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Bagels, Lox and Tefillin



Let us read an inspirational story, told in the first person by Reb Mishulem Laib Drapkin.

"I always felt a connection to Judaism because of my grandfather. We often spent the Jewish holidays with my grandparents and were always greeted by the warmth of my grandmother's cooking, and my grandfather's sure, but soft handshake with a hearty "Gut Yontiff!" I didn't really know what "Gut Yontiff" meant, but I knew that we always greeted each other with it at happy times.

Often when we came to visit on Sundays, my grandfather took us kids to a small amusement park. He bought us tickets for the rides, watching us scream with delight. He got such pleasure from his grandchildren. He even went on the Ferris wheel with us his arm wrapped protectively behind us as the car soared up into the sky.

One Rosh Hashanah, I asked my mother where my grandfather was. She said he was at services all day. I asked why, and she replied, "He goes to an Orthodox synagogue. They pray all day." I imagined my grandfather in a synagogue full of other grandfathers, all wearing dark suits and yarmulkes. I thought to myself that if my grandfather went there, it must be serious Judaism!

When I was older, I attended Hebrew School at our local Conservative Synagogue. I didn't much care for it. It cut into my after-public school play time. Like many children of my time, I couldn't see the relevance of Hebrew School when none of what we studied was practiced in our "regular" lives.

Although my experiences seemed to be pushing me farther from Judaism, there was one notable exception: my Bar Mitzvah. I enjoyed learning how to read my Torah portion. My tutor, an elderly Orthodox rabbi teaching at our synagogue, really inspired me. I also immensely enjoyed the singing and chanting. My Bar Mitzvah was an unqualified success. I was proud of what I did, and was gratified when my mother said, "I wish that your grandfather was still alive to see your Bar Mitzvah. He would have been so proud of you."

By the time I went away to college, I had little or nothing to do with Judaism. The fact that I was living far away from family and friends and the heritage I grew up with didn't bother me most of the time, except during the December holidays. Then, I became intensely aware of being a minority in a country where someone else's religion is assumed to be part of everyone's heritage. My Jewish identity remained at an ebb for many years until a close family friend became a "Baal Teshuvah" and an orthodox Rabbi to boot.

When his mother passed away, some local Chassidim volunteered to help with the necessary arrangements. After the funeral, I chanced to talk to the baal teshuva - Orthodox rabbi, who to my great surprise was a really nice guy! He in turn, gave me the number of my local orthodox rabbi who also turned out to be really terrific. He was my age, with a background like mine, and was not only observant, but seemingly fulfilled and happy with his world and existence.

My preconceptions about Judaism were blown away. What an amazing world I had discovered, where people actually lived what they learned. I was overwhelmed by the vast storehouse of knowledge that I had not only discovered, but belonged to me by birthright!

I began to study more about Judaism, and one Sunday, my new found friend from the orthodox shul announced a class called "Lox, Bagels, Cream Cheese and Tefillin." I eagerly went down to shul with my grandfather's Tefillin which my father had recently given me, only to discover that I was the only one who showed up. We chatted for a while, which helped to calm my jitters about something that seemed so foreign. The rabbi explained the workings of Tefillin, and then told me to get them out. I was completely unprepared for what I found.

I took the Tefillin out, and laid them on top of the bag. I was struck by how carefully and lovingly they had been wrapped. Although they were last touched by my grandfather over 25 years ago, it was as though I was seeing his hands carefully wrapping them and holding them right in front of me. This conscious act of his had transcended the decades since he had last used them. The memories of my grandfather came back in a flood, and when I had his Tefillin wrapped around me, I felt myself surrounded by his love, strength, and kindness.

Later, I related the story to my wife and wept. On the High Holy Days this past year when I was praying, I remembered the image of my grandfather going off to daven in his synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. This was the first time that I was attending observant services in their entirety, from beginning to end! In a moment of reflection, I wished that I could be next to my grandfather, together, chanting the prayers that were such a natural part of his life. He would see them becoming a part of my own life, and I know that he would have beamed with pride.

Recently, I told one of my new, observant friends that my Tefillin were my grandfather's. I told him the story of how they hadn't been used for over twenty-five years, and when my local orthodox rabbi had them checked that they were still "kosher." With a twinkle in his eye he said, "You know, your grandfather knows that you are wearing them." Shrugging his shoulders he concluded, "Don't ask me how, but he knows."

Reprinted from the Parshat Chaya Sarah 5787 email of Good Shabbos Everyone.

