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The “Terrible” Shabbos



Rav Don Segal

One evening, some 20 years ago, Rabbi Fink, a rebbi in Flatbush, received a phone call from a talmid of his, requesting to speak. Rabbi Fink apologized to his talmid, saying that he was busy preparing for a sheva brachos of a wheelchair-bound couple, and wasn't available to speak just then. There wasn't anyone who could oversee the care of that event other than himself, so he asked the talmid to kindly call back at a later time.

The talmid apparently understood, and they hung up. 20 minutes later, Rabbi Fink's phone was buzzing again. He picked up and was surprised to hear the same talmid's voice on the other end, again requesting to speak. Rabbi Fink again

explained how he was busy with the sheva brachos preparations, and that he couldn't talk then.

Another 20 minutes passed, and again the talmid called. Rabbi Fink told him that couldn't help him at that time, hung up the phone, and put his phone on silent mode. After the sheva brachos, Rabbi Fink looked at his phone and saw 17 missed calls from...guess who! It's no surprise. At that hour of the night, it was too late to return the call, so he decided that he'd go to the talmid's classroom after he finished teaching the next day to see how he can help.

When they met the next afternoon, Rabbi Fink told him that they could meet at his house at 9:30. At 9:29:59, the boy already knocked on Rabbi Fink's door, and he was greeted warmly. After sitting down, the boy's tears broke forth. He told the rebbi his bitter story:

His parents had gone away for Shabbos, and they'd left him home all alone. Sitting bored for several hours before Shabbos, he started fidgeting with his parents' computer, and in no time he was pulled into the rock-bottom of the internet. He saw the worst.

"I can no longer learn in yeshiva," the bachur proclaimed, with hot tears pouring out of his eyes. "My life is over. I am going to find myself a job, as I'm lost from growing any further in ruchniyus. Not only that, but when my parents find out where I was looking, I'll be abandoned from them, too. So not only did I lose my yeshiva life, I also lost my family life. I'm doomed. What should I do, rebbi?"

Rabbi Fink sat there thunderstruck. What was he to tell this boy? Meanwhile, his phone rang, and it was his brother on the other line. "I'm making sheva brachos tonight," he said. "We'll be honored with the presence of the mashgiach, Reb Don Segal. It would be our pleasure for you to come and hear the mashgiach speak."

Rabbi Fink was amazed. Right at the moment when he was sitting faced with a dilemma like this, he's offered this chance. The mashgiach must be the right address for the chizuk, he realized, and so he told the talmid to come along, and they'd address the issue with Reb Segal.

At the sheva brachos, the mashgiach's escorts told Rabbi Fink that under no circumstance would he be able to approach the mashgiach. "Reb Segal came to speak for just five minutes — and that's it. The mashgiach is in America for a one-night stopover, and tomorrow he's off to Mexico to raise funds for his kollelim."

Still, as the mashgiach was leaving, Rabbi Fink pushed his way in while holding the boy's hand, and said that they had a time-sensitive urgent matter. The mashgiach told them that they'd speak outside.

There, Rabbi Fink detailed all that happened to the boy, and how he feels that he can no longer continue as a "yeshiva boy" after the damage that was done. The mashgiach turned to the boy and told him that his thoughts were certainly the wiles of the yetzer hara.

“The yetzer hara tells you that you’re over,” said the mashgiach, “but I am telling you that you are not. The Torah allows us to do teshuva, and with that you can restart anew.

“These are the three ingredients for you to get over it: First of all, don’t think about it. (Reb Aryeh Leib Zell told over in the name of Reb Don Segal that the way to know if such thoughts are evoked by the yetzer tov or the yetzer hara is by examining if they bring one to serve Hashem better. If it’s coming from the yetzer tov, it would bring a person to serve Hashem better, but if not, it must be a fabrication of the yetzer hara.)

“Second of all, accept that if you ever need to go on the internet, that you’ll only do so with someone watching. Otherwise, don’t go on under any circumstances.

Third of all, go and learn the amount of time you spent on the computer in beis midrash, and that’ll purify your eyes once again.”

When the mashgiach finished the conversation, he commented that up until today, he thought that he left Eretz Yisrael to raise funds for his kollelim, but now he sees that he left all so that he can revive this neshama. Rejuvenating that Yid was so important that it was worth leaving Eretz Yisrael just for that.

