

# The Jewish Weekly

## Hebron Stairs of Hope

By David Shirelle

Shlomo Schwartz - a.k.a. "Shwartzie"'s favorite time of the year was summertime, the months he spent in Israel. Although the majority of his time was spent teaching in Safed (as resident summer scholar at ASCENT!), every summer he would take off two weeks to breathe the air of Hebron, learning, praying, talking to everyone. He was at home.

His daily schedule would include an immersion in the mikvah in the Abraham Avinu neighborhood; praying in "Machpelah Cave," the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah; learning Torah in the Menucha Rachel shul; reciting some Psalms at the graves of Jesse and Ruth; eating at the Shirelle home; and of course, talking to every IDF soldier along the way. I was always amazed that within hours of arriving he knew every soldier's name and where each one came from.

One summer afternoon, towards the end of a week in Hebron, Shlomo walked into my house after returning from the grave of Ruth and Jesse in the Admot Yishai neighborhood, which happens to be the first palace of King David; it was there in Hebron for many years before it was in Jerusalem.

Shlomo said to me, 'What a long walk up! Isn't there a shortcut?'

I explained to him that there actually is, by taking the steps right outside my house. It is half the distance, but there is one problem: years ago, when the Arabs saw that the Jews were enjoying the shortcut, they built a wall blocking the way. 'Young teenagers are still able to climb over, but for you and me, Shlomo, as young as we like to feel, forget it; it's not for us.' I said.

Now the Jews in Hebron are known to be tough, but here we had a problem. The courts had decided that the wall was now built, and the soldiers had been given clear orders to protect it and even arrest anyone who tried to damage it or take it down.

The local Jewish residents tried everything: speaking to the top generals in the Army, Knesset members, ministers, and so on. But it seemed that the wall was there to stay.

After hearing these details, Shlomo said: 'It can't be. It doesn't make sense, I'll have to check it out myself.' And then he was out the door.

A few minutes went by and Shlomo was back in my house, very upset. 'You're right, I tried walking up the steps,' he said. 'What a great shortcut, but halfway up, there's a wall blocking the path. I can't get over the wall. We need to do something.'

I said: 'Good luck, Shlomo; we've been trying for years to solve the problem. Don't waste your time.' I told him that so many people had walked up these steps to find themselves blocked, causing them to turn around and come all the way down again, that the steps actually had been given a name by the Jewish residents: 'Madraigot Ha-Yi'ush 'The Steps of Despair.'

An hour went by and Shlomo was back in my home again, this time full of dust and dirt. 'Shlomo, what happened?' I asked.

'Baruch haShem-Thank G-d, we took the wall down. The shortcut is now open to all.'

'Shlomo, what are you talking about?'

Very excited, he explained to me that he had spoken to the soldiers, and they knocked the wall down. 'You're telling me that you simply spoke to the soldiers and they said, 'No problem,' and they knocked the wall down?'

'Yes, that's what happened.'

Shlomo went on to explain. 'I spoke to Motti, and he gave the orders to knock it down.'

'I can't believe this! Who's Motti?'

'Motti is the head officer,' Shlomo explained.

Shlomo of course, knew every one of them by name. He continued, 'Well, I was sitting and talking to the soldiers, a great bunch of guys: Shimon, Rulet, Heshy. Sholom - did you know Sholom is a Jersey boy? Anyway, they saw how the wall really bothered me, so they spoke to Motti, their officer. Motti arrived at the scene and spoke on the Army radio to Itzik, Itzik called Avi, who phoned Dudu and told him to bring a big, five-kilo hammer. Next thing you know, no wall.'

Shlomo was so happy, but I continued not to believe, telling him he was dreaming. 'Let's go look together; I have to see this for myself.'

When I started up the steps with Shlomo, I couldn't believe my eyes. Sure enough, no wall.

After asking the soldiers what happened, they answered, 'Shlomo asked us to knock it down, so we did.'

'What?' I said, facing the soldiers. 'This guy has been here a week, and you do whatever he wants?'

'Well, he's such a nice guy,' the soldiers said.

'I'm also a nice guy,' I answered. 'I've been asking you to knock down the wall for the last ten years, with no success.'

Finally, one of the soldiers explained, 'Shlomo may have only been here for a week, but every day this week, he bought lunch for the entire unit. One day pizza, next day falafel, and then malawach (Yemeni fried flatbread) together with ice cream and soda. He showed his true and sincere love to us.'

I looked at Shlomo in amazement. 'Shlomo, is this true? Every day, you have been buying lunch for the entire unit?'

With his modest smile and special laugh, he answered, 'Hey, look what you can do with fifty dollars in Hebron.'

From that day on, the name of the steps changed. Anyone visiting can pass by the steps and see the new name embedded in the wall: "The Steps of Hope." "Madraigot Ha-Tikvah" is what these steps are named now.

