

The Jewish Weekly

Finding G-d in Thailand

By Rabbi Chaim Mentz

Two years ago a young Israeli in his early twenties entered Rabbi Wilhelm's Chabad House and stood before the massive bookcase filled with Torah books with a bewildered look on his face. Rabbi Wilhelm asked him if he needed help and he replied that he was looking for a book on Judaism.

When the Rabbi suggested that perhaps they learn something on the book of Bereshis (Genesis) the fellow asked if that was a Jewish book and when he heard it was, agreed to sit and learn.

The young man (we will call him Erez) grew up on an atheistic Israeli Kibbutz where the Jewish religion was branded as no more than a crutch for the crippled. So it was no wonder that he knew virtually nothing about Judaism.

Erez told the Rabbi that a few months ago he and his girlfriend, from another Kibbutz, decided to ditch Israel for a few months (at least) and set off for an unforgettable tour of the Far East together like tens of thousands of other Israelis.

They traveled from one exotic country to another, met the people, ate the food, camped out in jungles, climbed mountains ... but were careful to call home regularly to let their family know they were still alive.

Several months into their journey, in one of his calls home, Erez's parents made an interesting proposition. His sister was coming to visit them from Canada for two weeks. They suggested that they would pay his round trip, and they would love to have him for a family reunion.

He talked it over with his girlfriend, she agreed and a day later he was back in Israel with his family. There was a wonderful warm feeling of love and unity that he never felt before. They ate together, spoke, sang, laughed, reminisced and took walks together every day and after two weeks his sister flew back to Canada, he kissed his parents good bye and returned to his girlfriend in Thailand.

When his plane landed he called to tell his parents that he arrived safely but his mother, fighting back the tears gave him some terrible news. Just minutes after his plane took off his father suffered a heart attack and passed away. The burial was to take place in a few moments. Erez was stunned.

Not being religious he didn't even consider a period of mourning but it was a shock to his entire being; especially the wonderful irony of the family reunion.

Its coinciding exactly with the last two weeks of his father's life could not have been an accident; some infinitely kind, omniscient and unfathomable power or being was involved here.

Could that be 'G-d'?

But every time he brought it up to his girlfriend she just fell silent; she wanted to just enjoy the trip and concentrate on happy, non-religious things.

And that's what Erez did. The weeks passed, the trip went on and they were enjoying every moment of it together. But once in a while, sometimes in

the middle of the afternoon as they were walking in the street, sometimes before he went to sleep, the mystery of it all suddenly welled up in his heart like a mysterious ocean until he took his mind off it.

Then his girlfriend came up with a fantastic idea; she heard of a very special yoga master in India who was beginning an unforgettable ten-day silence and meditation seminar and she wanted that they should go.

But for the first time Erez disagreed. How could it be that she didn't want to speak about Jewish things but she did want to go to an ashram? He respected her desire for the seminar, but he wanted something different.

So they talked it over and decided that they wouldn't be able to be together in the meditation seminar. They would part ways for ten days and he would go to learn about Judaism.

In fact, he didn't really have much of a plan but he had been briefly in the Chabad House in Bangkok (his girlfriend stood outside and didn't even want to enter while he looked around) which was the only religious Jewish place he had been to in his life and figured that maybe they would teach him.

Rabbi Wilhelm was more than happy to arrange a full day of teachers for Erez and even take time every day to personally teach him. But when he suggested that he should first of all put on Tefillin for a minute or so, Erez flatly refused; he hated religion, he came only to learn.

But at learning he was fantastic. He took to the books like a fish to water. He asked tens of questions on each detail and enjoyed the answers but at every opportunity he was careful to declare that it would never bring him to change his lifestyle.

Then, two days later, he suddenly approached Rabbi Wilhelm and said he wanted to put on Tefillin. Rabbi Wilhelm didn't ask questions. Before Erez could change his mind he took out his Tefillin as quickly as possible and showed Erez how to put them on for the first time in his life.

"You're probably wondering why I suddenly changed my mind and put on Tefillin." Erez asked when he finished. Rabbi Wilhelm nodded 'yes'.

"Well, last night when I called home and told my mother that I decided to learn in the Chabad House she began to cry. She said that she would never have even thought of telling me, but now that I mention Chabad, she has a secret about my father to reveal.

She told me that over fifty years ago, Chabad helped him to get out of Russia and he got to know them. He didn't like religion, not at all. But the Chabad people made a good impression and, well, he used to put on Tefillin every day.

