

The Jewish Weekly

To Ask Or Not To Ask

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

Mrs. Bernstein took her pupils for an outing. It was one of the eight days of Chanukah when Jewish schools take vacations and make special programs. But this outing was special. They went to a local mall in New Jersey, to not only light Chanukah candles, but also to inspire Jews.

It was a campaign of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; to go anywhere and everywhere, even public places, to search for uneducated, uninspired, unattached Jews and give them a taste of Judaism. And on Chanukah it was easy; everyone liked the candles and the message of light and victory.

They agreed that the girls would split up into groups of three, to cover as much area as possible and meet back at the bus in an hour and a half.

Mrs. Bernstein was a very punctual person and she demanded the same from her pupils; tardiness or disorder of any sort was out of the question. So one hour and a half meant no later than an hour and a half!

The girls loaded up the pamphlets and candles they had brought and set off in different directions, while she took what remained and went alone in a direction they hadn't chosen.

She immediately met with success and after almost an hour of conversing with receptive Jewish women and girls she looked at her watch to see that forty minutes remained, enough for three or perhaps four more discussions. She approached five or six women and one young man sitting around the table of an outdoor restaurant.

"Anyone here Jewish?" She asked with a smile. Two of the women raised their hands in good spirits and a lively conversation ensued. She told them about the holiday, they asked questions, she answered, they replied and the conversation continued for several minutes. Meanwhile the other women, most of which were about to leave before she arrived, excused themselves and left, while the young man, who obviously was not Jewish, sat and listened.

Mrs. Bernstein looked at her watch and exclaimed. "Oh my goodness! We've been talking for forty-five minutes! I must go!!! I'm already late! I was supposed to meet the girls five minutes ago!"

She shook hands with the women, they exchanged telephone numbers, and she left some of the pamphlets and candles with them and ran off to meet her pupils at the bus. It wasn't like her to keep them waiting.

But she stopped. A voice inside of her was saying she shouldn't have ignored the young man, 'You should have at least asked him if he was Jewish'. But then she thought again. 'Why, that's foolish! I'm late! And he didn't look at all Jewish! Anyway, he didn't say anything when I first asked everyone. I'm not going back!'

But the first voice won.

She turned around, walked briskly back to the table, approached the young man who was now sitting alone and said "Excuse me but, by the way, are you Jewish?"

She never would have expected his reaction. He looked up at her, eyes filled with tears, began

trembling so severely that the food fell from his fork on his shirt leaving a large stain and began to cry.

Mrs. Bernstein was confused, she apologized handed him a few napkins and apologized again.

"Why did you ask me that?!" the young man said as he was calming down. "Why did you come back and ask me that!?" He said again between snuffles, drying his eyes and blowing his nose a few times.

"I don't really know." She replied. "I can't really explain it. I just did. But why are you crying? What happened? I'm sorry. But please tell me, are you Jewish?"

"I'll tell you." He replied. "You don't understand what a miracle just happened now." He invited her to sit down and spoke.

"First of all, my name is Fred. My mother is Jewish, so that makes me Jewish, right? But my father is not Jewish. To you that probably isn't so important because to you I'm still a Jew. But to me it meant confusion.

"My mother wasn't at all observant. That's why she married a gentile, religion meant nothing to her. But for some reason she insisted that if they had children, they would be given an orthodox Jewish education. Doesn't make sense does it. But anyway, my father agreed. So when I was born I became that child.

"When I was three, they enrolled me in a real Jewish school and by the age of five I not only could read the Torah, I dressed and acted like a religious Jew with a yarmulke, locks of hair at the sides of my head, Tizzies, on the four corners of my garments; the whole business!

"But you can imagine what a feeling I had every day after school when I returned home, which was totally non-religious. And although my parents didn't bother me about how I looked the kids in school did bother me. Not my clothes but my face.

"I looked exactly like my father; blond hair, blue eyes, small bobbed nose in other words like a total gentile. They were just little kids and, well you know how kids can be cruel sometimes.

"Anyway, it made me confused and miserable and when my parents saw how it was ruining me, they talked it over and when I got to the fifth grade they moved me to a normal public school.

"After the move it only took a few days till I removed all the signs of Judaism, made new friends and almost forgot the whole episode... but deep in my heart I knew I was different. What I had learned in the Jewish school stuck with me, but so did the negative experiences.

