

# The Jewish Weekly

## Did G-d Ride The Brooklyn Subway

By Paul Deutschman

Marcel Sternberger was a methodical man of nearly 50, with bushy white hair, guileless brown eyes, and the bouncing enthusiasm of a czardas dancer of his native Hungary. He always took the 9:09 Long Island Railroad train from his suburban home to Woodside, N.Y., where he caught a subway into the city.

On the morning of January 10, 1948, Sternberger boarded the 9:09 as usual. En route, he suddenly decided to visit Laszlo Victor, a Hungarian friend who lived in Brooklyn and was ill.

Accordingly, at Ozone Park, Sternberger changed to the subway for Brooklyn, went to his friend's house, and stayed until mid afternoon. He then boarded a Manhattan-bound subway for his Fifth Avenue office. Here is Marcel's incredible story:

The car was crowded, and there seemed to be no chance of a seat. But just as I entered, a man sitting by the door suddenly jumped up to leave, and I slipped into the empty place. I've been living in New York long enough not to start conversations with strangers. But being a photographer, I have the peculiar habit of analyzing people's faces, and I was struck by the features of the passenger on my left. He was probably in his late 30s, and when he glanced up, his eyes seemed to have a hurt expression in them. He was reading a Hungarian-language newspaper, and something prompted me to say in Hungarian, "I hope you don't mind if I glance at your paper."

The man seemed surprised to be addressed in his native language. But he answered politely, "You may read it now. I'll have time later on."

During the half-hour ride to town, we had quite a conversation. He said his name was Bela Paskin. A law student when World War II started, he had been put into a German labor battalion and sent to the Ukraine. Later he was captured by the Russians and put to work burying the German dead. After the war, he covered hundreds of miles on foot until he reached his home in Debrecen, a large city in eastern Hungary.

I myself knew Debrecen quite well, and we talked about it for a while. Then he told me the rest of his story. When he went to the apartment once occupied by his father, mother, brothers and sisters, he found strangers living there. Then he went upstairs to the apartment that he and his wife once had. It also was occupied by strangers. None of them had ever heard of his family.

As he was leaving, full of sadness, a boy ran after him, calling "Paskin bacsi! Paskin bacsi!" That means "Uncle Paskin." The child was the son of some old neighbors of his. He went to the boy's home and talked to his parents. "Your

whole family is dead," they told him. "The Nazis took them and your wife to Auschwitz."

Auschwitz was one of the worst Nazi concentration camps. Paskin gave up all hope. A few days later, too heartsick to remain any longer in Hungary, he set out again on foot, stealing across border after border until he reached Paris. He managed to immigrate to the United States in October 1947, just three months before I met him.

All the time he had been talking, I kept thinking that somehow his story seemed familiar. A young woman whom I had met recently at the home of friends had also been from Debrecen; she had been sent to Auschwitz; from there she had been transferred to work in a German munitions factory. Her relatives had been killed in the gas chambers. Later she was liberated by the Americans and was brought here in the first boatload of displaced persons in 1946.

Her story had moved me so much that I had written down her address and phone number, intending to invite her to meet my family and thus help relieve the terrible emptiness in her life.

It seemed impossible that there could be any connection between these two people, but as I neared my station, I fumbled anxiously in my address book. I asked in what I hoped was a casual voice, "Was your wife's name Marya?"

He turned pale. "Yes!" he answered. "How did you know?"

He looked as if he were about to faint.

I said, "Let's get off the train." I took him by the arm at the next station and led him to a phone booth. He stood there like a man in a trance while I dialed her phone number.

It seemed hours before Marya Paskin answered. (Later I learned her room was alongside the telephone, but she was in the habit of never answering it because she had so few friends and the calls were always for someone else. This time, however, there was no one else at home and, after letting it ring for a while, she responded.)

When I heard her voice at last, I told her who I was and asked her to describe her husband. She seemed surprised at the question but gave me a description. Then I asked her where she had lived in Debrecen, and she told me the address.

Asking her to hold the line, I turned to Paskin and said, "Did you and your wife live on such-and-such a street?"

"Yes!" Bela exclaimed. He was white as a sheet and trembling.