"Torah of Truth"



Early in life, Rav Shimon Schwab's father taught him the importance of not only speaking the truth but of living the truth. The Rav told the following story from his childhood: "

As a young boy around the age of *Bar Mitzvah*, I decided to stand for the entire *tefillos* on the night and day of *Yom Kippur*, a custom cited in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 619). My father, who was not one to ignore such things, made no comment.

On *Motzei Yom Kippur*, one of my younger brothers did something that was not to my liking, and I let him have it physically. My father slapped my face. 'I thought that you had perhaps attained the *madreiga* of observing even a custom brought as *yesh omdim* (somenstand) in the *Shulchan Aruch*,' he said. 'But your behavior immediately following *Yom Kippur* indicates that you reached no such level at all and were just showing off. For that, you got the *potsch*.'"

Compiled by Tzvi Schultz chinuchchaburah@gmail.com.

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sara 5786 email of Chayeinu Weekly.

Rabbi Avraham Azulai and the Me'aras Hamachpelah



Rabbi Avraham Azulai lived in Chevron. In Chevron the Arabs had the custom to go and pray by Me'aras Hamachpelah (the Burial Place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs) on Fridays. One Friday there was a Pasha from Istanbul. The Pasha

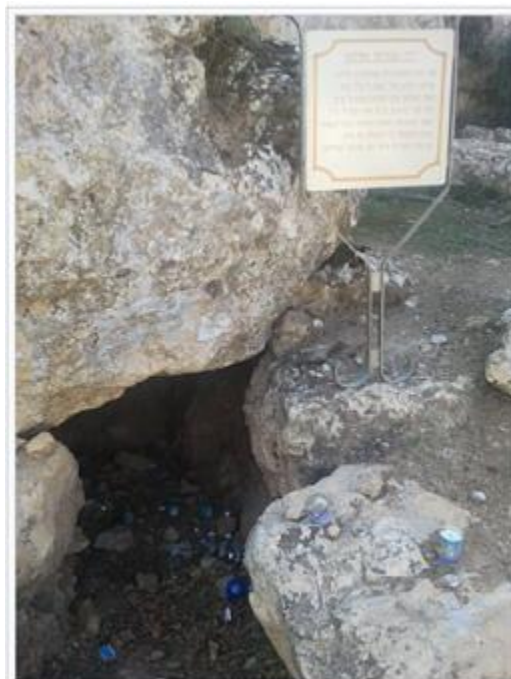
was very curious to see inside the cave so he looked over the hole. As he was stretching over his sword of honor fell off his waist in to the cave. It was no ordinary sword. It was covered with gold and diamonds.

The Pasha ordered the local Arabs to go into the cave and bring him his sword back. But as soon as the Arabs entered the cave they died. So, the Pasha decreed that the Jews have to fetch his sword and return it to him. He gave them three days. The Jewish community was at loss what to do.

They cast a lottery to see who will be the one that has to enter the cave. The lottery came out that Rabbi Avraham Azulai is the one that has to go. He went to immerse himself in the Mikvah and then spent the whole night studying and giving Shiurei Torah in Kabbala all about Avraham Avinu. At dawn he turned to the community and begged they should pray for him that he returns alive and safely.

He was lowered with a rope into the cave, picked up the sword and gave it to someone who was above outside the cave. He then started walking around the cave and suddenly he was approached by someone. Out of fear he screamed Shema Yisrael.

The man told him that he is Eliezer the servant of Avraham Avinu. He asked Rabbi Avraham how he got there? Rabbi Avraham told him the story of the sword. Eliezer then told Rabbi Avraham to wait while he asks permission for him to enter inside the cave. When he was allowed inside he merited to see the Avos – the holy Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.



The burial place of Rabbi Avraham Azulai in Hebron

Rabbi Avraham was so engulfed with the holiness around him that he didn't want to leave. But the Avos told him he has to leave and tomorrow he will leave this world and can join them again.

The Jews of Chevron were already getting very worried as Rabbi Avraham took so long to come out. But finally, he appeared at the entrance of the cave and they pulled him back out with the rope. Rabbi Avraham told them what happened and informed them that he will die the next day. That night he spent learning and giving Shiurei Torah on Kabbalah.

The next morning Friday Erev Parshas Chayei Sarah, 24 Cheshvan 5404 he went to the Mikva to immerse himself, he put on white shrouds, said Shema and passed away.