This talmid took to the words coming out of the mashgiach’s pure mouth and didn’t let himself be led by the Evil Leader — the yetzer hara. He caught himself in his tracks, didn’t allow it to overpower him, and he was able to continue growing to heights he never thought he would reach.

After finishing yeshiva in Flatbush, he went on to Eretz Yisrael, where he learned as a bachur and continued for many years after his chasuna — following the guidance of the mashgiach. In the time when he was faced with darkness and despair, he replaced it with hope and light — and brought life back into his life.

Reprinted for Issue #202 of Rabbi Moshe Hirschberg’s Zichru Toras Moshe.

Testing the Rabbis on Secular Subjects

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

The days when the Czar ruled in Russia were unbearable for the Jews. It was almost impossible to believe anything could be worse. Anti-Semitism and evil decrees were constant. Every few years, wholesale massacres of Jews called [“pogroms”] popped up like poison mushrooms. But in this atmosphere of constant

oppression and suffering, Judaism miraculously survived and even flourished! As the Torah says: "The more the Jews were oppressed, the more they were fruitful....." (Ex. 1:12).



Pyotr Stolypin (yemach shemo)

One of the biggest enemies of the Jews, and of mankind in general, was the Czar's Minister of the Interior--an evil, sadistic despot by the name of Stolypin. He was always making new oppressive rules and laws to terrify the people, secure his own power and, whenever possible, torture the Jews.

One awful day, the leading Rabbis of Russia were notified that, under the direction of Stolypin, the government was passing a new law requiring all Rabbis to pass a series of exams in secular subjects. Any Rabbi failing to meet the requirements would not be allowed to lead a congregation. The idea behind this was to “normalize” Judaism and open the doors to “new” rabbis who cared nothing for such ancient ideas as “G-d” and “commandments,” thus lowering the resistance of the next generation to, G-d forbid, conversion.

The Rabbi leaders decided to meet in Petersburg to decide what to do. Hundreds of devout geniuses were present for one purpose: how to assure the decree would fail by opposing it in every way possible. But the cunning and ruthless Stolypin had already anticipated their opposition. On the second day of the

convention, a messenger of the government entered the hall on his orders, took the podium and called for attention, and announced to the hushed crowd of Rabbis:

“The Minister of the Interior wishes to inform you, in the name of His Majesty the Czar, that he fervently hopes that the Rabbis are willing to support and join His Majesty the Czar in his new program. But if not, His Majesty the Czar will find it difficult to support and protect the Jews against those who threaten them, and it could certainly be that 101 cities will suffer pogroms at the hands of Anti-Semitic mobs.”

The Rabbis went pale with fear, and a deathly silence fell on them. These were no empty words. Just a few years earlier, they had actually come true; thousands of bloodthirsty Russian peasants suddenly swept through Jewish areas, destroying Jewish shops, homes and property, and sadistically killing and maiming thousands of Jews as they went. It seemed clear that resistance would be pointless, and, although there were still a few Rabbis who had not yet taken the podium, it was doubtful that anyone could change the atmosphere of defeat in the air.



Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, zt”l

The next to speak was supposed to be the Rebbe of Lubavitch, Rabbi Shalom-Dovber Schneersohn (called the Rashab an acronym of his name). But he requested

that he be allowed to speak last. So, the holy genius Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, the great Rosh Yeshiva and leader of the Lithuanian-style rabbis of his generation, stood and heroically declared that, despite the threats, he was opposed to the government idea. But it was obvious that he spoke with a heavy heart. It seemed clear that the outcome would be concession.



Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, zt"l

Finally, the Rebbe Reshab's turn came to speak. The Rebbe was not a healthy man and was often obliged to see doctors or take treatments for weakness. But here, he stood straight and spoke with a clear, loud voice that all could hear. (These same words would be spoken by his son and successor, Rebbe Yosef-Yitzchak Schneersohn, years later against the Communists.)

"It is not through our will that we are in exile, and not with our will that we will leave it... G-d has put us in exile and He alone will gather us from the four corners of the earth through our righteous Moshiach. Until then, all the nations on the face of the earth must know that only our bodies are in exile, for no power can rule or imprison our souls!

