

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS BAMIDBAR 5785

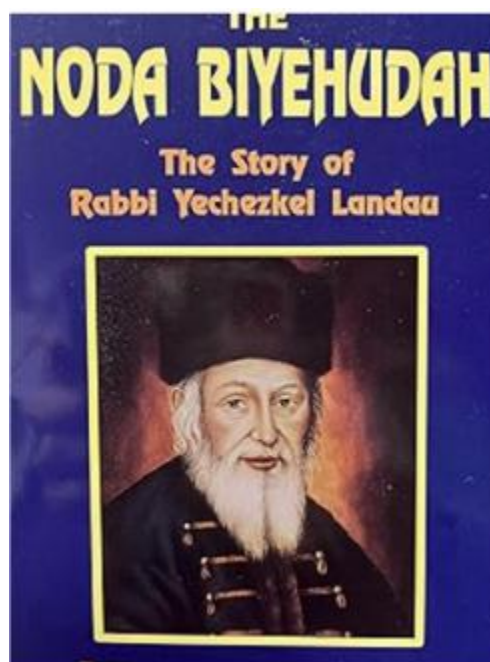
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Two Stories from the Noda B'Yehudah



R' Landau once helped a young non-Jewish boy with food and clothing when he was in distress. Years later, as an apprentice in a bakery, the boy overheard a plan by the non-Jews to poison bread intended for Jews on the day after Pesach, when all the Jews would buy bread.

Remembering R' Landau's kindness, he rushed to warn him. R' Landau immediately gathered all the Jews together on the last day of Pesach, and announced that there had been a miscalculation in the calendar. They had started Pesach a day early, and therefore, they must keep an extra day of Pesach.

On the “ninth” day of Pesach, the non-Jewish bakers were eager and ready to sell the poisonous bread to the Jews, but not one Jew came to make any purchases. They accused the Jews of sabotaging their businesses.

When confronted, R’ Landau asked for one of the loaves of bread. He threw it to a dog, and after a few mouthfuls, the dog dropped dead from the poison. R’ Landau thus proved their malicious intent, and a large tragedy was averted. It was a powerful example of how R’ Landau’s silent acts of kindness had inestimable ripple effects for Klal Yisroel.

A young man from a poor background was learning in Prague and caught the attention of R’ Landau for his brilliance and yiras Shamayim. When the boy approached him privately, distressed that his impoverished status was preventing him from securing a shidduch,

R’ Landau took it upon himself to advocate for him. He sent a personal letter to a prominent family, vouching not for the boy’s intellect alone, but for his character. The girl’s family agreed to meet him, and the match was ultimately made. Years later, the couple’s son became a leading posek in his own right. R’ Landau’s deep understanding of people—and his willingness to personally involve himself—changed their family’s future.

Reprinted from the Parshas Emor 5785 email of The Weekly Vort.

A Blast from the Past (April 26, 2002)

Chutzpa in Prison

By Rishe Deitsch

Back in the 1970s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe initiated a campaign for his chasidim to visit and help Jewish prisoners. Rabbi Yossie Tevel began visiting prisons then and continues to visit them.

In those days, it wasn't easy for Rabbi Tevel to get permission from the authorities to enter the prisons. Some chaplains do not welcome competition. Rabbi Izak Hodakov o.b.m., the Rebbe's secretary, was guiding Rabbi Tevel every step of the way, and he always instructed Rabbi Tevel to approach stubborn or hostile chaplains politely and patiently.

By hook or by crook, Rabbi Tevel and his merry band of Lubavitcher chasidim finagled their way into the prisons to visit the Jewish prisoners.

But there was one prison in upstate New York that was a hard nut to crack. No matter how often Rabbi Tevel applied for permission to visit, he was always refused. This prison's chaplain was a Reform rabbi close to 80 years old. Rabbi J.

was adamant that no Chabad rabbi would enter "his" institution. He didn't need any help. But as soon as Rabbi Tevel got word of another refusal, he would just apply again. It looked like Rabbi J. had met his match.

Things came to a head a few weeks before Passover. Rabbi Tevel, as always, requested permission to meet with the Jewish prisoners. Rabbi J., as always, refused. Rabbi Tevel sighed, "What am I asking? All I want is permission to bring matza and maror to the Jewish prisoners." Finally, Rabbi J. agreed, but only that he could send the food by mail, not that he could deliver it himself.

