

The Jewish Weekly

A Slap in the Face

By Rachel Graciela Mancusi

I grew up in Caracas, Venezuela, in a very warm family and went to a secular school without any religious affiliation. While my mother is Jewish, my father is Catholic, and whatever religious rituals we did practiced in our home were Catholic.

As I grew and matured, my perception of G-d was changing. I came to understand that there is one G-d for the whole world and it was very disturbing for me to be expected to connect with something and calling it G-d.

When I was studying at the Central University of Venezuela I took upon myself to believe in the one G-d, and also to believe in myself. Although I consciously behaved in a manner that I thought G-d would want me to, I had no interest in studying anything to do with religion.

My time in college was amazing. I was studying in the best university in Venezuela, I was getting good marks in my classes, I had amazing friends - simply put, I was having the time of my life.

As the date of my graduation neared - my degree was in Actuarial Science - I started looking for a job. Soon I was hired by an insurance company.

A few days before I started my new job, my mom and I went shopping to buy me a piece of jewelry in recognition of this milestone. Little did I know that our innocent shopping trip was going to change my entire life.

When we had chosen a piece of jewelry and were about to pay, my mom noticed that the owner was wearing a Star of David necklace. "Are you Jewish?" my mother asked.

The owner was so excited to hear that we, too, are Jewish that she actually called her daughter to tell her that she had a customer who is Jewish. I was so confused; what was she so excited about? I just wanted her to give me my jewelry so I could leave.

A few minutes later, the woman's daughter arrived in the store, eager to meet my mother and me. Before we left the store, the daughter asked me, "Would you like to come to a Jewish retreat taking place soon outside of Caracas?" I was not really interested in attending and I was sure my mother would not think it was a good idea for me to go, especially since I was starting a new job. Figuring I would get out of it easily, I asked my mother what she thought. To my surprise, with a huge smile my mother said, "Of course my love why not?"

Not only did I go to the retreat, but I brought with me my brother and two of my cousins. I felt like Christopher Columbus. I discovered a whole world that I had never known about before. For the first time in my life I heard about the Sabbath, kosher food, Jewish dress, Moshich, and more.

I came back from the weekend "shell-shocked." I was certain that I could never do all of those things the people at the retreat had said G-d wants me to do. I decided not to even try, I'll stay with math better.

In my job at the insurance company, the colleagues I worked with most closely were a Muslim man and an evangelical Christian woman. My male colleague, though a very warm and kind person, would often say horrible things against Israel and the Jewish people when the media reported conflicts between Israel and her Arab neighbors. I felt very hurt by his words and I told him, "Excuse me! I'm Jewish!"

He looked at me and said, "I'm not talking against you, you are not a real Jew."

I didn't have anything to say. Even though I knew that I am a "real Jew" and 100% Jewish, at some level I felt he was right. I didn't know anything about my people at all. I started studying Jewish history and the history of Land of Israel. After that, every time that he said something against Israel or the Jewish people I had an answer for him.

One afternoon at lunch, another conversation about the conflict in the Middle East came up and I was answering very confidently to my colleagues. In a very sincere way, my evangelical Christian woman colleague said, "Graciela, you know you're Jewish and it seems that you're not ashamed to be it, so why are you not doing anything about leading a Jewish life?"

That was the worst moral slap in the face that I had ever received. I resolved to learn about Judaism. I started studying every day and I became very excited about the Torah's approach to life. I started to keep kosher and Shabbat. It was a challenge but with a lot of work, and patience and support from my parents, we worked it out.

Over time I became fully observant, but I felt like something was missing. I wanted to develop a real relationship with G-d. At about that time I met a young woman my age who was also observant. Eventually she invited me to spend Shabbat at her Rebbetzin's home.

That Shabbat was the first time I came in contact with Chabad and my introduction to Chassidic teachings.

I fell in love with Chassidut. I learned that being a Jew is not about counting how many sins or how many mitzvot (commandments) I've done; it's not about being scared of every move I make because G-d is going to punish me. It's not about doing mitzvot for a reward - material or spiritual. Chabad and Chassidut taught me that being a Jew is about truly connecting to G-d with every fiber of my body and soul. Understanding that G-d gave me a mission that nobody else can accomplish but me and also to know that He gave me all the tools that I need to succeed. So whatever it is that I need to do, I have the power and ability to do it!

Last year I decide to study at Machon Chana Women's Yeshiva. I am trying to take advantage of every single day here to give myself the best opportunity for growth. I really have to say that this wouldn't be possible without my parents support.

Reprinted from an email of L'Chaim Weekly.

It Once Happened...

A Thought on Unintentional Inspiration

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

My parents settled in Detroit, Michigan, in 5714 (1953). At that time, many prominent Rabbanim would come there to raise money. One of them was Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, the Rav of Ponevezh and founder of many yeshivot.