"We must announce in public, for all to hear, that what is relevant to Judaism -- Torah, the Commandments and even our customs -- no one can change or influence. We must declare, with the greatest Jewish stubbornness drawn from

thousands of years of Jewish self-sacrifice, "Touch not my anointed and my nation of prophets do not harm."”

He then raised his arms and cried out, "Jews! Sanctify G-d's name in public!" (i.e. Be willing to die for the Torah.) Then, he fainted. Immediately, Rabbi Chaim of Brisk stood and shouted that he too opposed the new decree, even at the cost of his life. A vote was taken and it was decided: not one Rabbi would support the decree.

Meanwhile, the Rebbe Rashab was taken to his room and a doctor was rushed in to treat him. Still, it wasn't long before two mammoth soldiers appeared there also, with orders to arrest him and take him to prison. It was only with the greatest effort and maneuvering, including the doctor's objections, that his sentence was reduced to house arrest and finally dropped altogether.

Several of the great Rabbis with Rabbi Chaim of Brisk at their head came to visit the Rebbe to see how he was. They found him sitting in a chair at his desk weeping...obviously over the impending law. Rabbi Chaim put his comforting hand on the Rebbe's shoulder and said, "Lubavitcher Rebbe, why are you crying? After all, we did all we could! Now it is up to G-d to do the rest!"

"True", said the Rebbe. "We did all we could. Yet the decree has not been averted!"

Calming down a bit, he continued. "If a paid factory worker does everything possible to fix a broken machine, he can go home and sleep peacefully whether he succeeded or not. But not the factory owner; he won't sleep until the problem is solved!"

Unexplainably, however, the decree was never mentioned again by the government, and, thank G-d, Stolypin's threats of pogroms also never materialized.

Source: Modified and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton in a weekly email a few years ago, which was based on an article in Kfar Chabad Magazine (#1017, pg 45) and a lesson in Toras Menachem (vol. 3, pg. 210).

Biographical note: Rabbi Sholom-Dovber Schneersohn [20 Cheshvan 5621 – 2 Nissan 5680 (Oct. 1860 – April 1920)], known as the Rebbe Rashab, was the fifth Rebbe of the Lubavitcher dynasty. He is the author of hundreds of major tracts in the exposition of Chasidic thought. In 1915, after 102 years of four Chabad rebbes living in Lubavitch, he transferred the center of the movement to Rostov-on-the-Don.

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayikra 5785 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safat in Israel.

The Legendary Abarbanel

By Rabbi David Bibi



Many years ago, in Portugal, lived the legendary Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, known simply as the “Abarbanel”, after his commentary on the Chumash. The Abarbanel was not only one of the close ministers and friends to the King of Portugal, but also his trusted Treasurer.

Some of the other ministers were very jealous of this Jew that was so close to the King, and made it known. Yet only one, the Minister of the Exterior, hated him with such a passion to do something about it. Taking his lead, the other ministers went to the King, to try and make him doubt the Abarbanel’s loyalty. They told the King that he should instruct the Abarbanel to make an exact account of all of his possessions and wealth, and report it to the King.

The King summoned the Abarbanel to his chambers and commanded him to submit to him a precise account of all of his possessions. The Abarbanel returned and said that his wealth consisted of 700,000 gold ducats.

The ministers met again with the king, and showed him what a mockery the Abarbanel had made of him. “Only his orchards and gardens alone are worth almost double this amount!”, said one of the ministers. They brought an expert to come and count for himself, and he concluded that indeed, the Abarbanel’s estate and

possessions were worth more than four times the amount he told the King. “And the King became very angry, and his anger burned within” (Megillat Esther).

Another incident came about, that angered the King enough to act upon his wrath. There were certain, top-secret documents, that only the King and the Abarbanel knew their contents. The Minister of the Exterior bribed the Abarbanel’s servant to steal the papers for him, which he did gladly. The Minister mentioned to the King some of the details, and the King asked him how he knew of such things. “From Don Yitzchak, your Jew friend”, answered the Minister.

