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Rav Shmelke and the River Filled with Large Chunks of Ice



In the days of Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg, there was a very cruel decree against the Jews of the city. Rav Shmelke decided to go with his Talmid to Vienna to speak with the king, hoping to have the bad decree annulled.

While traveling, they reached a river which they had to cross, but because winter was just ending, the water was filled with large chunks of ice. No boat could be hired to travel across because all the sailors were afraid of crashing into the ice. Rav Shmelke said that he had no time to waste and must get across the river.

One boatman said that if the Rav wanted, he could use his rowboat, but he would have to go himself. Rav Shmelke paid to use the boat, and got in with his student. He stood up in the shaky little boat and started to sing 'Az Yashir', the song Bnei Yisroel sang after they crossed the Yam Suf. He sang one line at a time, and his student repeated it after him.

As they sang, an amazing thing happened— the boat started moving on its own, and quickly crossed the river, without even touching one chunk of ice! No one could believe what they saw! When Rav Shmelke reached the king, the king had heard about what happened on the river, and realized that he was dealing with a very special person. The king granted Rav Shmelke's request and annulled the decree against the Jews, and the Jews were able to live safely! (Sipurei Chassidim, p.184)

Reprinted from the Acharei Shel Pesach 5779 email of Torah U' Tefilah compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

A Tunisian Shidduch

By Rabbi David Ashear

Many years ago, Moshe* and Shifrah* grew up in the same neighborhood in Tunisia. As hashgacha would later prove, these two children were meant to become united as one, but the road to bringing them together would not be a simple one, as Moshe's family moved to a different continent when he was a teenager.

When Shifrah graduated from high school, her parents sent her to a renowned seminary in England. A few days after she arrived, she began feeling ill. She suffered from severe headaches and fever, and at times was too weak to walk. Doctors conducted various tests but could not determine the cause of her illness. She eventually felt better, but relapsed a few months later.

Doctors, including several eminent specialists, again failed to diagnose the cause of her debilitating weakness. She persevered at the seminary until Pesach vacation drew near. After discussing it with her parents over the phone, she made plans to visit her married sister in Toronto for Pesach and remain there to rest until summer. Flight arrangements were put in place.

But then, several days before her travel date, Shifrah received an unexpected phone call from Mimi*, her other married sister who lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil. "I know you're planning to go to Toronto," Mimi said, "but the weather in Canada can be harsh. In your weakened condition, you would be much better off in a mild, sunny climate."

Shifrah agreed, and with the approval of her parents and her Torontonians sister, made a last-minute change of plans and flew to Sao Paulo. There, she made an immediate recovery and quickly settled into a normal routine. About a month later, an elderly shochet in Sao Paulo, originally from Tunisia, took ill and was hospitalized. The sisters, who knew the shochet from their hometown, went to the hospital to visit him.

During the visit, he suggested to Mimi that her younger sister be introduced to a boy named Moshe Hadad.* “He is a fine young man, a real ben Torah. He is in town now, on vacation from yeshivah.” Moshe’s family had moved from Tunisia to Sao Paulo nine years earlier. His outstanding mind and abilities had been recognized by the rabbi in Sao Paulo, who had encouraged him to attend a top-tier yeshivah in New York, where he had been learning for seven years. He had come home for Pesach and had intended to travel back to New York the previous week, but remained for a relative’s first yahrzeit.

Miriam called her parents and they approved of the shidduch, having known the Hadads from Tunisia. Shifrah and Moshe met and got engaged in Sao Paulo. Today they have a large family and are disseminating Torah to hundreds of people in New York. (Living Emunah on Shidduchim)

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

The Transformation of a Jew

On the day that the young man who would later be known as Rav Yisroel of Ossatin, zt”l, turned thirteen, his father, Rav Mordechai Feivish, zt”l, called him over to teach him how to put on Tefilin. Before he started, he first he told him a story, and it inspired him for the rest of his life.