A few days later, Rabbi Tevel came with the matza and maror. Rabbi J. met with him and took the packages-he wouldn't let Rabbi Tevel meet the prisoners. But for the first time, they sat and talked. In accordance with Rabbi Hodakov's explicit instructions, Rabbi Tevel remained calm, thankful, and patient, and soon-incredibly-Rabbi J. was agreeing to let Rabbi Tevel come back with a few friends on Lag B'Omer. It was a breakthrough, although as they were setting the time, Rabbi J. warned Rabbi Tevel: "Don't push it... when you come, don't overstep your bounds."

On Lag B'Omer, the chasidim arrived with a tape recorder, a lively tape, and lots of food. They explained the significance of Lag B'Omer, why it is a happy day, and drew the Jewish prisoners into a joyous circle of singing and dancing. There were only two Jewish prisoners there, because Rabbi J. had not spread the word as he was supposed to.

But word of the party going on (or was it the enticing smell of the pastrami?) got out, and other Jewish prisoners joined the group.

Soon Rabbi Tevel and his cohorts took out tefilin and asked everyone to do this important mitzva. The prisoners took turns putting on tefilin. Then Rabbi Tevel got a crazy idea. He turned to Rabbi J. and called out, "Rabbi J.! Now that we're such good friends, maybe we could put on tefilin with you, too?"

Rabbi J. seemed to freeze for a few seconds. A strange expression came over his face. And then, slowly, he stood up and walked over to Rabbi Tevel, saying, "Your chutzpa is truly without limits!"

Rabbi Tevel took this as a compliment and began to put the tefilin on Rabbi J. But Rabbi J. stopped him. "I know exactly what to do." He took the tefilin and put them on perfectly. And then, suddenly, Rabbi J. burst out into hysterical weeping and wailing... and he didn't stop for a full 20 minutes. Rabbi Tevel didn't know what to think. Soon the room grew silent as everyone gathered around solemnly watching Rabbi J. say the blessing and the Shema through gasping sobs. And then, a heartfelt cry: "Tattah zisser, zei mir moichel!" ("Sweet Father, forgive me!")

"Please, Rabbi, tell me what's wrong," Rabbi Tevel begged. "Why are you so upset?" Rabbi J. caught his breath, calmed down, and told his story.

"My family lived in Berlin. My zaide was a religious Jew, and my father was also religious. Many years ago, I lived through that infamous night known as

Kristallnacht. My zaide was a dignified presence in the community, and the Germans knew it. They took my zaide, tied a pig around his neck, and forced him to march around the town for hours. When they were through with him, they shot him point blank. I was a boy, and I witnessed the whole gruesome spectacle. I ran into the forest to escape. After a few days I realized that I was alone in the world. I asked G-d either to kill me also, or else I would take revenge on Him for what had just happened to me, and to my family. I swore to G-d I would make Him sorry!

"After the war, I came to America and became a Reform rabbi. And in my bitterness and grief, I made it my business to marry as many Jews to non-Jews as I could, and if possible, to officiate at weddings on Tisha B'Av or other days when weddings are forbidden. I wanted to make G-d suffer as He had made my family and me suffer.

"Why do you think I didn't want you here all these years? I knew what Lubavitch is. I knew they warm people up and draw them to Judaism. I didn't want you to get to me. So, I kept you away.

"Today, you asked me to put on tefilin. As I sat there trying to keep my armor on, I heard my father's voice, and then my zaide's voice, telling me to put on tefilin. Much as I tried, I couldn't stay cold. My heart welled up and I suddenly felt that I had been wrong all these years. In an instant I regretted all the 'revenge' I had wrought against Him. Ach, Yossele..."

Rabbi J. was now calling his former enemy "Yossele." They parted with warm hugs and Rabbi J. invited Rabbi Tevel to come back any time.

A few nights later Rabbi Tevel's phone rang. It was Rabbi J.'s son. Ever since Lag B'Omer, his father couldn't stop talking about the young Chabad rabbi, his work with the prisoners, and his experience putting on tefilin after so many decades. Today his father had passed away. Would Rabbi Tevel please attend the funeral? When Rabbi Tevel got over his shock, he agreed.

