

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS SHELACH 5786

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Not Just Another Aliyah

By Rabbi David Bibi



Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman tells a remarkable story. There was a man living in Yerushalayim who needed to attend a brit milah on the first day of Pesah. Since in Eretz Yisrael there is only one seder night, he had gone to sleep late and woke early searching for a vatikin minyan so he could daven and still arrive at the brit on time. He found a small shtiebel with barely twelve men present.

When they reached the Torah reading, the aliyot were being sold, but nobody was really participating. The man was in a rush, but he also wanted to help move

things along, so he purchased two aliyot himself. There was no Kohen present, so he bought Rishon, and he also purchased Hamishi, the special aliyah of Yom Tov.

The amounts were tiny — only a few shekalim. Then he noticed an older Jew sitting quietly in the back of the room. The man looked worn down. Quiet. Invisible. The kind of person people pass every day without thinking much about him. Perhaps he had difficulties at home. Perhaps loneliness. Perhaps disappointments nobody knew about. Maybe the synagogue was the one place where he could simply sit and disappear. The donor suddenly thought to himself: let me give him the aliyah.

So, he walked over and offered him Rishon. The older man slowly came to the Torah, recited the berakhot, and returned silently to his seat. No smile. No visible emotion. No dramatic reaction. Later, when the donor himself received Hamishi, he asked that they make a Mi Sheberakh for that older Jew as well. Again, no response.

The man went to the brit and forgot the entire incident.

Two weeks later, the phone rang. It was the older Jew. He asked if they could meet. When they sat together, the older man said something astonishing: “I am seventy-five years old, and nobody has ever shown me recognition like that before.”

The younger man tried to dismiss it politely. “It was nothing.” But it was not nothing. To one person it was five shekalim. To the other person it was life itself.

The older Jew then asked him a question: “Do you have financial pressure?”

The younger man told him no, but in the back of his mind, he thought about having married off two children that year and accumulating significant debt from the weddings. The older Jew arrived carrying an old package wrapped in cloth. The man took it and thanked him and at home he opened it. Fifty thousand shekalim — enough to cover the debts.

But Rabbi Biderman emphasizes that the money is not really the point of the story. The money is simply the dramatic ending. The real message is something much deeper.

People are starving for recognition.

A person can sit in a synagogue for years while nobody has any idea what he is carrying inside. Nobody knows his private pain. Nobody knows his loneliness. Nobody knows how much dignity he has lost. Nobody knows how desperately he needs someone to say: “I see you. You matter.”

Reprinted from the Parshat Bamidbar 5786 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Doing the Supernatural

By Yoni Schwartz



Rav Elazar Shach, ZT”L, was once very sick, to the point where he could barely move. He had a 104-degree fever and was in his older years. Outside his building, on the sidewalk, there was a bachur pacing back and forth with a very worried look. This bachur was a *ba'al teshuva* who was known to take things to extremes and, as a result, had severely strained his relationship with his secular family.

When the Rav heard about this, he figured there must have been another blowup and that the bachur needed to talk. He told his grandson, “Please pass me my clothing. I need

to talk to him.” His grandson responded, “Zeidi, you have a 104-degree fever! You can’t go downstairs.”

Rav Shach, however, ignored him. He continued getting dressed and said, “I’m going downstairs to talk to him.” His grandson replied, “In this situation, he can wait.” Rav Shach said, “I’m sorry, I’ve made up my mind.”

His grandson then said, “At least let me bring the bachur up to the apartment.” The Rav responded, “No. I need to go downstairs to him.”

With superhuman effort, at nearly 100 years old, he mustered the strength to go downstairs and speak with him. That conversation ended up being pivotal. Whatever Rav Shach told the bachur set him on the path to repairing and rebuilding his relationship with his family.

Rav Shach later explained to his grandson why he went downstairs: the situation was extremely difficult, and normally, situations this severe do not have happy endings. “To fix it, I needed Hashem to do something supernatural - something that He normally doesn’t do. I had to show Hashem I’m willing to do something that I normally don’t do and push myself past my natural limits.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Bamidbar
5786 email of Torah Sweets.*

Fulfilling Torah's Final Commandment Magnificently

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

In the small town of Okop in Western Ukraine, where Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was born and also lived for a certain period in his life, there was a wealthy man named Rabbi Yoel. He was respected not just for his riches; he was an advanced Torah scholar, G-d-fearing, and meticulous in observing the commandments.