“A group of Chasidim once came before the Maggid of Mezeritch, zt”l, and asked that he suggest a leader to guide them. The Maggid gave them a garment, a belt, and a staff, similar to what important people in those times wore. He then said to them, “Go to Vitebsk, find my student who is called Mendel, and give him these objects. He is your future Rav.”

The Chasidim obeyed the Maggid’s instructions. When they found Rav Mendel of Vitebsk, zt”l, they gave him the items from the Maggid. He put on the garment and belt, and he held the staff like a respected Rav, and requested that they treat him with Derech Eretz, proper respect.

This seemed strange to the Chasidim, since before they gave him the Maggid’s three objects, he had seemed to be the most simple and unassuming person. Why had he suddenly changed to behave like a prominent figure? When Rav Mendel noticed their confusion, he explained.

“The Torah tells us (Devarim 17:15), that you should appoint a king over yourselves from your brothers. An instant before a person is accepted as king, he was considered ‘among your brothers’, and in a split moment, he is profoundly changed, since he has now become the king, and all the many Halachos that are

relevant to a king apply to him. That is why I am now acting differently. It is because my status and title has changed from just moments ago, that I am now required to act differently.”

Rav Mordechai Feivish then explained to his son how this story applied to him. He said, “Every Jew undergoes a similar change when he becomes a Bar Mitzvah. A moment before he makes the change, he is a simple boy unable to join in a Minyan or fulfill any Mitzvos, except in the context of Chinuch, as he is just ‘in training’. But a moment later, he is a completely different person, with a new status and title in Klal Yisroel!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Naso 5781 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’ Tefilah.

Reviewing the Commander’s Instructions Repeatedly



Even as a young child, Rav Chaim of Sanz, zt”l, was renowned for his love of Torah and Mitzvos. Once, an adult saw little Chaim murmuring to himself with great seriousness, and he asked him why he was talking to himself.

The young boy smiled. He said, “I’m reviewing the 613 Mitzvos of the Torah. I want to know them by heart.”

The man responded, “Wouldn’t your time be better spent studying Chumash or Mishnayos?”

Chaim replied, “Let me explain. One day, I happened to overhear a conversation between two of the Czar’s soldiers. One soldier asked his comrade, ‘Do

you remember what our commander instructed us to do during the military mission we'll be carrying out tomorrow?"

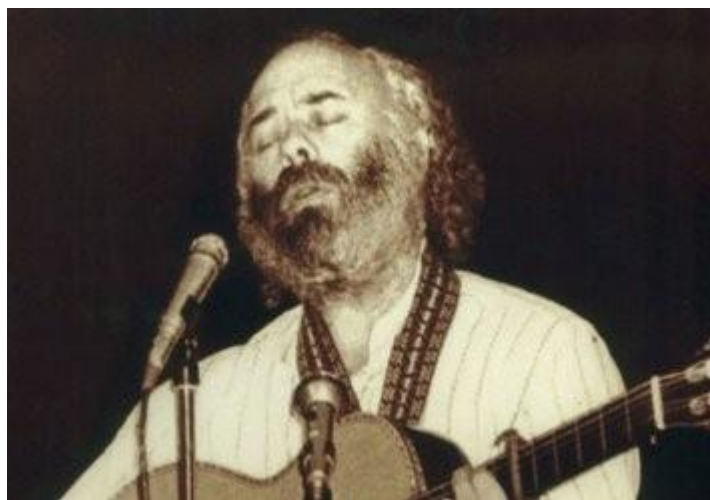
The second soldier answered, 'Of course. Every evening, I review the commander's orders. A good soldier must know all the military commands by heart. Even if one soldier doesn't bother reviewing and makes a mistake on the battlefield, he causes all the soldiers to lose the battle!'"

Young Chaim continued, "When I heard that conversation, I thought to myself that we Yidden are soldiers in the army of Hashem! Our 'military commands' are the Mitzvos, and I very much want to be a good soldier in Hashem's army. That's why I constantly review the Mitzvos!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Naso 5781 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U' Tefilah.

