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Divine Providence at the Mall of America



Jonathan Ghermezian

Rabbi Joey Haber relates a story that was told to him by Jonathan Ghermezian, one of the owners of the Mall of America in Minnesota. He said once his wife was in Israel, and he was home with his young daughter. She was bored, so he took her to his mall. They were eating French fries at the only Kosher café when they saw another religious family who told them they were driving cross-country from L.A. to a wedding, and they had stopped off there at the mall.

The head of the family was a Rabbi in a school in L.A., and he made small talk with Mr. Ghermezian, not knowing he was the owner of the mall. The Rabbi

mentioned his last name, and only after walking away from the family, did Mr. Ghermezian's realize that that this Rabbi may be related to another Rabbi that he had as a teacher when he was younger. He had been looking for this Rabbi for a long time to ask for forgiveness for something that he had done when he was younger.

So, he went back to the cafe after he had already left and asked this Rabbi if he knew the Rabbi that he was looking for, but he did not know him. Now, Mr. Ghermezian started thinking more. This family couldn't even afford flights to the wedding they needed to go to, so he turned to the children and asked them if they wanted passes to the rides in the mall. They all said they wished they could have them, but they could not afford them.

He told them he would take care of it. Since that day was a national holiday, the back offices were closed, and so he went and stood in line like everyone else to get tickets. When it was his turn, he asked to speak to a supervisor. When the supervisor came out, she recognized him and gave him what he asked for. He went back to where the family was waiting and put the passes in the mother's hand.

The mother then said, "Wow, this is amazing." She explained, "For two weeks, we knew we were going to stop off here, and my children knew we weren't going to be able to afford to buy tickets to the rides. They have been talking about this for the past two weeks, how they wished that somehow they would be able to get onto the rides there."

This mother, who learns bitachon--faith every day, told her children, "If Hashem wants to put the tickets in my hands, He can put them in my hands." And here she was standing with the owner of the mall, who had just put the tickets right in her hands."

When Mr. Ghermezian walked away, he was awed at the hashgacha—divine supervision of Hashem. Here he thought he was making decisions about what to do that day. Little did he know, he was just a pawn in the hands of Hashem to give this family the tickets that He wanted them to have. Hashem caused the Mr. Ghermezian's wife to go to Israel, which left him home with their younger daughter. Hashem made the daughter bored, so he would go to his work on his off day. He made him go to the cafe at the same moment that this family who was traveling across the country would be there. He made him go back to find out the name of a person that this Rabbi didn't even know. All just to give this family tickets to the rides. Hashem loves us more than we could ever imagine and is always looking out for our best. It may not always appear that way, but we must know it is the absolute truth.

Reprinted from the Parashat Chayei Sarah 5785 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

The Beauty and Value of Yissurim, Suffering



Illustration of the Chida, 1724-1806

Rav Dovid Sutton shared a story that was relayed by the Mekubal, Rav Ovadiah Hadayah, zt"l. In the times of the Chida, Rav Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai, zt"l, there lived a Talmid Chachom who suffered from terrible illness and pain. In despair, he decided to visit the Chida and ask for a Brachah.

When he entered the Chida's Bais Medrash, he found the great Tzadik giving a Shiur on a certain topic in the Gemara. Not wanting to disturb, he sat quietly in the back of the room, waiting until the Chida finished. His journey to the Chida had been a long and tiring one, and in the warmth of the Bais Medrash, this Talmid Chachom fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly, he felt like he was dead. He was surrounded by his family and friends who were escorting him to his final resting place. They eulogized him, they asked his forgiveness, and then they turned back to their homes, and he was left

alone. The quiet of the grave was soon broken as a Malach came to escort him to the Heavenly Court for judgment.

It's a long way from this world to the next, and the Talmid Chachom found it exhausting as he walked with the Malach. When the Malach said it would take two days of walking to reach where they had to get to, the Talmid Chachom was shocked. He exclaimed, "Two days? I'm exhausted! I can't walk much farther."

As they were speaking, he heard the sound of a carriage approaching. He looked up hopefully, but saw it was sagging beneath the weight of its heavy load, which was a huge trunk. The Talmid Chachom asked the driver, "Could I possibly get a ride with you?"

The driver laughed, "Do you have any idea what is in this trunk? It's filled with your Aveiros! Tell me, do you really want to ride with the Aveiros that will incriminate you?"

The Talmid Chachom stared in horrified disbelief. Could this really contain his Aveiros? Impossible! He hadn't committed so many Aveiros in his lifetime! Again, the driver laughed, "And all this? This is nothing! There wasn't enough room in my carriage for all of your Aveiros. There are dozens more coming after me!"

