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The Fiscal Honesty of Rav Aharon Leib



When the Chazon Ish zt"l departed Vilna for Eretz Yisroel in 1933, a small sum of money was owed to a distributor who supplied his wife's store with merchandise. Despite many sincere efforts on behalf of the Rebbetzin, she could not locate the person and repay the debt.

Twenty years later, after the Chazon Ish passed away in 1953, the creditor, who had relocated to Tel Aviv, heard the news on the radio and attended the funeral. Before it began, he happened to mention to R' Shmaryahu Karelitz zt"l, a nephew of the Chazon Ish, that his uncle had once owed him money from 40 years ago. R'

Shmaryahu immediately repaid the outstanding sum and even before the Chazon Ish was buried, the full debt had been discharged.

“This was a special zechus the Chazon Ish enjoyed because of his life-long scrupulousness in financial matters,” R’ Aharon Leib Steinman zt”l later concluded.

Would Only Accept Donations Whose Money Was Above Suspicion of Not Being Dishonest

It was known that R’ Aharon Leib would only accept “kesef naki” - money that was above any suspicion of being obtained dishonestly. If he thought a potential donor to his yeshivah, Orchos Torah, received his funds via questionable means, he would not take them. A yeshivah, he said, must be built al taharas hakodesh.

Every year, the Israeli government disburses UN-claimed funds from dormant bank accounts to charity. The owners of most of these assets are deceased, and they have no known heirs.

But one day, the administrator mentioned to R’ Aharon Leib in passing that Orchos Torah was joining many other yeshivos in Israel in obtaining funds from the unclaimed accounts. R’ Aharon Leib objected. “Since a person likely has halachic heirs, even if nobody came forward claiming to be his next of kin, that doesn’t mean an heir does not exist.”

The administrator countered, “But most yeshivos do accept money from this source. Furthermore, if our yeshivah doesn’t get the funds, a university or other secular institution may get the money, thereby depriving the deceased from the merit of donating to Torah! We would be giving the niftar a zechus by allowing his unclaimed funds to support our yeshivah!”

R’ Aharon Leib listened to his logic, and smiled. “That is not our calculation to make,” he replied. “Since halacha dictates that the money should go to the deceased person’s relative, we can’t be looking to ‘give’ people ‘merits’ if our actions are not in line with halacha.”

A Thief Broke into His Home

R’ Aharon Leib was once out of town giving a drashah, having left his home in the morning after the netz minyan. A person familiar with his schedule, the inner workings of his household, and the large amounts he habitually distributed to avreichim and yeshivos monthly, walked in and when no one was looking, stole the large amount of cash that was in the tzedakah drawer, adjacent to the one in which R’ Aharon Leib stored his personal funds.

When he and his grandson returned home late that afternoon, they were greeted by a huge mess. Drawers and closets had been overturned and rummaged through, and piles of clothing and house-hold possessions were strewn about. Obviously, the thief had searched every corner of the home for valuables.

His grandson opened the drawer that contained R' Aharon Leib's paltry personal funds. To his shock and relief, not a shekel was missing! R' Aharon Leib was very saddened that the tzedakah funds were stolen and immediately began calculating how much he could replace.

"Sabba," said his grandson, "a real miracle occurred! At least the ganav didn't touch your personal funds!"

Denies that There was a Miracle with His Money

"It wasn't a miracle," R' Aharon Leib replied. "You know I am scrupulous that all the money I earn should be 'kosher.' Hashem watched over the money."

R' Aharon Leib then lifted his hands and related the following: "I have always been extra careful to never steal from anyone. However, there were two times in Switzerland during the war that I may have inadvertently taken things that weren't mine. I once picked flowers from an open field and only later realized that the field wasn't public property but belonged to a non-Jew. I also mistakenly reused a stamp. In both instances, I did my best to repay the owner of the field and to make a payment to the postal service in Switzerland."

It no wonder that R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l said that he didn't know anyone with such clean hands in financial matters as R' Aharon Leib.

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5782 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin parsha sheet.

The Reason Young Shalom Cried Bitterly

When Rav Shalom of Kaminka, zt"l, was seven years old, a fascinating ceremony was held in the town where he lived. In order to enhance his army's military skills, the king encouraged his soldiers to engage in mock military battles. A particular troop would be divided into two opposing teams, and the "battle" would begin. The king himself participated in these events and presented the winning team with a prize.