That was Shlomo. Whether in his home Friday nights with all the guests, on the beach, or in the casbah (marketplace) of Hebron, he taught us all what Ahavat Yisrael, true love of one's fellow Jews, is all about. Not just talking about love, or learning about it in a book, but getting out there, finding Jews in need, loving and caring for them, and showing them the steps of hope in life. He taught us all that true love can knock down even the biggest wall."

*Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.*

## It Once Happened...

Made in Heaven

By Rabbi Elimelech Biederman

The Vilna Gaon zy' a was once a guest in someone's home. Taking leave of his host, the Vilna Gaon said, "I noticed that every morning you prepare a coffee for your wife, even before you make your own coffee. I was wondering why you do this. Is it because Chazal say מְכַבְּדוּ יוֹתֵר מִגּוֹפוֹ, one should honor his wife more than he honors himself?"

The host said, "The answer to your question is the story of my life. When I was thirteen years old, I was already a talmid chacham. A wealthy person recognized my potential and chose me as his future son-in-law. The chatunah was scheduled for seven years later when I would be twenty. In the meanwhile, he hired private tutors and teachers so that I could grow in Torah. When I turned twenty, I was a recognized talmid chacham, but my future father-in-law had lost all his money by then. I would have gone ahead with the wedding regardless, because I had hakarat hatov (gratitude) to him for hiring Torah teachers for me all those years, but my father refused to let me go ahead with the shidduch. He considered it a disgrace that I, an accomplished scholar, should marry a poor man's daughter.

"I married a girl from a wealthy family. Soon after we married, I discovered that I have a health problem, which I didn't know about beforehand. My father-in-law invested a lot of money to cure me. Doctors earned a nice living, as they pretended to try to heal me, until one doctor admitted to my father-in-law that nothing known to medicine could cure me. My father-in-law asked me to divorce his daughter, and I obliged.

"First a broken shidduch and then a divorce... I felt my life was in shambles. I became depressed and went to live in the hekdesch (a communal room-and-board for the homeless). Someone who knew me was shocked to see me in the hekdesch. 'You have so much potential; how did you end up here?' I told him what happened. Sometime later, that man returned to the hekdesch and offered me a shidduch. 'The girl has the very same defect as you have,' he said.

"I married her. After the chatunah, she said to me, 'You were born with your defect, but I was born healthy. I developed my health problems later in life.' She explained that she was once engaged to marry a Torah scholar, but since her father lost all his money, the shidduch was called off. She became depressed and ill.

"I asked her some questions and discovered that I was her first chattan! She became sick on my account! Doesn't she deserve that I should honor her with a cup of coffee each morning?"

The Vilna Gaon said, "If I came here only to hear this story, it would have been worthwhile." The Vilna Gaon was impressed by this story because it's a demonstration that when a shidduch is bashert, it will happen.

*Reprinted from an email of Torah Wellsprings.*



**Y-GRAPHICS**

Shabbat Times - Parshat Toldot

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:02	5:16	5:54
Tel Aviv	4:16	5:17	
Haifa	4:06	5:15	
Be'er Sheva	4:20	5:19	



## Brave by Definition By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

All winter long, starting two weeks after Simchat Torah, Jews include a petition for rain in the daily prayers. When the Master of the Universe responds generously and gives copious rains to His land, all is well, but when this is not the case, the Land of Israel and its inhabitants suffer.

One year there was a dearth of rainfall. The dry ground yielded but little produce, and food prices were sky-high. Even the wealthy were pressed to pay for all their needs, while for the poor, starvation looked them in the eyes. And yet, it was even worse for the Torah scholars who were always dependent on the yeshivas for their livelihood. The many yeshivas were supported by the generosity of the wealthy citizenry, who now couldn't afford to give with their usual open-handedness.

The leading rabbis of Jerusalem met and decided to dispatch a delegate to raise money from their brethren abroad. But who would go? No one was anxious to accept upon himself the task. In the end they agreed to draw lots.

The choice fell upon Rabbi Avraham Galante. He was a man noted for his piety and vast knowledge, but he had never traveled abroad and had no experience with foreign ways. Nevertheless, he accepted his mission and traveled to the port city of Yaffa, where he boarded a ship headed for Constantinople.

The grueling voyage took many weeks, and when the sailors finally saw land, a strange sight met their eyes. Instead of the busy activity of a port, they saw distraught people running to and fro. Others stood on rooftops, while militia patrolled the empty streets.

The ship's captain and crew were frightened. They were reluctant to land. Rabbi Galante, however, was determined to go ashore, for Constantinople, with its well-to-do and generous Jewish community was his main destination. It was specifically there that he had been sent and he was determined to fulfill his mission. Rabbi Galante begged the captain for a small rowboat, explaining the importance of his mission. Soon a small craft carrying the rabbi and one sailor set out for the shore.

