

# The Jewish Weekly

## The Rabbi from the Bronx And the Empty Chair

By Rabbi Shmuel Butman

The Chassid Rabbi Michel Vishedski, escaped Russia almost 60 years ago and settled in New York where he did everything in his power to help other Russian Jews and even visited all the orthodox synagogues in New York to encourage them to do the same.

One of his visits was to the synagogue of the head rabbi of the Bronx, Rabbi Rabinowitz. He arrived there in the early afternoon. He found the place empty, as most synagogues are at that time of day, and the Rabbi seated at a long table next to the head chair.

Rabbi Michel shook the Rabbi's hand, introduced himself and, supposing that the Rabbi had left the head seat vacant for him, began to sit in it.

"Excuse me," Rabbi Rabinowitz said, "Please don't sit in that chair. It's the head seat and I always leave it vacant."

Rabbi Vishedski apologized and when he took a different seat the Rabbi smiled, apologized for not warning him and said, "You're a Lubavitcher, right? Well then, you'll probably understand the reason I leave that seat open. It was because of a dream."

"Really? A dream?" Rabbi Michel was interested and seeing his interest, Rabbi Rabinowitz, smiled and began telling him the story.

"It began almost twenty years ago, 1949. I had survived the holocaust in Romania and moved to New York. I got married and began thinking about a job. I wasn't a rabbi then and didn't intend to be one. I had a few other ideas about how to make a living but I couldn't make up my mind. Then someone suggested that I go see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak [the Rebbe Rayatz] (1880-1950), for advice.

"I called up, got an appointment and I got in to see him. I was told that he wasn't so healthy and it would be hard to understand him, but in fact when I did meet him I understood him. He heard me out, thought a moment and said that he thought I should be a Rabbi. He was very clear about that and he said I should let him know what happened.

"Well sure enough, a while later I got this offer to be the head Rabbi of the Bronx here in this shul (synagogue), so I went back and asked the Rebbe if I should take it. He closed his eyes, thought for a minute and finally looked up and said.

"A Shul (synagogue) is a Shul, but I don't like the Shamash (sexton-caretaker)."

Then he again closed his eyes and said it again; 'A Shul is a Shul, but I don't like the Shamash'.

Then he blessed me with success in the new job and told me to return to see him again in two weeks.

"So I followed his advice and took the job. But when I came back two Sundays later I found a huge crowd gathered outside his building. For his funeral! They told me that the Rebbe had passed away on Shabbat! The Rebbe had invited me to his funeral! But I felt he was also telling me that our contact would continue.

"Anyway, at first things went fine in the Shul; I got along well with everyone and the place began to become popular but I sensed there was always an undercurrent of discontent. Finally, I found out what it was; the Shamash of the Shul was speaking against me and even had a small following.

"At first he was quiet about it, I really didn't know what to do and hoped it would die out. But it just got worse and the politics threw the Synagogue and myself into turmoil. A few times I even thought of quitting, but the Rebbe's words stopped me. Finally, when I thought I was going crazy I decided to go to see the Rebbe's son in law, [Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994] who had become the next [Lubavitcher] Rebbe, for advice.

"I got in to see him and it was the most amazing experience in my life. As soon as I told him my problem he said; 'My father in law told you that a Shul is a Shul, but that he didn't like the Shamash!'

"It was simply uncanny. Remember, this was years later and I never told anyone what the Previous Rebbe said to me! Anyway he told me not to worry; just to be patient and that eventually I'd catch him doing something wrong.'

"Sure enough, that's exactly what happened! Just a few weeks later I was having trouble sleeping one night and took a walk to the shul and who do I see also walking around outside but the president and the janitor who also couldn't sleep. Anyway as we got near to the Shul we noticed something strange; a few lights were on inside and someone was in there doing something. So we entered silently and what did we see? The Shamash was emptying all the charity boxes into his pocket! Needless to say he got fired the next day and my problems were over, till the episode with the Butcher.

"Like I said our synagogue became popular. In fact, it got to the point where there was nowhere to sit and we needed to expand. But there was nowhere to expand to, all the land around the Shul was taken. But just then, the butcher next to us decided he wanted to sell us his place so he could expand elsewhere. It was a miracle!!

"And the butcher was so friendly. We came to an agreement, he gave us a great price and we shook hands, didn't even write a bill of sale! The next week the butcher moved to a big store he bought across the street and we knocked down a wall, did a bit of remodeling and like magic our Shul became almost twice as big as it was! Everyone was happy! For a while.