One day, as the minyan concluded davening Shacharit and the people left, Rav Kahaneman sat down to learn. Suddenly, he heard someone davening with tremendous emotion. Initially, he thought that this man was experiencing an extremely difficult situation and was pouring out his heart to Hashem, beseeching for His help and mercy.

Although he was there to raise money for his institutions, Rav Kahaneman felt it was his duty to help another Jew in distress. He waited for almost an hour until the individual concluded davening. He then went over to him and said, "Reb Yid, how much money do you need to cover your immediate expenses? I am willing to help you."

The Jew looked at him in bewilderment; he didn't understand what he was talking about. Rav Kahaneman saw his perplexed expression and thought that perhaps the man was too embarrassed to disclose his situation. So he continued: "I heard your heartfelt tefillot to Hashem, and I said to myself, 'Hashem sent me to this shul today for a reason, and I believe the reason is to help you.'"

The Jew replied, "I don't understand. Baruch Hashem, my family is healthy. I have nachas from them and we are covering the expenses. I don't need any assistance."

Rav Kahaneman persisted: "If that is so, please tell me, why were you pouring out your soul to Hashem? If everything is good and there are no problems, why were you crying like a child?"

The Jew replied, "Today is a legal holiday, and my place of employment is closed. Since I have a few extra hours, I decided to connect myself to Hashem, and the way one connects to Hashem is through davening."

Hearing this, Rav Kahaneman recognized that my father was not just one of the only Jews in Michigan who did not cut his beard, but rather he was a person of tremendous depth. He continued to carry on a conversation with him. When he heard that my father sheched his own chickens, he requested that he be invited to eat in our house, saying, "I am confident that I can rely on your shechitah."

Years later, my brother, Rabbi Gershon Avtzon, heard from one of Rav Kahaneman's students that when he returned to Eretz Yisroel, he was full of praise, stating: "After meeting such a Jew, I knew there is a future for Judaism in America."

Reprinted from a Story email of Rabbi Avtzon.



Y-GRAPHICS

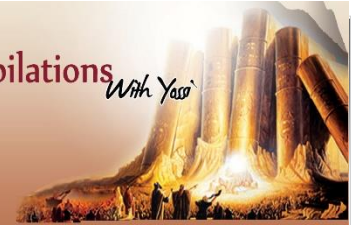
Shabbat Times - Parshat Shemini

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:28	7:42	8:22
Tel Aviv	6:44	7:44	
Haifa	6:35	7:45	
Be'er Sheva	6:46	7:44	

Slice of Life

Torah Compilations With Yossi

Parshat Shemini



New Jews from Transylvania

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

About 600 years ago a religious movement began in Transylvania whose adherents, although not Jewish, observed certain Jewish commandments. In addition to keeping the Sabbath and the laws of kashrut, they celebrated Passover and had their own prayer book, an almost literal translation of the Jewish siddur into Hungarian.

For many years the group was persecuted and its leaders imprisoned, tortured and even killed. Some of its members escaped to Turkey, where they formally converted to Judaism. The most bloodthirsty enemy of the "Sabbath Observers," as they were called, was Queen Maria Teresa, who was known for her hatred of anything Jewish. Nonetheless, the sect stubbornly held on to its beliefs.

In the times of Kaiser Franz Josef the members of the sect underwent mass conversion and became full-fledged Jews. The following was written by a Jewish journalist who visited their village shortly before the outbreak of World War II:

"We entered the converts' synagogue. There we found a congregation consisting of a few dozen men praying the afternoon service, reading intently from small prayer books. Their appearance is dignified and serious, and they pray with great devotion. The person who led the service appeared to be the embodiment of the words, 'Know before Whom you stand.' These were never common people, as their lineage goes back over 1000 years to the founding of Transylvanian society. Today, however, they all have long beards and long side curls..."

"At the end of the service they clustered around us and gave us a hearty 'Shalom Aleichem.' It did not take long until the conversation turned to a subject that is obviously very dear to them, their conversion to Judaism. This story is a glorious chapter in their history, and they do not conceal their pride in their ancestors' decision, in the times of Franz Josef, to join the Jewish people..."

"And not only that,' they add modestly, 'many of our forefathers were already quite old when they willingly underwent the mitzva of brit mila (circumcision). Surely that in itself is no trifling matter!'

"As they tell it, the first member of their group to be circumcised was over 60 years old. He insisted that the Rabbi and the mohel (ritual circumciser) promise that if he died during the procedure, they would bury him as a Jew. In fact, everyone was

clamoring to be circumcised first, as they all wanted to become Jewish as soon as possible. Even the youngsters were impatient..."

"The new Jews suffered greatly because of their faith, but to them, all the pain and anguish was welcome. 'We knew that we had done a great thing,' they say, 'and we waited patiently for the reaction of the non-Jewish community.'

