

Shabbos Stories for Parshas Emor 5783

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Generation to Generation

By Tzippy Clapman



At the age of 24, I stepped out of my sheltered little world when I became a member of the Chevra Kadisha, Jewish Burial Society. That is when my dear friend Rendel Alenick, obm, started the Crown Heights Women's Chevra Kadisha under the directives of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

I was sort of pushed into joining the tahara committee (that prepare the body of the deceased) over a July 4th weekend when almost all the regular members were out-of-town. They needed a person and I was there. I was very reluctant to go as I was taking part in the committee that sews tachrichim, burial shrouds, and I had no intention of doing any more than that. But the need was urgent and I was talked into it by Rendel's very persuasive and convincing reasoning.

My husband, whose father and uncles were members of the Chevra Kadisha in the Upper West Side, was very happy to see the Clapmans continuing in this great mitzva (commandment) after skipping one generation.

It was nothing like I expected. I thought it would be traumatic for me as I had never had any prior experience with a dead person (although I am a nurse). But it was so uplifting, even spiritual, and I felt the presence of G-d in that very room.

When involved in these mitzvot, the soul you are doing it for is benefiting from the acts being performed on their bodies, but the people performing those acts are often the ones who feel transformed. These acts of chesed shel emet, kindnesses which will not be repaid because the person is no longer alive, make us feel the presence of G-d in our lives. They light up our days in exile and it would not be an exaggeration to say they give us a high. Can you imagine getting a high without the use of drugs or alcohol?

A Very Secretive Society

Of course, my children knew about me being active in Chevra Kadisha even though I would never disclose the name of the person I had attended to or any details, which are not allowed to be discussed. This is a very secretive society where no details are shared about the chesed that is being done, as a way of honoring the person who died.

I was quietly hoping that their mother being involved in Chevra Kadisha, Bikur Cholim (caring for the ill), and other organizations would inspire my children to do the same when they would grow up. We had countless Bikur Cholim families staying over at our home during health crises in their lives, and our children were usually involved.

For example, we had one woman who lived with us in our home for months, when her daughter was in a major car accident and in a coma after suffering from a traumatic brain injury. My children graciously tolerated her using up our limited space, cheered her on during the crisis, and helped her in any way they could, for eight months, until her daughter was discharged.

Hosting People for Shabbos Who Were Visiting Family Members in the Hospital

Many people would stay with us on Shabbat so that they were able to walk to the hospital to visit their family members on Friday night and Shabbat day. My children would accompany my husband on the long walks late Friday night to meet the family members in the hospital lobby and walk them back to our home for kiddush and the Shabbat meal.

Now with all my children married, what we hoped for has come true, and they are repeating what they saw and what they lived during their childhood in our home. Some of my children who live in Crown Heights volunteer at the Crown Heights Bikur Cholim.

Giving Rides to Nurse-Companions

One daughter of ours would leave the house late at night and drive to a different part of Brooklyn to pick up a nurse-companion and bring her to a Manhattan hospital to sit at the bedside of a critically ill Jewish woman. The nurse-companion would not go unless she had a ride. Our daughter did not talk about where she was going and what she was doing, to protect the privacy of the patient, a woman without any family.

Another daughter accompanies patients during their different life-saving therapies. She picks up the patient from her home, sits with her throughout the procedure and then drives her home.

Two years ago, corona hit and unfortunately throughout 2020 there was a continuous need for women to take care of the women who were passing away from the virus. The older women who belong to these organizations were at very high risk themselves. They could not do a tahara on women who had died from the virus. One of my daughters was called by a major Chevra Kadisha asking her if she would be willing to come in to help with the multiple cases that were piling up.

My daughter immediately went to help out. These souls needed their bodies to be made ready for burial as soon as possible and not to G-d forbid postpone it, which we know is painful for the soul. She went with her husband's blessing and his help, as he knew the greatness of this mitzva.

As Many as Eight Purifications in a Row

My daughter was called in daily for over a month to do countless taharas from early morning until late at night. She was part of a group of young women who were passionate about doing this great mitzva of getting countless Jews prepared for burial according to Jewish law and in a very gentle, caring way. My daughter said some days she would do as many as eight purifications in a row, then finally drive home and get a call to come back for some additional new arrivals. She would turn around and drive right back.