"Try to be calm," I urged him. "Something miraculous is about to happen to you. Here, take this telephone and talk to your wife!"

He nodded his head in mute bewilderment, his eyes bright with tears. He took the receiver, listened a

## It Once Happened...

moment to his wife's voice, then suddenly cried, "This is Bela! This is Bela!" and he began to mumble hysterically. Seeing that the poor fellow was so excited he couldn't talk coherently, I took the receiver from his shaking hands.

"Stay where you are," I told Marya, who also sounded hysterical. "I am sending your husband to you. We will be there in a few minutes."

Bela was crying like a baby and saying over and over again. "It is my wife. I go to my wife!"

At first I thought I had better accompany Paskin, lest the man should faint from excitement, but I decided that this was a moment in which no strangers should intrude. Putting Paskin into a taxicab, I directed the driver to take him to Marya's address, paid the fare, and said goodbye.

Bela Paskin's reunion with his wife was a moment so poignant, so electric with suddenly released emotion, that afterward neither he nor Marya could recall much about it.

"I remember only that when I left the phone, I walked to the mirror like in a dream to see if maybe my hair had turned gray," she said later. "The next thing I know, a taxi stops in front of the house, and it is my husband who comes toward me. Details I cannot remember; only this I know—that I was happy for the first time in many years...."


"Even now it is difficult to believe that it happened. We have both suffered so much; I have almost lost the capability to not be afraid. Each time my husband goes from the house, I say to myself, "Will anything happen to take him from me again?"

Her husband is confident that no horrible misfortune will ever again befall them. "Providence has brought us together," he says simply. "It was meant to be."

Skeptical persons will no doubt attribute the events of that memorable afternoon to mere chance. But was it chance that made Marcel Sternberger suddenly decide to visit his sick friend and hence take a subway line that he had never ridden before? Was it chance that caused the man sitting by the door of the car to rush out just as Sternberger came in? Was it chance that caused Bela Paskin to be sitting beside Sternberger, reading a Hungarian newspaper?

Was it chance—or did G-d ride the Brooklyn subway that afternoon?

Reprinted from "Everything is possible" Facebook post.



**YE GRAPHICS**

Shabbat Times – Parshat Vayechi

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:02	5:18	5:56
Tel Aviv	4:16	5:19	
Haifa	4:06	5:17	
Be'er Sheva	4:21	5:21	



## "Growing a Spiritual Present"

By Rabbi Yaakov Cass

Rabbi Abraham Gluck of blessed memory was a successful English businessman. In the early 1970's, he met the Lubavitcher Rebbe for the first time. The Rebbe said to him, "You manufacture light bulbs, correct? Well a person in the lighting business knows that a bulb must be lit. Every Jew is like a light bulb, and we should help him glow. So everywhere you happen to be, you must ignite and illuminate Jewish souls."

In a short space of time Rabbi Gluck became the emissary of the Rebbe in Europe. He was the Rebbe's "shadar," - Shliach D'Rabbanim ("emissary of rabbinical leaders") - a venerable title, in Chabad bestowed upon select individuals who travelled the world at the Rebbe's behest, promoting Torah education and observance. A mission in which Rabbi Glick was famously successful.

Rabbi Gluck was accustomed to travel to 770 on Yud-Aleph (11th of the Jewish month of) Nissan for the Rebbe's birthday and each year he would deliberate as to what birthday present he could give the Rebbe. Clearly it had to be something spiritual that would bring the Rebbe joy. One time, before he was due to fly, he decided that this year's birthday present would be to stop shaving and grow a full, untrimmed beard.

This was not a simple resolution in those days, given that it was quite unusual then for even orthodox Jews in the UK to grow a beard; for a number of reasons. One is that the vast majority of men in England were clean-shaven. Bearded men were easily identified as Jewish and open to anti-Semitic abuse.

The week before his flight to New York, and now sporting a fully-grown beard, his business took him to Leicester, a town in The Midlands. Arriving at the outskirts of the town, he saw to his dismay that the roads had been closed by the police and he was unable to proceed in any direction. "No doubt this is Divine Providence, so I will get out and see what is happening," he thought.

He soon discovered that a new shopping mall was opening very close to where he was parked. Shopping malls were still a great novelty in the

UK having only been recently imported from the United States. So much so, that none other than the Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth II, and her husband, Prince Philip, were opening this new mall.