"He didn't want anyone to know. Especially the people in the Kibbutz, so he used to put them on in the bathroom where no one would see. But he did it every single morning till the day he died. He was proud to be a Jew. And that is why I decided to put on today."

After her seminar Erez's girlfriend returned to Bangkok to resume their trip but she was in for a surprise; Erez wanted one more week and he wanted her to join him!

It Once Happened...

It wasn't an ultimatum. He made it clear that he would do what she decided. So they talked it over. She agreed to the week but there was no way she would even set foot in the Chabad House. But on the other hand she knew that Erez was no fool. He was a clever young man, and had been as big an atheist as herself, maybe bigger. She didn't want to be closed minded.

So they came to an agreement; he could have one more week and she would participate from 'outside'. Every morning Erez would enter the Chabad House with a list of questions she had prepared the night before and after each class he would go outside, meet her, they would discuss the answers and he would enter with more questions.

The week ended, Erez announced that he was continuing his trip, said goodbye and Rabbi Wilhelm returned to the hundreds of visitors that pass through the Chabad House every day.

A year later Rabbi Wilhelm, was invited to speak at several institutions in Israel the last of which was the Yeshiva (Torah Academy) in Tzfat where four hundred-plus students learn.

As he entered the building and the Rabbis there greeted him and shook his hand, someone from behind him yelled "Hey, Rabbi!!" and as he turned to see who it was one of the bearded young men ran up, hugged him warmly, gave him a kiss on the cheek and stepped back saying "Don't you recognize me?"

Rabbi Wilhelm was baffled.

"It's me! It's Erez! Remember? A year ago? Remember? how my father passed away?"

The Rabbi could not believe his eyes. "Wow!" He exclaimed "Of course I remember! It's a miracle! But what about your girlfriend? What happened? How is she?"

"Listen Rabbi" Erez moved closer and spoke in a low voice, "You better watch out! There are a lot of people that I think are after your life! A lot!"

"My life?" he replied "Are you serious? Why? Who? What has that got to do with your girlfriend? Why are you smiling?"

"Who?" Erez answered "All the people in my kibbutz... and in my girlfriend's as well!! That's right, she is now learning around the corner in Machon Alte, the Chabad College for girls. And the people in our Kibbutzim are blazing mad! They're going out of their minds!"

A few months later Rabbi Wilhelm got an invitation to their wedding and just recently he heard they were hired by a Chabad House to do what the Rebbe sent him to do... wake up Jews.

Reprinted from an email of Shabbos Stories by Chabad of Bel Air.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Vayishlach

Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:00	5:15
Tel Aviv	4:14	5:17
Haifa	4:03	5:14
Be'er Sheva	4:18	5:19



Full and Empty Synagogues By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

The Baal Shem Tov gathered together a small group of his disciples and bid them to quickly get ready for a trip. The Baal Shem Tov's chasidim were quite used to short notice orders. They often traveled by coach with their Rebbe, usually leaving in the late evening and, at the break of dawn, miraculously finding themselves hundreds of miles away. But, wherever the place, whatever the time, they knew that eventually they would find out the reason for the mysterious trip.

The Baal Shem Tov and his students sat themselves in the coach and Alexi, the Baal Shem Tov's gentle faithful driver, sat outside. Within a few minutes, Alexi had fallen asleep and the coach picked up speed. Though without a driver, the horses knew exactly where to go as they sped across the land.

In the morning, the Baal Shem Tov and his students found themselves in a small Jewish village. The town was just beginning to wake up and the visitors quickly made their way to one of the little shuls. The Baal Shem Tov walked in quietly and motioned his chasidim to do the same.

Inside, the noise was nearly deafening. Of the thirty men gathered in the shul to say the morning prayers, most seemed to be conducting some type of business transaction. Even during the Torah reading, many of the men were talking and whispering to each other. Those who were praying were simultaneously gesturing to their friends or staring off into space in boredom.

The Baal Shem Tov left the synagogue, motioning for his chasidim to follow him. Once outside, he told them quietly and with the utmost seriousness, "The shul that we were just in is full of Jewish prayer."

Surprised and shocked, the chasidim waited for some type of explanation, but none followed. "What might the Baal Shem Tov have seen in other 'worlds' that they could not perceive, to allow him to make such a statement?" they wondered.

