

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI 5785

Volume 16, Issue 34 26 Iyar 5785/May 24, 2025

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

For a free subscription, please forward your request to keren18@juno.com

Past emails can be found on the website – ShabbosStories.com

The Ransom or The “Happy” Ending?

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



The following story involving the great Talmid Chacham (Torah Scholar) and Tzadik (righteous person) Reb Yonason Eibshuetz (c.1690-1764) author of "Yaaros Devash," shows the extent to which a few Jews were willing to go in their dedication to doing mitzvahs out of a love for Hashem.

R' Yonasan Eibshuetz was married in his late teens into a wealthy family. Reb Yonasan's father-in-law gave him three thousand gulden as a wedding present. The

generous gift was meant to enable the outstanding scholar to study Torah undisturbed and realize his fullest potential.

As was (is) the norm in Europe, it happened to be that the gentiles of R' Yonasan's town had very little tolerance for Jews and their customs. Appropriately, the gentiles decided to build a huge church right across the street from the synagogue that would overshadow and dwarf the Jews' place of worship and study. The Jews were enraged at having to face a church the moment they stepped out of their shul, but being a minority in both numbers and power, they could neither do nor say anything.

The Hot-Headed Young Chavrusa

That is, all the Jews except Aryeh Leib, R' Yonasan's hot-headed, temperamental young chavrusa (study partner). While the church was being built, Aryeh Leib seethed with anger at the audacity of the church officials. The constant flow of priests and nuns who looked at the Jews with contempt evoked a terrible fury in R' Aryeh Leib. He promised himself that someday he would avenge the insult.

R' Yonasan could not calm his hot-headed friend. Even R' Yonasan's insistence that any attempt at reprisal would jeopardize other Jews went unheeded. Aryeh Leib was adamant. When the building was finally completed, ceremonies were held for the inauguration of the church, and services began. Many gentiles moved into the neighborhood to be closer to the new church, and Aryeh Leib decided that he had had enough.

Late one night he entered the church and climbed the winding stairs to the steeple top, where there was a huge cross. Equipped with a hammer and chisel, he managed to break off and shatter the cross.

Caught by the Priests

The noise woke up the resident priest, who raced up the stairs to investigate what had happened. Another priest joined him and when they caught sight of an "accursed Jew" in their church, they ran after him in hot pursuit. In his blind rush to get away from the scene of the crime, Aryeh Leib lost his way in the dimly lit halls of the church. The priests caught him and beat him mercilessly. They then decided to lock him up until the morning when they would decide how to deal with him further. In the morning, at a conclave with other church officials, it was decided to burn Aryeh Leib at the stake for desecrating their church.

When Aryeh Leib did not appear for learning the next day, R' Yonasan was surprised but not particularly worried, but when he did not come the next day either, his friends really began to worry.

The next night, as R' Yonasan and a few others were learning in shul, they heard a knock on the door. It was the priest in charge of security at the church across the street. He knew that Jews are charitable, and had devised a plan that would net him a large amount of money. He told the small group that if they would agree to give three thousand gulden, he would see to it that Aryeh Leib was set free, as long as he agreed to leave town forever. The sum was a very large one, but pidyon shevuyim (redemption of the captured) is a great mitzvah.

R' Yonasan and his friends reluctantly agreed to the priest's price. There was only a small chance that the Jews could raise such a large sum of money before Aryeh Leib would be killed. The priest might change his mind about the deal if the ransom was not paid on time. He decided that he would use the three thousand gulden that he had received from his father-in-law to redeem Aryeh Leib.

The next morning, he went to the church and met with the priest. "I have the money," R' Yonasan told him, "but first let me see Aryeh Leib."

"How did you get the money so quickly?" asked the incredulous priest.

Answering the Priest's Question

"It's my own money," said R' Yonasan. "My father-in-law gave it to me as a wedding gift, but I'm glad to give it up to save my friend."

The priest could not help but be in awe at the selflessness of the young scholar. He brought Aryeh Leib to a back door. R' Yonasan embraced his friend and gave the priest the money. Aryeh Leib was set free and told to leave town immediately.