When we spend a holiday with our children out-of-town we marvel at their dining rooms filled with needy and lonely guests who now have a family to celebrate Shabbat. My daughters serve as the mikva matrons in their out-of-town mikvas when needed. And I see them in action, whether it is helping families in a medical crisis, cooking for new mothers, or other important activities. We are proud and grateful that our children are continuing in the ways they saw as children, ways that my husband and I saw in our childhood homes, and now we pray that their children and future generations will follow in their footsteps.

Reprinted from the Acharei Mos 5782 edition of L'Chaim. The article was originally published in the N'Shei Chabad Newsletter.

The Devoted Husband

Putting Right a Broken Engagement

By Yossi Ives



Art by Sefira Lightstone

Rabbi Elijah, known as the Vilna Gaon (“genius of Vilnius”), was one of the most celebrated rabbis of all time. Among his many accomplishments, one element of his life remains a mystery: his attempts to travel to the Land of Israel. We know that the Gaon was a passionate advocate of living in the Holy Land. Many of his most prominent students settled there, and he taught that only when living in the Holy Land could a Jew practice Judaism in a complete manner.

As best we know, he made two separate attempts, neither of which came to fruition.

In approximately 1777 the great rabbi raised funds to finance his mission to establish a new community in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine. After traveling from Vilna, Lithuania, to the Prussian port city Königsberg (now Russia’s Kaliningrad), he wrote and sent a letter to his mother promising that should he arrive safely in Jerusalem, he would pray for her there.

For reasons that are still unclear, the Gaon detoured via Amsterdam. We know this because the formal minutes of the Jewish community of the Hague record that

Rabbi Elijah of Vilna received a donation towards his trip to the Holy Land. One theory suggests that he was in search of rare mystical texts, which he may have expected to be able to find in Amsterdam, which was then a hub of Jewish spirituality with a major printing press.

He stayed in Amsterdam for approximately two weeks, at the home of a learned businessman. There are some reports that the Gaon found his way to England, but that is highly unlikely. As best we can tell, after his stay in Amsterdam he abandoned his plan to travel to the Holy Land and returned home to Vilna.

Felt a Lack of Heavenly Permission

Why did the Gaon change his plan? While we have no definite answer, several sources record the Gaon saying that he felt he lacked Heavenly permission. The most likely explanation is that the circumstances at the time were not favorable to establishing a new community.

According to his illustrious student, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, when the Gaon bade farewell to his host in Amsterdam, the man asked the rabbi to suggest any improvements he could make to his life. The Gaon said that he was most impressed by everything he had seen, and there was actually something he had been wondering about:

“I noticed that every morning you prepare your wife warm water to wash her feet and bring fresh coffee to her bedroom. The Talmud¹ advocates that a man ‘should love his wife as much as himself,’ but you seem to go far beyond that, showing more devotion to her than you show to yourself. Why is that?”

Regarded as a Budding Scholar

The man replied:

“As a child, I was regarded as a budding scholar. My father was a respected scholar although not financially successful. A wealthy businessman was impressed by me and wanted me to marry his daughter. I was still very young, but both sides came to an agreement that we would get married at the appropriate time. For six years, the wealthy businessman provided for me financially, while I continued my studies.

“Sadly, my father-in-law-to-be lost all his wealth and he could not keep his promise to provide for me after marriage. As a result, we broke off the engagement. “Shortly thereafter, I married another young woman, the daughter of a wealthy family. Not long after the marriage, however, I became weak and sick. When the doctors gave up hope of a cure, I was sent to the town’s sick house. When I showed no sign of recovery, my father-in-law asked that I give his daughter a divorce and I obliged.

“One day, an entrepreneurial fellow approached me in the sick house with an intriguing proposition: ‘You are a brilliant scholar, yet very sick. Surely, people take pity on you. Let me take you around on my wagon from place to place, where people can benefit from your knowledge, and they will no doubt reward you handsomely. We will split the income between us.’ This seemed like a reasonable plan, and so the partnership began to our mutual benefit.