Quickly the Baal Shem Tov lead his followers to another small shul, not far from the first. Inside, they found another group of thirty or so men offering their morning prayers. But this shul was indeed different from the first.

Here, too, silence did not reign. But the sounds that one heard could not be categorized as noise. There was the sound of a sigh from one bemoaning the long exile, or the heart-breaking sob of one unburdening his troubled heart to his Maker. There, too, was the sound of joyous melody as the worshipers praised their Creator with ancient prayers.

The Baal Shem Tov once again led his disciples out of the shul. "This synagogue is empty of prayer," the Baal Shem Tov announced to his amazed chasidim.

The chasidim now waited patiently, certain that soon the Baal Shem Tov would reveal the meaning of his extraordinary statements. And so, he did.

"Whenever a Jew prays or performs a mitzva, an angel of sorts is created by the prayer or mitzva," the Baal Shem Tov explained. "When the prayers are said wholeheartedly, when the mitzvot are performed with sincere intention, the newly formed angels are whole and perfectly shaped. They can easily fly straight to the Heavens where they will act as advocates for the person and his family. They will also be there when it is time to welcome the one who brought about their formation and defend him against strict Judgment.

"But when prayers are said without concentration, and mitzvot are performed haphazardly or for the wrong reasons," continued the Baal Shem Tov, "the angels they create are 'crippled.' They cannot break through the gates of heaven. They cannot even fly to the heavens. They cannot argue the case for the person or his family now or in the Final Court. They remain here on earth."

The faces of the Baal Shem Tov's chasidim began to light up in understanding. "And so," concluded their Rebbe, "The first shul we went into was filled with, nebuch (a pity!), crippled angels of Jewish prayer. The worshippers there were not praying with any feeling or concentration and their prayers were stuck in the synagogue.

But the second shul we visited was different. There, the prayers, offered sincerely and wholeheartedly, were able to soar to the Heavens, through the gates, where they appealed to the Supreme Judge to heal and have mercy, to bless and protect. And there, the beautiful and sparkling angels will remain until such time as they need to welcome the person who formed them."

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.com.

Torah Compilations With Yossi Parshat Vayishlach

I have always been saddened by the fact that Holocaust victims have no 'מצבה' - Headstone. You can't visit a cemetery and see a tombstone over a grave for them as one does for all others. Yet I derive some חייוק, some support, from the beautiful teaching in Parshat Vayishlach. Here the Torah provides the details of the sad passing of Rachel. She was buried in בית להם, Beit Lechem, and one can visit her tomb to this very day. Indeed the Torah refers to the place of her burial by saying, "הוא מצבת קברת רחל עד היום" - This is the memorial to the burial place of Rachel to this very day."

Now some of our commentators ask about a redundant word here. The Torah could have said, "הוא מצבת רחל" - This is the memorial of Rachel." Why does it say, "הוא מצבת קברת רחל" - This is a memorial of the burial place of Rachel?"

The Sefer Chomat Aish explains beautifully. He cites the teaching of Chazal, our Sages, who say, "אין עושים נפשות אין עושים מצבות" - There is no need to make a memorial in stone, for outstanding people. Their words and their deeds, that is their everlasting memorial."

Indeed this is so very true, because the true impact, the legacy of such people continues to exist in people's hearts and in people's minds. In turn, they pass it on to the generations to come and that's how great people continue to live forever.

Now we can understand why the Torah does not say, "הוא מצבת רחל" - This is the memorial of Rachel." It is because Rachel has a far greater memorial than a memorial in stone. Rachel's legacy has endured within our hearts and our minds for all time and that's why the Torah says, "הוא מצבת קברת רחל."

The essence of that place is as a memorial in stone marking the place where she was buried, and that's the place which we can come to in order to pay our respects to her.

With regard to the six million precious Jewish souls who perished in the Holocaust, it is beyond words to explain. But in truth, they continue to live on through us. The torch of their Judaism and their good deeds are borne aloft by us with pride, guaranteeing that despite the efforts of our enemies to destroy us, עם ישראל חי - through our efforts and our faith, the people of Israel live on forever.

Despite the fact that there are no headstones for them, nonetheless, the victims of the Holocaust will remain alive within us for all time.

Let's join together, and have all the holocaust victims in mind while we pray for peace, and 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: 0
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 1

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 154
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1976
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 7458

HAFTORA:
Ovadiah 1:1-21

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