That evening a group of men came to the synagogue and told R' Yonasan that they had collected a large sum of money for the release of Aryeh Leib. R' Yonasan told them that it wasn't needed anymore because he had already paid the ransom and Aryeh Leib was safely out of town. The men tried to convince R' Yonasan to keep part of the money, but he refused.

"But we too would like to share in the mitzvah," they argued. "Save the money for a future emergency," answered R' Yonasan, and he refused to take a single gulden of their funds.

Meanwhile, at the church, the other priests found out that Aryeh Leib was missing. They were infuriated and tried to find out how he had escaped. They confronted the priest in charge of security who claimed that he had found the cell open and the young man gone. The others did not believe him, for he had not reported the escape to them. They unanimously decided to put the scheming priest to death, for they suspected that he might have arranged for ransom money which he kept for himself.

The priest overheard their conversation and the death sentence they had pronounced on him. Now he would have to escape before his colleagues would be able to execute their sentence. He quickly took R' Yonasan's money together with other money and jewelry that he had amassed over the years and made his way to R' Yonasan's house.

There he told the young wife how her husband had given his own money to free his friend, and then said to her, "I have no one to trust. I must get away quickly. Here, you hold the money and my gold and silver items. If I come back, I know you will return everything to me. I never saw such integrity as your husband showed. I'm sure you are the same. If I don't come back, it's all yours."

Later that day the priest's body was found in the river, under the town's bridge. Three days later R' Yonasan returned home, somewhat uneasy about the reception he would receive. To his pleasant surprise, his wife greeted him with smiles, praise and warmth.

Hashem Has Returned Your Money Along with a Great Fortune

"What a tzaddik you are. I know the whole story. I'm proud of your willingness to fulfill the great mitzvah of pidyon shevuyim, even at such great cost to yourself! But look how wonderful Hashem has been to you. He has returned all your money and even given us a great fortune."

R' Yonasan couldn't believe what he was hearing. "What are you talking about? How do you know about the mitzvah?"

His wife told him how the priest had had to flee for his life, how he'd given her the three thousand gulden plus other things, with instructions to hold everything until he returned.

"He said that if he doesn't return, everything belongs to you. Today I found out that he'd drowned under the town bridge. Everything belongs to you, now," said R' Yonasan's wife. R' Yonasan's face fell, and he began to cry. His wife understood that these weren't tears of joy. "Why are you so unhappy," she asked, "when the whole incident has ended so well? Aryeh Leib is saved, we have our money back ...

R' Yonasan couldn't be consoled. "G-d has thrown the mitzvah back in my face," he wept. "For some reason he doesn't want me to have my reward in the World to Come, where righteous people enjoy their true reward (see Avos 2:21). That is why He gave me my reward here and now."

After Three Days of Fasting

For three days R' Yonasan fasted. After the third day he beseeched G-d to reveal to him in a dream why his mitzvah hadn't been accepted. That night he was told the answer in a dream. Because he had refused to share the mitzvah of pidyon shevuyim with others and had kept it for himself, it was not acceptable. He should not have refused his friends' money. By "giving" all the money on his own, R' Yonasan had been "taking" - that is taking the whole mitzvah for himself when others wanted a share in it. He had not used proper judgment in fulfilling the mitzvah.

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5785 email Good Shabbos Everyone. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “The Maggid Speaks” by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn.

The “Mistaken” Bouquet of Flowers



The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation shared a story. Gitta Levin opened an envelope that was attached to a beautiful bouquet of flowers that had just been delivered to her door. It was a thank-you note from Sara Green, a young woman she sometimes saw in Shul.

Gitta thought, “This must be a mistake. Sara must have meant for these flowers to be delivered to a different Levin.” She called Sara Green to let her know about the mix-up, but Sara let her know that there was no mix-up at all.

She explained, “One Shabbos, a few weeks ago, you left Shul with me after Davening,” Sara reminded her. “That day was my best friend’s Chasan’s Aufruf. She is my last single friend, and I was feeling very lost and alone. I decided, that’s it, I’m not dating anymore. I’m almost 35, and if there’s someone out there for me, I would have found him by now. Why keep going out and being disappointed? I’ll make the best life I can as a single woman.

