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The Public High School “Friends”

By Rabbi Reuven Semah



Rabbi David Ashear tells a true story in the name of Rabbi Zamir Cohen that sheds light on the subject.

As a young boy, Yosef decided that he wanted to go to public school after finishing 8th grade in Yeshivah. His uncle, who was a Rabbi, tried to convince him to remain in Yeshivah, but failed. Finally, after trying for so long they agreed to let him go. He went and made new friends, and liked the new situation.

One day, during a break, he went to meet his new friends. He saw three of them waiting a short distance away. When he reached them, one boy punched him, another knocked him down, and the third kicked him. What in the world was happening? The bewildered teen wondered.

He kept the incident to himself, hoping it would be a one-time episode. But the following day, the same thing occurred, and again the next day. He told his mother that he wanted to go back to Yeshivah.

Yosef eventually grew to love Torah learning and became a Rabbi. When his uncle reached retirement age, he passed on his position as Rabbi of a New York shul to his nephew.

Reminiscing About the Past

Years later, towards the end of his life, the uncle called Yosef over to speak to him. He told him how proud he was of the job he was doing leading the congregation, and then reminisced a bit about the past.

“You went to public school for a short time,” he said. “Remember?”

“Yes,” Yosef said. “I feel terrible that I did that.”

“What made you leave?”

Embarrassed, Yosef told him about the three bullies.

“I have to tell you,” the uncle admitted, “I paid those boys to beat you up. I couldn’t bear to see you throw your life away and get mixed up in their culture.”

Yosef was so appreciative, he kissed his uncle and whole-heartedly thanked him for saving his life, both in this world and the next.

This is similar to what Hashem does when we get too close to the nations of the world. He loves us and wants us to become the kings and princes that we are meant to be.

Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Tabo 5783 email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin.

The ‘False’ Alarm

Dovid and Rochel Berman* had an alarm system installed in their new home in Lakewood*. If the alarm went off, the company called the primary or secondary contact number. If it was a false alarm, the person called would give their name and the code, and the alarm was logged as false. If no one answered to give the code, the alarm was assumed to be a real emergency, and the police were sent to the home.

If there was a false alarm on Shabbos, Dovid and Rochel paid the company for an extra service – a non-Jew would come, and verify that it is a false alarm, so that the police would not come.

One Shabbos, Dovid and Rochel's alarm went off, and it was a false alarm. The non-Jew did not come, but neither did the police. Dovid called the owner of the alarm company to complain that the service on Shabbos for which he was paying extra was not being provided.

The owner said he would check the log and see what had happened. When checking, the owner heard a recording of someone answering the phone on Shabbos saying, "This is Rochel, and our code number is..."

The Painful Realization of Who was Me'chalel Shabbos

The owner couldn't believe it! Maybe she got flustered, and thought it was important – but bottom line was that Dovid's wife, Rochel, was me'chalel [a desecrator of] Shabbos!! The owner tried to avoid Dovid all week, so that he wouldn't have to reveal this to him.

The following week, Dovid received a call from his daughter in Eretz Yisroel. "Totty, your alarm went off last Shabbos, didn't it? Interestingly, the alarm company called me right away, as I'm the secondary phone number. It was already Motzei Shabbos in Eretz Yisroel, so figuring it was another false alarm, because you were all home at the time, I used Mommy's name and gave the code. I hope that was helpful."

Dovid felt both embarrassed and relieved. He quickly called the owner and explained the story. The owner was even more relieved with the knowledge that Rochel was not me'chalel Shabbos, and that he wouldn't have to tell Dovid that. Who would have thought?!

Reprinted from the Parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.

Praise Hashem with Every Breath

By Baruch Lev

Mrs. Fried was uneasy about her newborn baby. His breathing seemed labored and unnatural, but all the doctors and nurses she asked about it had played down her fears, saying there was nothing to worry about. What she perceived as a breathing difficulty was perfectly normal for day-old infants, they said.

“You’re just overtired and weak. Don’t worry. Your baby is in the best of hands.”

She didn’t know what to think. True, she was fatigued and drained, and yet she trusted the sixth sense that Hashem gives to mothers – and that intuition was now sounding the alarm. Having no other choice, she turned to the Healer of all flesh and prayed for the health of her newborn son, barely a day old.

At the same time, Dr. Nachmani, a pediatric surgeon, was tossing and turning in his bed at home. For some reason, tired as he was, he could not fall asleep. Two hours later, he gave in to his “nerves” and went into the kitchen to have a soothing drink.