The King was so angry, and decided he must kill Abarbanel, who he once thought he could trust. Yet, he was faced with a dilemma. The people of Portugal, especially the merchants, were extremely fond of Don Yitzchak. He had done them many favors, such as reducing taxes for them. He knew if he would explicitly order his execution, the country would be in an absolute uproar. He remembered that on the outskirts of the city was a brick factory, there was a fiery furnace burning day and night. He would have him killed there, with no one knowing that he was behind it.

The King summoned Don Yitzchak to his chambers once again, and told him he had a secret letter that must be delivered to the owner of the brick factory immediately. The Abarbanel, being a great admirer of the King, readily agreed to deliver the letter, sealed with the special seal of the King of Spain. Little did he know that the contents of the letter stated:

A secret message to the owner of the factory, Immediately upon receiving this letter, without any questions, take the man who delivered this letter to you and cast him to his death in your furnace.

Signed, The King of Portugal”

The Abarbanel got together his chariot, and ordered his “loyal” servant to take him to the factory as soon as possible. They had just left the city’s borders, when the Rabbi noticed a Jewish man flagging down his chariot. He ordered his servant to open the door for the Jew, and let him speak. The man approached the Abarbanel and said, “My Master the Minister. Today is the eighth day after my wife gave birth to a baby boy. The mohel that I asked to come, has fallen ill, and will not be able to circumcise my child. Please, I beg of you, I know you are an expert mohel. Help me fulfill the Biblical commandment requiring me to circumcise my newborn son!”

The Abarbanel listened to his words, and then stopped to think. He was faced with a serious problem. On one hand, he had to fulfill the orders of the King, and deliver the letter immediately to the factory. On the other hand, he had a requirement to obey the King of Kings, G-d, and help this Jew circumcise his son.

After a few moments of silence, Don Yitzchak told his servant, “You go to the factory and deliver this letter immediately. I will proceed by foot to help this

Jew. I will wait for you here, to pick me up when you are finished.” That being said, he stepped down and followed the Jew to his home, where the guests and family were already waiting. The Abarbanel prepared the baby, and along with the father, blessed and circumcised the newborn child, welcoming him to his Jewish nation.

Of course, after having such an illustrious figure in their home, the family begged the Rabbi to please stay for the feast, and grace them with his presence. He agreed, and joined the guests in a lavish feast in honor of this special moment. Him being the great Torah sage that he was, the Abarbanel stood and gave over a beautiful sermon to the crowd that was gathered there.

The Abarbanel looked outside and saw that it was close to sundown, and his servant still had not returned. He borrowed a horse and wagon from his hosts, and went off to the factory to see if they knew of his servant’s whereabouts. How surprised and terrified was he to hear that the owner fulfilled the secret command of the King, and cast his servant into the fire to burn.

The owner added and said, “before he died, he screamed out and said that he was deserving of death, for he rebelled against his master and stole secret documents from him for the Minister of the Exterior”.

This was all news to Don Yitzchak, but he realized he was just saved from sure death, by fulfilling G-d’s will and helping out the Jewish man. Immediately, he burst out in song and praise to Hashem, that He saved his life, and fulfilled in him the verse that states “The one who keeps the law, will never know evil. A righteous man will be spared from evil, and I will replace a wicked man in his place.”

The next morning, the Abarbanel came before the King, to relate with him all that happened. The King, not believing his eyes, asked the Rabbi if he had indeed visited the factory as he commanded him. Don Yitzchak told the King all that had happened, and about his servant’s confession before his death. The King realized that he really was a man of G-d for He had saved his life, and immediately ordered the Minister of Exterior to be hung.

Happy his close friend was saved from death, and realizing his innocence, the King asked, “Don Yitzchak, I still have one complaint against you. When I asked you many months ago to give me the sum of your possessions, you gave me a number that both you and I know, is at best a quarter of your wealth!”

The Rabbi smiled, and told the King, “Your Majesty, all the worldly possessions I have, are not really mine. At any given moment, the King could seize them from me, and who would be able to tell him otherwise? All my life, I have kept a notebook containing all the money I have given to charity. The reward for that, is eternal, and that is the only money I really own. For not you, or anyone else for that matter, can ever take it away from me.”