The Hug

By Yoni Schwartz



As he entered, his eyes were drawn to the tall, daunting guard towers and razor-like barbed wire surrounding every inch while his ears were pounding from the hounds' incessant barking as they snared their fang-like teeth at him. Here, nobody got in or out without express permission. It was the '70s, and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach was visiting a maximum-security prison in upstate New York to sing for the Jewish prisoners there. His aim was to bring them some joy, which he did.

After each song, the prisoners' bitter frowns slowly sweetened into gentle smiles. After singing for them, he asked the guards if he could visit some of the other

non-Jewish prisoners. He spoke with them for a while, gave them some inspiration and a hug, and headed for the exit. Suddenly, a bulldozer of a man charged toward him like a steam engine.

The guards clenched their fists, squinted their eyes, and braced for the worst. He approached Rav Shlomo and looked at him with his glassy, watery eyes, and said, "Rabbi, I want to thank you for the hug you gave me."

"Of course, my pleasure," said Rav Shlomo.

The inmate continued, "I want you to know that was the first hug I ever got in my life, and I swear to you, if I had ever received a hug like that before, I never would've committed the crimes that I'm here for today."

Comment: In this week's parsha, Toldos, we learn about how Yitzchak and Rivka raised the next generation. Yitzchak was very aware of who Eisav really was, despite his masquerading as righteous.

Despite this, however, Yitzchak's love never ceased for Eisav. Why? Perhaps he knew that beneath Eisav's wickedness on the outside, inside there lies both great potential and a great struggle, in which case, the answer isn't less love, but more. As a great Rabbi once told the parents of somebody who left orthodoxy and approached him for advice, "If you loved him before, love him even more now!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Toldos 5785 email of Torah Sweets.

Two Stories of the Holy Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

The Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk would not accept visitors during the month of Elul. Throughout the year, his door was open and people would go to him for blessings, but during the month of Elul he required time for himself. People understood this, and they respected the Rebbe's stated boundaries.

One year, however, a wealthy person who felt desperate decided that he would travel to speak privately with the Rebbe even during Elul. His problem was indeed serious; his son had become insane! As he and his son were traveling to the Rebbe, they met a pauper, collecting money.

The boy said to his father, "Give this man a generous donation."

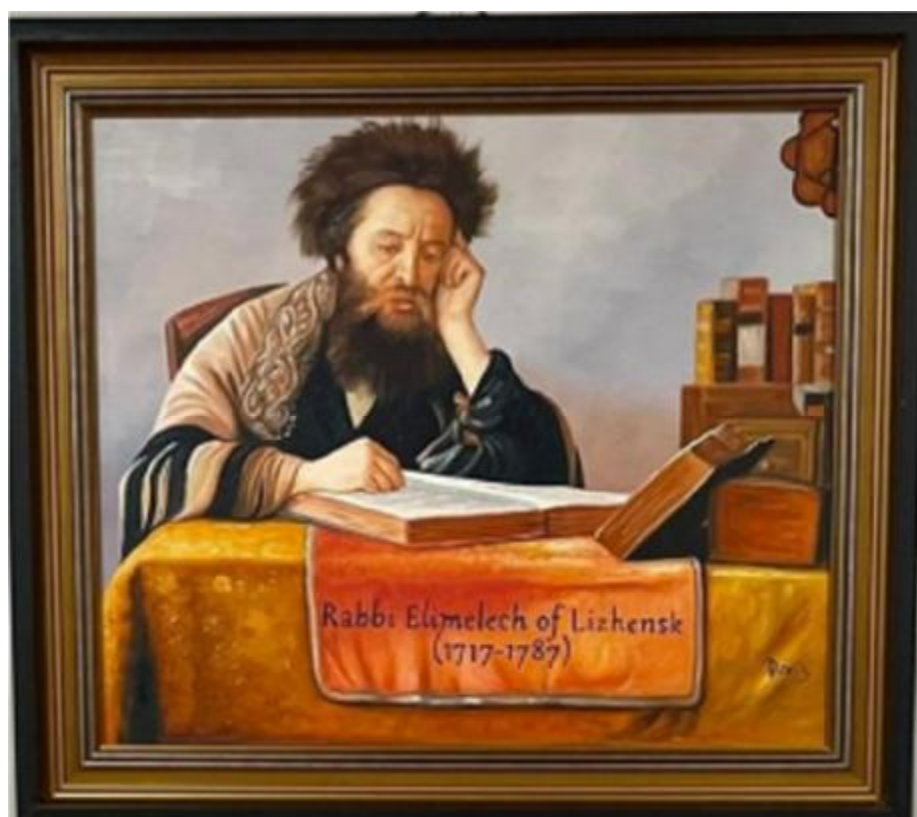
The father was startled; this was the first sane sentence he heard from his son in a long time. Since he was so pleased with his son's improvement, he gave a half-golden coin, to the pauper.

