

# The Jewish Weekly

## It Once Happened...

### Claude From Ghana vs. Rabbinical Court!

By Rabbi Yaakov Cass

About four years ago I walked into the Tchekenov shul in Ramot [suburb of Jerusalem] after work one evening to study with my chavruta [Torah-study partner]. I found him learning with a young man who I had never met before. I was somewhat taken aback when I first set eyes on Eliezer. Dressed like any other Chareidi ["Ultra-Orthodox"] young man, he stood out from the crowd for he had just arrived from the West African country of Ghana.

Eliezer was then known as Claude. He was born in Benin and had escaped from that very dangerous country by illegally crossing the border into Burkina Faso and from there he crossed over to Ghana, again illegally. Ghana was much safer and more stable than the previous two countries.

[Benin is a country in western Africa, bordered to the northwest by Burkina Faso, to the east by Nigeria, and to the west by Togo. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in West Africa that is bordered by Mali to the northwest, Nigeria to the northeast, Benin to the southeast, Togo and Ghana to the south, and the Ivory Coast to the southwest.]

Crossing the border in this way was extremely hazardous and many who did so were killed. However, there was no legal way to gain entrance to Ghana as it did not accept Benin citizens. Claude felt the hand of G-d guiding him safely to his new home in the capital, Accra, where he secured a profitable job as a cook at the French embassy.

One fine day a Chareidi Jew from Ramot, Jerusalem, by the name of George Brown arrived in Accra. He had come to work in the mining industry and had rented a villa. He told some of his new colleagues that he needed someone to run his home as he was unfamiliar with the local scene. Very soon thereafter Claude knocked at his door.

"My friend just told me that there is a Jew from Israel who is looking for someone to manage his household. I immediately handed in my notice at the embassy and came running to work for you. I have never met a Jew before but I know that they are the Chosen People. It will be an honor for me to assist you throughout the time that you are in Ghana."

Thus Claude began to help George establish his home. He went with him everywhere. He helped him immerse his dishes in the mikveh, kosher the kitchen, purchase a Shabbat kettle and hotplate, install a time switch for the

Shabbat lights, and set aside a place where he could pray undisturbed.

One day as George finished his prayers, Claude asked him what were the things he had been wearing. George answered that they were items that G-d had commanded the Jews to wear during the morning prayer. Claude asked if he could do likewise. George explained to him that it wasn't necessary because he was not Jewish.

"Nevertheless I want to keep this commandment," Claude retorted firmly.

George went on to explain that it was forbidden for a non-Jew to perform such mitzvot but Claude did not bat an eyelid.

"Then I will become a Jew so that I will be able to keep all the beautiful mitzvot that I have observed in your home."

George told him that in order to become Jewish according to the specifications of the Jewish religion he would have to go to an appropriate rabbinical court but there wasn't one in Ghana; nor in hardly any of the African countries. Claude was not the least bit deterred. He spent every spare moment researching Judaism online, delving deeper and deeper, with his burning desire to convert growing stronger with every passing day.

Time moved on and with the help of some roving emissaries, George was able to organize a minyan for Yom Kippur. Claude turned up in the morning wearing a tallit and clutching a machzor [Rosh Hashana-Yom Kippur prayerbook] with a French translation. He had been walking for over an hour, fasting, because he knew it was forbidden to ride on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

George explained to him that as he was not Jewish he was forbidden to observe Yom Kippur and moreover, to do so would incur punishment.

"I don't care," he answered, "I am prepared to die as a Jew, no matter what price I have to pay."

The following year shortly before Rosh Hashana, George told Claude that the time had come for him to leave Ghana. Foreseeing complications and problems that would arise were Claude to accompany him back to Israel, he waited until the last moment to announce his departure, hoping that would dash any irrational attempts on the part of Claude to join him.

Claude of course begged to go, so George consulted with his wife. "Of course you must bring him to Israel," she exclaimed.

He turned to Claude and said, "The flight is due to depart in six hours. If you can be ready by then, you are welcome to join me, but be aware that you will have to enter Israel on a tourist visa with all that it entails."