When Rabbi Yisrael Abuchatzira, the Baba Sali came to Eretz Yisrael there was a big Kabalas Panim in his honor. Many great Rabbanim and Mekubalim attended in the honor of Babi Sali. The Baba Sali asked the name of some who attended. The man replied that his name was Avraham Wilhelm and he is a descendent of the Chida.

The Baba Sali's face lit up and he started giving great respect to Reb Avraham. The Baba Sali explained that his grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzira, the Abir Yaakov was born in the merit of a blessing from the grandfather of the Chida, Rabbi Avraham Azulai, the Chessed Le'Avraham and this descendant was called after his great grandfather. Out of gratitude he honored him in return.

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sarah 5786 email of Rabbi Dovid Caro's Inspired by a Story.

Fifteen Years Later

It was late one winter night in 1998. Snow swirled under the streetlights as Shulamis Friedman*, a young mother of three, drove home to Monsey after visiting her ailing parents in Flatbush. The highway was slick and empty as she neared the Tappan Zee Bridge. Suddenly, she noticed a woman standing beside a stalled car, waving desperately. Shulamis hesitated. It was late, she was alone, and her instincts told her to keep driving. She also had to get home to her young children. But something tugged at her heart.

"What if it were me?" she thought. She pulled over, and the woman, shivering and pale, explained that her car had died and her phone battery was dead. Shulamis bundled her into the car, turned up the heat, and took her to a gas station, where they

made arrangements to have the car towed. Seeing how weak she looked, she insisted on driving her all the way to her home in Teaneck.

The woman's name was Devorah*, a nurse just off a long hospital shift. "You were the only one who stopped," she said softly. "I know Hashem sent you." Shulamis smiled. "Maybe He sent both of us. You reminded me that we should always extend ourselves to do a *chessed*." They exchanged numbers, and then life moved on.

Fifteen years later, in Yerushalayim, the Friedmans had long since settled in Eretz Yisroel. Their eldest daughter Esti*, now twenty-two, was kind, bright, and accomplished — but *shidduchim* had been difficult. That spring, Esti began teaching in a special-education nursery, where she grew close with one of the mothers, a warm American lady named Naomi Klein*.

One afternoon, Naomi mentioned that her brother-in-law was visiting from the States — "a really special young man, learning in Yerushalayim for the year." His name was Ari Klein* and she wanted Esti to meet him. After inquiries were made, they met. Their first meeting went unexpectedly well. Ari was thoughtful and sincere, and Esti felt at ease around him. Soon both families were quietly hopeful. After they met for the third time, Shulamis Friedman was talking to Naomi, when it suddenly dawned on Naomi that the name sounded so familiar to her. "Tell me did you ever live in Monsey?"

Shulamis paused. "Years ago."

Naomi hesitated. "Did you ever stop for a woman whose car broke down near the bridge one snowy night?" Shulamis was taken aback. "Yes," she whispered. "Her name was Devorah. But how did you know?"

Naomi exclaimed. "That was my sister!"

Silence hung between them. Then Naomi continued softly, "She told that story so many times — how she was freezing and scared, and one *frum* woman stopped when no one else did. She said, 'That woman saved my life and reminded me of how *chessed* should truly be done.' My sister passed away at a young age, years ago. She never forgot what you did for her."

Shulamis could barely believe what she was hearing. Naomi whispered, "Maybe, in the *zechus* of what you did for her, she advocated in shomayim for your Esti, and now Hashem is bringing our families together."

A little while later, Esti and Ari were engaged. At the *vort*, Naomi said to Shulamis, "Kindness travels — even across oceans, even through time. You helped my sister Devorah when no one else did, and it came back to you through your daughter's *shidduch*."

Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5786 email of The Weekly Vort.

Opportunity of Responsibility

By Aharon Spetner



Illustrated by Miri Weinreb

“Yitzy!” called Totty. “Hurry up, Zaidy and Bubby are waiting for us!”

Yitzy hurried to the front door, where the rest of the family was waiting.

“What is that?” asked Basya, noticing the box in Yitzy’s hands.

“It’s a chocolate chip injector,” Yitzy replied. “It makes it easier to bake chocolate chip cookies by injecting the chocolate chips into the dough, instead of having to do it by hand. I’m bringing it as a present for Bubby.”

“But Bubby always makes the chocolate chip cookies before we arrive,” said Shimmy.

“Yes, but she can use it next time,” Yitzy answered.

“Come on, kinderlach, let’s go,” Totty said, as everyone walked outside towards the car.

“Can I drive?” asked little Yaeli.

“What?” laughed Mommy.