The Cause for His Illness is Discovered

“It turned out that this fellow was not the only one with the idea. On my travels I encountered a young woman who was also being carted around. Her chaperone likewise thought that people would have compassion for a beautiful woman who was so ill and would be generous towards her. So, we came up with an idea. Why not join forces? It would save us both money – needing just one wagon.

“As we got to know each other, we decided to marry. Although we were both quite unwell, we managed to put together a simple wedding. After the wedding, the bride was crying, so I asked her what was wrong. She explained that as a child she had been engaged to a promising young scholar who broke off the engagement, and she is still sad about it.

“We began discussing the circumstances around her past relationship, and it became clear that I was the person she was engaged to. We had both become unrecognizable due to our poor health.

“We were deliriously happy at the discovery. It seems that this was the woman I was destined to marry, and my illness was merely a means of ensuring that the union would transpire. Shortly thereafter we both made a full recovery.

“Now you understand why I treat my wife in such a special way. I am doing what I can to compensate for all the suffering I caused her by breaking off the engagement. I know how much pain and suffering I caused her and I am doing my best every day to put things right.

Reprinted from the Parshat Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5783 website of Chabad.Org

The Fancy Bas Mitzvah Invitation

The thick, cream-colored invitation with a delicate floral pattern exuded lavish elegance. The shimmery lavender letters spelled out a single name in the center of the card. Within moments my classroom erupted with discussions on what to wear

to the over-the-top Bas Mitzvah. It seemed that I was the only one in the class who had two Shabbos dresses, far from a selection of what to wear. Not that I needed to decide, because it seemed I was the only one not invited to Leah's bas mitzvah.

At the beginning of the year, I thought this year I'd make some friends, and become "one of the girls." Maybe now in sixth grade my classmates would finally be able to look past my parents being divorced and my mother not having too much money.

Promised to be the Party of the Year

But it looked like this year would be much of the same lonely, friendless reality for me. Popular, lively Leah, was the first girl in the class to become bas mitzvah. Her parents weren't divorced and they had lots of money. This bas mitzvah promised to be the party of the year. The invitations had been hand-delivered. Everyone was invited. Except for me.

Later that night, curled up on my bed, I could hear Leah's voice, "We're going to have so much fun! I want every single one of you to come. My mother is planning the best party in the world!"

If she wanted every single one of us to come, why hadn't she invited me? Tears cascaded down my cheeks. Mrs. Levy had been teaching about being *dan l'kaf zechus*. Perhaps I shouldn't assume that Leah had purposefully ignored me. What other reason could there be that Leah invited every single other girl in the class?

She probably didn't even know I existed. I couldn't even remember the last time someone in class had spoken to me. Occasionally, teachers called me aside and asked me if everything was alright at home. I stared at them silently. Yes, everything was alright at home. Besides for the fact that my father and mother don't both live there, and besides that my father lives in a different city and my brothers go to shul with a neighbor, who sometimes, kindly, offers to learn with them, and besides that my mother doesn't always feel strong enough for all of us to lean on at once and doesn't always have the money to buy us everything we need. Besides all that, everything is just wonderful.

How Do You Look Past the Pain?

But I just murmured politely, "Yes, thank you. Everything is fine at home." Because my grades were good and I never misbehaved, they always let me go. Mrs. Levy's stories always had a seemingly simple explanation of how to be *dan le'kaf zechus*. But when you were stuck deep inside the story — when the story was happening to you — how did you look past the pain to think that there was actually a reasonable explanation?

When I got home I was still mulling over Mrs. Levy's class. Perhaps a wild animal had attacked the person who was supposed to deliver my invitation? Maybe

Leah had run out of invitations and was planning to invite me in person? Maybe the invitation had actually been delivered and someone in my family had misplaced it? The latter seemed most plausible.

I ran into the kitchen to ask my mother. She had no idea what I was talking about. Crushed, I headed slowly back to my room. Just then, my brother Moshe stuck his head out of his bedroom where he was playing with his MagnaTiles.

“By the way, is this yours?”