"The reaction was not long in coming. 'We were ordered to assemble at the courthouse. We were not afraid. We thought, what could they do to us? Put us in jail? Our ancestors had also been imprisoned. Maybe we would be forced into the very same cells...'

"The date of the court appearance arrived. Everyone in the entire village put on his finest Sabbath clothing ...

"The chief magistrate turned to an elderly gentleman and demanded to know what had gotten into his head. The man replied that as his family had already been observing the Sabbath and eating kosher for several hundred years, the time had come to complete the process and not be satisfied with halfway measures. The judge then asked if anyone had felt compelled or coerced to convert, to which they all answered no, they had become Jews of their own free will. The judge then declared that he would announce his verdict in two days. The fledgling Jews were ready to accept whatever punishment he decreed..."

"Two days later the verdict was announced: Whoever wished to remain a Jew would be obligated to turn over all his property to the royal treasury!

"A vast sigh of relief filled the courthouse. That was to be their punishment? Joyfully they went home and returned to the courthouse with all of their cows and oxen, jewelry and fine clothes. Everything was piled into a huge mound in front of the building. The judge, who had been watching the proceedings, then declared, 'In the name of the Kaiser Franz Josef, you are hereby granted permission to embrace your new faith. I just wanted to see how much you were willing to sacrifice on behalf of your beliefs...'

For the next 75 years the community flourished. Jews from the surrounding areas built them a synagogue, and sent them a Rabbi and a shochet (ritual slaughterer) to attend to their needs.

Unfortunately, the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, may their name be erased, did not leave these righteous converts unscathed. When the time came they entered the ghettos and concentration camps with the rest of their brethren, where they publicly sanctified G-d's Name.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.

The fact that this week's Parshah is called Shemini, which means 'the eighth', issues an invitation to us to answer the question of what is special about the number 8?

In Kabbalistic teachings, the number six represents the natural world. Hashem created our world in six days, and therefore we work on six days. The number seven represents the perfection of people. On the seventh day we celebrate Shabbat which is known as "משכן שלום הבא" – the closest we can come in this world, to the perfect spirituality of the World to Come. The number nine represents אמת הקדוש ברוך הוא - Hashem, it is the Divine number.

In maths, quite extraordinarily, a number can only be divided by nine if its digits add up to nine, or a multiple of nine. For example, in the number 459, $4+5+9 = 18$ which is a multiple of 9, and therefore we know it is divisible by 9. It shows that 9 fits perfectly into the world around it, and that is a description of Hashem.

At the end of the Shema, we conclude the words "ה' אלוהים" – the Lord your G-d, but we always add the word 'אמת' onto it which means truth. That is because the Talmud teaches us "ה' אמת", the seal of Hashem is truth. The gematria of the word 'אמת' adds up to 441, which is $4+4+1$, which equals 9, indicating that the truth of Hashem is represented by the number 9.

So if seven represents the perfection of people, and nine represents Hashem, eight represents the bridge, connecting us with our Creator. That is why a baby boy has his 'ברית מילה – circumcision' through which he establishes a covenant between himself and Hashem - on the eighth day. That is why the festival of Chanukah is eight days long when we recall the Divine intervention which saved our people. And that is why between Pesach and Shavuot for a period of 7×7 days we prepare ourselves for the re-enactment of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Once we reach that number 49, we are prepared for the festival of Shavuot, which takes places at the beginning of the eighth week, reminding us of that ultimate revelation when Hashem appeared to us, and of the first two of the ten commandments. He delivered them directly to us – the ultimate bridge between Heaven and earth.

Now we can understand our parshah, "ויהי ביום השמיני" – and it came to pass on the eighth day – once the "משכן" - the sanctuary in the wilderness" had been completed, and the altar was there to be dedicated, for seven continuous days the people offered sacrifices with no response from Hashem, but after those seven days, "והוצא אש מן השמים" – on the eighth day, fire came from Heaven and consumed the animal on the altar – there was that connection between Heaven and earth.

The number eight is a special number which issues a call to us. Let us embrace the natural world represented by the number six. Let us strive to reach our greatest potential for perfection, represented by the number seven. And in that way, may we merit to live up to the aspirations of the number eight, to feel the presence of Hashem in our lives and to enable Him to bless us always and let's pray with all our hearts for all those who are sick from the epidemic as well as praying for our soldiers who go out to protect us and 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.



ראש חדש אייר יהיה ביום שני וביום שלישי
Rosh Chodesh will be Monday & Tuesday, April 12 & 13

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 17
MITZVOT ASEH: 6
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 11

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 91
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1238
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4670

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Shmuel II, 6:1 - 7:17
Chabad & Sephardim: Shmuel II, 6:1 - 19

Shabbat Mevarchim Chodesh Iyar which falls on Monday and Tuesday, April 12 & 13.
This Shabbat afternoon we begin the weekly study of Pirkei Avot, every Shabbat until Rosh Hashana. This week we study Chapter 1.