The pauper then asked them, "Where are you headed?"

The father told him that his son had become insane, so they were going to the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk for a blessing.

The pauper replied, "But don't you see that your son is healed? Why should you bother the Tzaddik? You probably heard that he asked not to be disturbed during Elul."

Nevertheless, the father decided that since he had already traveled a long way, he would continue. When he arrived at Lizensk he went directly with his son to speak with the Rebbe Elimelech, and as soon as he was admitted into the Rebbe's room, he gave him twelve golden coins.



Rebbe Elimelech replied, "am I more special than Eliyahu Hanavi? To Eliyahu Hanavi you only gave a half-golden coin."

Only then did the father understand that the pauper he met was Eliyahu Hanavi in disguise who had taken the bother to heal the boy to avoid disturbing the Tzaddik during such a holy time.

One of the famed barons in Poland planned to throw an extravagant party for his friends in the Polish aristocracy. In honor of the event he had his palace

refurbished, planted new trees and flowers in the surrounding gardens and hired master chefs to prepare all the luxurious foods that he intended to serve. He employed many servants in various occupations in order to ensure that his party be remembered for a long time afterwards by the large number of people he had invited.

The baron wished to wear an extraordinarily impressive outfit, designed especially for the occasion. He ordered his servants to find an expert tailor for him, somebody who know how to tailor magnificent clothes. When his servants returned to the baron, they brought with him a tailor who according to the testimony of witnesses was a great specialist in this profession.

When the tailor was introduced, the baron scowled. The face of the man standing in front of him and the way he was dressed clearly showed that he was a Jew. The baron was not fond of Jews, to say the least, but since there was not much time left until the big party, he had no other choice but to employ the Jewish tailor. The baron asked him: "Zhid, I have heard that you are a master tailor, and there is nobody to match your craftsmanship in the whole area. Are you willing to take upon yourself the important task of creating a magnificent outfit for me?" "Certainly, your honor", said the tailor. "I am an expert in this field and I have already made outfits for this duke and that baron," and he started to enumerate names of Polish aristocrats.

The baron accepted him as his personal tailor. Already that same day the tailor began to take the baron's measurement. He wrote down all the measurements in his ledger in an orderly fashion, instructed the baron's servants on where to purchase the fabric needed for the different parts of the outfit and he immediately began working.

The tailor labored diligently and with great self-confidence. After all, he was a master tailor and he knew how to fashion such outfits in the most impressive manner. When he finished his work, he proudly brought the finished product to the baron.

However, when the baron tried the outfit on, it did not fit him at all! One sleeve was too short, and the other was too long, the seams were not straight and the entire garment looked very odd. The baron was so furious that it seemed he wanted to kill the Jewish tailor. The poor tailor had to run away. He was very afraid of the wrath of the baron and what he might do to him as a revenge for the ruined outfit.