When the mock battle came to Kaminka, a large parade with soldiers and musicians was held in the town square in honor of the king's arrival. The entire town converged on the square to watch the beautiful ceremony. Like everyone else in town, young Shalom's parents wanted to go watch the parade. It is written in the Gemara that if a person has the opportunity to witness the honor accorded to a non-

Jewish king, he should not pass it up because if he will merit to see a true Jewish king, he will appreciate what true majesty is, and how much greater is the honor and glory accorded a Jewish king.

In their haste to leave, however, Shalom's parents forgot him at home. Each parent thought the other had taken him. After the majestic parade, Shalom's parents returned home, and they found Shalom sitting at the table, crying bitterly.

Shalom's parents felt terrible. They apologized for having left him behind and offered to buy him a nice gift to make up for the fact that he had missed the parade. But little Shalom had no idea what they were talking about. He wasn't upset at all that he had missed the parade.

"Why are you crying, then?" his mother asked in bewilderment.

"How can I not cry?" little Shalom sobbed, pointing to the open volume of Choshen Mishpat from Shulchan Aruch that was on the table. "I have been studying the Shach's commentary on Choshen Mishpat for so long, but I just don't understand what it means! Obviously, the Shach understood it. So why can't I?!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Frustrated Eliyahu HaNavi

The Baal Shem Tov once told his students, "Many years ago, in the holy city of Tzefas, there lived a simple, G-d fearing Yid. Though he was not blessed with a great mind or with any exceptional talents, he served Hashem with a whole heart and a humble spirit.

"Late one night, there was a knock on his door. He opened it to see an old man with a long white beard standing there, and his face was as radiant as the heavens. He said, 'I am Eliyahu HaNavi. I have come to open and broaden your mind and heart in Torah, and teach you the deepest secrets of Creation.' Eliyahu continued,

"On the day of your Bar Mitzvah, you did a great and wondrous deed, an act that reverberated through the entire universe. The Malachim (angels) and Neshamos (heavenly souls) that are there all wondered, 'What has this man done that has flooded the heavens with this magnificent light, such as has not been seen for many generations?'

"But your deed was too radiant for us to look at. Please tell me what it was that you did,' asked Eliyahu, 'and I will reveal things to you that only the greatest Neshamos are allowed to know.'

The man replied, ‘What I did, I did only for Hashem. It is not for the knowledge of anyone. Not a person, or even a Malach.’

Eliyahu pleaded, and promised even greater gifts in Ruchniyus (spirituality), but the man was steadfast in his refusal, and Eliyahu HaNavi left unsuccessful.”

The Baal Shem Tov concluded, “In my previous life, I was that man!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

Spreading the Fire

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon



Recently I heard from a friend of mine, Reb Yosef, whose work as an engineer brings him into contact with people who want to make changes in their house or building and needs his report about asbestos and lead in order to obtain a permit.

He said, I received a phone call from an architect asking if we can meet at a certain address in Manhattan. I replied that I have to make an inspection at a nearby address, so instead of giving her a time that I may not be able to commit to, if it ok

with her I will pick her up when I conclude that inspection. She said that was fine and that is what we did.

The following day I picked her up and we discussed what she wanted to do, and I told her what I expected to find in that old building and how it can be resolved.

She then mentioned to me that she is also Jewish.

I asked her “Do you light the candles on Fridays?”

“No, but I should“ she replied. “I have my grandmothers candle sticks which she lit in Communist Russia and that was difficult to do under her circumstances yet she was determined to do so, and here it isn’t difficult to light them, in fact, there is nothing that prevents me from doing so. I think I will start.”

Informed of Candle Lighting Times

Reb Yosef informed her that he will send her on Friday the proper time when the candles should be lit and they arrived at their destination and he made the inspection.

For the next few weeks, he dutifully sent her the time for the lighting of the candles.

One Sunday she sent him the following, this past weekend there was a family get together in honor of a wedding. At the reception I took out the candle sticks and I mentioned to my relatives that my grandmother had the fortitude to light candles in honor of the Sabbath in Communist Russia, and we should all emulate her and light the candles in beautiful America. And everyone did.

Reb Yosef then said, “Not only can a chossid who is a professional do the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe’s shlichus (mission) and conduct himself as a Shliach (emissary of the Rebbe), but as the Rebbe often said, Shliach oiseh Shliach - one emissary can appoint and make an additional emissary.”

She Convinced Others to Also Light Candles

I was able to make a woman that I would never have thought was Jewish, to also become a messenger and successfully give over to others what the Rebbe wants from them.

The heart of every Jew is ready to be awakened. All it needs is for us to ready to light it.