At the funeral, Rabbi J.'s son begged Rabbi Tevel to say a few words. So, Rabbi Tevel spoke about the pintele Yid, the tiny spark that lives on within every Jew, no matter how estranged he is from his Judaism. The pintele Yid is flickering still, waiting to burst into full flame, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe knows that and feels that and actually suffers when a single pintele Yid is not yet burning brightly. Which is why he sent his chasidim into prisons.

Not just for the prisoners. For the chaplains, too.
Condensed from the N'Shei Chabad Newsletter

(Editor's Note: The above article was reprinted on April 26, 2002. Sadly, Rabbi Yossie Tevel passed away a number of years ago on January 19, 2010.)

The Hidden Manuscript, The Grave and the Tree

By Menachem Posner



Art by Sefira Lightstone

In the old cemetery in Cracow, right near the burial place of Rabbi Moshe Isserles, stood a great tree. Its large branches seemed to have borne the weight of centuries, and were laden with the heaviness of time.

Come listen, and I will tell you the story of that tree, as it was told on Lag BaOmer, the day when Rabbi Moshe, known by all as the Ramah, passed away in the year 1572 (5332).

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher was a great Talmudist who flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries. His most lasting contribution to Jewish life may have been his book Arba Turim (Four Towers), an encompassing compendium of Jewish law and tradition as applied to all areas of life in his day.

As the centuries wore on, more questions were asked and more answers were provided. Circumstances continued to evolve, and scholars dug yet deeper into the well of Torah.

Two great scholars took it upon themselves to compose commentaries on the Arba Turim. In Poland, Rabbi Moshe Isserles wrote a commentary known as the “Darkei Moshe” (Ways of Moses). Faraway in the mystical city of Tzfat, nestled in the hills of northern Israel, Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote a commentary, which he named the “Beit Yosef” (House of Joseph).

The commentaries were well-received, but Rabbi Moshe felt there was room to do even more. The time had come for a new work, a text that would provide guidance for Jewish people all over, encompassing the works of Rabbi Yaakov, but incorporating other voices and traditions as well, all in a concise and clear manner, eliminating the meandering conversation that sometimes obscured the “Arba Turim” and its commentaries.

Without fanfare, Rabbi Moshe set to work on the monumental text.

One day, after the work had neared completion, he received a prized visitor: a messenger of the Jewish community in the Holy Land.

In those days, there was precious little industry in Israel, and the Jews there relied on their brethren in the diaspora for crucial financial support.

Only the most special individuals were entrusted with the task of raising funds. The roads and waterways were fraught with danger, and the traveler needed to be resourceful and hardy. In addition, as a representative of the residents of the holiest place on earth, he needed to be learned and pious, a stellar example for all. And last but not least, he needed to be trustworthy and honest.

As soon as Rabbi Moshe learned of his guest, he called for a sumptuous feast to be prepared for him, and the two men soon found themselves deep in Torah discussions.

“Since you have set out such a fine table for me,” said the visitor after the meal was concluded, “I wish to leave you with a set table as well. Here is a set of Shulchan Aruch (literally “Set Table”), which was recently completed by Rabbi Yosef Karo.”

Rabbi Moshe eagerly perused the books. He could hardly contain his emotions as he realized that his peer from the Holy Land had done almost exactly what he had set out to do, creating a terse and easily applicable code of Jewish law.

He spent the entire night poring over the work. By morning he concluded that although it was similar to his work, there were many critical differences. While Rabbi Yosef relied chiefly on the great Sephardic decisors of previous generations, he did not cite the more recent rulings, particularly those of the leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry.

What was he to do? Should he publish his work, competing directly with the already-published treatise by the sage from Tzfat? That would not do. No, he would need to hide his work, ensuring that it would never see the light of day.

The following night, after the town was asleep, Rabbi Moshe crept out of his house and made his way to the Jewish cemetery, which was not far away. There, under a tree, he buried his manuscript, and stole back to bed.

No one knew of his noble deed, except for the caretaker of the cemetery, who had seen the rabbi bury the manuscript.