If the new clothes were not ready in time for the party, the tailor might pay the ultimate price. In his plight he went to the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk in order to ask for his blessing and advice. The Rebbe listened attentively to his tearful plea, smiled briefly, and responded.

"This is what you should do. Go back to the baron's estate. Take the clothes and undo all the stitches. Do not leave even one stitch undone. Afterwards you must sew everything back exactly in the same order. The tailor returned to the baron's mansion and followed the instructions of the Rebbe to the last detail. He undid all the stitches, took new threads and joined the different parts together.

He told the baron's servant that he wanted the baron to try on the outfit once again. Lo and behold! This time the outfit was a perfect fit! The baron was so happy that he almost allowed himself to embrace the tailor! Of course, he richly awarded him. The tailor could not understand what had happened. He knew very well that he had made no alterations in the outfit but had just sewn everything exactly as he had done the first time.

He went to Rebbe Elimelech and asked him for an explanation. The Rebbe told him: "When you started your work, you were haughty and considered yourself to be a master tailor in your own merit. You forgot all your talents are given to you from Hashem. When you undid all the stitches and remade the outfit, you knew that if it was to succeed, it was not because of your skill but only due to the divine kindness of the Master of the Universe. In the merit of this acknowledgment, you were able to have success in your work!"

Reprinted from the Parshat Vayak'hel 5785 edition of Rabbi Dovid Caro's Inspired by a Story.

Something Special

By Rabbi Aryeh Kerzner



Rabbi Aryeh Kerzner

When my wife and I were married and had our first child, we were quickly faced with a daunting challenge. A few months after our daughter was born, she suddenly began refusing to eat, struggling to sleep, and vomiting every single night. We were at a loss, and despite our efforts to find a solution, nothing seemed to help. We consulted with numerous doctors and specialists, but none of them were able to

offer any answers. After months of uncertainty, when our daughter was 11 months old, we made the decision to travel to Bnei Brak to seek a blessing from the Gadol Hador, Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt”l.

It was the height of summer—one of the hottest days of August—when we made our way to Bnei Brak. I presented our issue to Reb Chaim, asking for a bracha for my daughter's complete recovery. Reb Chaim, with his characteristic sparkle and gentle smile, looked at me thoughtfully and said, “You know, your daughter is not dressed in a tznius’dik manner.”



Rav Chaim Kanievsky

I was taken aback. "Does the Rav know that she is only 11 months old?" Reb Chaim nodded and acknowledged that he did indeed know her age. I asked again, "Is it required to dress an 11-month-old baby girl in a tznius’dik way?" To which Rav Chaim replied, "No, it is not halachically required. In fact, for future children, it is not something you need to be concerned with. But I would like to share with you a powerful mesorah, a tradition that I hold dear. When facing a challenge, when we are in need of salvation, there is a very effective way to secure that salvation. If we commit to taking on something special in the realm of sanctity and purity, if we make an effort to elevate the level of kedusha in our home and in our family, Hashem responds in kind and grants us unbelievable salvations."

Reb Chaim then made a promise: "If you commit to this level of tznius and kedusha for your daughter, I guarantee you will receive tremendous bracha and success, and your daughter will experience a full recovery." In a state of shock, I left Reb Chaim’s presence, and my wife and I decided, together, to follow the guidance of the Gadol Hador.

Within just one week, our daughter was completely fine.

This experience taught us an invaluable lesson about earning salvation. When faced with difficulties and challenges, and when we are in desperate need of a yeshuah, we can find a powerful segulah by taking on something, no matter how big or small, that enhances the kedusha in our lives. Whether it's a personal commitment to an increased level of sanctity or purity within our home, this act becomes a profound way for Hakadosh Baruch Hu to reciprocate and offer His blessing. When we do something special for Hashem, He, in turn, does something special for us.