Claude ran home and told his wife that they were going to Israel right away. They packed as fast as they could and then dashed to the airport. Luckily by that time they had already acquired passports.

When he landed in Israel, Claude was in seventh heaven. He found a French speaking beit hamedrash [Torah-study hall] and studied Torah there from morning till night. On Yom Kippur he went to shul with George and stood for 25 hours fasting and reciting every word from his French machzor. After Sukkot, George took Claude to a Beit Din [rabbinical court] authorized to do conversions, where he expressed his wish to convert. It was denied.

"It's not for you," the judges told him. "It's enough for you to be a righteous gentile and keep the seven Noachide laws."

Claude was not discouraged and returned to the Beit Din a second time and again his request was refused. Determined as ever, he went back a third time and was refused yet again, this time with a strict warning never to reappear. Claude was not fazed in the slightest.

"Before I leave I would like to ask each one of you three judges to sign on and stamp a document that I, Claude, came to you on such and such a day requesting to convert to Judaism and you refused me."

"Why on earth would you want such a document," the judges asked.

Claude answered that Moshiach's arrival was imminent and when they met he would ask him: "Why did you not become Jewish? You knew the truth!"

"So I will tell him that the Beit Din turned me away, and I will produce this document to prove I am telling the truth."

Within a matter of seconds the three judges approved Claude's request for conversion.

After all the Halachic [Jewish law] requirements had been fulfilled (including his wife's conversion and a 3-month waiting period), Hannah and Eliezer stood under the chupah [marriage canopy] and became husband and wife "according to the law of Moshe and Israel."

*Reprinted from an email of Living Jewish.*



## Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Lech Lecha

Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	5:31	6:43
Tel Aviv	5:46	6:44
Haifa	5:37	6:43
Be'er Sheva	5:49	6:45

### The Chortkov Rebbe and His Chassid Reb Meir Shapiro

By Rabbi Yisrael Friedman



The Chortkov Rebbe and Rabbi Meir Shapiro

The job of a Tzaddik is to elevate the neshamot (souls) of Jews and bring them ever closer to their Father in Heaven. This role is well illustrated by the following story which was recorded by R' Tzvi Hirshorn Hy"ד (Rav of Yebrozna in Galicia).

It was Shabbat Mevarchim (the Shabbat before the start of a Jewish new month) in the vast shul of the holy Rebbe, R' Yisrael Friedman zt"l of Chortkov. R' Meir Shapiro zt"l, who was then a young man and Rav in the town of Sonik, had come to spend Shabbat in the company of his Rebbe.

After the reading of the Torah ended, the door of the Chortkov Rebbe's private room suddenly opened and there on the threshold stood his radiant form. "I honor R' Meir Shapiro with Rosh Chodesh bentching (blessing the new month) and the Mussaf prayer," the Rebbe declared.

In Chortkov it was a very rare event for the Rebbe himself to honor anyone with praying before the congregation. Normally this was left totally to the gabbai (sexton)'s discretion. R' Meir, however, was known not only to be a brilliant talmid chacham (scholar), but also a genius of the emotion and the heart. His fiery prayers captivated the hearts of all who heard them and his prayers softened even someone who had a heart of stone.

And so with his beautiful and melodious voice R' Meir walked up to the pulpit. He prayed the Mussaf prayer with such emotion that the thousands of listeners were completely caught up with his devotion. After prayers, the Rebbe invited R' Meir into his room, where he remained for some time. When he emerged, R' Meir's face was radiant with joy.

Later on, while eating the Shabbat meal together with the other chassidim, R' Meir related a small snippet from his conversation with the Rebbe. The Rebbe had revealed to him what his mission in this world was to be. Since the Rebbe had mentioned R' Meir's gift for davening, and his ability to inspire others, R' Meir had asked him, "If my power of prayer is so great, perhaps I should become a regular cantor?"

The Rebbe pondered his chassid's question and after a few moments of silence, he answered. "I would like to tell you a story about the Rebbe,

R' Zishe of Annipoli zt"l. R' Zishe was once on his travels, going from town to town. Eventually he reached the town of Zalkova where he made his way to the local shul.