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5782 email of Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber Avtzon’s Weekly Story. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim of Lubavitch and their chassidim. he can be contacted at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

The Blessings of the Intense Stomach Pains

By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

When a person finds himself in a crisis, as we all do from time to time, he should pause and try to recall situations that he has experienced in the past that were similar to the current dilemma, and then reflect on how Hashem helped him to get past the problem. This will help him to calm his fear and trepidation, and to rely totally on Hashem. For example, if someone is struggling financially, he should think about a past situation when he was also very tight on cash, and yet he managed to get by.

Sentenced to Five Years in Siberia

Rabbi Yisrael Rabinowitz was living in Poland when Word War II broke out. When Germany attacked Poland, many Jews decided to attempt to sneak over the border to Russia. However, Rav Yisrael and his group were caught by the Russian border patrol and were sentenced to five years in Siberia.

When Tish'ah B'ab arrived, Rav Yisrael was unsure whether he should fast or not. On a regular day, they were given so little food that they were frail and weak, and fasting could be dangerous. In the end, he decided to fast anyway. His fellow prisoners respected his determination, and one woman even managed to make him a bowl of soup to break his fast on. But as soon as he ate the soup, he got a tremendous pain in his stomach, and they needed to transfer him to the hospital. The whole time, he was wondering how this could happen to him after he just fasted with such self-sacrifice.

A Pact Made by Stalin and the Polish Government

He woke up the next morning to cheers of "We're free!" He was told that Stalin had just made a pact with the Poland government and he agreed to free all Polish political prisoners who were in the hospital. So, his intense stomach pains that sent him to the hospital were actually a gift from Hashem so that he could be released from prison.

Most outcomes are not as clear as that one. But if we take a moment to think back, we can probably remember many times in our past when we didn't see a way out of our difficult predicament and we were worried about our future, and yet at the end of the day, things worked out and it turned out that we were worried for

nothing. Hashem has a perfect track record, and we trust that He always makes things work out for the best, even when we sometimes can't see it. If we can train ourselves to always remember Hashem's constant involvement in our affairs, we will find it much easier to cope with whatever comes our way. Sometimes we will be able to understand how it was all for the best, and sometimes we won't be able to see it. But we can always feel secure in the knowledge that Hashem has everything under control and that our Father in Heaven knows best.
Shabbat Shalom.

Reprinted from the Parashat Ekev 5782 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Shortcut to Greatness

By Rabbi Boruch Brull



Rav Yitzchak Feigelstock, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Mesivta of Long Beach, lives around the corner from the mesivta. Every morning during the zeman, he walks to the mesivta for Shaharit. It takes him about five minutes to get there.

During the summer, when most of the bachurim and Rebbeim are away, not enough people are left for a minyan at the mesivta. So each morning, the Rosh Yeshivah gets a ride, approximately twenty minutes each way, to the Yeshivah of

Far Rockaway, in order to pray with a minyan. Needless to say, the Rosh Yeshivah is treated with great kavod. Nevertheless, Rav Feigelstock looks forward to the beginning of the new zeman, when the bachurim will return to Long Beach and a minyan will be held in the mesivta building.

One summer, the zeman for the mesivta was scheduled to begin on Thursday. The Rosh Yeshivah traveled to the Yeshivah of Far Rockaway on Monday and Tuesday mornings to pray, and was planning to go on Wednesday morning as well. However, on Tuesday night, Rabbi Shlomo Lesin, the executive vice president of the mesivta, called the Rosh Yeshivah to tell him that some of the bachurim had unexpectedly returned to the mesivta earlier than planned and that they would be making a minyan for Shaharit on Wednesday morning. As a result, it would not be necessary for the Rosh Yeshivah to travel all the way to Far Rockaway for Wednesday morning's minyan.

The Rosh Yeshiva Doesn't Change His Plans

Rabbi Lesin was surprised when the Rosh Yeshivah thanked him for informing him of the change but insisted nonetheless on going to the Yeshivah of Far Rockaway on Wednesday morning. It seemed to Rabbi Lesin that the Rosh Yeshivah could have saved so much time by just walking to the mesivta instead of going all the way to Far Rockaway! What could be his reasoning? On the way back from Far Rockaway on Wednesday morning, Rabbi Lesin decided to ask the Rosh Yeshivah.

The Rosh Yeshivah explained, "When I left the Yeshivah of Far Rockaway on Tuesday morning after minyan, I did not realize that I would not come back on Wednesday morning for Shaharit, so I did not properly thank everyone in shul and wish them a good year. It was only right to come back this morning and properly thank everyone for allowing me to join them for minyan all summer."