Joining the large and excited crowd, he decided to take this special opportunity to get a glimpse of the royal couple when they came out of the mall. Somehow or other he managed to find himself at the very front of the barriers which were to separate the public from the Queen and the Prince Consort on their upcoming 'walkabout.'

After the ceremonies inside the mall were over, the royal couple came out to the cheering crowd. Those at the front strained forward to try to greet them. Prince Philip scanned the crowd and his eyes fell on Rabbi Gluck. Before his protectors could stop him, he walked straight over to him and struck up a conversation.

"That's a magnificent beard you've got. Were you in the navy?" Prince Philip had been a senior commander in the British navy for many years even after his marriage to the Queen, and explained that he was wondering if he was talking to a comrade-in-arms. Sailors who were out at sea for a long time under difficult physical conditions were accustomed to grow beards. Thus, a beard was considered a 'naval thing'.

Rabbi Gluck explained that no, he was not a sailor, but rather an orthodox Jew and growing a beard was part of his religious observances. The prince expressed his admiration for a man who adhered to his religion with such obvious happiness. Then followed a very friendly and lively discussion between the two men.

The conversation continued for quite some time, much to the annoyance of those people whose job it was to get the prince to his next engagement on time. He finally walked away, smiling.

A few days later Rabbi Gluck flew to the Rebbe. Arriving at 770 he knocked on the door of the Rebbe's office without the intervention of the Rebbe's secretaries, as he was allowed to do, in order to give the Rebbe reports of all the activities that he had been busy with since his last visit.

The Rebbe looked up and upon seeing Rabbi Gluck broke out into a broad welcoming smile. The Rebbe put his hand up to his own beard and gently moved it around his face. "Thank you for such a beautiful birthday present," he said.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.



The Torah begins this week's Parsha by telling us that "Yaakov lived". Yaakov Avinu, when we look through the last few Parshiot, did not by any means have an easy life. From his birth, to constant battle with Eisav, including when Elifaz stole everything he had on his way to Lavan. He was by Lavan, not the most easy going father in law, for many years, then had to fight off the angel of Eisav before facing the physical Eisav. His daughter got raped by the local prince as they passed through a village, Yosef disappeared for 22 years, and because of a famine he went to live out the rest of his life in Egypt. There is no one who would call this an easy life on any standard. Yet Yaakov lived and he never gave up on life, he lived every day to the fullest.

There are those who define success by how much money you have in the bank, and they make that the value of their life, at any cost. People like that will leave wife and kids for days at a time, and their families certainly suffers from that lack of attention. They leave their houses early in the morning and don't come back until late at night. Some people call that a life, but is there any real value to such a life? You would think that once they have enough money, they would be smart enough to stop and enjoy the real things in life like their families and their friends. Not only don't they, they tell others "You want to be successful like me? "Divorce your wife, disown your kids, and focus only on the job and you will start becoming a millionaire." They call that 'life' but is it?

Friends, we all have hardships - each in his own life. Some people have financial issues, so they run to slave their lives away to try to make a buck and their families suffer, as we wrote in the previous paragraph. Others have money but have health issues in the family. As they say, if all people packaged their own positives and negatives, and we put all the packages into the middle of a room to be chosen, we would all run and take our own back, because once we see what other people go through we realize that what we have in life is exactly what we need, designed by our dear Father in Heaven who loves us very much and wrote a screenplay just for us. "בשריילי נברא העולם" and the minute we accept that, we need to take that life, think about Yaakov Avinu and live our lives to their fullest and enjoy all the great things we have. R' Noach Weinberg Z"l said "If you don't know what you are worth dying for, you have not begun living yet."

Friends, may we all see the value and what is important in our lives and LIVE our LIVES like never before and let's pray for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace 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

**ויחי** תורת

This week has been sponsored by Shmuel and Dina Halpern In memory of his father ר' שמעון צבי בן הרב דוד ז"ל Whose Yahrzeit was י"ג טבת

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The Jewish Weekly's **PARSHA FACTS**

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 85  
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1158  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4448

HAFTORA:  
Melachim I 2:1 - 12