One day, he felt a strong desire to fulfill the final (613th) commandment that appears in the Torah, that every Jewish man should write a Torah scroll for himself. But for Rabbi Yoel, doing a mitzvah “properly” meant doing it magnificently. He purchased cattle, gave the meat away to the poor, and had the hides specially processed to be excellent quality parchment for an exceptionally beautiful Torah scroll.

Then he hired a highly respected scribe, known both for his expertise and his piety, brought him to Okop and hosted him in his home for many months while he worked. Every day the scribe immersed in a mikveh (ritual bath) before writing. Every letter was written with reverence. When the Torah scroll was finally completed, Rabbi Yoel organized an elaborate celebratory feast. After all, tradition teaches that completing a Torah scroll deserves a true celebration.

The guest list included the town elite: rabbis, judges, cantors, ritual slaughterers, wealthy benefactors, and community leaders. Rabbi Yoel himself spent days preparing the lecture he planned to deliver at the event — something Talmudic, yet sophisticated enough to impress the Torah scholars of Okop.

One person who did not receive an invitation was Berel the water-carrier. Berel was a simple Jew. Not rich. Not scholarly. Every morning before dawn he would go to the small synagogue called “Chevra Tehillim,” where he and other working men gathered to pray and recite the entire Book of Psalms before heading out to their daily labors. W

When Berel heard about the celebration for the new Torah scroll, he innocently assumed — that any Jew who loved Torah would be welcome there. So, he put on his worn Shabbat clothes, made himself presentable as best he could, and went to Rabbi Yoel's home. Without thinking twice, he sat down among the honored guests.

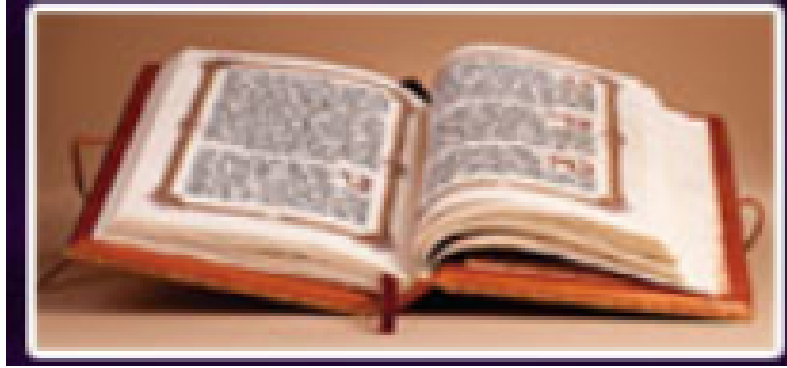
When Rabbi Yoel saw Berel the water-carrier sitting in the place reserved for Torah scholars, he approached him angrily and hissed, "Just because you say a lot of Psalms, you think yourself a man of distinguished lineage and importance?" Berel understood instantly. Without saying a word, he stood up and quietly left. Inside, the celebration continued in full splendor. Silver goblets gleamed, candles burned in expensive candelabras. Rich food and fine wine covered the tables. Musicians played lively melodies while guests enthusiastically sang and danced in circles around the Torah scroll.

Rabbi Yoel was radiant with joy. He danced passionately, delivered his brilliantly crafted Torah lecture, and basked in the admiration of the town scholars, who were deeply impressed by his deep scholarship, broad knowledge and sharp insights concerning the verse: "And now, write for yourselves this song" [Deut. 31:19].

Late that night, after the final guest had gone home, Rabbi Yoel climbed into bed feeling completely satisfied with himself; everything had gone perfectly. Then he fell asleep... and dreamed. In the dream, a violent storm seized him and swept him away like a tidal wave. into a barren wilderness. He found himself standing alone and terrified in a desolate wilderness, when suddenly he noticed a brightly illuminated structure in the distance.

He knocked and entered. Inside sat a panel of solemn judges around a long table. Immediately, the head judge called out: "Rabbi Yoel of Okop — you are hereby summoned to judgment."