Thinking About the Feelings of Others

We can learn so much from the Rosh Yeshivah's actions. Sometimes, even if we can take a shortcut and do things that might be easier for us, we must think about the feelings of others. When it comes to showing hakarat hatob to others, we've got to take the long road, no matter how far. (Excerpted from the Feldheim Publisher's book – "For Goodness' Sake.")

Reprinted from the Parashat Ekev 5782 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

A Viennese Table

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

One afternoon two young men came from Poland to seek employment in Vienna. They made their way to the headquarters of Zeirei Agudas Yisroel. It was only hours before Yom Tov, and the two men were worried they would have no place to eat that evening. They were told to go to the Schiff shul, the main shul in Vienna, and make sure that R' Dovid Schlesinger sees them, as he would surely invite them.

Over 300 people davened in the Schiff shul every Shabbos and even more so on Yom Tov. All had designated seats, so guests would congregate in the last rows of the shul.

The Two Men Tried to Make Eye Contact

The two men tried to make eye contact with Mr. Schlesinger, but were not sure he noticed them. When davening was over the two visitors stood at the end of the main aisle in the middle of the shul so that Mr. Schlesinger would see them on his way out.

As Mr. Schlesinger passed by, he was deeply engrossed in conversation with another man. He nodded to the two and said Gut Yom Tov, and went on. The two young men were dismayed. What were they to do now? They stood outside the shul looking around hopelessly.

Five minutes later they saw Mr. Schlesinger running towards them. "Boys, would you do me the honor of joining us for the se'udah tonight?" he asked. They of course accepted the invitation. By the middle of the meal their curiosity overcame them, and they respectfully asked Mr. Schlesinger why he first left the shul and then came back for them.

Concerned for the Feelings of the Man Who Lost His Wealth

He answered them, "The man I was walking with was at one time a very wealthy person. But now he has lost all his money. If I would have invited you in front of him, he would feel compelled to invite one of you as well. But I know that he cannot afford to have guests as he hardly has enough to feed his own family. However, after I walked him down the block and he turned the corner, I was able to rush back, hoping that you would both still be outside the shul so that you could grace our table." (Around the Maggid's Table published by ArtScroll)

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5782 email of The Weekly Vort.

Baptized at 16, She Died With Shema in Her Ears

By Chaya Rochel Zimmerman



My brother-in-law Dave, with his sister Bernice.

“Educate the child according to his way: Even as he grows old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

My brother-in-law Dave and his sister Bernice grew up on Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 1930s, when it was a place full of Jewish life. Their mother lit Shabbat candles, kept kosher and cared for her aged, religious grandfather. Bernice and her brother attended public school, followed by Hebrew school in the late afternoons. Their mother taught Bernice to play piano and sing opera, and she sent her for dance lessons: tap and ballet. Even though Bernice was a bit of a tomboy, she loved those things.

Despite all of this—a nurturing environment, and the modeling of Jewish observance and values—at the tender age of 16, a few friends from high school convinced Bernice to convert to Catholicism. She hid her conversion from her parents for two years until she graduated high school. Once Bernice revealed her monumental decision, her irate mother insisted that she leave home, and the family hid the news from her elderly grandfather for the rest of his life.

Under these circumstances, Bernice moved into Greenwich Village in 1952 and found a job acting in one of the many Yiddish theaters that flourished on Second Avenue on the Lower East Side. Her grandmother had sewed costumes for the Yiddish theater, and she felt at home there. Five years later, Bernice reconciled with her mother and moved back home to continue her education. She became a registered nurse and worked as a school nurse for the rest of her life.

Married a Former Priest and Had One Child Born with Disabilities

Bernice met her husband, a former priest, when she was nearing 40. They married and had one child, who was born with some physical and cognitive disabilities. With her training as a nurse, she was able to care for him until he could move to a group home for adults with disabilities. To supplement her income, and because she loved music, she taught children to play piano and perform recitals.

Over the years, I had several pleasant interactions with Bernice, a good-hearted and kind person who never spoke badly of others. She was very appreciative that I invited her and her husband to my wedding. She sent me cards every year—for New Year’s, Chanukah, Pesach—and devoured the novels I wrote on Jewish topics. In our phone calls, I could perceive none of the rebelliousness that might have spurred her decisions as a teenager. I wondered how her memories of growing up in a very Judaism-oriented home differed from those of her brother, who had grown warmer and more receptive to Judaism as he matured.