Kept Thinking about the Newborn Goldman Baby

His thoughts kept returning to the newborn Goldman baby upon whom he had that day performed complicated surgery. He knew that it had gone well, and he had checked with the hospital before retiring. The nurses had reported that the baby’s condition was stable and that he was doing very well.

Still, the doctor felt an irrepressible urge drawing him back to the hospital. Perhaps he should go and check the baby himself. Ten minutes later he was in his car, heading for the hospital.

Dr. Nachmani hurriedly donned his sterile coat, scrubbed his hands, and entered the nursery. To his great relief, he found the Goldman baby sleeping peacefully in his bassinet, his chest rising and falling in a steady, undisturbed rhythm.

The Doctor Cried Out to the Nurse

But his eye was drawn to another bassinet nearby, in which a baby seemed to be struggling to breathe. Dr. Nachmani gave a closer look and cried out, “Oxygen! Nurse, set up the oxygen immediately!”

The struggling infant, whose breaths were coming in gasps, was rushed to the newborn intensive care unit. The Fried infant had fluid in his lungs and they discovered it not a moment too soon.

Later, when the baby was out of danger, Dr. Nachmani went to see Mrs. Fried and explained to her that her baby was now fine and had suffered no ill effects – thanks to the fact that he had come just in the nick of time. The bare-headed doctor remarked in wonder that it could only have been Divine intervention that had prevented him from sleeping that night. (Excerpted from the book – “There is No Such Thing as Coincidence 2)

Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tabo 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Story #1343

The Single Unatonable Sin

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com



Rav Ben-Tzion Abba-Shaul

He was a wealthy and respected, happily married man, whose world collapsed after his wife gave birth to twins that were paralyzed from head to toe. They grew up unable to speak, confined to wheelchairs, and needed to be fed, clothed, cleaned, and changed. He couldn't take the suffering any longer and took to drinking as an escape route.

His friends brought the matter to the attention of Rabbi Yosef Netanyan, asking him to intervene. R. Netanyan promptly went to visit HaRav Ben-Tzion AbbaShaul and told him the man's story. The Rav immediately said, "Bring him to me!"

Rabbi Netanyan went and told the man about the greatness of HaRav Ben Tzion, but he paid no attention. He said, "What could he possibly do for me?"

"The key to salvation is in his hands," Rabbi Netanyan replied. "They heed his words in Heaven!"

After much persuasion he finally agreed. They went together to the Rav, who seemed to be waiting for their arrival. The Rav sat the man to his left and Rabbi Netanyan in front of him. The Rav then turned to the man with affection and said, "Tell me what the problem is."

Years of suffering erupted in bitter tears. "I'm healthy, I have money, I have everything. Yet, my life is miserable!" He exclaimed. He then explained to the Rav about the two children and how he's unable to continue living and had even thought about committing suicide.

He cried, "Either the Rav performs a miracle that at least one of them will be healed, or he pray for me that I die!" He then sobbed uncontrollably.

Rabbi Netanyan thought that HaRav Ben Tzion would comfort him, but to his surprise, the Rav's great wisdom led him to rebuke the man harshly.

Suicide Removes One from Olam Habah

"You should be ashamed of yourself! You should know that all sins can be atoned for, except suicide. That sin completely removes one from *Olam HaBah* (the next world [of everlasting life]).

"Do you know why? Because this world is the world of tests, like a war zone. A soldier is sent into battle. If he gives his life, fights fiercely, and wins, he will receive recognition and a medal of honor, and will be promoted to a higher rank. But if he is negligent and shows resentment, he will be condemned and even punished. But for one act, there is absolutely no forgiveness, desertion. Despair of life is like desertion!"

No one ever spoke to him like that. He stopped crying and listened intently. HaRav Ben Tzion then told him about an incident that happened in Izmir, Turkey, about three hundred years ago.

* * *

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen, the *Shevet Mussar*, was invited to a *seudat mitzvah*, and when he arrived, the hosts' wife yelled at him to leave.

"What injustice did you find in me?" he wondered.

"Nothing, but it is forbidden for a *rasha* (evil person) to look at the face of a *tzadik* (righteous person). I can't stand your *kedusha* (holiness)!"

Perplexed, Rabbi Eliyahu asked, "What makes you think that you are a *rasha*?"

"Not me," she answered, "rather the spirit possessing me."

When the Rabbi heard this, he began speaking with the spirit, asking him why he received this punishment.

The spirit explained "I was born in Germany to a Torah-observant family. In my teens, I connected with bad friends, and they enticed me to commit the most severe sins. After a while I started to feel remorse and wanted to return to my community.