The plaintiff stepped forward. Rabbi Yoel was shocked to his toes when he realized that the plaintiff was King David himself. "I accuse you," David declared, "of dishonoring my Tehilim (Psalms) and publicly shaming Berel the water-carrier, who recites every verse in each of the 150 chapters every single day with sincerity and devotion."



Next, the prosecutor rose and demanded the harshest punishment of all: that Rabbi Yoel's soul should not be returned to his body. Rabbi Yoel was frozen with terror. He could neither speak nor move. Then, surprisingly, help came from an unexpected source. Another figure stood up in his defense: the Baal Shem Tov.

"If Rabbi Yoel dies now," he argued, "people will never learn the great value of reciting Psalms with sincerity. Let him return so the lesson can be known."

At once the storm wind returned, carrying Rabbi Yoel back into his body and bed. He awoke shaking in fear, soaked in cold sweat. The next afternoon, between the afternoon and evening prayers, Rabbi Yoel went to visit the humble "Chevra Tehillim" synagogue. Standing before the congregation, he publicly asked Berel for forgiveness.

The astonished worshippers listened as Rabbi Yoel recounted the entire episode: the feast, the insult, the terrifying heavenly trial, and the lesson he had learned. From that day on, Rabbi Yoel changed completely. He no longer took pride in being the greatest scholar in the town. Instead, every morning he joined the uneducated but wholehearted workers at the little synagogue, sitting among them and reciting Psalms with humility, warmth and sincerity.

Source: Freely adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Sipurei Tzadikim.

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Another Amazing Baal Shem Tov Story!

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon



Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon and Rabbi Nissan Mangel

I heard this incredible story a few weeks ago from Rabbi Nissan Mangel Sheyichye at his weekly Shabbos farbrengen in Ksav Sofer [a shul in Crown Heights, Brooklyn].

One of the early chassidim of the Baal Shem Tov for many years was not blessed with a child. Every year when he would come to the Baal Shem Tov, he would request the Rebbe's brocha, however, the Baal Shem Tov never gave it. Rather, he would discuss other topics with him.

As the years passed and he and his wife were still not blessed, he decided he would do something a little bit out of the ordinary. The next time he came to the Baal Shem Tov, he once again requested a brocha for a child, and as before the Tzaddik spoke about other aspects and concluded talking. The chossid realized that this meant the audience had come to an end. However, this time he did not leave. Rather, he stated emphatically, "Rebbe, I am not leaving until the Rebbe blesses me with a child."

Hearing these words, the Baal Shem Tov became deep in thought and after a few moments looked at the student and told him, "This year you will be blessed with a child!"

The chossid thanked the Rebbe, and he was ecstatic. Rushing home, before even taking off his coat, he told his wife the wonderful news, the Rebbe had blessed us. Sure enough, towards the end of the year they were blessed with a healthy baby boy and the chossid immediately rushed back to Mezibuzh to inform the Rebbe of the wonderful news and to request of him that he come and be the Sandek at the Bris.

The Baal Shem Tov agreed and arrived in the town which was quite close to Mezibuzh, the day before the bris. The mother of the child came to the Baal Shem Tov and personally thanked him but she said that she has a premonition that something bad might happen to her child. I am therefore asking that the Rebbe gives me a segulah which would protect my son that nothing bad happens to him.

Baal Shem Tov said, while it is customary for a boy to begin wearing Tzitzis from the age of three and afterwards, you should prepare a special pair for your son to begin wearing from his bris. Also, you shall embroider on the four corners the letters Lames, Suf, Aleph and Reish (which represent the Hebrew words, לֹא רָעָה תֵאֻנָּה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה (nothing bad shall befall upon you).

On Lag Bm'oe'r that year, the chossid who was the Rosh Hakahal, made a large festive meal in honor of the day, and everyone in his household was busy preparing and setting up. At one point his wife went into the baby's room and to her horror the crib was empty; the baby had disappeared.

Her shrieks were heard and everyone came running to see what caused it. The festivities were forgotten and every began searching, but to no avail. The baby had just simply disappeared.

The grief-stricken parents went back to the Baal Shem Tov and poured out their broken hearts. The Baal Shem Tov joined them in their sorrow and promised them that they would have another child.