Seven years ago, my husband and I celebrated my sister and brother-in-law’s 50th wedding anniversary with a trip to Florida. Our itinerary included visiting Bernice, who was living with her husband near Jacksonville. When we planned the trip, I didn’t initially realize that it would fall out over Chanukah, so when the time came, I packed three menorahs: one for us, one for my sister, and one for Bernice, in the hopes that she would light one, too.

The Third Night of Chanukah

We arrived at Bernice’s family home on the third night of Chanukah. Bernice had already set up candles in the large metal *chanukiah* which she had taken from her parents’ house years ago. She lights it every year, she told us. My husband sat down at her piano to play “Hanerot Halalu,” “Maoz Tzur” and other Chanukah songs, which delighted her. She, in turn, played some Jewish melodies that she remembered from the Yiddish theater.

There was a *mezuzah* on the door of her house, a Magen David star in the bedroom, and she bought a kosher Empire chicken to serve on the kosher dishes she had taken from her mother’s house. Although outwardly she had left Jewish practice many years before, inwardly her childhood memories and the impressions of her youth had remained strong.

Pirkei Avot, “Ethics of the Fathers,” teaches: “He who studies Torah as a child, to what can he be compared? To ink written on fresh paper.” The initial imprints from her youth apparently remained with her throughout her lifetime. They had exerted themselves in bursts over the course of her life, and she didn’t resist.

In their later years, when Bernice’s husband insisted they should both be cremated, she demurred and purchased plots instead. This year, the travails of severe dementia led to her husband’s placement in a nearby nursing home. Only a few weeks later, at the age of 88, Bernice suffered a fall at home and was taken unconscious to the hospital.

Chabad Rabbi Visits Her Before She Passes Away

I called the local Chabad rabbi in her area and asked him to visit her. He said the holy *Shema* prayer by her bedside days before she passed away. I was able to arrange with the rabbi that the *chevra kadisha* would prepare her body for burial in accordance with Jewish tradition, including the ritual washing of the body and the wrapping of it in *tachrichim*, white burial shrouds.

Her brother and nieces contacted Chabad.org to arrange for Kaddish to be said for the elevation of her soul.

Bernice was born a Jewish child. She walked the path she chose, but the impressions her soul absorbed in the early years nudged her to express the wishes of her true Jewish heart.

May the memory of Basha bat Chaim Gedalia be for a blessing.



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University of Maryland, Machon Chana and Bais Rivka Seminary. She lives in Chicago, raised a large family, and devoted her life to Jewish educational projects. Ever mindful of sensitive issues in the community, her recently published novels, *Lemons in the Fog* and *The Next Pair of Shoes*, focus on mental illness and the immigrant journey.

Reprinted from the Parshat Re'eh 5781 website of Chabad.Org Magazine.

The Foolish Innkeeper

Reb Yisroel Salanter, ZT”L, once stopped into a Jewish-owned inn while traveling. He found that the innkeeper had become irreligious. When asked why, the owner responded that a recent guest had belittled the omnipresence of Hashem. In fact, he had held up a piece of non-kosher meat and announced that if there is a G-d Who was watching, rewarding, and punishing he should choke on the meat when he would eat it. Nothing happened, and subsequently, the innkeeper’s religious observance slipped.

The Boasts of the Innkeeper’s Young Daughter

Reb Yisroel didn’t respond and went to his room. A few hours later, the innkeeper’s young daughter came home from school and proudly announced that she had graduated with an honors diploma in Mathematics and Music.

Reb Yisroel called her over and asked her to sing, to prove that she could. She refused. The innkeeper asked her why she had refused to sing for Reb Yisroel. She answered that she didn’t have to prove herself every time to every person; after all, she had a diploma to prove her excellence!

Reb Yisroel spoke privately to the innkeeper and explained to him that his daughter’s answer applied to his predicament, as well. Hashem had already proven His powers to the entire world at the time of our Exodus from Egypt, and we have our Torah to prove it. G-d also proved himself in the days of Mordechai and Esther, and again with the Chashmonayim, and so on. Does Hashem have to prove Himself every time some non-believer wishes to challenge Him?

Attempting to Dissuade Jews from Serving G-d

Comment: In Parsha Re’eh (Devarim 13:2-6) discusses false prophets who attempt to dissuade Jews from serving G-d and worship idols instead. The Torah warns us not to listen to them but to always follow Hashem, who has proven Himself by taking us out of Egypt and instructed us via the Torah on how to lead our lives. Remember, Hashem does not have to reassert Himself every time a naysayer arises.

Reprinted from the Short and Sweet Story of the Week with Rabbi Mordechai Levin from the Parshas Re’eh 5782 email of Torah Sweets.