"The community didn't agree to take me back. Rather they denounced and expelled me. The friends I left also mocked me for trying to go back. I wandered

around tormented. My soul had been beaten from all sides, it was too hard for me, and I couldn't take it anymore. Then, one clear day, I committed suicide.

Cast Back into this World for Eternity

"My soul ascended to heaven and there they didn't even agree to look at me, because suicide had no atonement. They cast me back to this world to wander for eternity, persecuted by ruthless *malachei chabala* (angels of destruction) full of wrath."

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen promised that he would pray and dedicate a certain amount of his Torah study for him, and in that merit he would be permitted into *Gehinom* (Purgatory), to be cleansed.

Upon hearing this, the spirit agreed to leave the woman.

* * *

After the Rav finished telling the story the man murmured, "But poor guy, he couldn't stand life anymore."

HaRav Ben Tzion was determined, "There is a rule in Torah that says that no one can receive a test that they are unable to withstand, just as a soldier isn't sent into a lost battle. The Talmud (Ketubot 33b) brings proof for this by telling us that Chananya, Mishael and Azariah sacrificed themselves and didn't bow down to Nebuchadnezar's statue, thereby sanctifying G-d's name in public.

"The Talmud then reveals that if they had been tortured they wouldn't have withstood the agony and would have bowed down to the statue (because it wasn't actual idolatry, rather a monument in honor of the king, as the *Tosafot* commentary explains there).

Able to Overcome Being Thrown into a Fiery Furnace

"How did the Sages know that they wouldn't have withstood the torture? The answer is that one doesn't receive a test one cannot withstand. They were tested by being thrown into a fiery furnace and they endured it. If they could have withstood a more difficult test such as torture, they would have been tested with that instead.

"Listen carefully. That young man was tested with terrible depression and stress, and he was required to withstand it. You are being tested from heaven with an enormous test, but you're required to withstand it and therefore able to do so. Don't desert the battle! Getting drunk is also a kind of desertion."

The man had a gloomy look on his face. He asked, "But why? Why? Why were these souls sent into the world if they're bound like cocoons? and why were we chosen to be their parents?"

HaRav Ben Tzion's face lit up. "You want to know why? You want to understand? Good! Who these souls are I won't reveal to you. But why they chose you I will tell you. In your previous *gilgul* (reincarnation) you..."

As the Rav began speaking, the man became pale. Rabbi Netanyan felt that the matter was personal, a secret from the world of souls. He called to the Rav and said "Kevod HaRav, maybe I should step out?"

The man stared at me. HaRav Ben Tzion muttered, " That's it. That's enough!" "No! Please HaRav, tell me," begged the man.

The Rav replied, "It is from Heaven that we were interrupted. It is a sign that I shouldn't continue. But know that everything is justified. Everything is precisely measured. Everything is for the best.

"But this I can say: this is the height of your suffering. You won't suffer from health problems or from earning a living, and the rest of your children will be healthy and will bring you utter satisfaction and joy!"

The father left HaRav Ben Tzion's home invigorated, his face glowing and his soul strengthened, and now able to accept the judgment of heaven wholeheartedly and with joy. And indeed, they subsequently had healthy children and today are a happy and joyous family.

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the report of Rabbi Yosef Netanyan in the book, *Rabbeinu HaOhr LeTzion*, and translated to English in "MESILLOT: Pathways to the Soul" (#27), the weekly publication of Rabbi Yisrael Abergel.

*Connection:* see Deut 29:14.

*Biographic notes:* Rabbi Ben-Tzion Abba-Shaul [29 Tammuz 1924 - 19 Tammuz 1998], born in Jerusalem, became a leading Sephardic rabbi, a judge on the Supreme Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem, and an eminent authority on Jewish medical laws. For the last 15 years of his life, he served as the head of the prestigious yeshiva, Porat Yosef. In addition, he penned thousands of *halakhic responsa*, some of which are printed in his book, *She'eilot U'Teshuvot Ohr LeZion*. He was also well-versed in *kabbalah*, and in the 1960s he founded the *Emet VeShalom* Yeshiva for learning *kabbalah* at night. [Mostly from Wiki]

Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen of Izmir, Turkey [1650 - 1 Adar B 1729], is best known as the author of *Shevet Mussar*, a major work of Torah ethics and morality. He also wrote *Midrash Talpiot*. In the historical work, *Shem HaGedolim*, it states, "Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir wrote almost 40 books and turned many away from sin with his public lectures."