Impressed, the King replied, “you are really an honest and upright man. There is no doubt in my mind that this is why you were saved from guaranteed death. Your enemies have fallen before you, and you walk on their threshold”.

Reprinted from the Parashat Pikudei 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Crash Course

By Baruch Lev

Once on an intercity bus ride toward Jerusalem, I noticed a highly respected rosh mesivta and maggid shiur making a request of the bus driver. “It is now 2:15 P.M. At exactly 3:00 I have to give a class to some boys, at a yeshivah right near the entrance to Jerusalem. If I go with you all the way to the Central Bus Station and then go back to the yeshivah, I’m afraid that I will be late to the class and I will cause my students to lose valuable time from their Torah study. So could you please stop first at the bus stop right at the entrance to Jerusalem so that I can go straight to the yeshivah and start the class on time?”

The driver, however, answered, “I’m sorry, sir. There are no stops between here and the Central Bus Station.”

But it’s on the way. You won’t have to do anything other than stop for a moment to let me off,” the rosh mesivta pleaded. “Listen,” he tried a different tactic,” do it for the sake of the Torah, and may this merit help you and protect you. Please.”

“Sir,” the driver said emphatically, “will you please be seated.”

The rosh mesivta went back to his seat, sat down and in moments was deep in a sefer. He had made every effort he could, and whatever would be would be. You could see on his face that he had decided that it would be a waste to spend another moment of thought on the subject.

For my part, I wondered who was right. On the one hand, I understood the driver. He had to follow procedures faithfully, and couldn’t make changes for every passenger, no matter how spiritually motivated the request might be. On the other hand, my heart contracted to see the distinguished, honorable Rabbi defeated.

But there was no point dwelling on the issue. The driver had stood his ground and the rosh mesivta was deep in his sefer. The argument was over.

A few minutes later I was witness to the end of the story. If I hadn’t seen it myself, I would never have believed it.

At the entrance to Jerusalem, right in front of the bus stop where the Rabbi had wanted to get off, the bus crashed into the back of another bus which had stopped

short in front of it. With a startlingly loud noise, the windshield of our bus cracked as we braked to a sudden stop.

The driver immediately opened both front and back doors and the passengers, a bit flustered, got off, each heading in his own direction. It was a few minutes before 3:00 P.M. The Rabbi gathered his books and strode briskly to the yeshivah to begin his class on time. (Excerpted from the book – “There is no Such Thing as Coincidence.”)

Reprinted from the Parashat Pikudei 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

The Farmer's Lesson

Rabbi Yitzchok Aryeh Epstein

A well-known story is told of a Jewish man who approached Rav Shalom Belzer, requesting a blessing. The Rebbe inquired, “What is your profession?” “I am a farmer,” the man replied. “A farmer?” the Rebbe asked. “Tell me, do you observe Shabbos? Do you refrain from performing labor on the holy day?”

The farmer hesitated. “Rebbe, it’s impossible to leave the field unattended for an entire day. If I neglect my work, the field will be ruined.”

The Rebbe patiently began to advise him, offering practical guidance on how he could maintain his farm while fully observing Shabbos. Their conversation continued for an hour until, finally, the farmer conceded. He resolved to commit himself to keeping Shabbos.

However, he added a condition: “Rebbe, I will begin after the harvest season. Right now, it’s the busiest time of the year. Once things settle down, I will observe Shabbos properly, following all the laws you have explained.”

At this, the Rebbe smiled and said, “Let me share a story with you.”

A group of wealthy Polish landowners once gathered for a celebration. As they drank and laughed together, each one boasted about the Jewish manager who oversaw his business.

“My *Moshe* is the best,” one declared. “He runs my tavern flawlessly.”

“Well, my *Moshe* is even better,” another countered. “He manages my lumber business and is completely trustworthy.”

The host of the gathering, eager to prove his point, announced, “I don’t know about your Jewish managers, but my *Moshe* is more loyal than any of yours. He would do anything for me.”

“Let’s put him to the test,” suggested one of the landowners. “Tell him he must convert to Christianity.”

The host agreed and summoned *Moshe* immediately.

“*Moshe*,” he said, “I want you to convert and become a Catholic.”