"But after a few years the butcher's new place also became small for him. He also was succeeding and

## It Once Happened...

he wanted to move his refrigerators to somewhere nearby and use the space for more customers. But he also couldn't find a place to buy. Until he suddenly remembered that there had been no bill of sale for the building he sold us!

"He got a lawyer, sent us letters telling us to leave and when we tried to reason with him, he took it to court and got an order of eviction. We had no proof on our side. Things happened so fast we were going crazy but there was nothing we could do. We were going to lose half of our shul. Where would we pray?

'Then, the night before the eviction I had a dream.

"I dreamt that I was standing in this room and at the head of this table, in the chair I told you not to sit in, was the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe with his son in law, the present Rebbe, standing next to him. The Previous Rebbe smiled and said, 'Why are you so worried? G-d will direct everything in the best way.'

"Then his son in law said ' The Rebbe told you that a Shul is a Shul. It means that once a butcher shop becomes a Shul it can't become a butcher shop again. Don't worry.'

"Suddenly I woke up! I looked at my watch. I was late! I was supposed to wake up an hour ago! I wanted to get there before the police! I got dressed and ran to the Shul as fast as I could, but it was too late. There were police everywhere, all our congregants were standing in the street trying to talk to them, while ten husky movers were carrying all the seats out of our shul to the street.

"But suddenly there was a big crash from the new butcher shop across the street then screams. Everyone turned to see. One of the workers came running out the door screaming 'Call an ambulance! Get a doctor! Help!! The boss is hurt!!'

"It seems that somehow a huge chandelier that was hanging there came loose and fell on the owner knocking him unconscious. I ran there and there was blood everywhere! But before the ambulance arrived he came to and limped out the door holding his bleeding head and yelling like a madman. "Put the chairs back!! Don't evict them!! I lied!! I lied!!! They really paid for my store. I'm sorry!!"

"The ambulance took him away, the policeman shrugged his shoulders told the movers to return everything and that was the end of it! Just as the Rebbe said. Incidentally the butcher survived.

That is why I never let anyone sit in this chair

*Reprinted from an email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim, www.ohrtmimim.org.*



### Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Yitro

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:41	5:56	6:35
Tel Aviv	4:56	5:57	
Haifa	4:46	5:56	
Be'er Sheva	5:00	5:59	



## The Junior Draftsman By Rabbi Shmuel Butman

Rafael Ben-Zichri of Beersheba, Israel, was born in Safro, Morocco, where he attended yeshiva until he was 16 years old. By then it was time to learn a profession, so he went to the city of Fez, where there were more options. He decided to become a draftsman and enrolled in a special vocational school.

When the Second World War broke out it became very hard to find work - especially in his profession, and especially as a Jew. People were grateful to have any job at all.

One day he applied for a job at a huge woodworking factory that produced furniture and other items for the government. The plant was French-owned, and the workers were Arabs and Jews.

Because it was wartime, the factory was open seven days a week. As soon as he walked through the doors he vowed to himself that he would never desecrate the Sabbath, no matter what happened. He presented himself to the supervisor, and after a short interview he was hired.

For a whole week he worked very diligently, so much so that he received several commendations. But he could not stop worrying about the coming Shabbat. No matter how hard he tried, he could not come up with any solution to the problem.

On Shabbat morning he found his feet taking him in the direction of the factory. But he was determined not to do any actual prohibited work, even if it meant being fired. He thanked Hashem for every moment that went by without the supervisor noticing him. When eventually the supervisor came over, he made believe he was busy solving an equation, but he could tell that the supervisor knew he was faking. The supervisor said nothing, and continued on his rounds. Rafael breathed a deep sigh of relief. His first Shabbat had passed without incident.

He continued to be very industrious. The second week passed as the first. His hands worked diligently, but his mind was elsewhere. All he could think about was the coming Shabbat.

Again he found himself in the same situation as before. He stood at his usual workplace, but did not touch any of the wood or machinery. Unfortunately, that day the supervisor showed up early in the morning. Rafael didn't know if it was a coincidence or he was checking up on him.

His heart started to pound as the supervisor walked over. "Why aren't you working?" he demanded. Rafael didn't answer, and the supervisor repeated the question. When Rafael still said nothing the supervisor told him, "If you do not start working you will have to leave. You'll have to find a job among the Jews..."

A few minutes later the supervisor returned, but this time he wasn't alone. Walking alongside him was the manager of the factory! Rafael's whole body started trembling.