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



# The “Hot” Seat

By Yehudit Samet



We were getting ready to leave after a two-day visit with my parents. I was dressing the baby, while my husband carried out the luggage and car seat. I took another look around the room to see if we had forgotten anything, and then went downstairs to say good-bye to the family.

As I opened the front door to leave, the heat hit me. What a scorcher. It was midday and the sun was beating down. I hurried to the car, anxious to get the baby inside, out of the strong sun. I pulled on the handle and bent to settle the baby, when I saw that my husband had thrown in the car seat backwards. He could have spent the extra minute to put it in place and save me the trouble, I thought. What happened to his usual consideration?

Just then my husband came out with the last bag. He saw me trying to adjust the seat with one hand and hurried over to help. “You can fry an egg in this sun,” he commented as he put the seat in place. “I didn’t want to put the baby into a hot seat,” he added, as if reading my thoughts.

“That’s why I turned it around – so it wouldn’t be facing the sun.” (The Other Side of the Story)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Haazinu/Sukkos 5782 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# Know Your Musical Purpose in Life



Rav Paysach Krohn told a story that he heard from Rav Moshe Plutchok from Yeshivah Derech Chaim in Brooklyn. There was an accomplished writer who was working on a biography of the famous symphony conductor, Arturo Toscanini. One day the writer called Toscanini and asked if he could come over the following night to interview him.

The great maestro told him that he could not meet that night, as he was planning to listen to a concert on the radio of an orchestra that he had conducted himself the previous year.

## **Asked the Great Maestro if He Could Listen to the Concert with Him**

The writer asked if he could join him and discuss the concert after it was over. Toscanini agreed, on condition that he would not disturb him during the concert. The

next night they listened together to the orchestra's performance, and when it was finished, the writer said, "Wasn't that magnificent?"

"No, it wasn't," Toscanini answered sternly. "There were supposed to be 120 musicians, among them 15 violinists, but there were only 14 violinists playing tonight."

The writer could not believe what he just heard, but he did not dare question the great maestro. However, he wanted to investigate to verify if Toscanini was right. The next morning, he called the director of the orchestra and asked him how many musicians were supposed to be in the orchestra, and how many had actually shown up.

The director told him that there were supposed to be 120 musicians, but one of the 15 violinists called in sick. The writer was in awe and could not understand how Toscanini could have noticed that one violin was missing. That night he returned to Toscanini and asked him how he was able to discern the missing violin in an orchestra of 120 musicians.

### **Noticed that Some of the Musical Notes were Missing**

Toscanini answered with authority and said, "There is a great difference between you and me. As part of the general audience, everything sounds great to you. But I, being a conductor, must know every sound that comes forth from the orchestra. When I heard the concert, I noticed that some notes were missing, and I knew immediately that one violinist was not there!"

Rav Plutchok used this story to teach an amazing insight. We may not discern the difference when we or someone else is learning Torah or observing a certain Mitzvah, for we are all part of the general audience. But to the Conductor of the World Symphony, Hashem, Who knows every note that should come forth, to Him, every word of Torah that is learned, every Tefilah that is uttered, and every Mitzvah that is fulfilled, makes a big difference!

Rav Paysach Krohn concluded and said, "We are all musicians in Hashem's Orchestra. In an orchestra, the drummer is not expected to play the cello, the cellist should not play the flute, and the flutist cannot play the violin. Each one must play his own instrument to the best of his ability. This is how it is in real life. We are all different, and we must all perform with the talents, mindset, and personalities we were blessed with. We should perform on the highest level of our capability for Hashem, the Conductor of the World Symphony!"

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

# It is the Germans Who You Saw Smoking on Shabbos



When the Bobover Rav, R' Shlomo Halberstam, arrived in America after surviving the Holocaust, he settled in the West Side of Manhattan. With barely a minyan, the Rav and his son, R' Naftoli, would often stand on the sidewalk in search of Jewish men to complete the minyan.

One Erev Shabbos, they called in a man named Yankel, who was also a Survivor. Yankel shared that back in “der heim” he had served as the baal tefillah in his shtetl. When the Bobover Rav heard that, he said, “Wonderful! Please lead the Kabolas Shabbos for us!”

This continued for many weeks – Yankel would lead the minyan in Kabolas Shabbos. As they got to know him, it was clear that Yankel’s traumatic war experiences had left him angry at G-d for all he had endured.

One Friday, Yankel did not come. And the following week he did not come. The Bobover Rav was concerned. He asked R' Naftoli to find him. But they did not know his address.