Rabbi Moshe then began a new task, writing glosses that would accompany the Shulchan Aruch, allowing all of Israel to study a single, unified code, which he called the Mappah (Tablecloth). The Sephardim could rely on the words of the original author, and Ashkenazim could study the glosses that Rabbi Moshe artfully inserted.

Years later, the same visitor from the Holy Land once again visited Cracow. This time, Rabbi Moshe joyously presented him with his latest work.

“Please take this back with you to Tzfat and present it to Rabbi Yosef Karo,” he asked the guest. “Tell him that the tablecloth had been prepared before the table, but it was then tailored to fit after the table had been crafted.”

When the unified work made its way to the holy city of Tzfat, Rabbi Yosef Karo, who was then elderly, was pleased by what had been done. Full of gratitude to his humble, junior peer in far-way Poland, he purchased 100 dinars worth of parchment and wrote a Torah scroll to be given as a gift to Rabbi Moshe.

Meanwhile, the tree under which the manuscript was buried continued to grow. Its strong arms spread in all directions, and it produced lush leaves year after year.

Before he passed away, Rabbi Moshe asked that he be buried under the tree’s ample branches. And so, it was.

Years passed, and the tree grew ever bigger, and closer to the grave. One year, on Lag BaOmer, when thousands of pilgrims would stream to the resting place of Rabbi Moshe, the shoving got so bad, that there was talk of uprooting the tree to create more room for visitors.

Despite the caretaker’s objections, the men arrived with their tools and were about to set to work. Suddenly, a great storm began brewing, and the men felt themselves being blown in all directions. It was then clear to all that the tree was special, and no one dared touch it again.

Years turned into centuries, and the Nazis swept into Poland, bringing destruction and devastation in their wake. In the ancient Jewish cemetery of Cracow, the Nazis tore down the walls and hauled away tombstones to be used as paving stones.

The tombstone of the Rabbi Moshe was one of the few that remained undisturbed. It’s said that the tree’s boughs bent down to shelter the tomb from the Nazis and their henchmen.

When the city's few, broken survivors returned home from the camps, they made their way to the desolate cemetery, and there they were greeted by a lone tombstone, that of Rabbi Moshe Isserles, sheltered by the tree that had borne witness to the rabbi's magnanimity and sacrifice.

Reprinted from the website Chabad.Org Adapted from Sichat Hashavuah.

The Lost Manuscript of Precious Chiddushim



Rav Zundel Kroizer, zt"l (1924-2014), had a manuscript of his Chiddushim (original insights) on Masechta Kesubos, that he uncharacteristically would not lend out. There was a young Talmid Chacham who knew this Masechta very well, and he kept asking Rav Zundel to borrow it so that he could learn from it, and finally, Rav Zundel lent it to him.

This fellow took it with him to Mei'ah She'arim, but he somehow misplaced it and it got lost. He was completely shattered. He just couldn't bear to return to Rav Zundel without his manuscript. After spending much time looking for it, he built up the courage and told Rav Zundel what had happened, and that his manuscript was gone. Rav Zundel did all he could to console this Talmid over the loss. The fellow soon walked away remorseful, but felt reassured by Rav Zundel's warm response.

Sometime later, an antique Seforim collector was sifting through some piles of Sheimos, and a handwritten pamphlet caught his eye. He took it home, and

miraculously saved it from being buried. He later showed it to someone, who recognized the handwriting to be Rav Zundel's. He went to see Rav Zundel, and asked if it was his. When Rav Zundel said that it was, his precious manuscript was returned to him.

Rav Zundel thanked the man and told him that those particular Chiddushim were written with tremendous Mesiras Nefesh, as Yerushalayim was being bombed in 1948. With all the neighbors crammed into the dark bomb shelter, he found it impossible to learn, so he returned home, despite the danger. Rav Zundel said,

"Bombs were exploding and the windows were shattering, but I did not move from that room. It was under those traumatic and stressful conditions that I learned Kesubos and wrote those Chiddushim in that notebook. I knew the fruits of that labor would not be permanently lost. I knew someday it would come back to me!"

Rav Zundel taught that one's most treasured learning and greatest growth occurs during his most difficult times. Similarly, the opportunity for anyone to grow the most is greatest in times of hardship and challenge!

