

The Jewish Weekly

The Helpful Thief

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

It was early morning when the police knocked on his door. In front of the stunned faces of his family the officers arrested him and put him in handcuffs. Before he could open his mouth he was taken to the police station, where he soon found himself in a holding cell, already occupied by criminals.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok/Vitebsk, one of the greatest students of the Maggid of Mezritch, had not the slightest idea what crime he could have committed that caused the authorities to arrest him as a lowly criminal. Yet, he was extensively interrogated and accused of serious misconduct.

Slowly the situation was clarified somewhat: someone had invented a false accusation against him and made him out to be a powerful criminal. Rabbi Menachem Mendel tried to convince the interrogators of their mistake. He told them that all the accusations directed at him were nothing more than slander and lies, that there was no connection between them and reality.

His explanations fell on deaf ears. The interrogators wouldn't budge from their position and pressured him to admit to the grave accusations. When he refused he was thrown back into the crowded cell.

There, on the hard board, surrounded by coarse thugs, Rabbi Menachem Mendel considered his situation. He withdrew within himself and began a self-examination to try and discover the spiritual reason that would explain why he had been thrust in this untenable situation.

When it was time for prayer he went to a corner, faced the wall, closed his eyes and concentrated deeply on his prayer, ignoring the noise around him and immersing himself in the words, in which he found support and consolation.

Turning around after finishing his prayers he noticed one of the other prisoners watching him attentively. At first he ignored the man, but the next time he prayed he noticed that the other man again watched him carefully. The prisoner didn't take his eyes of him, from the beginning of his prayer till the end.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel studied the man who looked like any other gentile just like all the rest of the prisoners. Soon after, the man approached him, offering him help and concerning himself with Rabbi Menachem Mendel's well-being and comfort. It was obvious that he was going out of his way to be of service to the holy-looking Jew.

Also in the following days the prisoner sought Rabbi Menachem Mendel's company. He humbly did his utmost to be of service to Rabbi Menachem Mendel. The latter decided to find out more about this helpful prisoner.

It became clear that the man had been waiting for this. With tears running down his cheeks he began to tell his life story, interrupted again and again by sobs.

He was a Jew and his name was Nachum. Life's hardships dragged him down to crime. He sunk lower and lower till he became a burglar. He would break into houses at night and steal everything he could lay his hands on. For a long time he lived this way, always afraid and every night taking great risks.

And then one day he was caught and thrown into jail. None of his Jewish brothers came to his assistance. Quite the opposite, those Jews who knew who he was, were secretly glad that they finally got rid of the damage he caused them. So Nachum found himself alone and deserted in his distress.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel listened with great attention to his story.

"All of a sudden you arrived, standing there, praying", continued Nachum, "the sight of which touched my heart and started to melt the indifference to my Jewishness that has surrounded me for so many years. For the first time in my life I felt true regret for my evil behavior. Please, help me find a way of teshuva (return) and atone for my sins."

At that moment a thought crossed Rabbi Menachem Mendel's mind: here, in front of him, was the reason why he was incarcerated for a crime he had not committed. A Jewish man, whose soul is crying out in misery for help, and hoping to be rescued from the pit in which he is trapped.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel decided to dedicate himself entirely to help Nachum. He started teaching him Torah and Fear of Heaven, and guiding him how to repent and to reject his bad tendencies and to attain a correct way of living.

Nachum proved to be a serious and devoted student. He accepted upon himself all the instruction Rabbi Menachem Mendel gave him. He stopped eating non-kosher food, put on tefilin every morning and his awe of G-d increased daily until he succeeded in transforming himself to be a genuine observant Jew.

"You should know," said his special personal Rabbi, "that we are still at the beginning of the way. Now G-d will help; we will be released from imprisonment, and then we will travel together to the Rebbe, the Maggid of Mezritch, and he will show you a complete way of return."

While he was still talking to Nachum, the commander of the jail entered to inform Rabbi Menachem Mendel that he is released. The accusations against him were investigated and proved to be groundless. The interrogators came to the decision that he was innocent.

To the amazement of the officer the prisoner said with finality: "I am not leaving here unless my friend Nachum is released as well!"

The commander thought that he hadn't heard correctly. Never had he come across or even heard of a prisoner who refused to be released! Looking at Nachum he said: "This prisoner hasn't completed his sentence; he cannot be released."

Rabbi Menachem Mendel did not give in. He demanded to speak to the regional judge. When that was arranged, the rabbi promised him that he would take Nachum under his supervision and see to it that he will not steal any more or harm anyone.