The Talmid Chachom saw that, indeed, more carriages were following on the road. As each of them passed he asked the driver what load he was carrying, and with a sinking heart, he heard the same answer. They were each carrying his Aveiros. Finally, the dismal procession of wagons came to an end.

Only one more coach drove up. It was a small one which carried a very small trunk. Almost in despair, the Talmid Chachom asked the driver what he was carrying. The response was, "Oh, this small trunk? It contains your Mitzvos."

They made it to the trial, and the verdict seemed to be a foregone conclusion. On one side, stacked so high you couldn't even see the top, were the boxes of his Aveiros, and on the other side, was the pitifully small box that held the Mitzvos.

A voice called out, "He shall be brought to Gehinom!" Two Malachim immediately appeared at this man's side to bring him to where he would carry out his dreaded sentence. But before they could move, a Malach dressed in gleaming white appeared and demanded, "Where are you taking him?"

The Malachim replied, "To Gehinom."

The Malach turned to the judges of the Heavenly Tribunal and said, "Have you taken into consideration the terrible suffering this man went through in the physical world?"

The judges began to leaf through the book of the man's life. Seeing the suffering he had undergone they ordered that half of the crates that were filled with Aveiros be discarded.

"And what about the illnesses? Have you considered them?"

Again, the judges looked through the book, and again, they reduced the number of Aveirah crates.

“And what about the problems with his family?”

More crates disappeared.

“And his financial troubles?”

By this time the scale was almost equal. But the Aveiros still weighed heavy. The Malach looked at the scale and asked the judge. “Is there more Yisurim, suffering, that perhaps this man can go through?”

The man watched in disbelief. He could no longer control himself. “More suffering!” he screamed, “More suffering! Can’t I have just a little more suffering?” And then he awoke. He wasn’t dead. He wasn’t in the grave. He wasn’t facing the Heavenly Court. He was in the Bais Medrash of the Chida, who was just finishing up his Shiur.

The Chida saw the stranger and courteously asked him what he could do to help him. The Talmid Chachom told him with enthusiasm, “Baruch Hashem, I don’t need any help. I have everything I need, and I accept it all with love!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

Earning a Share in the World to Come in an Instant

By Yisroel Besser



R’ Tuvia Goldstein once went to borrow a sefer from Rav Moshe Feinstein, who lived in the same building. He saw someone leaving R’ Moshe’s house, and he

was shocked. It appeared to be a certain Rav who had authored a booklet attacking R' Moshe's Igros Moshe, causing R' Moshe pain.

"I imagine he came here because he needs a favor?" R' Tuvia speculated, and R' Moshe nodded.

"And I imagine the Rosh Yeshivah agreed to do it?" R' Tuvia continued, and again, R' Moshe agreed.

"I am mocheh, I protest," R' Tuvia exclaimed. "How can the Rosh Yeshivah look away from what he did and treat him nicely?"

R' Moshe responded, "I contemplated the words of Chazal, 'A person can earn his share in the World to come in a single instant,' and I thought to myself, 'maybe this is my instant!'"

R' Moshe, who had finished Shas hundreds of times, who had learned and taught Torah under duress and opposition, who had written hundreds of teshuvos, who, with his generosity and compassion, bore the burden of Klal Yisroel, felt that perhaps that moment had been the one that would gain him entry to the World to Come! (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "Reb Dovid".)

Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

My Grandmother's Candlesticks

By Diane Abrams

As the summer of 1970 approached, the end of the Vietnam War was in sight. The years of marches, legal battles, demonstrations, letter writing, and political activism were behind me. Although there was relief that the war was ending and my work was gratifying, there was an empty place in my heart. An anxiety I couldn't explain. The community that had seemed so solid was splintering into thousands of pieces.

My friend Flo Kennedy received an invitation from friends in California to use their apartment for a few weeks, and she invited me to join her. I was more than ready for a change of scenery. Another friend of ours, Ginny, also came West for a few days. The apartment in San Francisco had a view of the Golden Gate Bridge directly out of the living room window.

Before I made the trip out West, someone mentioned to me that they knew a couple who had joined a farming commune. It was one of a number of experimental

communities that had sprouted in Mendocino County north of San Francisco during the '60s. His description of vineyards growing on the hills reaching down to the Pacific Ocean made Mendocino sound like one of the truly beautiful places in this country. Curious to see the commune for myself, I asked Ginny if she would be interested in going there with me. We headed north and arrived at four in the afternoon, having heard that visitors were always welcome for dinner.



