a controversial choice for several reasons: First, at that time, even boys were not sent overseas to yeshivahs, and to send a young girl half-way across the world was unheard of. That my father would ship off both his daughters must have seemed to people like a crazy thing to do.

Second, my mother missed Penina very much, and to have both daughters so far from home would be very difficult for her. But she realized that they had to treat us equally, so if Penina got to go abroad, I was entitled to the same. And third, while Gateshead had an excellent reputation academically, it was not a chasidic school, and some of the faculty seemed to hold a somewhat negative view of Lubavitch.

However, several Lubavitcher girls were enrolled there, and the school was respectful of their customs. On my way to Gateshead, I stopped off for a few months in Kfar Chabad, Israel, where a wonderful lady named Mrs. Yehudis Lison took me in, housed me, fed me and learned chasidic teachings with me every day.

I came to love her and also the community in Kfar Chabad, and so I wrote to the Rebbe about it, telling him what a beautiful and spiritual place Kfar Chabad was, asking if perhaps I should stay there. He replied that my description of the village brought him much nachat ruach — pleasure, but he did not answer me directly about staying there. He only wrote, “A person should learn where their heart desires.”



Rabbi Chaim Gutnick and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l

I took that to mean that I could stay in Kfar Chabad, but my father felt that since I had applied and been accepted to Gateshead, I needed to follow through. So off I went to Gateshead — which was then considered the best girls' seminary in the world — and I got an excellent education there. While at Gateshead, I did not write much to the Rebbe, but one of the teachers, Mrs. Chana Kievman, did write, and the Rebbe responded to her that he frequently hears from Penina, but very little from Channah.

He added, "Please take good care of her." It just goes to show how the Rebbe cared about everybody. I was just a young girl, one among many children of his chasidim, yet he inquired about me and told Mrs. Kievman to take care of me. That, I have to say, is astounding. I only found out about this years later when my daughter married Mrs. Kievman's son.

After completing the three-year course of study at Gateshead, I traveled to New York, where I had my first audience with the Rebbe. During that meeting, the Rebbe quizzed me about my education and how I was treated at the school. He asked me: "What is the attitude of the administration of Gateshead toward Lubavitch?" The question took me aback. I had a great deal of gratitude to the school for the wonderful education I received there, so I didn't want to say negative things about it and the administration's criticism of Lubavitch. After all, they came from the Lithuanian tradition of mitnagdim, who had been opponents of chasidim in the 18th century. And, although critical at times, they were also respectful — for example, they allowed us Lubavitch girls to get together and read chasidic teachings on days that were special to Lubavitch.

So, choosing my words carefully — because I did not want to make the Rebbe feel bad — I answered: "If we didn't do anything against the administration of Gateshead, everything was good."

"Against?!" the Rebbe exclaimed. "The word mitnaged means against. Lubavitch is only for."

When the audience was over and I was walking out, he repeated: "Remember — mitnaged means against. Lubavitch is only for."

We are only for. Who are we against? Nobody. Instead of standing in opposition, Lubavitch is for spreading Torah and its mitzvot and everything that is good in the world.

While in New York, I began dating for marriage, and I had a firm idea of what I wanted in a husband — he had to be a talmid chacham, a Torah scholar. I had picked up this attitude at Gateshead where Talmudic learning was considered the be all and end all, and where I often heard disparaging remarks that Lubavitchers are not sufficiently dedicated to Torah study because they are too busy with their

outreach campaigns. The implication was that if you marry a Lubavitcher, you're a lost cause.

Lubavitch, of course, had a different point of view. The Rebbe often described Torah learning as the most important thing, and urged his followers to study Torah night and day. But he also felt very strongly that nowadays we don't have the luxury of sitting in a yeshivah indefinitely while people are out there drowning — we have to get up and do something about it. In addition to studying Torah, we have to devote ourselves to saving Jewish souls.

However, coming out of Gateshead, my top priority was marrying a talmid chacham, and when I was introduced to my future husband, Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht, I wrote to the Rebbe that I had my doubts about him because, in my opinion, he hadn't studied in yeshivah long enough. He was clearly a brilliant man, but I wasn't certain that he was as big a Torah scholar as I wanted my future husband to be.



Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht

The Rebbe replied: "Work for Pegisha and you will come to learn the truth." Pegisha — which means "Encounter" — is a Chabad program where Jewish college students are invited for a weekend in Crown Heights to be exposed to the beauty of Torah observance and to chasidic teachings. I worked very hard as a volunteer for Pegisha, and I did learn the truth. I learned the importance of outreach how crucial it was to save Jewish souls. And, perhaps in the merit of the effort I devoted to this task, I also recognized that my future husband was, in truth, a big talmid chacham.

When we got engaged, the Rebbe gave us his blessing on the condition that my husband would initially learn Torah in a kollel for married men. And so, after our wedding, we went to Israel for three years while my husband studied in a kollel in Kfar Chabad and Nachlat Har Chabad. The Rebbe cared that I wanted a Torah scholar, and he made sure that I was completely satisfied.

Rebbetzin Channah Hecht and her husband, Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht, are the head Chabad emissaries in Queens, New York, where they have served the Sephardic community for the past fifty years. They are the proud parents of fourteen children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was interviewed in December 2025.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shemot 5786 edition of Here's my Story [with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l], a project of The JEM Foundation.

“The Main Thing is That I Arrived”

R’ Chaim Kanievsky zt”l once shared a remarkable story about a Jewish merchant who owned a factory which produced closets and coffins. Despite the somber nature of his work, he was a devout Yid who davened three times a day. Yet he had one persistent flaw: he was always late for davening.

The Rav of his shul, who noticed this pattern, gently rebuked him. “If you are so careful to come every day, why not also be careful to come on time?”

The merchant shrugged off the rebuke. “What does it matter?” he replied. “*The main thing is that I arrive and manage to catch up the parts that I missed.*”

The Rav shook his head, not knowing how to get through to the man.

But one morning, the merchant appeared in shul very early, his face pale and his demeanor humbled. He approached the Rav and confessed, “Rabbi, I have received my punishment, measure for measure. My factory burned down completely, and I know it is because of my lateness to davening.”

The Rav was Surprised

The Rav was taken aback. “How can you know such a thing?” he asked.

The merchant explained: “When the fire broke out, it happened so suddenly that I could hardly believe what I was seeing. One moment everything was quiet, and the next, flames were crawling up the walls like wild animals.”

He described how he ran into the workshop, shouting for help, grabbing whatever he could - buckets, cloths, even a small fire extinguisher mounted near the door. He tried to smother the flames, beating them back with frantic desperation. Workers rushed in with pails of water, splashing and throwing water as fast as they could. "But the fire was faster than we were," he said. "Every second it grew stronger. It leapt from board to board, from beam to beam. It was as if the fire had a mind of its own."

Dialing the Fire Department with Shaking Hands

Realizing they were losing control, he grabbed the phone with shaking hands and dialed the fire department. "I told them it was urgent. I told them the building was going up in flames. They said they were on their way."

He paused, his voice tightening. "And then ... we waited." With teary emotion, he described those minutes - minutes that felt like hours. The flames roared louder. The roof began to crack. Smoke billowed into the sky like a dark pillar. Neighbors came running with hoses, but the water pressure was weak. "We were fighting with everything we had," he said. "But the fire didn't care. It kept climbing, kept spreading. And all the while, I kept looking down the road, waiting for the fire truck."

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the fire engine appeared, sirens blaring, lights flashing. But by then, the building was already collapsing inward. Flames shot out of the windows like arrows. The firefighters jumped out, unrolled their hoses, and began spraying powerful streams of water, but it was too late.

"There was nothing left to save," the merchant said quietly. He swallowed hard, remembering the moment he confronted the firefighters. "I yelled at them them, 'Why did you take so long? Why didn't you come sooner? You could have saved the building! I called a long time ago!'"

And then came the words that pierced him like a knife: "What does it matter? *The main thing is that we arrived.*"

"I Felt the World Stop."