As he promised, so it happened, and the following year they had a baby girl, who gave them tremendous happiness.

Years passed and on Lag B'Omer the Baal Shem Tov went out with his talmidim to the open fields outside of Mezibuzh.

At one point he asked one of the students if he had brought with him a bow and some arrows.

Definitely, was the reply, as the Baal Shem Tov's yearly custom was to shoot a few arrows.

The Baal Shem Tov took an arrow and shot it forward. But to his dismay and astonishment, the arrow flew backwards to a bush in the woods. Seeing this, he realized that it is a signal from Hashem. So, to verify it he shot a second arrow, this time to his right and the third arrow to his left, and as he thought, they both went to the same bush as the first one did. He shot another one upwards and it too turned and went there, proving beyond a doubt that this is a strong message from Hashem, and a message that shouldn't be put off for a later time, but to be acted upon immediately.

The Baal Shem Tov and his students went to the area where all the arrows landed, and they noticed that they were very close together. They were all in the front of a bush. The Baal Shem began sniffing and then asked his students what they smelled. After a moment they all stated that there was a sour (foul) smell.

The Baal Shem Tov explained, such a smell is not from something rotting etc., but rather it is from an act that was extremely negative, in other words, it is a spiritual thing. Therefore, you my students are to return to Mezibuzh, while I will begin to travel and search for the meaning and source of this smell. I must know what happened here and rectify it.

When the Baal Shem Tov reached a nearby town, the townspeople greeted him warmly and murmured among themselves loudly, The Baal Shem Tov must have arrived here, in order to participate in our Rosh Hakahal's only daughters' wedding. Someone rushed over to the Rosh Hakahal's house and informed him that their Rebbe arrived.

Hearing this wonderful news, that the Baal Shem Tov indeed came to his daughter's wedding, the Rosh Hakahal rushed to welcome the Baal Shem Tov and after greeting him with the proper respect, he said, Being that our daughter is a result of the Rebbe's brocha, won't the Rebbe honor us to be mesader kiddushin.

"Yes", replied the Baal Shem Tov, but as you know the Rov that is m'sader kiddushin, is obligated to investigate and ask questions. I know your family, but can you please tell me, who is the chosson?

He is such a wonderful young man. His Yiras Shomayim' his character is exceptional, and he is extremely knowledgeable in Torah.

That is excellent, noted the Baal Shem, and who are his parents?

A very respected family from Frankfurt Germany, he replied.

Can you ask your mechutan to come to me, the Baal Shem Tov said, I am required to ask him a few questions.

The father of the chosson came and after he sat down, the Baal Shem Tov asked him, is the chosson your son.

Yes, of course, we raised him from his infancy, he replied.

You said you raised him, the Baal Shem Tov noted, does that mean that he is not your actual (biological) son?

"The Rov is correct", replied the man.

If that is the case, do you know who his actual parents are, inquired the Baal Shem Tov.

No, we never met them, the "father" replied.

So how do you know that the child is Jewish, the Baal Shem Tov asked.

That is quite a story, the man replied, and he proceeded to relate to the Baal Shem Tov.

As my mechutan most probably informed the Rov, we are from Frankfurt, Germany. Many years passed since we were married, and Hashem had not blessed us with a child. One day I heard a traveler talking about a great tzaddik who lives in Ukraine, who has performed numerous miracles. He has helped so many Jews in various ways. People who were sick, miraculously were healed and became healthy again. People who had struggled their entire life to earn a livelihood no longer had to struggle and he even blessed many of them to become wealthy. And he also blessed couples to have children. This tzaddik is called Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov.

Hearing this, I stopped what I was doing, rushed home and informed my wife of what I had heard, and my decision to go immediately to the great tzaddik and request that he blesses us with a child. My wife was thrilled that I am willing to undertake this long and arduous journey, prepared food for the long trip, and off I went with my coach driver.

After traveling for a few weeks and we almost arrived at our destination, we were traveling in an open area, and the sun was shining down, and I felt faint. So, I told my coach driver to please pull off the road, so that I can rest in the shade under some trees, and regain my strength.