Diane Abrams

This commune was touted as an avant-garde spiritual outpost with members having decided to live simply, without the hypocrisy and materialism of bourgeois society. As we drove onto the grounds, we were impressed by the tepees and hexagonal igloo-type structures. We saw young people working the earth. Ginny and I entered the communal dining room and were delighted by the aroma of freshly baked bread ready and waiting. It was time for the communal farmers to be called to dinner.

One of the members ceremoniously took out a ram's horn and blew loud blasts to call the rest of the group to the dining room. In response, people began filing into the dining room, and I experienced a jolt to my memory. The last time I had seen or heard the blowing of a ram's horn was in a synagogue, on Yom Kippur. Though I had drifted away from Jewish life, I still appreciated the solemnity of that holy day when people are called to engage in introspection, take stock of their lives, and return to G-d.

When all of the diners were present, everyone stood, linked hands, and chanted, "Ohmm." Once again, I was reminded of a tradition I'd grown up with —

expressing gratitude prior to the beginning of a meal. The freshly baked bread stirred up the memory of my grandmother's special Sabbath challahs that she baked for her family each week. These avant-garde people, I told myself, had surely developed a precise set of rituals for themselves. As soon as I finished my fruit plate, I told Ginny I wanted to leave.

Back in the car, I found myself mulling over what we had seen. I was not inspired by that hodgepodge of different traditions. Suddenly and clearly, I understood that rituals play a key role in transmitting a way of life as well as important values to future generations. Seeing the people at the commune trying to latch onto other people's traditions in such a seemingly haphazard and desperate manner seemed shallow and pathetic. People cannot do without rituals, I realized, and if they reject their own, or didn't have a set of meaningful rituals handed down to them, they would try to create their own.

But I did have a family that handed down rituals and a way of life to me. When I returned to Manhattan after that summer in California, in September 1971, I searched through the boxes stored in my parents' garage and retrieved my grandmother's two silver candlesticks, which she had left me upon her death. I tracked down photographs of my four great-grandfathers, put them in frames, and set them up on my desk.

Although I had traveled far from my early connection to family tradition, the solid Jewish education I had received and the traditional home where I was raised made moving in this direction feel natural to me. Friday afternoons, I would check the time for sunset — the onset of Sabbath and the time for candle lighting. Watching the sky as the sun began to set, a feeling of peacefulness would slowly descend upon me.

Diane Schulder Abrams is an attorney who taught the first Women and the Law course in 1969 at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and then at New York University Law School. An activist at the forefront of the fight for women's rights in the 1970s, she has written about women's rights and also about issues related to the Jewish community. After reading an article that she published about her grandmother in 1974, the Rebbe requested that she write more about her grandmother. Diane is now completing an intergenerational memoir titled *My Grandmother's Candlesticks: Feminism and Judaism*. This article appeared in the Fall 2021 issue of the Lubavitch International magazine.

Reprinted from the Parashat Chaya Sarah 5785 email of L'Chaim, a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.

By Rabbi Aharon Spetner

By Rabbi Aharon Spetner



“Moray v’rabbosai, I was recently diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s and dementia. As a result, I lost my job as an air traffic controller and can no longer support my family. In addition, I am marrying off three of my daughters next week. Heilige Yidden, please! Anything you can give me would be a great help. May Hakadosh Boruch Hu bentsch you with shefa parnosa and you be zocheh to all of the yeshuos and brachos in the world.”

“What’s wrong, Totty?” asked Shimmy.

“Oy, I left my wallet at home,” Totty lamented, as the man finished collecting from everyone and gave yet another klap on the bimah.

“Moray v’rabbosai,” the man said again. “I was recently diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s and dementia. As a result, I lost my job as an air traffic controller...”

Everyone looked sadly at the poor man and many gave him even more tzedakah as he walked around the shul a second time. Meanwhile, Totty turned to the back of his siddur and started saying Tehillim.

Meanwhile, before the man could make yet another klap on the bimah, the gabbai of the shul quickly walked over and kindly explained that he had already made the announcement and offered to give him a ride home.

Several minutes later, Totty closed his siddur. “Okay boys, are you ready to go?”

“Totty,” asked Yitzzy as they put their siddurim away and left the shul. “You don’t usually say Tehillim after davening. Why is today different?”

“Would you boys be surprised if I told you that it has something to do with this week’s parsha?”

The boys smiled. For some reason, whenever they asked Totty a question, the answer seemed to be related to that week’s parsha.