The manager looked a little familiar to him, but he wasn't really sure and he couldn't remember where he might have seen him. The manager gave him the once-over from head to toe before whispering something in the supervisor's ear. The only word he could make out was "draftsman."

It was common knowledge that the plant's draftsman had quit several weeks before. Since then the factory was lacking a full-time draftsman, and the work supervisor, who had been formally trained as a draftsman, was trying to fill two jobs at once. It had never occurred to Rafael to apply for the senior position, as he was too shy.

Suddenly, he found himself being addressed by the manager. "If I'm not mistaken, I signed your diploma from draftsmanship school," he said. At that moment Rafael realized why he looked so familiar. "Yes," Rafael answered.

"Report to my office first thing tomorrow morning," he said, and went back to his other duties.

The next day Rafael began his career as the plant's official draftsman. He was delighted by the unexpected promotion, but still worried about keeping Shabbat. He had a feeling that the whole happy adventure would be coming to an end that Saturday...

Shabbat came. This time Rafael decided to take the initiative. He went to the manager's office and announced, "I don't work on Saturdays." The manager's face paled, and for a whole minute he was dumbstruck. In the end he didn't say anything and just nodded his head slightly in agreement.

Rafael worked in that plant for many years. And never again did his feet cross its threshold on Shabbat.

One time, in a rare moment of candor, the manager confided, "You should know that never in my life has anyone won an argument with me. You are the first person who ever succeeded, and got me to back down. Can you believe it? A little Jew, barely an adult, got the best of me..."

*Reprinted from an email of L'Chaim weekly.*



## Torah Compilations With Yossi Parshat Yitro

Is it possible for anyone to see sound?

As heard from Rabbi Mirvis, the Chief Rabbi of England and the Commonwealth, there are three different terms used in the Torah for 'listening'.

The first appears at the very beginning of Parshat Yitro, "וישמע יתרו - Yitro listened." When we use the term 'שמע' it means, that we take what we hear very seriously - what we hear becomes a call for action. That is why Hashem says to us, "שמע ישראל" - Listen O' People of Israel, to the fact that I am the one G-d that you must believe in." We, in turn, call out, "שמע קולנו ה' אלוהינו" - Listen to our voices O' Lord our G-d." - appealing to Hashem to help us.

The second term is 'להאזין' - to hear. Sometimes a word can go into one ear and out through the other, and that is what happens with 'מאזין', that is 'hearing'.

But there is a third, unexpected term, which is the most powerful form of listening. It comes immediately after the Ten Commandments. When in this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us, "וכל העם רואים את הקולות" - and the entire nation saw the sounds." Here we have a combination of senses, something quite extraordinary. Perhaps even close to supernatural, in which we were able to internalize the messages that reached us from Hashem, with our entire beings.

So powerful was that experience at Mount Sinai, that we believe all of our souls were there. We carry that experience with us, even today, and it gives us the incentive, to carry out the expectations of that covenantal relationship, established at Sinai.

So if 'listening' is a call for action, 'קל וחומר' - how much more so, when one sees the voices? As a result, all that transpired at Mount Sinai, continues to be a very powerful and essential call to us, through all ages, to live our lives according to the will of Hashem.

It is good when people are able to say, 'I hear what you have said'. It is even better, when they're able to say 'I have listened'. But the best of all is when somebody can tell you, 'I see what you mean'.

So let's hope Hashem sees what we mean, by praying 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, happy Shabbat and Chodesh Tov.

## The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS Yossi

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 17  
MITZVOT ASEH: 3  
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 14

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 75  
Many Chumashim print the number of pesukim at the end of the Parsha. In Yitro's case, the number is 72 or 72 pesukim. The discrepancy is due to different ways of counting the Aseret HaDibrot. The Aseret HaDibrot consists of 13 pesukim. However, when they are read as Statements, rather than pesukim, there are only 10. Similarly, the Aseret HaDibrot is comprised of 10 parshiot. That's probably where the other 3 pesukim went.

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1104  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4022

HAFTORA:  
Ashkenazim: Yeshaya 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6  
Chabad & Sephardim: Yeshaya 6:1-13

Shabbat Mevarchim Chodesh Adar  
Rosh Chodesh is Friday and Shabbat, Jan. 12 and 13, 2021

# יתרו

# פרשת

Look out for the Halachot and Minhagim for Chodesh Adar and for this unique year of a three-day Purim in Jerusalem, coming next week.