I had a good nap, and awoke sometime later, refreshed and after washing my hands and taking a good drink of water, I began walking towards my coach. But suddenly, I heard the cry of a child, and I paused thinking that the mother would definitely pick up the child in a moment or two.

However, to my consternation and bewilderment, the baby continued to cry for a few very long moments, and I decided to check out if the mother is alright. But to my horror, I finally saw the truth. There was a baby all by itself, wrapped up in a blanket, lying under a bush. I picked up the infant and after giving it some water, I checked its diaper and saw that it was circumcised.

Picking up my eyes to heaven, I said, Hashem, thank you so much! I see you have answered my prayers. I travelled all the way here to receive a blessing for a child, and you gave me a child. Hashem, Thank You!!!

Shortly afterwards, as they continued speaking the father of the kallah knocked and entered the room asking the Baal Shem Tov if he is almost ready to go to the chuppa?

Let us take a short walk, said the Baal Shem Tov. While the two of them were quite surprised at this request, but out of respect for the Baal Shem Tov and

knowing that there must be a reason for his request they went along, anticipating that something interesting might be happening.

After walking a few blocks, a man met them and respectfully ask them if they can please come with him to a small hut on the street. He explained that there is a woman who is about to pass away, but she says she cannot pass away until she tells something of extreme importance to a beis din, as she must unburden herself of a deep secret.

The three of them entered the room and that person told the woman that the Beis Din has arrived. Without trying to open her eyes, she began to speak and related the following: many years ago, I used to clean the shul. However, the pay for the few hours a day work barely covered the cost for feeding my children. I tried to find additional jobs, and it helped.

But there were times, that I couldn't find additional jobs, or the additional expenses were more than normal, and it was heartbreaking to see my children's suffering. Then there was a winter and my children needed shoes to be able to go outside, and a thought entered my mind, sell one of the unused tablecloths of the shul, and when you will have the money you will pay it back.

I knew this was wrong, and I pushed it off, but my children couldn't go out in the winter and being that it was painful to watch their suffering, I did the unthinkable; I took a tablecloth and sold it.

My conscience bothered me, but I kept on answering myself, they didn't use it in over two years, I plan on paying it back, and I won't do it again. But the two months passed and once again I was dealing with an emergency expense, and while I held myself back for a few weeks, ultimately I succumbed and "borrowed" another item to sell.

I wasn't happy about my actions, and tried even harder to find additional jobs, and for a while it helped, but it came to a point when I felt as if I have no other option, and I took something else.

But a few days later it was needed and couldn't be located, and it became the talk of the town. Somehow, they realized that I was the one who took it, and the Rosh Hakahal summoned me. He said, this time we are not going to do anything against you, we understand that you must have been in a very desperate situation. However, I am warning you that it can never happen again. For if it does, the community will have no other choice, but to dismiss you.

I thanked him for his understanding and promised that I would never do it again. I desperately began looking for additional jobs, so this way I would have

some extra money to have when I will face some unexpected expenses. This was prudent and it helped me deal with a few situations.

But then a few unexpected emergencies came up at the same time and I felt I was collapsing, so with a heavy heart, I did it just one more time. But this time I was caught almost right away, and the Rosh Hakahal told me, he feels sorry, but he has no other choice but to dismiss from cleaning up the shul. He paid me whatever the community owed me and added some additional money out of his own pocket so I will have for a few week's expenses.

Initially, I was angry at myself, telling myself that I had no one to blame besides myself, as now I will have to struggle every week just to cover the bare basic expenses. Additionally, I was appreciative to the Rosh Hakahal. But as the weeks passed and every week was a new struggle, I began berating the Rosh Hakahal until I began loathing him.

Then he was blessed after many years of his marriage with a child, and the whole town celebrated with him. That was too much for me. He and that child of his is going to live without any worries or hardships, while, because he dismissed me, my children suffer every day, and it might be that they will die from hunger. Why should my children die, and his child live? It is not fair!!

I knew I was not reacting rationally, but I couldn't help myself for wishing that some tragedy befalls the child. Then one day, the community were preparing a celebration, and when I walked by his house, I noticed that the baby was asleep in his crib, and a surge of vengeance took control of me, and I grabbed the child and disappeared into the woods.

Standing in the woods I was covered with remorse, but what could I do now? If everyone sees me returning the child, no one would ever hire me again. But to harm the child, he is an innocent baby, even if his father wronged me. I stood there for a while not knowing what I should do.

Finally, I lifted up my eyes to the heavens and said; Hashem You will decide the infant's fate. If You want him to live, You will arrange a way for Him to be rescued and saved. If not, please let him have a fast death, rather than a long and agonizing one.

Saying that, I placed the infant, wrapped in his blanket under a bush, so that it would be in the shade and the sun wouldn't bake on him.

Saying that, she let out a deep breath, as if a heavy load was taken off of her, and a few moments later, she took her last breath.

The Rosh Hakahal who was listening intently to the entire story, let out a cry and sat down on a chair, While the mechutan realized that it is very possible that

the baby he had found was his mechutan's abducted son. That meant that "his son" was the older brother of his kallah, and there will not be a wedding today

The Baal Shem Tov asked the man who asked them to enter the hut, if he can go to the shul and ask the wife of the Rosh Hakahal as well as the wife of the chosson to come here. The individual went as requested, and in a few minutes they both arrived.

Seeing her husband's ashen and pale face, with tears flowing down she became startled herself, as she realized something of great importance had happened. The Baal Shem Tov asked her if she knows the young man,

Of course, he is a wonderful young man, whom we are fortunate that he will be our son-in-law, she replied.

Look at him closely, the Baal Shem Tov instructed.

Looking intently at his facial features, it began to dawn upon her that his features resemble her and her husband, and not his parents. But she dismissed that thought saying, that cannot be. But then she suddenly noticed a mark and without thinking she let out a shriek, My son and wrapped her hands around him crying with happiness.

The chosson was momentarily shocked, but being that he knew he was adopted, one look at "his father" who while wiping his own tears nodded in agreement, he realized that his Kallah's mother was indeed his own mother, and that he was about to marry his own sister, had the Baal Shem Tov not arrived a few hours ago.

Turning to the chosson and his father, the Baal Shem Tov asked, when you found him under the bush, did he have anything with him, besides for the blanket that he was wrapped in?

Yes, they both replied, he was wearing a very small pair of tzitzis. To remind me of this the chosson added, I carry that pair of tzitzis in my pocket wherever I go. Saying that he put his hand in his pocket and pulled it out, giving it to the Baal Shem Tov.

Looking at its corners, the Baal Shem Tov noticed the four letters that he had instructed to be embroidered into it, and said, this tzitzis should be placed in the coffin of the nifteres, so that she should be forgiven.

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Learn from the Americans

As Told By Mrs. Channa Arnold



Mrs. Arnold with her husband Rabbi Yitzchok Arnold

In 1957, I had just graduated from elementary school in Israel when my mother passed away. Our family was devastated, and as the oldest child, this meant that I had to take on a lot of extra responsibility in the home.

For a time, my father was so upset that he didn't write to the [Lubavitcher Rebbe – Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, zt"l]. But the Rebbe wanted to know how we were managing, so my father's friend would write to him with regular reports on what was happening with our family. Years later, this friend mentioned to the Rebbe the name of a fellow he knew from the local synagogue in Bnei Brak.

The Rebbe encouraged him to suggest him for me, as a potential match for marriage. We met shortly afterward, in 1960. After our first date, we had some doubts, and the Rebbe sent a letter to my father, urging us to go out again. Not wanting to pressure me, my father didn't show me the Rebbe's letter, but we spoke, and I agreed to meet with my future husband again — and the rest is history.

When we were ready to become engaged, my husband mentioned that the Rebbe was quite particular that the obligation for Jewish women to cover their hair after marriage was best fulfilled by wearing a sheitel — a wig. Was this something I would be able to do?

I had no intention of doing so. “None of my friends wear a sheitel,” I told him. “I’ll be embarrassed to do it, and they’re going to make fun of me! I’ll cover my hair, of course, but not with a sheitel.”

With that, I said that I would write to the Rebbe my reasons against having a sheitel. “I’ll do exactly what the Rebbe wants me to do, but you’ll see — he’s going to side with me,” I predicted.

Well, I did do what the Rebbe wanted me to do, but not as I had expected it. I got the Rebbe’s reply in the middle of the night. My father actually worked in the local post office, and all of the letters that came from the United States to our area would go through him. He didn’t know that I had written to the Rebbe, but when he saw that I had received a letter from 770, he brought it straight over as soon as he had finished his night shift. I think it was 3:30 AM. I still remember that night.

“Go wash negel vasser,” my father said, instructing me to wash my hands, as one does after waking up. “I have something here for you.”

Shaking — I had promised that I would listen to whatever the Rebbe said — I began to read. “Regarding your question of whether to wear a wig, rather than sufficing with a hat or headscarf: the need for this has been explained in several places,” began the Rebbe. “We see plainly that wearing a hat or even a headscarf leaves part of the hair uncovered, if only for a brief period of time, which means that one has transgressed this serious prohibition, as per Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim chapter 75.

“The importance of this matter can be further inferred from the greatness of the reward for fulfilling this commandment in the fullest measure, and in the words of the holy Zohar: ‘She is blessed with everything — with blessings from above and blessings from below, with wealth, with children, and with grandchildren.’

“As for your concern that people may laugh at you,” the Rebbe continued, “even among American youth, lately one can feel a sense of respect precisely for those who stand firm in their convictions... while those who are swept along after the majority without any inner stability are regarded with mockery and contempt...”

“And another clear and simple point: G-d Almighty fills ‘the heavens and the earth,’ and is with a person in every place and at every time. This is not the case with other people — even those in one’s closest circle — who are not always nearby. Therefore, is it conceivable that one should not be ashamed, G-d forbid, before the Holy One, blessed be He, and yet be ashamed before a human being of flesh and blood?!”

That final line, about being ashamed before a mortal but not before G-d was the clincher, and the next day I went out to order a sheitel. More than that, that line became a motto in my own life, and something I tell young women when I teach pre-wedding classes. After that letter, I was never embarrassed of other people again.

Shortly after our marriage, my husband and I moved to the United States, and we used to come to see the Rebbe once a year. We would always ask for his blessings, and I would specifically request a blessing for my father. One year, early on in our own marriage, the Rebbe cited the verse in the Book of Bereishit, “It is not good for man to be alone.” He thought my father should remarry.

He said to me: “Hasn’t it already been seven years since your mother passed away?” I was floored that he knew exactly what was going on with my family — I myself had to calculate how many years had passed since my mother’s passing. In that letter about the sheitel, the Rebbe cited the Zohar in saying that I would be blessed with children and grandchildren for adhering to this mitzvah. But after six years of marriage, I still had not become pregnant.

At that time, I was in constant correspondence with the Rebbe, and I requested a personal audience. I took the letter along with me and, in the audience, I held it up before the Rebbe.

“Rebbe, I have a promise!” I declared. “It says black-on-white that I’m going to be blessed with children. I’ve done my part, and I want the Rebbe to give me a blessing that, im yirtze Hashem — literally, if G-d wills it — I should have children!” My father was always amazed how I had the chutzpah to confront the Rebbe that way, but I was always taught that you have to ask for a blessing, and so I did.

The Rebbe smiled at me. He could see how nervous I was. I had said all of this in Hebrew, but he replied in Yiddish: “Don’t say, ‘if G-d wills it’ — instead you should say, ‘with the help of G-d’ (b’ezrat Hashem). Because He does want, and He will help!”

Thank G-d, I eventually became a mother to eight children, and now I also have many grandchildren.

Eventually, we moved to Los Angeles, where I became a teacher in Cheder Menachem, a Chabad boys' school, teaching Chumash to first-graders. During one private audience, though, the Rebbe told me to tell stories to my boys in the morning, explaining that stories of chasidim and tzadikim (righteous people) have a special power to imbue children with a reverence for Heaven. And so, before we start our studies, I would tell them stories. It came to the point that there were boys who would cry when they came late to class because they had missed the story — but I would tell it to them during recess so they wouldn't miss out. And of course, I would sometimes tell them stories about the Rebbe himself.

Mrs. Channa Arnold was a Judaic-studies teacher in Los Angeles for over forty years. She was interviewed in September 2011.

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