My heart skipped a beat as Moshe rummaged around and produced a thick, cream-colored envelope with glittering rhinestones. My hand shaking just a bit, I took the envelope. I opened my mouth, but before I could say anything, Moshe waved his hand. “It was delivered a couple of days ago. You weren’t home. It looked important, so I put it in my room so that it wouldn’t get lost. Uh, then I kind of forgot about it.”

Moshe shot me a charming grin. “But now I remembered.”

“Thank... thank you, Moshe,” I said. Holding the envelope close, I walked slowly to my room. If I would’ve only thought of this possibility at the start!

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos – Kedoshim 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Taxi Driver’s Reaction

Rabbi David Ashear wrote a story in Living Emunah 5 about loyalty between siblings. Shlomo, a taxi driver in Israel picked up a distinguished-looking man in need of a ride from the airport. As they drove toward their destination, the passenger casually rolled up his sleeves. “It’s warm in here, right?” he asked conversationally. Shlomo glanced over, and when he saw the man’s arm, he gasped. “Are you all right?” the passenger asked, noting Shlomo’s distress.

Shlomo proceeded to tell him a story. “Years ago, I worked on a kibbutz. My job was sorting apples. I would put the good apples in one pile, to be sold, and throw the lower quality apples into a giant blender to make juice. One day, I had an urge to see how the blender worked. After filling it with bruised apples, I climbed up to the top to watch the apples get chopped.

“Suddenly, I lost my balance and fell into the deep vat. The machine was running, and I had very little time before the blades would strike me. I began to scream. Right in the nick of time, I felt someone grab me. He pulled me out and saved my life. I thanked him profusely from the bottom of my heart. From that day forward, we became friends.”

“On occasion,” Shlomo continued, “I noticed my new friend would seem depressed. One day, I gathered the nerve to pry and asked him what was bothering him. He told me he was a Holocaust survivor. He and his only brother went through the war together before he was taken away. ‘I haven’t seen him since,’ my friend said. ‘Sometimes I think about him and I get really sad, remembering how close we were.’”

Shlomo said to the passenger, “He showed me the number on his arm, 8862. His brother’s number was one higher, 8863. It has been about ten years since my friend told me that story. He still gets sad about his long-lost brother. I’ll never forget that number. You just raised your sleeve and it’s there! 8863!!”

Shlomo drove his passenger straight to his friend’s home and let his tears flow unchecked as he watched the brothers’ emotional reunion. This episode was orchestrated by Hashem for many years, showing us the loyalty of a sibling is unmatched.

Reprinted from the Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

Rav Yisroel’s Amazing Legacy



From left to right: Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, the Steipler Gaon and Rav Yisroel Gustman of blessed memories

When R' Yisroel Gustman zt"l was only twenty years old, he was appointed a dayan on the beis din of R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt"l. R' Chaim Ozer was the Rav of Vilna, and a leader of world Jewry in the years preceding the second world war. R' Yisroel served as a dayan on R' Chaim Ozer's beis din for twenty-five years.

What was the secret to R' Yisroel Gustman's greatness? Many stories are told of R' Gustman's perseverance and self-sacrifice as he survived and thrived through the horrific years of the Holocaust. R' Yisroel was a partisan for five years during the war, hiding out in forests together with his wife and daughter, as they fled from the Nazis.

Learning Meseches Zevachim Twenty Times from Memory

He once survived being shot in the head at point blank range. He hid for six months in a pit with his family, living on scraps thrown in by a non-Jewish farmer - and during that time he learned Meseches Zevachim from memory twenty times. His entire existence was Torah - a life of "V'chai bahem."

After the war, R' Gustman came to the Budapester Rav, R' Yisroel Veltz zt"l, and asked him, "Does the Rebbe remember the five shailos (halachic questions) that he sent to R' Chaim Ozer a number of years ago?"

The Budapester Rav was surprised at this young man before him and replied, "I do remember the shailos, but I never received answers, because just at that time, the war broke out."

R' Gustman continued, "R' Chaim Ozer gave me the shailos and told me to write answers to them, which I did. I could not send them to you because of the war, but I remember the answers quite clearly." He then proceeded to tell the Budapester Rav, by heart, the answers to all five questions, which he had written five years earlier. Each answer was six or seven pages long!