The merchant closed his eyes as he repeated the sentence. "In that moment," he said, "I felt the world stop. Those were my exact words to you, Rabbi. The very words I used to excuse my lateness to davening. And now I heard them thrown back at me - at the worst moment of my life." He shook his head slowly. "That's when I understood. Hashem was speaking to me through the fire. Through the ashes of my factory. I finally understood what it means to be late."

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5786 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin.

Don't Forget Your Name!

In the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, the Nazis did everything they could to strip Jewish prisoners of their humanity. They took their possessions, their hair, and even their names. People were referred to only by the numbers tattooed on their arms or sewn onto their uniforms.

One morning, during the brutal “Appell” (the hours-long roll call when prisoners had to stand still in the freezing cold), the SS monster began shouting out numbers. “10425!” “55982!”

Each time a number was called, the prisoner had to snap to attention and shout “Present!” A man noticed a familiar looking boy standing near him. The boy was visibly agitated, far more than anyone else standing there.

“You Have a Name...You Are a Prince!”

As the officer approached their row, the man whispered to the boy: “Remember ... you are not a number. You have a name. Your name is Yisrael. You are a prince!”

The boy looked at him startled, but the man pressed on. “In Parshas Shemos, the Torah lists the names of the Jewish people. Even though they were slaves, Hashem counted them by their names because names represent the soul. They can take your bread, they can take your strength, but they cannot take your name - unless you let them.”

The officer reached the boy and screamed his number. The boy, now full of confidence, stood tall and shouted “Present” - with a strength he hadn’t felt in months.

Years later, now a grown man with a family, the fellow recounted: “That morning I had decided to give up. I felt like a piece of wood, just a number in a ledger. But when I was reminded about Parshas Shemos, I felt my soul return to me. I realized that if Hashem remembered my name in the suffering in Egypt, He remembers my name here, too.

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5786 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin.

The Power of the Mezuzah



Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz shared a story on Tiv HaHashgacha that someone shared with him: A man opened a centrally located store in the middle of a successful business area, but this store was not successful. After half a year of losses the store was closed. A new business grabbed the location, but he was also not successful and closed it after half a year. Other businesses took over, and they all had the same result. This went on for a few years. All the businesses in the area thrived, but this store seemed to have a curse hovering over it.

My friend who owns businesses in many places around the country and the world, decided to take the store and open a business there. However, he does not make even a small move without consulting his Rav. He heard that this store had a curse, and he asked his Rav what he must do.

The Rav went down to the store and looked around, and told him, “Open your business here and you will be successful, just move the Mezuzah to the other side of the doorway. The previous people placed the Mezuzah on the wrong side!”

My friend opened his business and was very successful, and I was amazed at how the Mezuzah brought Brachah to him. It taught me how important it is to consult with Daas Torah, because so many other people could have avoided the suffering they endured with their failed businesses if they had asked a Rav about the proper place for a Mezuzah!

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5786 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilin.

The “Surprising” Blessing of the Shtefaneshte Rebbe

By Yehuda Z Klitnick

Harav Avraham Mattisyahu Friedman (5608 - 5693), the Shtefaneshte Rebbe, was the son of Rabbi Menachem Nachum Friedman, the first Shtefaneshte Rebbe. He was the fourth son of the Heilige Riziner Tzaddik Harav Yisrael Ztsuk'l.

The following story was told by a Chosid, Yosef, who became an orphan of his father at a very young age, and as he was the oldest child, the burden of supporting his mother and family fell on him. He went to learn how to sew fur, and that brought income to the family.

But when he turned eighteen, he was called to enlist in the Romania army. Since he had a profession, he could not avoid serving. Being a Chassidish boy, he was worried about keeping his Yiddishkeit, and who would support his mother and family while he was in the army.