But as we walked out together, you smiled at me and said, ‘Sara, you look stunning in that suit! Where do you get your impeccable fashion sense? I’m sure your children will be the best-dressed kids on the block!’

“I was speechless. Not just at the warm compliment, but at the fact that you saw me having a family of my own one day. You awakened the hope in me that I could meet my Bashert and become a wife and a mother. I felt like a new person! That’s what your compliment did.

“And it happened at just the right time, because I had recently gotten a Shidduch suggestion that I had decided not to accept. The Chizuk you gave me made me feel that maybe it was worth a try. So now, I want to give you something to show my appreciation, Mrs. Levin, because last night, I became a Kallah! Who knows what might have been if not for your thoughtful, positive words?!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.

Obeying Our Parents

By Aharon Spetner



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

Thursday Afternoon, University City, MO

The Berkowitz family made their way to the checkout line at Schnucks grocery store.

“Totty!” whispered Eliezer excitedly as they approached. “That’s Mayor McGillicuddy! What’s he doing at the store?”

“That’s funny,” said Shlomo Dov. “I never imagined that the mayor does his own shopping.”

As if to answer their question, the mayor greeted the Berkowitizes with a wide smile.

“Welcome to Schnucks!” Mayor McGillicuddy said jovially. “As your mayor, it is my highest priority to go out of my way to help the loyal citizens of University City. And that’s why my assistant, Cameron, will be bagging your groceries for you

today!” Whispering to his assistant, he added “Cameron, where are the news camera crews? They should have been here by now.”

“Boys,” said Totty, “can you please help me load the groceries onto the conveyor belt?”

“Of course, Totty!” they replied, and quickly, Shlomo Dov, Eliezer, and Avrohom Chaim began taking all of the items out of their cart and putting them onto the conveyor belt.

Meanwhile, a loud commotion was heard from the next checkout lane, where another family was checking out.

“No, Matt!” the father was saying angrily. “We’re not buying that candy. Just help me finish up here and we’re leaving.”

“Well then I’m getting this bottle of lemonade!” Matt replied stubbornly.

“Put that back! Michael, what are you doing behind the register - get back here! Why don’t you children ever listen to me?”

The Berkowitzes did their best to ignore the rowdy family and continued to help Totty.

“Here, Totty,” said Avrohom Boruch, bending down. “Your credit card fell on the floor.”

“Thank you so much!” Totty replied with a smile.

Meanwhile, Mayor McGillicuddy watched the two families as his assistant filled the grocery bags as quickly as he could.

“Thank you, Mister Mayor and Cameron,” the Berkowitzes said politely as they finished checking out.

“Oh, I’m always happy to work hard for my constituents,” Mayor McGillicuddy replied, puffing out his chest. “It’s just too bad the camera crews haven’t gotten here yet so you could be in the news with your beloved mayor.”

“Oh, that’s quite alright,” Totty said. “We don’t need the publicity.”

“Who said anything about publicity?” the mayor answered. “I’m just here to help. But Cameron,” he added, turning to his assistant. “You should call them and find out why they’re not here yet.”

“Right away, Mister Mayor,” Cameron replied.

“You know,” Mayor McGillicuddy said, turning back to the Berkowitzes. “It’s always impressive to see how well Jewish children listen to their parents. I think that if I ever have children, I’ll become Jewish so my children will obey me too. Well, bye now, and don’t forget - ‘Vote McGillicuddy’!”

“Kinderlach,” Totty said as they waved goodbye to the mayor and walked outside. “You made a beautiful kiddush Hashem by acting so nicely and respectfully in the store.”

“Yeah,” said Shlomo Dov. “And we even made Mayor McGillicuddy want to become a Yid!”

“Well,” Totty said, opening the trunk of the car. “I’m not so sure about that - do you really think someone should become a Yid just so his kids will listen to him?”

“Well, no, but isn’t it a nice perk?” Eliezer said, placing a bag of groceries into the trunk.