“Well at the beginning of Chayei Sarah, Avraham Avinu is looking to bury Sarah Imeinu in the Mearas Hamachpeila. So, he approaches the Bnei Cheis and asks them to introduce him to Efron, on whose property the Mearas Hamachpeila was located. He says – ‘Listen to me and urge Efron ben Tzochar [to sell me the Mearas Hamachpeila]’. And the Torah is teaching us a lesson here by showing us that Avraham Avinu didn’t just ask them to send a message to Efron. He told them to urge him, to do whatever they could do to help him buy the cave. Because when we help a Yid out it’s not enough to just do something small. We must do whatever we can to help him, just like the gabbai went over to help him and took him all the way home.

“But there’s more. The Midrash tells us that ‘can also mean ‘daven for me’. Because Avraham told the Bnei Cheis that if there is nothing else you can do for me, at the very least daven for me that I should be able to buy the Mearas Hamachpeila.

“And that’s a lesson for us. When someone needs help and you think that you’re not able to help him, you can ALWAYS daven for him. So, when I realized that I had no money on me to give this man, I immediately opened a Tehillim so I could beg Hashem to give him a refuah shleima and parnassah. I couldn’t help him with my hands, but Hashem is much more powerful than me - and it costs me nothing to ask Him to help out.”

"Totty," said Shimmy. "This reminds me of what you told us from Rabbi Miller that whenever we see an ambulance with its sirens blaring we should daven for the sick Yid inside."

"Exactly!" said Totty. "You might see an ambulance and think 'what could I do? The paramedics have it under control, and besides I don't have their training or equipment so I couldn't help that Yid anyway.' And that's a huge mistake. There is no such thing as a Yid in trouble whom you cannot help. No matter what, you can at the very least say a kapitel Tehillim and a small tefillah to Hashem to help him out."

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sarah 5785 email of Toras Avigdor, based on the Torah teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt"l.

The Barber Shop Shidduch

By Rabbi David Ashear

A young lady named Meirah* began attending Rabbi Maimon's* weekly classes in Eretz Yisrael. She approached him after class one afternoon to tell him how inspired she was. "Your shiurim were the impetus for my becoming a baalas teshuvah!" she said.

One day, she passed a barber shop and noticed a boy standing outside, wearing a big black kippah on his head. She paused in front of the neighboring store and pretended to look at the merchandise in the window. After a few moments, she walked away. Later that day, Meirah went back to the shop and asked the barber if he knew the boy who had been waiting in front of his store. He seemed to be a very refined young man.

The barber laughed and said that the boy had noticed Meirah and told the barber he was interested in her as well. He gave Meirah his name (Roni*) and information, and she asked Rabbi Maimon to please find out if he might be a good match for her. The person the rabbi called said Roni had sterling middos but was not religiously observant at all.

"How strange," Meirah mused when she heard that report. "When I saw him, he was wearing a big black kippah." When Roni found out that Meirah was interested in him, he told Rabbi Maimon he was just beginning to become more religious. Being introduced to Meirah would be an additional incentive for him to continue on that path. Roni began going to shiurim and, shortly thereafter, became a shomer Torah u'mitzvos.

The shidduch was then made and, B”H, this couple was married. When they first met, Meirah asked Roni why he had been wearing a kippah on the day she first saw him if he was not yet religious. He laughed and said, “My friend went in for a haircut and asked me to hold his kippah. He plopped it on my head, and I just left it there.”

Hashem coordinated events so that Roni was wearing a kippah – perhaps for the first time in his life – just when Meirah was passing by. This is how He brought about their shidduch. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “Living Emunah on Shidduchim”)

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sara 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Chasid's Ripped Coat

A chasid once had a very successful day in business. He earned twenty-five rubles that day, much more than usual. But his coat ripped on the same day, and a new coat cost twenty-five rubles. The chasid went to his rebbe, the Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim zt'l, and asked him to explain what was happening. Why did he have to earn extra money only to lose it to an unexpected expense?

The Yesod HaAvodah revealed that it was decreed upon him to die r”l. But the decree was sweetened and changed so that his coat would rip instead. (The first decree was on the clothes of the neshamah (the chasid's soul), and the second decree was on the clothes of the body. The clothes of the neshamah is the human body. At first, it was decreed that the body should be removed from the neshamah – death. But the decree was changed that the body's clothes should be taken away, which is why his coat ripped.) But since he didn't deserve a financial loss, it was decreed that he would earn an extra twenty-five rubles – the cost of a new coat.

Let us learn from this episode that everything is for the good. It was upsetting to the chasid when his expensive coat ripped, and the entire day's profit went towards buying a new coat. But it was all for his benefit because the ripped coat saved his life.