Keeping Shabbos

The celebrated chossid, Reb Hillel Paritcher, once arrived in a town where some Yidden kept their stores open on Shabbos. Deeply disturbed, he called all the storeowners for a meeting, at which he explained to them why they should close their businesses on that day. They all agreed, but on one condition – that he persuade a particular wealthy man, their most formidable competitor, to close his business, too, on Shabbos.

The Rich Man's Defiance

Reb Hillel summoned the rich man to come, but to no avail. He called for him a second and a third time, but he did not make an appearance. Reb Hillel remained in the town for Shabbos. In the course of the day, that rich man suddenly felt a sharp piercing pain in his stomach. The pain grew so intense that he screamed. His wife, suspecting that this was connected to his disrespect for Reb Hillel, quickly ran to ask him for a beracha. To her surprise, Reb Hillel remained silent.

Thinking that he was hesitant to wish refua shleima on Shabbos (in the spirit of the halacha), the people present turned to him and begged that he wish her instead, Shabbos hi miliz'oik u'refua kroiva lavoi – "It is Shabbos, when it is forbidden to cry out; healing will come soon" – but Reb Hillel still remained silent. The woman left empty-handed, and her husband's pain worsened.

The Motzaei Shabbos Melave Malka

On Motzaei Shabbos, when Reb Hillel was sitting with chassidim for Melave Malka, the door burst open. The businessman's wife stood there crying, begging Reb Hillel to have rachmonus and bless her husband with a refua shleima. Reb Hillel turned to her and said, "Shabbos hi miliz'oik u'refua kroiva lavoi." The chassidim wondered: why now, after Shabbos, was he saying this?

Reb Hillel explained: "Shabbos hi miliz'oik – if Shabbos stops screaming in distress, then u'refua kroiva lavoi – the healing will come speedily. Go tell him that if he promises in the presence of three people that he will close his business on Shabbos, he will be healed." Three chassidim stood up and went to his home, where the man gave his word that his store would be closed on Shabbos. His suffering immediately eased, within a short time he was completely healthy, and the kedusha of Shabbos was restored to the town.

Without forewarning, one of the wealthy Yidden residing in Yerushalayim began rapidly losing his riches, until he reached a point of dire straits. One of his acquaintances went to Reb Shlomo'le of Zvil to ask for a yeshuah. Said the tzaddik, "Had this man not thought about his business matters on Shabbos and Yom Tov he would not have lost his possessions."

When the former wealthy Yid heard what the tzaddik had said, he admitted, "The Rebbe is correct. I used to do business with Arabic dealers on Motzoei Shabbos and Yom Tov, and would therefore plan these transactions during the afternoon hours on the holy days."

From then on, the Yid stopped faring as such, and his financial situation improved.

Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Sisa 5785 edition of The Weekly Farbrengen.

The Shabbos Shakedown

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

The negotiations were taking much longer than expected. Two representatives of a real estate conglomerate were trying to complete the purchase of an office building in downtown Mexico City, but the lawyers were discussing the details slowly and meticulously. Every office had to be inspected, the insurance policies verified, and the terms of payment specified to the last penny.

Jacobo Sherem, the managing partner of the owners' group, was desperate to complete the transaction. With every passing moment, he was becoming more impatient and exasperated.

An architect by profession, Jacobo had been trying to sell this particular office building for months, so that he could finally turn a profit on his investment. He had designed, bought and sold buildings in the past, but this building on Calle Presa Salinillas had been his biggest investment, and so far it had been a losing proposition

for his group. Due to the depressed financial climate in Mexico, most of the office space was unoccupied.

As the hours passed, Jacobo became increasingly nervous. The buyers had told him unequivocally that they were leaving Mexico on the first plane out the next morning, which was Saturday. They would not delay their trip. If they could complete the purchase that day, that would be wonderful; otherwise, they would cancel the negotiations and move on to prospective deals in other countries.