The Rav of the town, who was known as R' Yuzpah, was delivering a complicated shiur at the time, and thus no one took any notice of R' Zishe as he took a place at the back of the shul. Although R' Zishe was dressed in worn-out clothes and had the appearance of a beggar, R' Yuzpah sensed that there was more to him than met the eye.

"What is it about you that is so special?" R' Yuzpah asked him after the shiur concluded.

"I have no special traits," R' Zishe answered. "I hardly know how to learn. The only thing I know is to daven a little bit."

"R' Yuzpah wasn't satisfied with the answer. Which Yid does not know how to pray? Perhaps R' Zishe could show him what he meant that he knows how to daven a little bit. The two of them entered a side room and R' Zishe started to instruct his host in the secrets of prayer and the Kabbalistic ideas contained in every word, until R' Yuzpah could not contain his amazement. 'You are indeed, a very special person. I can see that I do not yet know how to daven properly,' R' Yuzpah exclaimed. 'Perhaps I should leave my post and follow you, so that I should at least learn how to daven properly?'"

"R' Zishe, however, refused to allow R' Yuzpah to leave his post. He told him, 'Chazal (the sages) have told us that just like no two people look the same, similarly no two people have the same inner mind and attitude. Accordingly, every person has been given a different task to perform in this world, one to which only he is suited according to the way he has been created. Your job is to sit and learn and give classes and my job is to pray.' The Zalkova Rov accepted this decision."

The Chortkov Rebbe finished his story and, turning to R' Meir Shapiro, he said, "You have the gifts and potential to become a great Torah disseminator in the world. You have the ability to establish yeshivot and produce fine students. This must be your goal! As for praying and inspiring Jews to greater kavanot, that you can leave to me, that is my job."

"With these words," R' Meir concluded, "the Rebbe directed me on my life's mission. He showed me that I had been appointed to educate the younger generation and to spread the Torah far and wide."

Reprinted from *Rebbses of Chortkov*, Artscroll publications.

This week's Parsha starts off with Hashem telling Avraham, Get up and go, for your good .....

Hashem is talking to us in a most special and unique way He is telling us it is time to grow up and move on. One of the biggest questions in the Torah is that the Torah calls the Spies "אנשים גדולים - great people," yet they came back from Eretz Yisrael talking Lashon Harah about the most awesome place on earth, Eretz Yisrael. How did that happen? Some of the commentators say it is because they saw the inhabitants working the land in order to eat and they knew Moshe Rabeinu would be niftar once they entered, so they said, we would rather stay in the midbar with the Manna and Moshe Rabeinu teaching us Torah. But that was their mistake: Hashem said it was time to move on. Hashem is telling us go, and move on, and don't try to go against Him.

You ask "Where should I move on?"

The Mesilat Yesharim says in the very beginning of the introduction, "יסוד החסידות ושורש העבודה התמימה הוא - שיתברר ויתאמת אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו - The foundation of kindness and the root of all one's work should be to focus on and make clear what is our purpose in this world."

Now is the time, after Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, we have to start making decisions and figuring out what Hashem wants from us. We all have many talents, special things that make us unique. Let us, with the encouragement of our family, teachers, friends and people around us, use our own strengths to figure this out, how to become the greatest people we can be.

We might ask, "Well what I want to accomplish seems so far! How will I ever get there?" The Mishna in Avot tells us, "לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין להיבטל - It is not your job to accomplish your goal, however you can never stop striving to achieve it."

Let us take this path and listen to the words Lech Lecha and go on for ourselves. Realize that ultimately, the only one who gains - and G-d forbid loses - from our actions is ourselves, so do for yourself. Strive for great things, and we have yet to see what we can all become. Let us surprise each other and our families, teachers and friends and exceed our wildest expectations 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 Shabbat.

Yossi

### The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 1  
MITZVOT ASEH: 1  
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 0

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 126  
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1686  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6336

HAFTORA:  
Yeshayahu 40:27 - 41:16

תורת  
לך לך

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ר' יוסף בן ר' אורי ז"ל פרנקל  
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ר' שלמה בן ר' נפתלי ז"ל קרליבך  
Reb Shlomo Carlebach obm  
Whose Yahrzeits are

ט"ז חשוון