The World's Cycle

Hashem created the world in a way that light follows the darkness, and goodness follows suffering. Therefore, going through hard times, one should remember that it won't last forever. Better times will come. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 8.) teaches, "When the sun set on the day Adam HaRishon was created, Adam said, 'Woe is to me! The world has become dark because of my sin. The world will return to nothingness (וְבָהוּ תִהְיֶה)' This is the death that was decreed on me from

heaven." He sat and cried the entire night, with Chavah crying opposite him. When the morning arrived, Adam said, 'This is the way of the world.' He brought an ox [for a korban todah]."

The Chofetz Chaim said over this Gemara to his students during the First World War, when many were very afraid and worried. They thought there was no hope or future for them. The Chofetz Chaim said, "Adam HaRishon cried on the first night because he thought the world would come to an end, but he didn't cry on the second night.

By the second night, he understood that this was the pattern of the world. There was darkness and then light, darkness and then light again. The same is for us, Bnei Yisrael," the Chofetz Chaim explained. "In the history of the Jewish people, we have suffered through many dark eras. So many times, the 'sun set' for Klal Yisrael. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu saved us each time and we have seen the light again. So why are you so worried? The darkness we are going through now will be followed by light."

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sarah 5785 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Bidernman.

The Supermarket Kiddush Hashem

A couple of years ago, a girl was employed at a local supermarket. One of her responsibilities was to return all the items taken off the shelves and placed elsewhere in the store. This task she performed after store-hours.

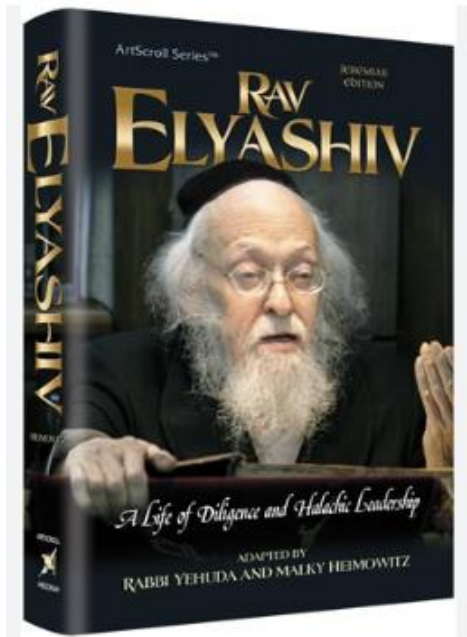
On the first day on the job, she noticed that her boss also stayed in the store after closing. She thought it was a one-time thing. But the next day, when her boss was there again after closing hours. She came home and told her father she no longer wanted to work there. According to halachah, it wasn't a situation that involved an actual issur yichud, but she was uncomfortable and felt it was a breach in tznius.

Some days later, she met a woman who also worked in the store and asked her why she left. She told her the reason. That woman was impressed by her yiras Shamayim, and went home and told her parents, "About a half-year-ago, a shidduch was redt for our sister with a certain bachur, but you turned it down because you got the impression that the yiras Shamayim in that home wasn't up to par. I just met the sister of that bachur. She left her job because of tznius! So, you see, the yiras Shamayim in that house is strong."

The parents looked into it again, and the shidduch was finalized.

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sarah 5785 email of Torah Wellsprings: Collected Thoughts from Rabbi Elimelech Bidernman.

The Pious Horse Thieves



Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv told the story of a group of horse thieves who made their home in a small town in Russia. A person must earn a living, so they decided they would earn their livelihood by stealing horses. After a while, they graduated to other items. They stole anything they could move and fence. They were open minded, liberal Jews; thus, they stole from everyone-not just the ultra-Orthodox. They stole from whoever had something worth stealing.

Something, however, was unique about their lifestyle and its relationship with Judaism. They established a shul which they named Congregation Horse Traders, in which they davened every day. Furthermore, every member of the congregation had to attend services on Shabbos, followed by Tehillim recitation in the afternoon. They were acutely aware that their chosen vocation was accompanied by danger. They hoped that their fervent prayers would circumvent any danger to themselves.

Clearly, anyone who possesses a modicum of intelligence understands the hypocrisy and fallacy of such frumkeit, observance. This type of self-serving nature is not even remotely connected with Jewish observance. They thought that as long as they davened and observed one particular area of bein adam la'Makom, they could reject bein adam la'chaveiro.

Reprinted from the Parashas Chayei Sora 5785 email of Rabbi L. Scheinbaum's Peninim on the Torah, a publication of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.