

The Jewish Weekly

Why I Thank the Rebbe

By Dudu Fisher

I am descended from a misnagdic family - that is, from those who opposed Chassidism - and yet I am walking this earth because of a blessing from a chassidic rebbe, the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, who was the rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch from 1920 to 1950.

This is what happened:

During the time that the Previous Rebbe was staying in Riga, Latvia, my grandparents were living on the outskirts of the city. In January 1932, in the freeze of the winter, my grandmother went into labor with my mother, and things started to go wrong. She was rushed to the hospital, where the doctors decided that it was necessary to abort the baby in order to save her life.

My grandmother, Frieda Gisha, was unwilling to accept the doctors' verdict, but fearing for her life, she asked her sister Leah to run to the nearest synagogue and pray for her. She said she would not make any decision until Leah returned.

So, in the middle of the night, Leah, my great-aunt, did just that - like her sister asked, she ran to the nearest synagogue and started praying. She went up to the holy ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept, grabbed on to the curtain and pleaded with G-d for the life of her sister and her unborn baby.

As she was praying and crying, a woman tapped her on the shoulder. Leah did not know who this woman was - perhaps the cleaning lady - but when this woman said, "Come with me," she followed her.

Together they went to where the Previous Rebbe was staying at the time and asked for his blessing. They received it in writing, and I still have it - it is a treasured possession in my family. It says: "With the help of G-d, everything will go well. You will give birth to a healthy and living child."

Leah took this blessing and rushed to the hospital, where she was informed that her sister had just been taken into the delivery room. A short while later, Frieda Gisha gave birth in a totally normal way to my mother, Miriam, whom the doctors had recommended aborting.



Dudu Fisher and the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Our family has kept the Rebbe's note for these many years. It is preserved in a safe, and we take it out only when a relative is giving birth so she can take it to the hospital with her. I myself have a copy, and I carry it with me wherever I go.

Two years after my grandmother gave birth to my mother, my grandparents left Latvia and went to live in Eretz Yisrael. It was just in time. The members of my family who stayed behind - fourteen in total - were murdered by the Latvians in the streets. We have eyewitness testimony from those who saw it happen.

Meanwhile, my mother grew up in Israel with an unusual attachment to Chabad, despite her father's anti-chassidic attitudes. Later on, it was in her house, and with her help, that Rabbi Menashe Althaus started the Chabad Center in Tivon.

Myself, I enlisted in the IDF, and after I completed my army service I started singing professionally. I was a cantor for many years. Then, while I was in London for a cantorial concert, a cousin invited me to see the musical *Les Misérables*, and when I went back to Israel, I told my manager that I wanted to take part in the Hebrew production.

He had no idea what I was talking about, but he quickly found out that the show - called in Hebrew *Aluvei HaChaim* - was coming to a theater in Tel Aviv. I got the part, and became famous for it. While I was performing in Tel Aviv, Sir Cameron Mackintosh, the world producer of *Les Misérables*, saw my performance and asked me to come to Broadway.

I was stunned. Of course every singer wants to appear on Broadway, but I turned him down. I said, "I don't think this will be possible for me, because I am an observant Jew - I don't work on Shabbat or on Jewish holidays."

He said, "Let us meet again to see how we can solve this problem."

It Once Happened...

Meanwhile, the story leaked out to the media, and the Israeli newspapers blared "Dudu Fisher goes to Broadway," which was by no means a done deal.

My mother saw that this whole thing was making me depressed, and she suggested, "Why don't you go see the Rebbe?" I said, "What am I going to talk to him about - Broadway? So many people are coming to him with real troubles like poverty and illness. How can I bother him with this?" She insisted, "The Rebbe's blessing helped us once before; it will help us again."

This was 1992. It was no longer possible to see him in a private audience, but it was possible to receive a dollar for charity and a blessing every Sunday.

When my turn came, the Rebbe gave me a blessing and told me not to worry; everything would turn out well. His exact words were, "G-d willing, you will hear good news soon. You will go from strength to strength."

And that is exactly what happened. In fact, the outcome was nothing short of a miracle, which never happened before or after - it was a one-time only occurrence.

I got the part. And not only that, Playbill featured the announcement that for religious reasons, Dudu Fisher would not be playing the part of Jean Valjean on Friday nights and during Saturday matinees.

They called me "the Sandy Koufax of the theater" - referring to great Jewish baseball player who refused to participate in the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur.

Personally, I consider it one of the biggest achievement of my life. When I leave this earth, I hope that people will remember me for this - that I would not violate Shabbat, and that I showed it was possible to make it in the world without compromising one's beliefs.

But most of all, I am ever so grateful to the Rebbe for helping me to get this message across to the Jewish world at large.

Reprinted from an email of Here's My Story

Editor's Note: the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn ז"ל's 71st Yahrzeit and the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn's inauguration 5711 (1951) is today, Shabbat, 10th Shevat - January 23rd of this year



YF GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Bo

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:29	5:44	6:22
Tel Aviv	4:43	5:45	
Haifa	4:33	5:43	
Be'er Sheva	4:47	5:47	



Why the Wedding Preparations Stalled

By Asharon Baltazar

Excitement was palpable on every street and corner as the residents of Opatow, Poland, readied themselves for the wedding of the son of their cherished leader, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel. Hoping to return their beloved rabbi's year-round devotion, the townspeople all sought to help in one way or another.