The Chassidim would go to their Rebbes for a Bracha to be freed from serving. Yosef traveled to the Shtefaneshte Rebbe with another group of Chassidim who also received an order to join the army! Every boy stood in line and the Rebbe blessed each of them, "May you be freed from the army and from the hands of the Gentiles,"

But surprisingly when his turn came, the Rebbe blessed him "May Hashem give you easy service in the army!" This fell on him like a thunderbolt. Because the Rebbe clearly said that he will have to join the army! What will happen to his Yiddishkeit and livelihood of the house! He decided to try his luck again and waited in line with other boys waiting for a blessing from the Rebbe.

Yosef was shocked that the Rebbe blessed them all to be freed from the army and the hands of the Gentiles, but when he came to the Rebbe, the Rebbe blessed him the same thing as before: "May Hashem give you an easy service in the army!"

He began to cry in front of the Rebbe and asked what about his Yiddishkeit, and who would support his mother and his family! The Rebbe reassured him not to be worried, because his serving would be easy and Hashem will guard you that your service would not affect your Kashrus or Shabbos observing. Hashem would help you to continue to support the family in the army.

After hearing the clear verdict, Yosef became calm and said goodbye to Rebbe who gave him a warm blessing. When the day arrived to join the army, Yosef was calm, with full faith in the Rebbe! When he arrived at the army center, an officer sent him to serve in the city of Chernovitz. This greatly comforted him because there

were many Chassidish Jews in Chernovitz.

The first two days he really worked hard. But on the third day, there was an announcement made if anyone among the soldiers had knowledge how to sew fur, should come forward. Yosef came forth that he was an expert in sewing fur. The officer was glad, and Yosef was sent to the home of the chief commander of the army and the minister of Chernovitz. His wife had torn her precious coat of fur and an expert was needed to fix it, so people would not recognize that it had ever been torn.

Yosef examined the coat and said he can fix it but he needed to take the coat with him to match the fur to blend in. The minister agreed to send the expensive fur coat with Yosef. Yosef took the coat and the first business that he entered that sold fur, belonged to a Chassidish Yid. But when he saw a soldier entering, he became terrified, what did the soldier want from him?

Yosef reassured him not to be afraid, and that he was a Chosid of Shtefaneshte Rebbe. He told him of the Rebbe's blessing, and the ministers wife's coat that he had to fix. The owner became relaxed and let him choose the right colored fur. The owner gave Yosef a corner where he could mend the coat, and he watched the expertise of Yosef and exclaimed: I can use you to work for me. I have a very close connection with the army. and I will arrange that they free you in order to work for me, as I fix their uniforms!

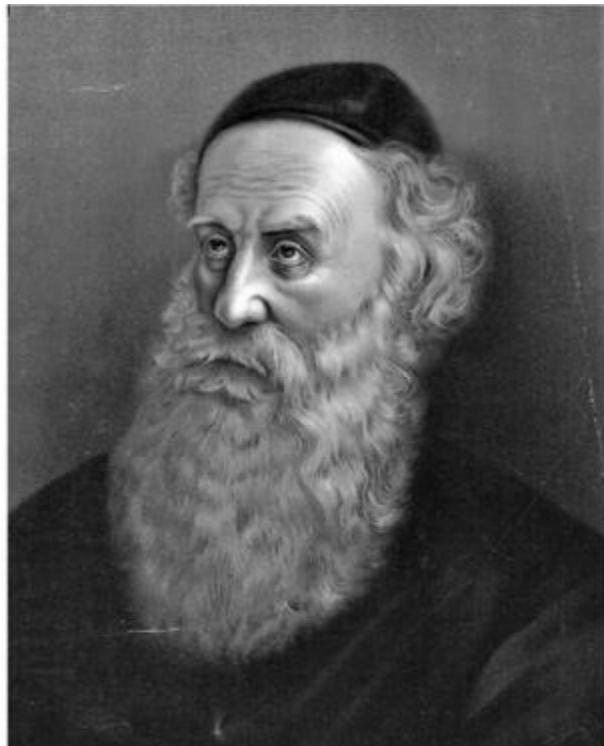
Yosef agreed as he realized now that the blessing of Rebbe was already being fulfilled. He actually worked hard for two days, but now he will be able to work for a Chassidish Yid, and stay a Yid and still earn money to support the family..