Moshe gasped. “Oh, my master! I never make such decisions without consulting my wife. Give me a few minutes, and I will return with an answer.” He rushed home, spoke with his wife, and within minutes, returned. “I have spoken with my wife, and we agree—I will convert.”

The landowners erupted in laughter and raised their glasses in triumph. *Moshe* had proven his complete devotion to his master.

Months passed, and the *Poritz* (landowner) who had forced *Moshe* to convert decided he preferred him as a Jew. He summoned *Moshe*, now known as *Ivan*, and declared, “Enough of this. I liked you better as a Jew. You will return to your old ways.”

Again, *Ivan* responded, “My master, as you know, I do nothing without consulting my wife. Allow me to speak with her first.”

Upon returning home, his wife advised him, “Tell the *Poritz* that we are willing to revert to Judaism, but not now. Pesach is in a few days, and we have a freezer full of pork and barrels of whiskey, and we can’t let them go to waste. We’ll finish everything over Passover, and then we will return to being Jews.”

Hearing this, the farmer who had sought the Rebbe’s blessing burst into laughter.

The Rebbe looked at him and said, “You think I control Shabbos? Do I have the authority to grant you permission to delay its observance? We must do what Hashem commands, regardless of the difficulty. The opportunity to fulfill His will is a gift, and we must embrace it wholeheartedly.”

The Zohar states that all the blessings of the week emanate from Shabbos.

A striking example of this occurred with two brothers who owned a jewelry store. Late one Friday afternoon, someone rushed to their home, shouting, “Your store alarm is blaring! Someone must have broken in!”

The brothers debated what to do. “Should we go check?”

But they ultimately resolved, “Shabbos is more valuable than all our jewelry.”

On *Motzei Shabbos*, they rushed to the store, where the police were waiting.

“You’re the owners?” an officer asked. “Yes,” they replied.

“Then you are incredibly lucky,” the officer said. “The robbers who broke into your store were armed with guns. Their plan was to lure you here, force you to open the safe at gunpoint, and steal everything. But since you didn’t come, they got nervous and fled before we arrived. Your Shabbos observance saved you.”

Keep Shabbos and love Shabbos and Shabbos will guard you and love you back.

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayakhel 5785 TorahAnytime Newsletter.

They Forgot to Tell the Patient

Michael Kaplan tells of a story that happened to two good friends of his. He starts off by introducing his good friend Banish that was about to undergo a grueling bone marrow transplant in Los Angeles. Whilst in recovery, two close friends came to visit him. Banish told them of a Yerushalmi man that did not speak English that was getting a bone marrow transplant as well, and they decided to visit him.

They wandered around, until they found the room. As they were about to walk in, the head of the nursing department stepped out and said that the man had just had the surgery, and he is not going to be up for visitors any time soon.

Disappointed the men turned to leave, and then the nurse noticing their Jewish clothing asked them if they spoke Hebrew. They said yes. The nurse began to explain how this man had a wife in the waiting room that didn't speak English. He asked if they could explain to her what they tell every patient before the surgery that he won't have the strength to move. He will be more tired than you ever were before, and it will take 24-48 hours before he will be able to sit up. We just don't want the wife to panic when she sees him.

While the nurse was talking, something astonishing happened. While the nurse was talking, the three men saw the Yerushalmi man stirred. Noticing the men's reaction the nurse turned as well. Thirty minutes after a bone marrow transplant, the patient who should have been completely incapacitated sat up, swung his legs over the bed and stood up. This all was done casually as if he hadn't had the surgery at all. The man calmly walked across the room, opened the cabinet, put on his hat and with complete composure he washed netilat yadayim with the beracha. Just as calmly as he had risen, he went back into bed.

The room was frozen. After what seemed an eternity of silence the nurse found his voice. "It's not possible! It's not possible. Nobody moves after the surgery. Nobody!"

Banish turned to the nurse with an astounding insight. "Either we just witnessed a medical miracle, or maybe he moved because no one told him he couldn't. Every patient is explained what to expect after the surgery, and they believe you because you are a nurse. They don't get up because they don't believe it's possible. They don't even try. But no one spoke Hebrew to explain to this man that he couldn't get up. No one placed that limitation in his mind!"

Reprinted from the Parashat Pekudei 5785 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings to Rabbi Amram Sananes.