The judge was impressed by Rabbi Menachem Mendel's personality and gave instructions to release Nachum immediately.

When they arrived at the house of the Maggid of Mezritch, even before they entered, the Maggid said to those surrounding him: "For this soul I have waited." Indeed, Nachum changed his way of life entirely and became a faithful student of the Maggid.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk/Horodok ז"ל's 234th Yahrzeit was Monday, 1st Iyar – May 2nd of this year

It Once Happened...

Gracefully Saved

By Rabbi Yechiel Spero

All the packages are prepared and distributed with an incredible amount of sensitivity and understanding. The organizers and volunteers try to maintain a low profile to ensure that those receiving the packages have no idea who brought them. These programs - the "Tomchei Shabbat" or "Mattan Beseter" or "Ahavat Yisrael" organizations - are often the crowning glory of the cities in which they operate. The following story depicts what these groups and their volunteers are all about.

Eliezer Gruchkind, a successful businessman, had his hands full. Not only did he run a successful, full-time diamond business, but he also ran the local Tomchai Shabbat near his home - which also turned out to be a full-time affair. Balancing the two was quite a grueling task, but Eliezer managed to do so with professionalism and integrity.

He made sure to attend every meeting of the organization and to be present when the food packages were distributed. Most of the people in need were from families he did not know. On the rare occasion when he found out that someone he knew was coming to pick up his package of food, he made it a point to keep out of sight and allow the individual his privacy.

Once, as Eliezer was entering the shul to help prepare the packages, he noticed out of the corner of his eye that his next-door neighbor was coming to pick up a package. Eliezer was shocked. His neighbor was a successful businessman who couldn't possibly have been in need of handouts - or was he?

Eliezer's immediate need was to somehow prevent his neighbor from seeing him; he wanted to spare the man any embarrassment. And he had only seconds to figure out how to get out of the way.

Eliezer was fumbling with his keys and realized that he was not going to have enough time to hide himself before his neighbor would see him. The regulars at Tomchai Shabbat knew Eliezer's schedule, and knew not to arrive when he was coming to prepare the food, to insure their privacy. But this man was a first-timer, and didn't know the ground rules yet.

Suddenly Eliezer had an idea; he began to bang loudly on the door, demanding that someone inside open up. As people began to arrive to pick up their packages, they noticed him...and so did his neighbor, who quickly walked around the building to avoid running into him. As soon as Eliezer saw his neighbor walk away, he pretended to mutter and rant to himself, acting like someone who had come for his own package.

Anything to save a fellow Jew from embarrassment.

Reprinted from an email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Emor

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	6:47	8:03	8:41
Tel Aviv	7:02	8:06	
Haifa	6:55	8:06	
Be'er Sheva	7:04	8:04	



A Child's Remedy

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

When the Rebbe Shmuel of Lubavitch was a young child he was unusually serious, but often a bit mischievous. One day, when he was just six or seven years old and searching for a quiet place to sit and learn Torah, he decided to try the women's section of the Shul. He was right. In the middle of the week the second floor of the Synagogue was empty and a perfect place for study.

He had been sitting and studying for a few hours when suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of the side door opening followed by the sobs of a woman. He silently walked to the front of the balcony and peeked down to the main floor. There he saw a woman standing before the Holy Ark, weeping uncontrollably.

"G-d, please help me!" she moaned. "I'm alone! I've tried to work; I've tried everything. But the house is bare and my children are starving! My husband is dead, all I have is You. Please answer my prayers, G-d!"

Her body shook with heart-rending sobs. Little Shmuel felt he had to do something. She was disturbing his learning and besides, he couldn't stand to see suffering. He ducked down behind the low wall and said in the lowest voice he could conjure. "Lady! Lady! Do not worry!"

The high ceiling of the empty Shul created a sort of heavenly echo that made it seem as though his voice was coming from everywhere. The woman fell to her knees, looked up at the ceiling, raised her hands towards heaven and sighed "Oh! Oh! Thank you, Lord!"

When he saw it was working he continued, "Do not cry! You will have money. I am giving you the power to heal! When someone is sick, just take a glass of water, make the "Sheh'ha'kol" blessing (the standard blessing of acknowledgement before drinking water), drink a bit, pour a bit for the sick person, and then bless them. People will pay you much money and you will never be needy again!"

Then the boy paused dramatically for a moment and said, "But remember! Never tell anyone how you got this power."

"Oh, I won't. I promise!" She innocently replied. "Thank you, Lord. Thank you! I won't tell a soul. Oh, this is wonderful!"

She stood and backed out of the Shul while drying her eyes, certain that an angel had spoken to her, and returned home.