No sooner had Rabbi Galante stepped ashore when he was approached by two soldiers who cried out, "You must return to your ship! Two great lions have escaped from the Sultan's private zoo and are running through the city. The Sultan wants them alive, and we are terrified to approach them."

Just then, they heard a blood-curdling roar, and the panic-stricken soldiers fled, leaving the rabbi standing alone. The famished lion sprang towards him, anticipating a long-awaited meal, but just as suddenly, it froze in its tracks and crouched down at his feet. People standing on the surrounding roof-tops turned away to avoid the horrible sight, but when they saw that a miracle was occurring, they craned their necks to get a better look.

To their great astonishment, Rabbi Galante was holding the lion by the mane and leading it quietly down the street toward the royal palace. Rabbi Galante's path took him past the second lion. Rabbi Galante gently called to it, and the lion turned and docilely followed him down the street. When they reached the Sultan's private gardens, Rabbi Galante deposited the two lions in their cages and locked the bars securely.

As he turned to leave, Rabbi Galante was approached by the Sultan and his ministers who now dared to leave the confines of the palace. The rabbi was invited to accompany them to the royal quarters. As they stood together, the Sultan turned to Rabbi Galante and inquired, "Who are you, and what are your powers that you have dared and succeeded to capture my escaped lions?"

Rabbi Galante explained that he was from Jerusalem where the people were enduring a famine. He had come to collect funds with which to help his beleaguered brethren. The Sultan was amazed. "I thought you must be an animal-tamer or a sorcerer. But if you are what you claim to be, merely a Torah scholar, I don't understand how you accomplished this feat."

"Your Majesty," replied Rabbi Galante, bowing respectfully, "I am a weak old man, and I certainly make no use of magic, for it is forbidden to us. I will explain to Your Majesty the teachings of our Sages, and you will be able to understand how I was able to control these wild animals.

"We have been taught that the definition of a brave person is one who can conquer his evil impulses. All of my life I have fought against my evil inclination, and I have succeeded in purifying my heart up to the point that I fear nothing except the Al-mighty.

"Also, Your Majesty, the Creator instilled in beasts, an innate fear of people which is manifest only when people act as they should. But, when a person sullies his G-dly image, the roles are reversed, and the person fears the beast instead."

The Sultan was impressed by the rabbi's words. He instructed his servants to bring a large sum of money from his treasury and give it to Rabbi Galante as a token of his gratitude and esteem. After a brief visit with the local Jewish community, Rabbi Galante returned to Jerusalem, having accomplished his mission of mercy and having sanctified the Name of G-d before the Sultan and all his people.

*Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.*

What is your most favorite outfit of clothing? For what special occasion did you wear it?

I heard from The Chief Rabbi of England and the Commonwealth, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, that in Parshat Toldot we are told, "ותקה רבקה את בגדי עשו בנה הגדל המתמתת" – Rivka took her oldest son, Eisav's, favorite outfit, and she placed it on Yaakov." Of course she was preparing Yaakov – we are all familiar with the story – to deceive his father Yitzchak, so that he would receive the blessing of the 'בכור' – the firstborn.

But if Eisav had a favorite outfit, why wasn't it in his own home? What was it doing in the home of his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka?

Our Sages explain that Eisav kept his favorite outfit in his parents' home, so that when he appeared before his father, such was the deep respect he had for him, he would always change into his smartest clothes.

But wasn't Yitzchak blind? If he couldn't see what Eisav looked like, surely his clothes made no difference whatsoever?

The answer is that Eisav's respect for his father was totally sincere. Of course, it would be nice for his father to see that he respected him, but that was not why he was doing it.

I believe there are two important messages that emerge from this, for us and for all time.

The first is, that when it comes to 'כיבוד אב ואם' – the respect we must have for our parents, like that of Eisav, should be natural. Not just to check the box to let our parents know that we are respecting them, but rather, whether we are in their presence, outside of their presence, or well beyond their lifetime, we should continue to respect their wishes and to live according to the values that they taught to us.

There is a second message. Over Shabbat Parshat Toldot, Eisav gets a lot of bad press. Within shuls right around the world we highlight what a 'צדיק' – (a righteous person,) Yaakov was, and what a 'rotten apple' Eisav was. But right in the midst of this story, we highlight the fact that Eisav did excel in one area: the respect that he had for his father. This reminds us of that great teaching in Ethics of the Fathers: "אין לך אדם שאין לו שעה" – there is not a single person on Earth who doesn't have his or her moment."

We learn something from everyone. As some people say, 'Even a broken clock tells the right time twice a day'.

So let's join together and pray with all our hearts, for the recovery of all the sick from this crazy pandemic, as well as praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual Shabbat.

*Yesri*

## The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 106  
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1432  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5426

HAFTORA: Malachi 1:1-2:7

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טולדות

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