“He said he lives on the other side of Central Park,” said the Bobover Rav, “so go there and see if you can find him.” R’ Naftoli took someone along, and they started their search, which felt like finding a needle in a haystack. As they walked through Central Park, they were shocked to see Yankel sitting on a bench smoking a cigar – on Shabbos!

### **Rav Naftoli Reported Back What He Saw to the Bobover Rav**

They went over and relayed that the Bobover Rav was concerned about his welfare. Yankel nodded, thanked them, and continued smoking his cigar. R’ Naftoli reported back to his father, “We found Yankel in the park. Unfortunately, he was smoking a cigar.”

The Rav responded, “It can’t be.”

“But we saw him smoking with our own eyes.”

The Rav again said, “It can’t be.”

“But we are two witnesses, who both saw him smoking on Shabbos.”

The Rav responded, “He’s not the one smoking, it’s the Germans that are smoking. You don’t know what he went through.”

The next week, Yankel returned to shul. The Rav greeted him with, “R’ Yankel, I’ve been missing your Lecha Dodi! Please daven for us.”

Fast forward 30 years. The Rav was now a leader of thousands of chassidim. One day, a man approached the Rav after Shacharis. “Rebbe, do you remember me? I’m Yankel from your minyan in the West Side.”

The Bobover Rebbe gave him a very warm welcome. Yankel continued, “I am marrying off my first grandchild, and I’d be honored if the Rav would be mesader kiddushin.”

### **At Least 100 Frum Grandchildren**

The Rav explained that he didn’t even do it for many of his own grandchildren, but agreed to come to one of the Sheva Brachos. R’ Naftoli came along with the Rav to the simcha. When they entered, they saw at least 100 of Yankel’s grandchildren – all Bnei Torah, many learning in Kollel.

The Bobover Rav turned to R’ Naftoli and said, “Didn’t I tell you? It was the Germans smoking that cigar; it wasn’t him.” The Rav relegated the cigar smoking on Shabbos to the effects of Yankel’s traumatic experiences, not attributing it to his essence. It’s not that the Rav judged R’ Yankel favorably – he did not judge him at all!

*Reprinted from the Rosh Hashana 5784 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# Turning ALS Into a Blessing

By Rabbi Joey Haber

There was a man named David who suffered from ALS, and after twelve years of suffering from this awful disease, during which time he lost control over his arms, legs and even face, his wife was asked how he was able to stay alive for so long. Her answer was astounding.

The wife explained that her husband participated in one of the worldwide programs run by the Dirshu organization, whose participants learn large amounts of Talmud and are occasionally tested on the material. Although he can neither write nor type, David never missed a test. He was able to answer the questions with special technology which enabled him to “type” on the computer by looking with his eyes at the letters he wanted to type. Each test took him fifteen hours (!!!!!).

Nevertheless, he completed each one. And he always completed the test on time. He did not ask for any special dispensation. He studied all the material just like all the other participants, and he then spent fifteen hours answering the questions and emailed the test back to Dirshu on time, each and every time, without fail.

Once, he took one of Dirshu’s exams and had two questions left when he needed to be taken to a doctor’s appointment. He decided to take his laptop with him so he could answer the remaining two questions in the waiting room. As it turned out, though, in the waiting room he had time only to answer one of the two remaining questions. The deadline was early the next morning, and David insisted on not missing it, so he worked on the final answer in the car on the way home. But during the drive, the car hit a pothole, and David’s laptop went flying, smashing on the floor of the car. His entire exam was lost.

David was not to be deterred. He arrived home at 6pm, and sat in front of the home computer to begin the exam anew. He stayed awake until 5am the next morning, answering all 22 questions, and sent the exam in on time, as always.

Ironically, David – who needed to struggle to survive more than any of us – did not just survive, but lived. He was not content just making it to the next day. He insisted on living, on spending his day meaningfully and productively. And he did so precisely because he lived with a keen sense that each day could be his last. This

awareness could paralyze a person, but it could also empower a person, energizing him to make each day count, to make each day meaningful.

The Talmud tells of a Rabbi who admonished his students to repent the day before their died. They asked him the obvious question: Nobody knows when he or she is going to die. How can we repent the day before we die, if we never know when we will die?

The Rabbi answered, “This is precisely the point. Repent each and every day, because you never know which day will be your last.”

People who feel that each day could be their last live each day with special vigor and energy. They work to make each and every day count, to make each and every day meaningful. David turned his condition into a great blessing, by being motivated to achieve more than he did before he fell ill, by recognizing that each and every day is a precious opportunity to do something great.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Nisabim-Vayelech 5783 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*