The next morning she got to work spreading the word that she could heal, and that very day someone brought their sick father to be cured. She felt a bit strange but she did as the voice had told her the day

before and amazingly, it worked. The man actually felt better!

The news spread like a forest fire and in no time people were lined up at her door. She transformed from a pauper to a fairly wealthy woman in just a few weeks.

The years passed. About 25 years later the child, Shmuel, became the Rebbe "Maharash" of Chabad, renowned throughout Russia for his genius and his holiness. Thousands flocked to his center in Lubavitch to obtain his blessings and his advice. Then, one cold winter he became dangerously ill.

He had caught a cold, but what began as a simple sore throat developed into a large festering boil deep in his throat that was threatening his life. The doctors, afraid to cut because of its delicate location, tried various treatments, but they all failed and things were deteriorating rapidly; the Rebbe developed a high fever and it appeared there was no alternative but to operate.

Then someone suggested that maybe, as a last resort, they should try Bubba (Grandma) Sarah. It seems there was this old Jewish lady in Vitebsk that had some charm for healing people and because there was no other choice she was brought, trembling with awe at the thought that she was actually in the same room with the holy Lubavitcher Rebbe, to heal him. The Rebbe was lying on his back, his head propped up by a large pillow breathing with great difficulty and in obvious pain.

But before she could even begin he asked, "First you must tell me what the source of your power to heal is."

"Oh, Rebbe!" moaned the old woman. "Please don't ask me to do that. I promised that I wouldn't tell. Please Rebbe!"

But the Rebbe insisted. "I promise that nothing will happen to you or your remedy. "After all, G-d also tells me things that are secret, so He won't mind if I know your secret too. In any case, I cannot take your treatment until you tell me."

How could she deny the holy Rebbe? She told him the entire story of how 25 years ago a heavenly voice spoke to her in the shul.

Suddenly the Rebbe realized that it was he himself that had given her the blessing and he began to laugh. It was painful because of the boil, but the more he thought about it the harder he laughed, he simply couldn't stop himself. His family, hearing the noise from where they were in the next room, thought the Rebbe was having some sort of attack and rushed into the room after sending for the doctor.

The doctor arrived just in time to see that the Rebbe's exuberant laughter had split the boil open and now all that remained was to clean the wound. In just days the Rebbe was back on his feet, a completely healthy man!

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



Where do we have a mitzvah to count?

In Parshat Emor the Torah tells us, "וספרתם לכם - Count for yourselves," meaning that from the second day of Pesach until the festival of Shavuot we must count forty-nine days. Why do we have such an imperative within the 613 mitzvot of the Torah?

Number our days

I believe that we can provide an answer from Tehillim which states, "למנות ימינו כן הודע - Teach us, Hashem, to number our days," indicating that when we look at our lives we shouldn't consider ourselves to be a certain number of years old but rather, a certain number of days old.

This was certainly the outlook of the founder of our faith, Avraham Avinu. In Parshat Chayei Sara, the Torah tells us, "ואברהם זקן בא בימים" - Avraham was old, having lived for many days."

It was in a similar fashion that Pharaoh noticed that this was the key characteristic of Yaakov Avinu, and so Pharaoh said to him, "כמה ימי שני הייך? - How many are the days of the years of your life?"

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov utilized every single day advantageously. How can we make the most of every single moment? The answer comes in the continuation of the verse of Tehillim, "למנות ימינו כן הודע - Teach us to number our days," "ונביא לבב חכמה" - in order that we should become wise-hearted."

In all other languages either you are wise with your mind or compassionate with your heart, but in our tradition we strive to become wise hearted, fusing together the finest capacities of thought and compassion so that we can believe with feeling, and become a blessing to the world.

That is what the tefillin represent. We have a 'tefillin shel rosh' on top of our heads and a 'tefillin shel yad' on our arm, which faces the heart.

During this period of the Omer we recall what the Talmud tells us about the students of Rabbi Akiva who were brilliant in their minds and yet not sufficiently compassionate in their hearts. That is why we mourn throughout this period. Therefore Hashem gives us a mitzvah to count days in order to make the most of every single one, so that we should become wise-hearted and a blessing to our environment, teaching us that if we count our days, we can make our days count.

So let us make our days count by joining in prayer for those suffering from the current situation in Eastern Europe, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, 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.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 63
MITZVOT ASEH: 24
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 39

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 124
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1614
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6106

HAFTORA:
Yechezkel 44:15 - 31

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 3 of Pirkei Avot (outside Israel one studies Chapter 2).

אמור
קדושים

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