With the wedding set to take place in the bride's hometown, local wagon drivers believed they held a pivotal role. The rabbi would surely hire a driver for the journey, and with the many Chassidim and extended family expected to join, the drivers reckoned dozens of wagons would be required, which they were more than happy to provide. Of course, none could overlook the tidy sum bound to end up in their pockets.

So, in the weeks leading up to the wedding, the drivers began their preparations. They greased their axles and reupholstered their seats. They thought about the best places to stop, planned where to stay overnight, and carefully considered how best to tend to their horses.

But two weeks before the big event, impatience soured their anticipation. The drivers waited, almost breathlessly, for the rabbi's invitation to discuss the journey and payment, but nothing emerged. Nor was any reason given for the delay. This sentiment was reflected in the rabbi's own home too, as members of his family also wondered why he hadn't made arrangements for the journey.

Puzzled as they were, no one approached the rabbi to question him directly, preferring to occasionally hint instead. And arrangements for the journey weren't the only thing that had stalled. None of the family - not even the groom - had clothes for the wedding. Yet, the rabbi merely dismissed any hint of concern with a cheerful, "All in good time."

But he wasn't oblivious. He simply lacked the necessary funds to pay for the wedding expenses. Well known for giving all he had to others, the rabbi had not a kopek to his name, much less the requisite gifts for the bride, the journey, or clothing for his family. Still, he held tightly to his belief that trust in the Almighty, together with prayer, would engender a positive resolution.

Meanwhile, time for a punctual arrival to the distant town was running out. One day passed, followed by another, as the wedding drew nearer and still the rabbi made no plans with the wagon

drivers, prompting them to act. They selected three representatives, hoping to finally cement a plan with the venerable rabbi.

"Why are you worrying?" chuckled the rabbi. "Heaven directs everything, and there isn't a person alive who knows what needs to happen or when."

"Rabbi," insisted one of the drivers, "although we are simple people, we are the experts in this particular field. We have experience. And we're telling you, unequivocally so, that even if we left tomorrow, it would be a miracle were we to arrive even a day before the wedding. Unless, of course, you intend to employ some miraculous shortcuts..."

Moments after the driver finished speaking, hurried footsteps sounded from the front door. Two men had arrived, one much younger than the other.

With a heavy clunk, the older man tossed a heavy pouch onto the rabbi's desk. "One thousand gold coins," he announced.

"One thousand gold coins?" replied the rabbi, turning to the visitor. "What? Why? How?"

Now it was the visitor's turn to look confused. "Have you forgotten? Around 20 years ago, I came to you for a blessing for offspring. I was miserable. Hoping to perhaps bolster my favor in G-d's eyes, I pledged then and there that on my child's wedding day, whenever it would be, I would bring you 1,000 gold coins.

"As you can see," he gestured excitedly at the young man, "your blessing bore fruit. This week my son will marry, and I came here to fulfill my long-standing pledge."

"Bless the Almighty Who has not forsaken me," breathed the rabbi with relief.

After the pair parted with more blessings, the rabbi turned to the drivers, smiling widely. "Perhaps you are right. The journey is a long one, and we're losing time. In two days, with G-d's help, we will leave."

The minutiae of the journey, such as the number of required wagons, the stops along the route, and payment, were discussed and determined. Hands were shaken all around, and the drivers quickly left for the market to share the word with the others.

The rabbi then presented his wife with the money for the rest of the expenses. A flurry of preparations followed, and two days later the long caravan of wagons rolled out of Opatow.

Only once he was seated in the jostling carriage did the rabbi confess the reason for his unusual silence to his companions.

"If the Rebbe perhaps hinted that something was wrong, we would've been able to raise the entire sum ourselves," protested his loyal students.

"I'm aware of that as well," said the rabbi. "However, as always, my trust in G-d has never failed me in a wonderful outcome."

Adapted and translated from an email of Sichat Hashavua.

Our children can change our lives.

This is one of the key lessons in Parshat Bo. The Torah instructs us throughout all generations to educate our children about all that transpired in Egypt. The purpose? "וידעתם כי אני ה'" - in order that you shall know that I am the Lord".

Intriguingly, the Torah surely should have said "וידעו כי אני ה'" - so that they, (the students) shall know that I am the Lord" but instead it says 'וידעתם' - that you the educators shall find out. But hold on: You already know - that is why you're teaching your children about it.

I heard from the Chief Rabbi of England and the Commonwealth, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, that the Iturei Torah gives a beautiful commentary. He explains that often, through imparting information the educator's awareness becomes deepened.

In order for me to present a lesson, I have to prepare. I have to know the subject and become a master of all the details. Then, through the process of education, thanks to the questions and the probing of the students, my own knowledge will be refined and my awareness deepened. That's why Rabbi Chanina in Mesechet Ta'anit tells us, "I have learnt much from my teachers, I have learnt more from my friends but most of all, I have learnt from my students".

I find this to be one of the most impressive features of Jewish tradition. We genuinely believe that we as adults and educators can learn a lot from our children and our students. I so often come across people whose lives have been enormously enriched thanks to the guidance, influence and inspiration of their children and sometimes even their grandchildren.

So that is why the Torah says 'וידעתם' so that you, the parents/educators shall know. It is from our history that we can learn about the existence of Hashem in the world - a greater awareness of this can come from our children and our grandchildren.

So therefore, let's learn from our children and students and let's 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, sweet and happy Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's

PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 20
MITZVOT ASEH: 9
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 11

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 105
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1655
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6149

HAFTORA: Yirmiyahu 46:13-28

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This week is sponsored
In memory of the
previous Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn zt"l
Who's Yahrzeit is today

י' שבט