"Sometimes I even would talk to G-d and ask Him why He put me in this confusion but I didn't get any answers; only more confusion. So I tried to take my mind off it and just live life like everyone else.

"But once in a while I had attacks of Jewish identity and one of them was just now. When you came and asked everyone except me if they were Jewish all the frustration, anger and sadness came back to me. Then, when you walked away, I decided to have my final, parting talk with G-d.

I said 'G-d, I want to be Jewish, but I can't do it alone. I need Your help. If that lady doesn't come back here, I'm finished with being a Jew.'

"So if you are wondering why you came back now you know; it was G-d answering my prayers!"

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

It Once Happened...

It's Not Enough

By Osher Chaim Levine

Too many of us settle for what is "good" rather than what is "great". And too few of us realise how bad this outlook is. Judaism expects man to do his best. Greatness is not simply a matter of "what you do" but of "who you are". A human being is the most astonishing creature. Greatness is invested within him – it is just up to him to take appropriate action to realize it.

Not simply a temporary state of being, greatness is a permanent feature of his makeup. This is beautifully hinted at in the Hebrew name for man "adam" which shares the same letters as the word "meod" which translates as "very" or "much".

A person cannot be content with his past achievements and staying with what he has. Instead, he continuously strives to accomplish more. For he has the capacity to excel exponentially. To become greater and greater. This outlook calls to mind one of the greatest unsung Jewish heroines of the past century:

Recha Sternbuch. Despite being briefly arrested for smuggling Jews into Switzerland, she invested great effort to rescue her brethren trapped in Nazi Europe. She obtained South American identity papers and dispatched forged visas.

On the Shabbos of her son's Bar Mitzvah, Recha left the shul early to rescue Jews in imminent danger. Her secret negotiations with Himmler's friend Jean Marie Musy paved the way for a later agreement in 1945. This turned over four concentration camps intact to the Allies – sparing the lives of countless inmates in the process.

She negotiated the release of thousands of women from the Ravensbruck camp and the release of 15,000 Jews held in Austria. Some historians estimate that this courageous woman saved up to 300,000 Jews!

Nevertheless, when asked about her rescue work, Recha expressed regret with the chilling comment: "I did not do enough!"

The fear of "not doing enough" should cause us to stop and think. "One good deed for the day" is insufficient where we can stretch ourselves to fill "one day with countless good deeds"! One hour of Torah studies is inadequate where one could have learned for two. What is man doing with himself if he is not continually working to deliver his best? Being "good" is not nearly "good enough" when true greatness lies within our grasp.

Reprinted from an email of Oneg Shabbos (London, U.K.).

Editor's Note: this story was added in as Mrs Recha Sternbuch's only son, Reb Avraham Sternbuch who is mentioned in the story, passed away last week.

Reb Avraham was the Rosh Yeshiva in the Bobov Yeshiva in London before moving to Israel a few years ago.



YF GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Vayikra

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	5:14	6:27	7:08
Tel Aviv	5:29	6:29	
Haifa	5:20	6:29	
Be'er Sheva	5:32	6:30	

Lost Shabbat in Yonkers

By Rabbi Levi Welton

In January 2021, one of my beloved congregants in Lincoln Park Jewish Center told me it would be his last Shabbat in shul. "Sorry, Rabbi, but I got offered a job and I'll have to work on the Sabbath." He caught me off-guard as we both stood socially distant from one another, our masks covering our faces.

He had been a rabbi's model congregant (and, by that, I mean he didn't fall asleep in my sermons) and I was just beginning to get to know him. What was I supposed to tell him? That I'd love to see him whenever he can make it to shul? That there are many other mitzvahs he can do to bring Mashiach? The Corona virus has impacted so many people financially and they were offering him a lucrative salary. Who was I to mess around with someone else's parnassa (livelihood)?

For those who know me, you know that I hate conflict and often bend over backwards to accommodate and not alienate. But this wasn't some trivial Facebook-debate. This was the holy Shabbat we're talking about! I was on the spot. What was I supposed to do?

"What would the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe say?"

This thought pierced my mind as I stood there, his eyes searching mine. I took a deep breath.

"My brother," I began. "It is impossible that the Creator of Heaven and Earth would give a child of His a challenge he cannot overcome. A great Jewish poet - the Ahad Ha'am - once said, 'More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.' You must tell them you can't work on the Shabbat, and, if you need a letter stating you require religious accommodation, I will write one for you."