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

The Teenager's Grandpa

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

There was a teenager who grew up in a non-observant house and went to the local public school. He excelled in his studies and his parents were planning or trying to figure out which college will their gifted son benefit the most from. But one evening to their bewilderment and shock, the son informed them that he is not interested in going to college, rather he would like to continue his learning in a Yeshiva - a religious Institution.

The parents who themselves were very educated and as noted not religious, tried to convince their son to change his mind and get what they considered a proper education. They argued that only through a prestigious degree would he be able to be successful in life! After some lengthy discussions did not resolve the issue they decided to bring in Grandpa who was beloved by everyone including this grandson their son and ask him to help straighten out the situation. They were positive that Grandpa who opposed religious observances, would support their position and their son would respect and accept his opinion.

When Grandpa sat down at the table, he first asked his grandson when and why he made that decision, as everyone else in the family either received or plan on

receiving a degree. After the grandson answered, he then asked, that yeshiva that you wish to apply to, is affiliated with which organization?

With Chabad, the grandson answered.

Chabad, they are good people, the grandfather said.

Gasps were heard throughout the room, The parents were shellshocked, especially when Grandpa said to his grandson, “Be successful!” this was something they never anticipated, Grandpa who was anti-religious just gave his blessings to his grandson to join a Jewish college or institution and become religious himself. How could that be?!

But at that point they realized, the damage could not be undone, they too had to respect and abide by grandpas’ strange and unexpected decision.

The grandson was ecstatic, hugged his grandpa and signed up into the Yeshiva.

Years later, the grandson was sitting with his grandfather and asked, Grandpa, we all know that not only are you not observant, but you are also against religion. So can you please tell me, why did you give your okay for me to go to Yeshiva and for which I am eternally thankful to you! My life is a wonderful blessing. I feel that I am one of the most fortunate people in the world.

The grandfather looked at his grandson and said, you know at that time I was a professor and on the campus was a man called Rabbi Shlomo Schwartz. One day he came over to me and asked politely, “Professor, would you like to hear the Megilla today?”



Rabbi Shlomo Schwartz, obm

In order not to be rude, I replied truthfully, “I am going home which is in the city of----, and I must be there as soon as possible.

“The rabbi exclaimed that's excellent because I happen to have to be there also. So, I did the proper thing and I offered him a ride. While I was driving, he was reading from his scroll some words I never heard before and when he concluded we talked a little bit.

“Shortly before entering the city, I asked him where are you going, I will drop you off.

“The bus station will be perfect he replied.

“Hearing this I saw that he only came because he was committed to a cause. Although I was and remain not observant, I saw that he is a person that there is what to respect. Therefore, when you said you two want to join that movement, I decided to respect your conviction, because I recognized that there is truth in their conduct.”

Reprinted from the Purim 5785 email of Rabbi Sholom Avtzon's Weekly Story.

The Sin of Indulgence



Rav Shmuel Salant

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz shared a story about one of the Tzadikim of Yerushalayim from long ago, named Rebbe Pesach. Before moving to settle in Yerushalayim, he served as a Rav in a small town in Chutz LaAretz. When he settled in Yerushalayim, he met a local Maggid who was a very special individual. Together, they decided to serve Hashem as a team.

Every night, they would rise at midnight to recite Tikkun Chatzos, and afterward, they would learn Torah until sunrise, and Daven Shacharis at the Vasikin Minyan. After Davening, they would eat a small meal and return to their learning, and they dedicated most of the day to learning Torah.

One day, the Maggid began speaking to Rebbe Pesach about the disgrace of indulging in luxuries, elaborating at length on the spiritual harmfulness of this behavior. At first, Rebbe Pesach thought that the Maggid was simply trying to reinforce the message for both of them, and was not directing his words at him personally. However, after several days where the Maggid did not stop raising the issue, even to the point that it took away from the time they were supposed to be learning,

Rebbe Pesach realized that the remarks were indeed aimed at him. Understanding this, Rebbe Pesach questioned the Maggid in astonishment, and said, “What ‘luxuries’ have you found in me? My children wear clothing where even the patches have patches, and we barely have enough food to eat. I am like any of the other poor people in the city who lives a life of deprivation and hardship. Why would you accuse me of indulging in luxuries?”

The Maggid revealed his reasoning and said, “I was in your home on Rosh Chodesh, and I saw a beautiful silk tablecloth of considerable value on your table. I ask you, is that not a luxury? How can you justify using such an expensive tablecloth when it is possible to use an ordinary one?”

Rebbe Pesach responded to the Maggid and said that it had never crossed his mind to purchase such a tablecloth, nor had he spent a single coin on it. He then recounted how the tablecloth came into his possession:

“While I was serving as a Rav abroad, it happened that a wealthy man in my town fell gravely ill, and his condition was life-threatening. He required a type of daily care that involved great effort. There was no one in the town who was suitable for this task, except for me. So, I took it upon myself to care for him, and I began attending to him diligently every day. Each day, I went to his home, looked after him, and also learned Torah with him. Baruch Hashem, my efforts made a significant impact on him, and gradually, he made a full recovery. Once he regained his health, he wished to thank me by giving me a generous gift. However, I of course did not want to trade the Mitzvah for any material compensation, and I refused to accept anything from him.

“This wealthy man lived a long life and passed away only a short while ago. A few days after his passing, a messenger arrived carrying this tablecloth along with a letter. The letter was from this man’s children, and it explained that their elderly father had passed away, and in his will, he had instructed them to give me this tablecloth as a token of gratitude for the time I had devoted to caring for him during his illness.

“The truth is,” continued Rebbe Pesach, “that I did not want to use the tablecloth, just as I did not wish to accept any reward at the time. I had considered returning it to the children of the wealthy man. However, before reaching a decision, it occurred to me that the children might feel bad if they would see that I did not value the gift from their father. Also, there is a Halachic principle of the obligation to fulfill the wishes of the deceased. Therefore, I reluctantly decided to use the tablecloth.”

Hearing this explanation, the Maggid was appeased and understood that his special Chavrusah was not guilty of indulging in Gashmiyus. Nevertheless, he still felt uneasy about using something he considered to be a luxury. Together, they deliberated over what should be done about the matter. Since they could not reach a conclusion, the two agreed to present their case to the Rav of Yerushalayim at the time, Rav Shmuel Salant, zt”l, and seek his ruling on the matter.

Rav Shmuel, with his wisdom, surprised them with his decision. These were his words: “Rebbi Pesach is correct that the tablecloth should not be returned, as it was given in fulfillment of the deceased’s wishes. At the same time, the Maggid’s argument is valid, that using it constitutes a form of indulgence. Therefore, my advice is as follows: use the tablecloth in a way that eliminates any enjoyment from it. Lay it on the table, but cover it with the old, simple tablecloth that you have been using until now.”

Rav Gamliel said, “From this story we can see how meticulous the righteous of previous generations were in avoiding even the slightest hint of indulgence!”

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

Just Two Minutes!!!

By Yoni Schwartz

Rav Refael Levin, the son of Rav Aryeh Levin, ZT”L, was visiting a hospital. Nearby was the hospital rabbi, who was doing his daily rounds - going from door to door, speaking with and encouraging patients. When the hospital rabbi saw Rav Refael Levin, he got very excited, ran over to him, and asked if his father was also there.

The hospital rabbi said, “I have to ask you a question. I come to the hospital as it’s my job. Your father comes, and it’s not his job. I can spend an hour with the patients, but when I get up to leave, they say, ‘So soon? You’re leaving already?’ - thinking that I don’t really care about them and that I’m just here because I have to do my rounds.

However, when your father visits, he only stays for a few minutes, yet when he leaves, there's always a smile on the patient's face. How does he do it?" Rav Refael responded, "Well, he's here right now - why don't we go over and check?"



Rav Aryeh Levin, zt"l

As they approached Rav Aryeh, they saw him enter a room. They looked at their watches: it was exactly 9:00 A.M. on the dot. When he walked out, they looked again. It was 9:02.

The hospital rabbi said, "I don't understand - he was in there for two minutes!" Rav Refael responded, "Yes, he was only there for two minutes, but for those two minutes, he had all the time in the world."

Reprinted from the Parshas Emor 5785 email of Torah Sweets.