Meanwhile, Yosef went back to the minister with the coat who showed it to his wife who was so excited as there was no clue that it had ever been torn. He offered Yosef a handsome amount of money for his expertise work. When the manager of the business asked the minister if he could take Yosef to work for him, the minister immediately agreed, and said that whenever he would need the services of Yosef, he should be ready for him.

Yosef received his temporary discharge from the army to work for the Chosid. In a short while Yosef became engaged to a fine Chassidish girl, and his boss arranged for Yosef to be released from the army. Just as the Rebbe promised "an easy service!!!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5786 email of Pardes Yehuda.

An Inspiring Story of the Alter Rebbe of Chabad



A Chassid of Rabbi Shnuer Zalman, the Alter Rebbe of Chabad, had a daughter of marriageable age, but lacked the means to provide for her to get married. His friends suggested that since it was winter, he should venture into the hard liquor business. Buy a large quantity from a local distillery, transport it to one of the large fairs at a big city, and with Hashem's help, sell it there for a profit. The man decided to follow his friends' advice. He managed to borrow a sizable sum of money, bought a barrel of vodka, rented a horse and wagon and transported his newly acquired merchandise to the city.

When he reached his destination, he immediately went to the fairgrounds, in order to start selling as soon as possible. He seized the barrel in order to hoist it from the wagon, but then froze in mid-action. The barrel felt way too light! Sure enough, the bottom of the barrel was cracked. The strong smell of alcohol wafted into his nostrils from the soaked wood of the wagon. The entire contents of the barrel had leaked out during the long ride. Not a single drop was left! In great sorrow, he loaded the empty barrel back on the wagon. He decided to drive on to his Rebbe.

When he was admitted to the Rebbe's study he unburdened to him his whole sad story. But the telling made the reality of his loss sink in heavily, and he became even more upset. He had barely finished his words when he fainted on the floor. The Rebbe's attendant succeeded in reviving him, but when the poor Chassid sat up and came to himself, enough to realize where he was and why, he fainted again.

This time, as soon as he opened his eyes, the Rebbe called out to him, "You can go home now; Hashem will prosper your efforts." The Rebbe's encouraging words made the Chassid feel a bit less desperate. After a few minutes he felt well enough to climb up to his wagon and begin the return journey to his town. But after he got to his house and had a chance to rest a bit, he became increasingly nervous and agitated as he considered his situation. He had lost his entire investment, he had no foreseeable means to pay back the large loans he had taken, and worst of all, and he had ruined his last chance of being able to help his daughter get married.

Bitter tears streamed down his cheeks. He tried to gain control of himself. Before he could stop crying, his wife ran into the house, bursting with joy. "I found a treasure! I found gold!" she shouted.

"What are you talking about?" he called to her. It took a few moments before she could calm down enough to answer. She related that she had gone to unload the empty barrel from the wagon so as to store it away. She thought she heard a clunk so she looked inside. Sitting on the bottom was a wrapped bundle. She dumped it out and opened it, and it was full of gold coins. A fortune, enough to pay their debts, marry their daughter and all their other children too.

What had happened? When he was riding home on the way back from the Rebbe, it was a freezing cold, Russian winter day. When he got to the river, instead of crossing over on the bridge that spanned it, he decided to save time by driving directly on the river surface itself, since it was frozen solid. While he was in progress, a wealthy Russian aristocrat was crossing in his fancy carriage on the bridge above him.

Apparently, the package of golden coins had fallen out of the aristocrat's carriage, and fallen directly into the barrel on the Chassid's rusty wagon. When the Rebbe was told all that had transpired, he immediately said, "Don't think that I made a miracle, or even that when I told him that Hashem would prosper him that I was divinely inspired. It was just simple logic. We are taught that Hashem does not require of anyone more than he is capable of, not even in the slightest. When I saw that this Jew was totally unable to withstand the misfortune that had come upon him, I already knew with certainty that Hashem was arranging his salvation.

Reprinted from the Parshat Shemos 5786 email of "Inspired by a Story" by Rabbi Dovid Caro.