The Late Hour of the Day

It was the late hour of the day, Friday, that was putting pressure on Jacobo. For the last year he had been attending evening study classes in the Aram Tzovah Kollel in the Polanco section of Mexico City. He studied Torah a few nights a week, but he was not as yet shomer Shabbos (Sabbath observant). After many discussions and much introspection and inspiration from avreichim (kollel members) at Aram Tzovah, Jacobo and his wife Sophia were inching closer to total commitment to Shabbos observance. Jacobo had already started going to shul every Friday night and his office was closed on Shabbos, but he and Sophia were not yet complete Sabbath observers.

Frustrated at being so close to, yet so far from, fulfilling his dream of selling the building, Jacobo looked at his watch and saw that there was less than an hour and a half to Shabbos. Reluctantly he told the prospective buyers that the negotiations would have to continue Sunday or Monday - he had to leave and close his office.

The Now or Never Threat

The buyers threatened that it was now or never, for they were flying out of the country the next day. But Jacobo would not budge. Shabbos was coming. He hadn't missed a Friday night in shul in weeks and he wasn't going to miss tonight. The buyers were incredulous that Jacobo would scuttle a deal that would lift him out of the financial doldrums, but he would not be moved. The parties to the negotiations bid each other a final farewell, and Jacobo went home to prepare for Shabbos.

He couldn't help but second guess himself. Had he acted correctly? There would be other Shabbosos when he would be in the synagogue, but now he might never be able to sell this building that was becoming an albatross around his financial holdings. He tried to enjoy the Shabbos, but it was difficult. An internal debate raged in his mind. He was proud of his commitment but he wondered if it was worth the price.

Two weeks later, early Thursday morning, September 19, 1985, (during the Selichos of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah) Mexico was struck by the greatest tragedy in its history. In a matter of seconds, a monstrous, rumbling earthquake gashed and

shook Mexico City, toppling buildings, swallowing homes, wreaking havoc and bringing instantaneous death to thousands of people! Within 24 hours, as the country staggered to adjust to the shock and magnitude of the Thursday tragedy, an aftershock staggered the city.

The number of people killed in these earthquakes reached a shocking 4,541. Another 14,236 were injured and 2,637 required hospitalization. In the downtown district there was utter devastation. People searched in vain for relatives and friends, but it was mostly for naught. The destruction, mayhem and sorrow was beyond imagination.

Jacobo's Build Remained Standing

Yet, amidst all the devastation, one building remained standing - the one Jacobo couldn't sell. Its windows were blown out and some of the facade of the building had peeled off, but remarkably it was structurally sound. The Mexican government had to regroup. Aid and rescue efforts had to be directed and coordinated. People needed the assurance that the government was functioning and accessible. Thus, within days of the earthquakes, Jacobo's building, conveniently located downtown, was checked for its strength and stability.

When it passed inspection, the government bought most of the offices in the building and the remaining space was sold to large corporations who had lost their offices when other buildings collapsed or were deemed unsafe. Jacobo's extraordinary profit was far beyond what he would have made had he sold the building weeks before. The deals for his building propelled Jacobo into a category of wealth he never imagined.

The Reward for Total Shabbos Observer

The Hashgachah Pratis (Divine Providence) of the Shabbos not allowing him to sell the building propelled him into being a total Shabbos observer. Jacobo and Sophia never told the story to anyone. Word got out that their building was sold to the government, but no one in the community knew about the frantic Friday negotiations two weeks before the earthquakes, and Jacobo's decision to close his office for Shabbos.

Years later, in the palatial lobby of his new magnificent office building, Jacobo and Sophia tendered a grand party in honor of his first completion of a Talmudic tractate, which he had studied for several years with Rabbi Shea Deutsch (now teaching in Lakewood, N.J.) at the Aram Tzovah Kollel. There, in the presence of rabbis, community leaders and friends, Jacobo told the story that changed his life. ("Reflections of the Maggid", Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn page 193)

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel 5785 email of Good Shabbos Everyone.