“I want to drive,” little Yaeli said, standing next to the driver’s door. “I will zoom zoom zoom so we can eat Bubby’s cookies so fast!”

“Yaeli,” Mommy said, lifting her up and placing her into the car seat. “You’re too young to drive.”

“Why did Hashem make me so young?” asked little Yaeli, as everyone buckled in and Totty started driving.

“Hashem makes everyone young,” said Shimmy.

“But what about Totty and Mommy?” little Yaeli asked.

“Totty and Mommy were once little kinderlach too,” said Basya.

Little Yaeli laughed. “Totty can’t be a kid - he has a beard!”

While the Greenbaums drove along the highway, Basya patiently explained to little Yaeli how people are born as babies and then grow older into adults.

“I still want to drive,” little Yaeli said.

“Yaeli,” said Totty. “There is a reason why little kinderlach can’t drive. Look how fast we are going. Chas veshalom, if a driver looks away from the road for even half a second, he could get into a terrible car accident.

“My friend Yoni’s aunt got into a terrible accident because another driver wasn’t looking where they were going,” said Shimmy. “And she had to stay in the hospital for six weeks!”

“Yes,” Totty said. “A driver needs to be constantly paying attention, not only to what he is doing, but to what all of the other drivers on the street are doing. That’s why we have these mirrors. We need to be constantly taking quick glances at all three mirrors, while still keeping our eyes on the road.”

“I like looking in mirrors,” said little Yaeli. “They make me look so pretty!”

“Oy, I don’t ever want to drive,” Basya said. “It’s too much responsibility! It would be easier just to walk to places nearby. Who needs it?”

“You sound like Eisav,” said Shimmy.

“Shimmy!” admonished Mommy. “How can you say something like that to your sister???”

“Sorry Basya,” Shimmy apologized. “I didn’t mean to compare you to Eisav, chas veshalom. But you reminded me of something my rebbe said.

“He said Eisav didn’t want the bechora because then it would mean he would have to do more mitzvos and be more careful about the things he did. He didn’t want all of that responsibility. So he said, ‘Feh! Who wants the bechora?’. He made fun of it. But we know that even though it comes with so much more responsibility, it is worth it because we get to be the Am Hashem, Hashem’s bechor.”

“That’s beautiful, Shimmy!” Totty said. “And driving a car is really a good moshol for that. Because yes, driving involves a tremendous amount of responsibility. But think about what a car enables you to do: you can use it to shop for Shabbos, to do chessed for other people, to bring food to poor people, the list

goes on and on. So yes, there's more responsibility involved, but with it comes tremendous opportunity!

"And being a Yid involves even more responsibility than driving a car - but it gives us endless opportunities to become greater people and to grow closer to Hashem!"

"Bubby's house!" exclaimed little Yaeli, as they pulled up in front of Zaidy and Bubby's home.

Everyone got out as Zaidy and Bubby came outside to greet them.

"What's this?" asked Bubby, unwrapping the box Yitzy handed him. "Ooh! It's a chocolate chip injector! This is going to be so useful - thank you, Yitzy!"

"My pleasure," Yitzy beamed. "You just need to be careful not to overfill it with chocolate chips, or it will shoot them all over the kitchen. And make sure to fuel it only with high-octane gasoline, so it won't give off fumes. And keep it out of direct sunlight..."

"Wow, that's a lot of responsibility," Bubby said, looking at Yitzy's invention.

"Yes, Bubby," grinned Yitzy. "But with it comes the opportunity to make chocolate chip cookies faster than ever!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5784 email of Toras Avigdor Junior based on the Torah teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt"l.

A Timely Dollar



A Timely Dollar The safe return of Avinatan Ohr, one of the Israeli hostages held captive in Gaza, unfolded in a truly miraculous and pre-ordained manner. His freedom became linked by an incredible chain of events to a date on the Jewish

calendar and a precious memento: a dollar received from the Rebbe. The story began in the aftermath of the horrific attacks of October 7th, 2023, when Avinatan was taken captive by Hamas terrorists.

As the Ohr family wrestled with the pain, a Lubavitcher chassid stepped forward with a meaningful gesture. Yitzhar Mordechai, a resident of Nachlat Har Chabad in Kiryat Mala- chi, visited Avinatan's mother, Ditza Ohr, and entrusted her with a dollar bill, one he had personally received from the Rebbe years earlier. Mordechai gave the dollar as a segulah for Avinatan's safe release and protection.

He also included a handwritten note whose words would later prove to carry much significance. In the note, he referenced a powerful precedent: Gilad Shalit's mother had also received a dollar from the Rebbe connected to the date of 21 Tishrei. Mordechai wrote that Shalit's son ultimately returned home on that exact date. He concluded his message to Ditza with a heartfelt blessing: "May you, too, merit a great salvation."

The date Yitzhar Mordechai had received the dollar from the Rebbe was 21 Tishrei, 5744 (1983). Two long years passed as the family waited in agonizing anticipation. Yet, when the moment finally came, the timing could only be described as Divine, because exactly on 21 Tishrei, the very same Hebrew date the dollar was received, (just like with Gilad Shalit) Avinatan Ohr was finally released from Hamas captivity. Adapted from COLlive.

Reprinted from the Toldos 5786 edition of Living Jewish.

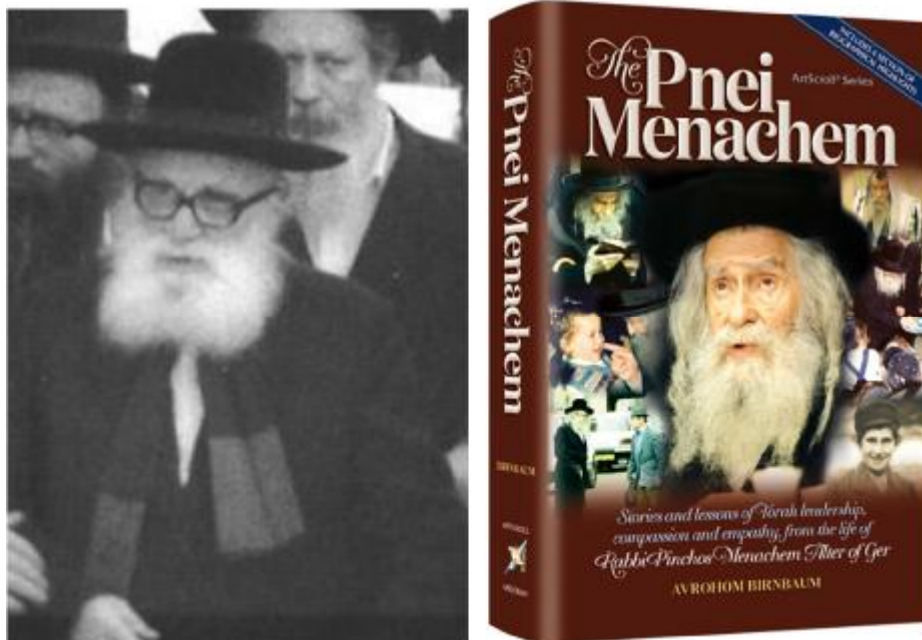
The Wrong Address?

A man once came to R' Chaim Kanievsky seeking guidance, but accidentally went to the wrong house — a neighbor's. Embarrassed, he left and only afterward realized the mistake. When he reached R' Chaim and told him the story,

R' Chaim immediately said, "If you went there first, then Heaven wanted you to go there. Did you speak to the neighbor?" The man said no, and R' Chaim sent him back. It turned out the neighbor desperately needed the visitor's exact expertise, which no one else could have provided.

Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5786 email of The Weekly Vort.

What a Rebbe is Capable of Perceiving



The Lev Simcha and the Pnei Menachem

In the twilight years of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Lev Simcha, R' Simcha Bunim Alter zt"l, a devoted chasid found himself at a crossroads. He had a son in shidduchim and when a girl from a fine family was put forth, he sent a shaliach to the Lev Simcha to inquire about the potential match for his son, hoping for a clear and favorable response.

But the answer that came back was not what he had hoped for - in fact, it was negative. Doubt crept into his heart. Was this truly the Rebbe's answer? Had it been conveyed accurately? Wrestling with uncertainty, he turned to a renowned Mekubal and asked him the same question, hoping for a different perspective.

The Kabbalist, with conviction and mystical insight, strongly encouraged the match. Now the chasid was torn. On one hand, the Rebbe's answer seemed to close the door on this match. On the other, he had the enthusiastic endorsement of a Mekubal, someone revered for his spiritual vision. Unsure of how to proceed, he went to the home of the Pnei Menachem, R' Pinchos Menachem Alter zt"l, another figure of Gerrer leadership, to seek clarity.

He laid out his dilemma: “I sent someone to ask the Rebbe, and they brought me such and such an answer. I don’t know if the Rebbe actually said this explicitly. But I also asked a certain Mekubal, and he urged me to take the match. What should I do?”

The Pnei Menachem responded with wisdom born of years of experience. “Those Kabbalists,” he said, “even when they see something, they only see what is good for the present moment. Their vision is limited to the immediate. But the Rebbe - his answers are for your benefit not just now, but in the future as well. I believe the Rebbe sees generations ahead. He sees what is good for each neshama, not only in this life, but according to its maasim in previous incarnations as well.”

He then shared a story from the days of the Imrei Emes, R’ Avraham Mordechai Alter zt”l, the father of the Pnei Menachem. A chasid once came to the Imrei Emes and begged for a blessing to become wealthy. The Rebbe refused. The chasid persisted, returning again and again, until finally, the Imrei Emes relented and gave him a blessing. The man’s fortunes changed dramatically - he soon became very rich, respected, and influential.

He also had one son, a boy of exceptional virtue and character. But before the boy reached marriageable age, tragedy struck. He was involved in a terrible accident, and his leg had to be amputated. The father, now wealthy and prominent, faced a new challenge: finding a suitable match for his crippled son. His newly elevated status made it difficult to find a family on his level willing to marry into a situation involving disability.

Eventually, he had to lower his expectations and agreed to a match with the daughter of the town’s tailor. When the Imrei Emes heard of this, he said to the father, “See, it was decreed from heaven that this was your son’s match. Had you remained in your previous position, you would have been pleased to hear of a match with the daughter of the tailor. But now, after you became rich and respected, you would not have considered it. So, it was arranged from above that your son would suffer this accident, so that you would be willing to accept the match that was destined for him.”

The Pnei Menachem stressed this point to the chasid who came to him about the shidduch. “It is not always wise to beg for what Heaven does not grant. Sometimes, in our desperation to shape our own destiny, we seek blessings that are not meant for us, and in doing so, we may unknowingly invite hardship. The Rebbe’s refusal was not a denial; it was protection. His answer encompassed not just the immediate desires of the chasid, but the arc of his life and the spiritual needs of his soul and family.

“Furthermore,” explained the Pnei Menachem, “a Rebbe’s guidance is not merely practical - it is a ‘shtickel nevuah’ - prophetic in many ways. It is rooted in a deep understanding of the neshama’s journey, of divine timing, and of the intricate

tapestry of human destiny. The Mekubal may see the present clearly, but the Rebbe sees the future with clarity and compassion.”

The chasid nodded with a renewed sense of trust. He understood that the Rebbe’s answer, though hard to accept, was rooted in a vision far deeper than his own. He now recognized that in matters of great consequence, such as marriage, livelihood, and spiritual direction, it is tempting to seek multiple opinions, especially when the first answer is difficult to accept. But true spiritual leadership is not about confirming our desires. It is about guiding us toward what is truly good, even if it is hidden from our view.

Reprinted from the Parshas Chayei Sarah 5786 email of Torah Tavlin.

A Most Unusual Shadchan

By Yoni Schwartz

My chavrusa once told me a cute story about Rav Shalom Schwadron, ZT”L, that brings a smile to my face every time I think about it. He had a talmid with whom he became very close. Rav Schwadron was very active on many chesed projects and would always take this talmid along with him; he was like his right-hand man. One night, Rav Schwadron called the talmid, who thought he was coming to help with another Chessed project, and was a bit puzzled when he walked in and saw two chairs set up in the dining room, and was told by the Rav, “She’ll be here soon.” Shortly after, the Rav’s niece walked in.

The talmid quickly understood what was happening. They sat down and began a pleasant conversation with each other. After about half an hour, Rav Shalom peeked his head in and said, “That was the first date.” Half an hour later, he popped by again and said, “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I must get up early for the *vasikin* (sunrise) minyan, and your conversation is a bit loud. Come outside to the bench, and you will continue over there.” I’ll never forget those funny words of my chavrusa:

“You see, Rav Shalom already held it was *shayach* (i.e., it was a match), he was just being nice to them by letting them go out first.” After about half an hour of them sitting outside, he poked out his head from the upstairs window and said, “It looks like your third date is going very well, but you guys are still being a little too loud.” Looking at his talmid, he then said, “Nu... It’s very late. It’s only *derech eretz* that you should walk her home.”

She lived an hour and a half away. The talmid returned in the early morning hours. His worried father asked, “What happened? Where were you?” The talmid responded, “I was on four dates.” When Rav Shalom was with him on another Chessed project, he asked his talmid, “Nu, how did it go?” “We got married,” he responded.

Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5786 email of Torah Sweets.