“I want you all to understand something,” said Totty. “The Mitzvah of honoring and fearing our parents is not a ‘perk’ of Yiddishkeit. It’s meant to teach us how to have Yiras Shomayim.

“You see, right after the Mitzvah of ‘- ‘You should be Holy’, the Torah teaches the Mitzvah of ‘Everyone should fear his mother and father’. And that is because in order for a person to learn to fear his Father Hashem, he must first start with fearing his physical mother and father from when he is young.

“The point of listening to our parents isn’t to benefit the parents, it’s to get us used to listening to the people whom we are grateful to for bringing us into this world and raising us. And then, as we get older and see more and more how it’s really Hashem who is ultimately responsible for creating us, keeping us alive, and providing us with happiness and wellbeing, we will naturally continue to fear and listen to Him in the same way that we did to our parents when we were younger!”

“Thank you for that beautiful lesson,” said Shlomo Dov. “And thank you Hashem for giving us beautiful Mitzvos like fearing our parents which help us get closer to You!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5785 email of Toras Avigdor Junior based on the Torah teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l

The Love of Learning Torah Even in Siberian Exile

Rav Dovid Koppelman told a story. At the beginning of World War II, Rav Elkanah Zoberman, zt”l, Rav of Yordanov, and a main Talmid of Rav Meir Arik, zt”l, was exiled to Siberia with his family. He suffered immensely, enduring extremely harsh weather and back-breaking labor.

Despite the hardships, Rav Elkanah’s love of Torah burned strong in his heart, and he continued to learn Torah constantly and Daven intensely, both before and

after his work. Even on days when he and his family had nothing to eat, Rav Elkanah kept learning.

A fellow prisoner, Shmuel, became aware that Rav Elkanah and his family had been fasting for two days. Shmuel risked his life to steal half a loaf of bread at midnight, then rushed to Rav Elkanah's tiny, cold room. He found Rav Elkanah standing on a chair, because the ground was frozen. His body was covered with torn rags, and he was holding a small, flickering candle next to a torn-out page from a Gemara. It was one of a few torn pages he had found in the area.

Oblivious to the bitter cold and the hunger, Rav Elkanah's eyes were entirely focused on the Gemara, and he was completely engrossed in his learning. When Rav Elkanah raised his eyes and saw Shmuel, his face shone with happiness. Shmuel handed him the bread.

Rav Elkanah thanked him profusely, and then woke up his family. He divided all the bread between his wife and his children, without taking even a small piece for himself. With renewed enthusiasm, he returned to his learning!

Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

Best Regards

Dr. James David Weiss had been attending Rabbi Berel Wein's classes for a while, and though he was not committed to Judaism in all its aspects, he was truly fascinated by the amazing insights and the spiritual impact that Torah study had made on his life. In fact, although he was a shiur regular, and his wife was committed to Torah observance, the doctor had not yet made the commitment to observe Shabbat.

Towards the summer, Dr. Weiss mentioned to Rabbi Wein that shortly he would be visiting Israel. The doctor had heard Rabbi Wein's stories of his experiences, as the Rabbi of Miami Beach, having chauffeured Rabbi Yosef Kahanamen, the Ponovezer Rav on his fund-raising missions in the United States. In many of his lectures, Rabbi Wein had related his close relationship with Rav Kahanamen, and Dr. Weiss excitedly told Rabbi Wein that he would soon visit the Ponovez Yeshiva.

Dr. Weiss did not know that the Rav had passed away a decade earlier, so he enthusiastically offered to send Rabbi Wein's regards to the Ponovezer Rav. Not trying to discourage the visit, Rabbi Wein smiled and said, "you could try."



Rav Eliezer Shach and Rabbi Berel Wein

Dr. Weiss arrived at the Ponovez Yeshiva and after marveling at the beauty of its gilded Aron Kodesh and nearly 1000 swaying Talmudists, he asked a boy to direct him to the Ponovezer Rav. Since the Rav had passed away a decade earlier, they directed him to the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach. Dr. Weiss waited for the Sage to lift his head from the large tome. The old Sage looked up and greeted the doctor. Dr. Weiss stuck out his hand, and with the remnants of the Yiddish he had salvaged from his youth, he addressed Rav Shach.