Protected by His Ameilus b'Torah

After so much pain, after so many troubles, he remembered each complete answer. It was his Ameilus b'Torah that protected him through the war and carried him through the rest of his life. He imbued his entire existence with "life" - Torah study and mitzvos, even during the darkest hours.

When R' Yisroel came to Eretz Yisroel in 1971, he went to see the great Steipler Gaon zt"l. The Steipler could not hear well, and his visitors had to write down what they wanted to say. R' Yisroel asked for a beracha and signed the note, "Yisroel Gustman."

Upon reading the signature, the Steipler asked him, "Was your father a dayan on R' Chaim Ozer's beis din?"

R' Gustman replied, "My father? That was me."

The Steipler read the words and he looked up in astonishment. “That was you?!” exclaimed the Steipler.

The elderly Gaon could not walk well, and sometimes could not even go to shul. When he would walk, he would tread slowly, step by step. Yet, upon hearing who stood before him, the Steipler stood up and ran to R’ Yisroel, hugging and kissing him, saying, “You do not know the esteem in which R’ Chaim Ozer held you!”

A short while later, R’ Yisroel went to visit the Tchebiner Rav zt”l, and the same story repeated itself. “Did you have a relative who was a dayan on R’ Chaim Ozer’s beis din in Vilna?” asked the Tchebiner Rav. “That was me,” came the reply. “That was you?!”

The Tchebiner Rav stood up, donned his hat, and made a beracha, “Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam Shechalak M’chochmaso Li’reiyav” (the beracha recited upon seeing an outstanding talmid chacham)! The Tchebiner Rav said the complete form of the blessing (with Hashem’s name), and did so wearing a hat and jacket, the way he would dress when davening to Hashem. He did not make this beracha for everyone, but R’ Yisroel Gustman was an unusual person - a talmid chacham who truly used his life to toil in Torah. One who spent his entire life “living” the Torah.

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5783 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman’s Monsey Mesaver.

The Anonymous Driver

Rav Avrohom Deutsch, Rav Shimshon Pincus’s very close friend for many years, and who also assisted him with many things, is a member of the Ofakim town council. Rav Deutsch once said: When my wife fell ill, in order to get her the best care possible, she had to travel to America for procedures and treatment.

However, this presented a problem for us because she didn’t know English very well, and we had young children at home. Rav Shimshon told me that if I sent someone to be with her, like a sister, he would travel with them and help them wherever they needed to be, because he knew English.

At first, I tried to turn down his generous offer, but he told me, “I’m not asking you what to do anyway! I’m telling you what I am going to do.” I sent along my sister, and he traveled abroad with them several times for her surgeries, and I remained at home to look after the children. It was amazing what he was doing to

help us. Rav Shimshon was a busy Rav, and he left everything to travel to America for extended periods!



Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt'l

My wife needed a hospital in Santiago, Texas, which is near the Mexican border, and Rav Shimshon went along for seven weeks, to some far-out place which was off the beaten track. The whole time, Rav Shimshon sat by himself in a room and learned. My sister stayed with my wife, and Rav Shimshon was their driver and attendant for almost two months! He also took care of the food for the three of them.

Who Would Do Such a Thing?

Is there any other Jew in the world who would do such a thing?! There is a Professor Schreiber from Bar Ilan University, and he called me up and told me that he was in Santiago at that time, and he was impressed with the Deutsch family's good driver, and he said that he used him himself some times. A little while later, he called me again, and he said with tears, "I just learned who your family driver was! What did I do? How could I use such a Gadol like that and ask him to drive me around?!" This was the humility of Rav Shimshon.

"Before one of my wife's operations, the doctor recommended that she go outside to get some fresh air. Rav Shimshon took them to a park and arranged to return to get them five hours later. My wife thought he was going to go and take care of something. After about a half an hour of walking around in the park, my sister found Rav Shimshon sitting and writing Chidushei Torah under a tree. Rav Shimshon came to the meeting place a few minutes after the time they had agreed on for him to pick them up. Apparently, he had lost track of time, and he was catching his breath from running to get there, and he apologized for the delay! Rav Shimshon was a one-of-a-kind individual!

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefillah.