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Is it Worth the Fight?



Shmuel Kamenetsky shlita, was presiding at a wedding as the mesader kiddushin. A certain Rav significantly younger than Rav Shmuel, was called up to read the kesubah. As the Rav concluded, he paused and said, “There’s a mistake in the kesubah!”

There was a bit of a commotion under the chupah but the Rav was encouraged to continue. However, he adamantly refused to continue, claiming that the kesubah was passul. People turned to Rav Shmuel for some direction. Rav Shmuel just shrugged his shoulders, which was interpreted to mean, “Nu, if the Rav says it’s passul, then write a new one.” Indeed, the chupah was delayed as they wrote a brand new kesubah.

After the chupah concluded, Rabbi Kleinman, who was at the chupah, approached Rav Shmuel and asked him, “Was it really passul?” Rav Shmuel smiled and said, “Of course not!” “So why did the Rosh Yeshiva allow the chuppah to be delayed for that?!” Rav Shmuel explained, “Better that people think I concurred that there was actually a mistake than to have the other Rav feel embarrassed for making a scene under the chupah for no reason.”

Reprinted from the Parshat Korach 5785 email of Chayeinu Weekly. (Stories compiled by Tzvi Schultz.)

The Holy Anti-Zionist

By Rabbi Reuven Semah



Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld

A story by Rabbi Y. Hisiger illustrates this point. In the early 1900's, decades before the founding of the State of Israel, the landscape of the Holy Land was a tapestry woven with diverse faiths and ideologies. Amidst this complex backdrop, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld once found himself in the company of various religious leaders from the Muslim community.

One of the gathered clerics turned to the great sadik and related an observation regarding the secular Zionists, who, at the time, were working insidiously to uproot religion and battle those who clung to Mesorah of old.

"Rabbi," began the Muslim leader, "I know that you are opposed to the Zionists as we are. You battle them and you hate them. In light of that, why don't we team up? It's only natural that we partner in our activities, given our mutual disdain for the Zionists."

The room fell silent, all eyes turning to Rav Sonnenfeld. Everyone present awaited his response.

“Correct,” said Rav Sonnenfeld. “You are absolutely right that we battle the Zionists. But there is a huge difference between us, a difference so vast that it renders our struggles fundamentally different.”

The Muslim cleric leaned in, intrigued by the Rav’s words.

Rav Sonnenfeld continued, “You see, whereas you hate the Jew in them, we hate the goy in them! We share no common ground at all! The difference between our views is like night and day, east and west! Our battles may seem aligned on the surface, but at their core, they could not be more different.

Reprinted from the Parashat Korah 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Beauty of the Bracha



Rav Yaakov Feitman related that once, he and a few other Rebbes made the trip to Monsey to formally invite Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt”l, to speak at the Torah U’Mesorah convention. During the meeting, Rav Yaakov had a conversation with them about the current issues of the day, and said over stories about Gedolim.

At one point, he made a Brachah of Shehakol on a glass of water. On their return trip, the group spoke about their meeting, but what stood out to them most was the memorable Brachah of Shehakol.

Rav Yaakov said it with such sweetness and Kavanah, with sheer joy and clear gratitude for Hashem’s kindness, and the meticulous pronunciation of every word was unforgettable. Rav Feitman noted that the group was made up of experienced Mechanchim, educators, but that day they learned a lesson in reciting Brachos, as though they were back in preschool!

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

Child's Play

By Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

A well-known man, a Belzer hasid, and his wife, had their first child – a boy – after being childless for 28 years. The Shalom Zachor that Friday night was the event of the year. Over a thousand people came to wish Mazal tov to the new father. At the height of the celebration, the crowd quieted down as the father indicated that he would like to say a few words. Then he related the following.

“When I was a bachur learning in the Belzer Yeshivah, there was a cleaning lady who would come by every day to tidy up and scrub the Bet Midrash and adjoining rooms. She was a fixture in the yeshivah and devoted her life to maintaining the yeshivah building. She was, however, not wealthy by any stretch, and as her own family grew, she was at a loss of options for taking care of her children.

“She decided to bring her kids with her to work, and as she cleaned and mopped in one area of the building, the young children would run amok, screaming, crying, and generally causing quite a commotion, in the rest of the yeshivah. At first, we put up with it. We even thought it was cute for a time. But after a while, the kids really began to bother us in our learning and praying.

“Try as we might to control them, they wouldn’t listen and continued on in their childish games and noise. A number of younger bachurim asked me, as one of the oldest in the chaburah to ask the mother not to bring her children anymore to the yeshivah.

“I agreed to talk to her. Brazenly, I walked up to her and told her that her kids were disturbing everyone in yeshivah, and that she should find an alternative method of child-care. I’ll never forget how she looked at me with tired eyes and said, ‘Bachur, you should never have sa’ar gidul banim (the pain and anguish that one goes through when raising children!’”

The crowd gasped.

“As many of you know,” continued the father, “my wife and I have been to countless doctors who have recommended every sort of treatment. We moved abroad for a while to be near an expert, which proved to be fruitless. One last, extreme treatment was offered and after trying that, it, too turned out to be just a fantasy. We felt doomed to a life without the pleasure of raising a family.

“After that last attempt, as we walked back into the apartment that we lived in for the past 28 years, our entire sad situation hit us full force, like a ton of bricks. Together, we broke down crying and praying for hours on end, begging

Hashem to have mercy on us. It was just then that I remembered this cleaning lady – Sima is her name – and what she said to me years ago. I made up right then and there to locate her and ask her for forgiveness. I spent hours on the phone until I came up with an address, and I ran there immediately. She obviously did not recognize me, but when I told her over the story, a spark flickered in her eyes. I tearfully apologized for my harsh words, and she graciously forgave me with her whole heart.”

Beaming from ear to ear, the father announced, “Rabotai, that took place exactly nine months ago!”

Reprinted from the Parashat Korah 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. (Excerpted from Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's "Torah Tavlin.")

The Box of Snuff

Rav Zamir Cohen shared a story about one of the previous Gedolim, that when he visited a certain community, he was hosted by the wealthiest resident of the town, who placed a room at his disposal on the top floor of his mansion. During the night, the Rav woke up and felt a sudden craving for some snuff. He got up to look for his snuffbox, and then he realized that it was in his coat pocket, which had been left in the lobby on the ground floor.

He decided that he would go down to get it, but then he hesitated. He said to himself, “Am I such an indulger, that I can't conquer my desire for some snuff? Should I go down all those stairs in the middle of the night, just to get a pinch of snuff? It is not necessary! I will go back to sleep!”

He sat back down on his bed, determined to return to sleep, when another thought struck him. “Maybe the reason I'm not going downstairs for that snuff is really not because I wish to conquer my desires. Perhaps the reason really stems from laziness, and I am just coming up with an excuse to avoid exerting myself?”

He rose again, then sat down quickly and asked himself, “But maybe the idea of me being lazy is only the excuse I am giving myself, so that I can happily surrender to my craving for some snuff?” He continued debating the matter internally for some time, until he decided to act.

He left his bed, went down to the ground floor, and located his snuffbox. He raised it, then put it back down, leaving it on the table without taking any snuff, and then he returned to sleep. With this, he managed to overcome both his craving, and his laziness, with one action!

Reprinted from the Parshas Naso 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Power of Not Lying



The Ben Ish Chai

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz related that in the time of the Ben Ish Chai, there was a young man who was a professional thief. One day he went to see the Ben Ish Chai and said to him, “I am a great thief, but now I want to do Teshuvah. Rebbe, please teach me the way for me to do Teshuvah!”

The Ben Ish Chai replied, “If you would like to do Teshuvah, then accept upon yourself that you will never tell a lie.”

The boy was amazed, what does lying have to do with stealing? But the Ben Ish Chai insisted that this was the correct path of action for him to take, and the boy accepted upon himself that no false word would leave his mouth, and he left.

A few days went by, and the desire to steal arose in his heart. He remembered that a wealthy woman lived alone in the city, with no husband and no family. He passed by her house, and when he saw that she was not home, he entered the house, and filled up bags with her valuables, nice jewelry, and a lot of money.

When he was about to leave, he suddenly thought, “If I should happen to meet someone on the way, and he asks me what I am carrying, what will I answer him? I am not allowed to lie, and to tell him the truth, that I just stole it, I also cannot do that!

Seeing that he had no choice, he left all the bags he had filled, and left the house empty-handed. When the woman returned home, she was stunned to see that she had been robbed, but all her things were still there, packed in bags! She quickly checked and saw that not a thing was missing.

She went straight to see the Ben Ish Chai and said, “Obviously, a thief was in my house, but he did not take anything. I am afraid that he will come back for what

he left, and I am afraid to be there when he comes. Can the Rav please suggest a Shidduch for me, so that I will not be alone anymore?”

The Ben Ish Chai called for this young man and suggested that he marry this wealthy woman. However, the young man was embarrassed, and he told the Ben Ish Chai everything that had happened.

The Ben Ish Chai said to him, “Just look. All this wealth was given to you by Hashem. However, the Yeitzer Hara tried to entice you to take it by stealing it, but because you overpowered it and fought your desire to take something that was not yours, Hashem is allowing you to have all the wealth in a permissible way!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Naso 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Power of Learning Torah



Rav Gershon Edelstein

Rav Gershon Edelstein, zt”l, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Ponovez Yeshivah in Bnei Brak, tells a fascinating story. A young man, who was not very religious, was unfortunately killed in a car accident, leaving behind a wife and a young son, R”L.

His young widow resolved to become more religious, and made Aliyah to Eretz Yisroel. She enrolled her son in a Cheder, where he began learning Gemara for the first time.

One day, this boy came home crying to his mother that he had a Gemara test the next day in Cheder, and he didn’t know the material well enough. His mother was apologetic, but she said she couldn’t help him, and the boy went to sleep very worried about his test.

The next morning, the boy woke up all calm, and in a great mood. He told his mother that his father had come to him in a dream, and learned the entire Gemara with him, and now, he was fully prepared for the test!

Rav Edelstein explained that this was miraculous, as the father had never learned Gemara when he was alive. Nevertheless, the fact that his son now learned Torah, it allowed his father to learn Gemara in the Mesivta D'Rakiya, the Yeshivah in Shamayim.

Additionally, because of this, the father's Neshamah was granted the opportunity to appear to his son in a dream and to teach his own son the Gemara! Rav Edelstein said that this is all due to the power of learning Torah, as the Gemara in Brachos (8a) says, that in today's times, when we no longer have the Mishkan or the Bais HaMikdash for Kedushah to emanate from, the only place where Hashem's Kedushah is derived from, is from those who learn Torah.

Therefore, explains Rav Edelstein, this young boy's Torah learning caused the Kedushah to flow all the way to his father's Neshamah in Shamayim. Rav Edelstein would say over this story to give Chizuk and encouragement for everyone to strengthen their Torah learning!

Reprinted from the Parshas Naso 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Coatless, Shivering Yeshiva Bochur

In the early 1900s, the great R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, Gadol HaDor in Vilna, towering in Torah and chess, involved himself not only in halachic matters and communal leadership, but also in shidduchim. He viewed each shidduch not as a personal arrangement, but as a step in rebuilding Klal Yisrael—another Torah home established.

At the time, the Slabodka Yeshiva housed many brilliant minds, but one bochur seemed invisible. Quiet, lacking yichus, and extremely poor—he often skipped meals to save for a sefer, owning just one worn set of clothing. He was always in a corner of the beis midrash, silent, head down.

But R' Chaim Ozer noticed him. One frigid winter night, as R' Chaim Ozer left the beis din, he saw a hunched figure outside the yeshiva's side door—coatless, shivering. He stepped closer.

“My son,” he asked gently, “what are you doing here?”

The startled boy stammered, “Just finishing a shtickel Ketzos... I didn’t want to lose the flow.”

R’ Chaim Ozer looked into his eyes and saw sincerity—and pain. He learned the boy was an orphan from a far-off village, with no family, no money. No one knew who he was. From that night, R’ Chaim Ozer took quiet notice. He’d ask maggidei shiur about him and pass by to hear a line of chiddush. Over time, he realized: this boy was a hidden gem—a lamdan, a baal middos, a ben aliyah.

When the boy reached shidduchim age, no suggestions came. Who would propose a poor, unknown orphan? But R’ Chaim Ozer had already begun working. In another town, a wealthy balabos had a daughter in shidduchim. Many top suggestions came. But none felt right. During a trip to Vilna, the father went to R’ Chaim Ozer for a brocha.

“You have a daughter in shidduchim,” said the gadol. “I want to suggest someone.”

“Of course, Rebbe. Who?”

“A bochur from Slabodka. No name, no family, nothing in his pocket—but a hidden treasure of our generation.”

The man hesitated. “I don’t doubt you, Rebbe, but what will people say? What will my daughter say?”

“I don’t ask you to agree today,” R’ Chaim Ozer said. “Just meet him. Listen for an hour. If your heart is open, you’ll see what I see.”

Out of respect, the man agreed. A quiet meeting was arranged. He returned to Vilna shaken.

“I don’t understand,” he said. “No one knows him. Yet he speaks with such refinement and clarity in Torah. Where was he hiding?”

R’ Chaim Ozer answered, “In the shadow of humility.”

The shidduch was redt. After one meeting, the girl told her father, “I don’t know what it is... but when he speaks, I feel calm. He sees the world only through the lens of Torah.”

Years later, that bochur became a maggid shiur and eventually a Rosh Yeshiva. His Torah filled battei midrashim across Europe and later Eretz Yisrael. But he never forgot that freezing night, when R’ Chaim Ozer saw what no one else did.

A talmid once asked him, “Rebbi, how did you rise so high when no one gave you a chance?”

He answered, “A gadol once taught me that Hashem doesn’t see the suit or the yichus—but the fire inside.”

R’ Chaim Ozer saw that fire—and lit the path forward.”

Reprinted for the Parshas Chukas 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

The Snake in Our Minds

By Aharon Spetner



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

Yosef and Daniel Spolter laughed as they watched a baby chimp grab a banana from an adult chimp and run off with it. Totty had brought them to the zoo as a reward for memorizing the first perek of Mishnayos Brachos, and they were having a great time watching all the animals playing and eating.

A few minutes later, they passed a concession stand selling yummy frozen treats. It was a hot day and Totty offered to buy ices for the two sweaty boys. After checking the hechsherim, Yosef picked a cherry freeze-pop and Daniel got a lemon popsicle. The boys thanked Totty, made beautiful brachos, and happily licked their frozen treats as they walked.

Just then they heard the ding-a-ling of a bell and looked up to see yet another man selling refreshments, this time from a little cart, and it advertised Cholov Yisroel ice cream! Another frum family approached and their parents bought the

kids each a large waffle cone with strawberry-vanilla ice cream topped with cookie crumbles.

“Let’s go, boys,” Totty urged, “you already got ices.”

“But Totty,” complained Yosef, “we wouldn’t have picked these yuchy ices if we knew that we could get a real treat like ice cream cones!”

“Yeah,” added Daniel. “And these lemon ices always make my tongue prickle.”

“No.” said Totty firmly. “You’ve already gotten a treat and I’m not buying you another one.”

The boys lowered their voices as they entered the cool, dark reptile house, filled with cages containing different types of lizards, turtles, and snakes. They saw an iguana munching on leaves and were amazed to see a foot-long chameleon catching flies with his tongue.

The King Cobra

Then another cage near them caught their attention. The sign read “King Cobra: (*Ophiophagus hannah*), also called hamadryad, the world’s longest venomous snake, it can deliver enough venom in a single bite to kill a large elephant.”

“Wow!” said Daniel, “but where is it? I can’t see anything but rocks and branches.”

“I see it,” said Totty. “Look carefully.”

The boys peered through the glass and suddenly jumped back. What they thought was just a branch had slithered towards them and raised its hooded head, flicking its forked tongue in and out.

Walking into the Bright Sunlight

“Wow, Totty, that snake scared me!” Yosef said, as they walked back out into the bright sunlight a few minutes later.

“Maybe that’s the Nachash from Gan Eden!” Daniel began to say, but just then they passed the ice cream cart again. “Oh, please Totty, please? Please can we get one? It’s not fair that they are selling cholov Yisroel ice cream here and all we got were these lousy ices! Please? Please?”

Totty stopped walking. “Yosef, Daniel, five minutes ago you were happily enjoying these ices. Suddenly you saw ice cream and now you don’t like the ices? Do you understand what just happened to you?”

A Confused Look on His Face

“Yeah, we saw ice cream.” Yosef said, a confused look on his face.

Totty smiled. “Daniel, you mentioned something interesting about the snake just now. We know that the Nachash of parshas Bereishis was the Yetzer Hora, whom Hashem had made look like a snake. After the cheit of the Eitz Hada’as, he was given the curse to ‘crawl on his belly’. “And the Yetzer Hora acts like a snake. You couldn’t even see the cobra until he moved, right? You thought he was a piece of wood. That’s how the Yetzer Hora works! He slithers in our mind and hides himself so we can’t see him even though he’s right there, causing us to think and act in ways that are wrong.

Similar to What Happened to Am Yisroel in Parshas Chukas

“Now what just happened with the ices and the ice cream is similar to what happened to the Am Yisroel in Parsha Chukas.”

“They had ice cream in the midbar?” Yosef asked.

“No,” Daniel said. “But the mann tasted like whatever they wanted, so it tasted like ice cream!”

Totty chuckled and continued. “Before the Am Yisroel came to Eretz Yisroel they passed by other nations who lived nearby. And those nations were eating real food! Sure, the Yidden had the mann, but you couldn’t chew mann like you chewed a nice geshmake steak. So, they complained about the mann to Moshe Rabbeinu, and Hashem sent venomous snakes to punish them. Why snakes? Because the snake of the Yetzer Hora was crawling in their minds, causing them to be unhappy with the mann.

The Trick of the Yetzer Hora

“We should always be happy with what we have. There is no need to complain about the good things Hashem gives us! Bnei Yisroel complained about the mann and, lehavdil, you boys are complaining about these delicious ices! That was the Yetzer Hora who jumped out at you, telling you not to enjoy what you do have now - and you didn’t even realize he was there!”

The boys thought about this as they slurped the last of their ices. Yosef looked up. “My freeze pop does taste good, Totty.” he said. “Thank you for buying it and thanks for teaching us such an important lesson.”

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