"Sholom Aleichem! My name is Dr. Weiss I study with Rabbi Wein and I come from America with warmest regards from him."

Rav Shach looked at him quizzically. "I don't know a Rabbi Wein."

"Don't you remember?" asked Dr. Weiss in shock. "Rabbi Berel Wein," he repeated. "He would often drive you when you visited Miami on behalf of the Yeshiva."

Rav Shach smiled. "I don't know Rabbi Wein, and I have never been to Miami. My name is Shach. I think you meant to see Rav Kahanamen, but he has passed away."

Dr. Weiss looked embarrassed. But Rav Shach quickly dissolved the discomfort by holding the doctor's hand and blessing him warmly.

"Dr. Weiss, you are a good Jew and you should be blessed. But remember, Shabbat observance is an integral part of Yiddishkeit. Do not forsake the Shabbat!"

Dr. Weiss was astonished. How did Rav Shach know about his wavering about commitment to Torah-observance?

It did not make much of a difference, because from that day on Dr. Weiss affirmed his committed to Shabbat with the same intensity that he had always committed to his fellow man. (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky)

Reprinted from the Parashat Aharei Mot-Kedoshim 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Nazi and His Three Jewish Grandchildren

By Dr. James David Weiss



In a trip to visit Israel, Rabbi Berel Wein attended morning services in a synagogue in Jerusalem. He relates that, unlike his own synagogue, which has benches facing the front of the synagogue, this synagogue had tables and benches, so he was forced to look at those praying opposite him. A tall, blue-eyed, blondhaired man and three blond small boys walked in and sat down opposite him. Rabbi Wein is used to the racial diversity of the citizens in Israel so little surprises him, but this was different; this particular family was definitely Aryan.

More noteworthy than their racial features was the seriousness and intensity of their praying. The children were especially well-behaved and followed the service dutifully without once wavering in their concentration. For Rabbi Wein, accustomed to the more freewheeling American child, it was an unusual experience.

Afterward, the rabbi remarked to a friend that they looked like fine people. His friend said that the man was a microbiologist at Hebrew University who happened to have an extraordinary story to tell. "Would you like to hear it?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer, called to his fellow congregant, "Avraham, this is Rabbi Berel Wein. I'm sure he would like to hear your story."

The two shook hands and agreed to walk home together. As they went, the rabbi listened to him tell the following story:

"I was born and brought up in Germany. My father was an officer in the elite SS killing squad, the Totenkopf (Deathhead Squad). He served throughout the war and after it was over successfully eluded apprehension. But his crimes were so heinous that years later the West German Republic continued to pursue him. Finally, he was caught and imprisoned for ten years. Later, because he was so old, they reduced his sentence and let him out after four and a half years.

"My father never talked about his past, and when he was caught, I read about his crimes in the newspaper. It was a bewildering experience to find out that my father led such a monstrous life.

"The family was shaken by the news. I was a teenager and became very confused by all the notoriety. When we went to visit him in prison I couldn't go in to see him. I felt as if he betrayed me. However, one useful thing came out of this -- I developed an interest in the War and found out as much as I could about the Todtenkopf and its role in the Holocaust.

"All this occurred around that time the Eichmann trial was taking place, and Holocaust material began to be published. I read all I could find and was able to get a general picture of what happened to the Jews. What I found out horrified me and the thought that my father took a role -- a leading role in the slaughter -- made me feel that perhaps our family was tainted with evil. If the conditions were the same, I asked myself, could I too become a killer?

"I took a trip, getting as far away from Germany as possible. It was as if I was haunted by Germany and all things German... On the way, I decided to visit Israel to get some perspective on the victims of the Nazis and find out what was so special about this nation that so consumed Hitler. I needed to come to terms with what was churning inside of me, and I toured the country, working periodically here and there on agricultural settlements.

"While in a kibbutz, I saw a poster advertising a summer's program at Hebrew University in desert zoology, and I enrolled. I did very well and in the fall was able to register for a graduate program at the university. While I was engaged in graduate work, I also became interested in Judaism.