During this past week, he did not reach out to me. I worried if he would ever talk to me again. "Maybe I shouldn't have pushed so hard?"

Today, after I finished praying the Amidah, I turned around to face the congregation and saw him in the

second row. He smiled and waved to me. I snuck over to him and asked in shock, "What are you doing here?!"

He leaned close and said, "Rabbi, everyone else in my life was encouraging me to take the job. You were the only one who was adamantly opposed. Yet, in the end I turned it down. I thought to myself, if there are Holocaust survivors like R' Chaim Grossman who still show up to shul, then how much more so should I.

So guess what happened next? When my old job heard what happened, they offered me a raise to stay. Plus, they put in my new contract that I will never have to work on Shabbat! I want you to know that if you hadn't given it to me straight, I wouldn't be standing here today."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Tears hit my eyes. In my sixteen years as a Rabbi, this is one of the top moments of my entire career. I opened my mouth and told him that the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 17a) states there are those who acquire their World to Come in (just) one glorious moment.

As the service progressed, I couldn't control myself and I stood up in front of the entire congregation and, with his permission, told them what had occurred. I said that the Talmud (Berachot 6a) teaches that G-d wears tefillin just as His children do. In our tefillin, it is written, "Hear O'Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). But, in His tefillin, it states, "And who is like your people Israel, a nation unique on Earth." (II Samuel 7:23).

This man inspired our entire congregation. This man inspired me. It's easy for me to come to shul on Shabbat. After all, I'm paid to do so.

But, for someone like him, to make that choice....achh, all I can say is that we are now reading the stories in the Torah of the "miracles and signs" G-d made for the Jewish people in Egypt. But this was a great miracle this man made for G-d.

Reprinted from a post by Rabbi Welton.

How can I bring Hashem into my life? The answer comes at the beginning of Parshat Vayikra.

After calling Moshe, Hashem delivered the opening mitzvah to us, which concerns sacrifices: "אדם כי יקריב מכם" – "if any one amongst you wishes to make a sacrifice to the Lord." The Hebrew wording seems to be a bit clumsy. "אדם כי יקריב מכם" literally means "a person, if he wants to sacrifice from amongst you." Rather, it should have said "אדם מכם" – "if any person amongst you wants to sacrifice."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe gave a beautiful explanation. He noted that it all depends on where you pause in the verse. This is how it should be read: "אדם כי יקריב, מכם קרבן לה" – "if any one of you wants to come close to the Lord, that closeness must be initiated by you." Don't spend a lifetime waiting for Hashem to reach out to you. Rather, we must initiate that connection, and we'll find that Hashem responds magnificently.

Indeed, our Sages of the Talmud teach us: "פתחו לי פתח" – "open for me just the space of an eye of a needle, and I will expand that to become a very large space."

There are several ways how to reach out to Hashem to start that process. An obvious way is through the practice of mitzvot; to keep Shabbat, to keep Chag, to perform deeds of kindness, etc. But there's another great opportunity. It's found in relating the praise of Hashem, seeing His presence in our everyday lives, and in exclaiming 'ברוך ה' – thank God for what is happening – regardless of the circumstances. If that is how we conduct ourselves, Hashem will respond in a tremendous way.

I believe, that the finest example of this, can be found in what is surely the most emotional of our prayers. We recite every day: "רפאנו ה' ונרפא" – "heal us Hashem, and we will be healed" – "הושיענו ונושעה" – "save us and we will be saved" – "כי תהללנו אתה" – "because You are worthy of our praise".

If, during illness, or challenging circumstances, we offer praise to Hashem, and recognize that He gives us what we call 'חיווק' – encouragement and support – indeed He will respond. He will keep us going & help us ultimately succeed.

Parshat Vayikra opens with the words "ויקרא אל משה" – "Hashem called out to Moshe." Don't presume that this just suddenly happened – rather, it followed Moshe calling out to Hashem, who then responded magnificently, "אדם כי יקריב".

So let us remember therefore, that if any person wants to come close... "מכם קרבן לה" – he needs to initiate that closeness, so 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 Chevre 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 and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 16
MITZVOT ASEH: 11
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 5

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 111
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1673
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6222

HAFTORA:
Yeshaya 43:21-44:23