"I loved Israel so much I just stayed on and applied for citizenship. Also, after about two years of learning about Judaism I decided to study to become a Jew. A few years later I earned my Ph.D. in microbiology and became a Jew. I married and settled in Jerusalem. My wife was a German Lutheran, but she, too, converted. A psychologist might interpret my conversion as sublimating my guilty feelings, but I prefer to think about it as fulfilling my Jewish destiny. Don't ask me how or why, but here we are -- an observant Jewish family. And we are very happy living as Jews.

"About a year ago we learned that my father was not feeling well. My wife thought it would be a mitzvah to visit him and show him his grandchildren. At first I was apprehensive about going back to Germany, a country I now feared. But in the end, I took a sabbatical and we went back to Darmstadt to visit with my father.

"It was quite a scene. My boys wore their yarmulkas, and had their tzitzis (fringes) showing. Their payos (sidecurls) were tucked back behind their ears and, of course, they spoke Hebrew.

"When he first saw us, my father was overwhelmed, and initially, couldn't bring himself to embrace anyone. Later we got to talk and he seemed to be pleased by the way things were turning out for us.

"My father is very old now, over ninety, and I wanted to know what he did to merit such a long life with such grandchildren, so I asked him point blank what he had done to earn his good fortune.

"I explained to him that we Jews believe that there are consequences to what we do, and the reward system in life is measured very carefully. He looked at me and pondered the question.

"He answered, 'I can't think of anything outstanding, but once, in Frankfurt,' he said, 'when we were rounding up the Jews, I had the chance to save the lives of three Jewish boys who were hiding in a Catholic orphanage. For some reason they aroused my sympathy. I was touched by their plight; they were so lost and forlorn I felt pity for them, so I let them flee. I don't know what happened to them. But I didn't kill them.'

"I thought his answer over and told him that according to our tradition his answer made sense. 'You know, papa, if you had let four boys go, you would have had four grandchildren.'"

Reprinted from the aish.com website. Excerpted from "Vintage Wein" - the collected wit and wisdom of Rabbi Berel Wein, by Dr. James David Weiss.

Offering to Stock the Shelves Of the Grocery Store



Rav Ezra Attiah, zt"l

Rav Yechiel Spero related that Rav Ezra Attiah, zt"l, was the Rosh Yeshivah at Yeshivas Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim. One day, a young student named Ovadiah sadly informed the Rosh Yeshivah that he would not be returning to the Yeshivah. His father owned a grocery store, he explained, and he was needed to help stock the shelves. Times were hard and there simply was not enough money to hire a worker.

Rav Ezra was very distraught at this news. Ovadiah was one of the Yeshivah's top students. He had a brilliant mind and was extremely diligent. Most importantly, he truly loved learning Torah. Rav Ezra went to visit Ovadiah's father and did his best to persuade him to change his mind. He explained the importance of learning Torah and he described Ovadiah's tremendous potential to grow in learning.

Although Ovadiah's father was moved, he insisted that he needed his

son's help in the grocery store. There was just no alternative at this time. Rav Ezra understood that he could not persuade the father, and wished him a good day and left.

Early the following morning, when Ovadiah's father came to open his grocery store, he saw Rav Ezra standing near the door. Rav Ezra said to Ovadiah's father, "I have good news for you! I know someone who is willing to work for you for free, just so long as you allow your son to return to Yeshivah."

Ovadiah's father couldn't believe what he was hearing. He asked incredulously, "Who would be willing to do such a thing?"

Rav Ezra said, "I would." He took an apron that was hanging on a nail on the wall, and he put it on. As he tied the apron strings, he said, "Just show me what to do."

Ovadiah's father was taken aback. Now he truly understood just how important it was to the Rosh Yeshivah that Ovadiah return to his learning. He promised Rav Ezra that he would find some way to allow his son to return to Yeshivah. Young Ovadiah went to learn, and he grew up to become the great Talmud Chacham, Rav Ovadiah Yosef! *Reprinted from the Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*