

The Jewish Weekly

The Rabbi's Motorcycle Accident

By Hershy Drukman

It's Friday afternoon in central Paris.

It's close to Shabbat, so I get on my motorcycle and head home.

I live in France, serving as a Chabad emissary in S.-Maur-des-Fossés, a small city south of Paris.

It's raining heavily, and the pavement is slippery. I slow down, adjusting my helmet.

Suddenly I notice a sports car entering the intersection. The driver hasn't noticed me approaching.

The situation is dangerous, and my heart races. What to do? Brake on wet pavement? I am in danger of rolling over. To continue? A collision is unavoidable.

I brake quickly. The motorcycle skids, and I fall to the ground. I am waiting for the approaching cars. Are these my last moments?

Silence. One car stops and blocks the road. I check myself for injuries. Thank G-d, I'm fine. I try to get out of the street.

A woman runs toward me. "Are you all right?" she asks in French. "Can I help you?"

"I think I'm all right," I answer, removing my helmet. She looks surprised - perhaps not expecting a bearded man. There are not many in Paris.

"Is everything all right?" she asks again, this time in Hebrew. Now I am taken aback.

She introduces herself as Madame Katia Dahaan. "I live nearby, and happened to be passing," she says. "I didn't expect to see a Jew, never mind a rabbi."

"And the Hebrew?" I ask.

"Oh, that's from trips to Israel years ago," she says.

Katia wants to talk, but I apologize and explain, "It's almost Shabbat, and I need to get home."

Katia is surprised to hear Shabbat is coming. Her reaction puzzles me. Almost 400,000 Jews live in that neighborhood, it's hard not to know today is Shabbat eve.

"Do you light Shabbat candles?" I ask.

Katia gives me another strange look. She mutters, "No, I don't."

"Can I invite you to our home for Shabbat?" I offer.

"Which Shabbat?" she asks with surprise.

"Tonight," I answer.

A smile emerges. "I don't think I can come tonight, but I will be happy to come another Shabbat," she says. We exchange phone numbers, and part.

Katia didn't come that evening, nor the next Shabbat. And I couldn't find her number, though I tried hard to locate her.

Four months pass. One morning I received a text message from an unfamiliar number.

Moments later, my phone rang.

"Rabbi? It's Katia Dahaan. Do you remember me?"

"Of course! We are still waiting for you to come for Shabbat."

"When can I come?"

"Please, this coming Shabbat!"

That Friday night Katia was one of our guests. She was very emotional throughout.

Others asked me who she was. I told them the story about the accident. I said, "You can say that she was a messenger from Above to help me during those scary moments."

Katia looked at us with a smile and said, "I think it's time for you to hear my version . . ."

"I am forty-five years old and live alone. I have a sister and mother, but I haven't spoken to them for over twenty years.

"It's hard to be single, especially for a Jewish woman. My parents were traditional; we made kiddush, celebrated holidays and fasted on Yom Kippur. But since I've been living alone, I stopped observing.

"When you live alone, it's hard to make kiddush, because there is no family to have a meal together. It's hard to go to synagogue alone. I didn't even have Jewish girlfriends.

"About two years ago, after years of being disconnected from Judaism, I wanted to come back to my religion. I decided to find a job in a

It Once Happened...

Jewish environment. This way I'd make friends, and maybe get invited for Shabbat and holidays.

"I found a job in a shoe store in the Pletzel. All the local workers were Jewish, and I made friends.

"But there was one problem - Shabbat. On Fridays they would wish one another 'Good Shabbat,' and on Mondays, ask each other how Shabbat went. But no one paid attention to me. Every week I hoped for an invitation, but every week brought more disappointment.

"Almost a year passed . . . 'Can it be that Jews don't accept you anymore?' I asked myself. 'How can they be so inconsiderate?'"

Katia's voice became choked with emotion. "I became very angry with Jews and Judaism. I decided it wasn't for me. I left that store and found another job.

"But there still was one problem - Shabbat. Every Friday night I would remember the Shabbat of my childhood - the candles, kiddush. I thought, 'How can I stop these memories?'"

"I decided to find something to do on Friday nights. I found an advertisement for a church choir looking for singers on Friday nights."

Silence prevailed around the table. "I was accepted into the choir, and it's been a year that I'm singing in church on Friday nights. With a sad smile she added, "I come home so tired that I don't have time to think about Shabbat.


"Everything went smoothly until that Friday," continued Katia, "when I saw the motorcycle rolling over on the road. I ran to help the rider, and was shocked when he reminded me that it was Shabbat eve and invited me! And he didn't even know me!

"You think that I was sent to you?" Katia concluded. "I think it was you who was sent to bring back my soul."


Katia doesn't sing in the church anymore. She spends every Friday night with us or other Chabad families.

So, it wasn't just a motorcycle accident after all.

Reprinted from an email of chabad.org magazine.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Behaalotecha

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	7:05	8:23	8:58
Tel Aviv	7:20	8:25	8:56
Haifa	7:13	8:27	8:59
Be'er Sheva	7:21	8:24	8:57

The Significance of the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah by Rabbi Elimelech Bideman

A suitable time to prepare for Matan Torah is during the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah, the three days before Shavuot. Rebbe Avraham HaMalach told his chassidim not to come to him during Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah because at that time, he wanted to study Torah by himself.

His chasidim didn't listen and came to him in the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah to hear his Divrei Torah. The Malach (as the Rebbe was called) locked his door and didn't let them in. He explained, "One's success in Torah for the entire year is dependent upon one's hasmadah (diligence) in the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah."

The custom in Yerushalayim (before תש"ח - 1948) was that the stores would close at midday, during Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah, so the shopkeepers could spend the afternoons and night immersed in Torah study.

This was also the custom in Poland. Polish Yidden began their preparations for Shavuot even earlier. Two weeks before Shavuot many Batei Midrashim in Poland were filled with people studying Torah.

The Imrei Emet zt'l once entered a Beit Midrash in Yerushalayim during Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah and said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the alter heim?" Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zy'a would tell the following story:

The Batei Midrashim of Poland were packed during the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah. People would take off from work to immerse themselves in Torah. Once, someone came into the Beit Midrash during Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah and enviously watched the passion for Torah that existed. He turned to the wall and cried. He too, wanted to join in the Torah learning.

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer added, "But he didn't merely remain with a desire to learn Torah. Instead, he reached for the first Gemara he saw, sat down, and was immediately engrossed in Torah study." At that time, he experienced the sweetness of Torah and this changed him forever. He became a masmid and a great talmid chacham (Talmudic scholar). Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer had a bookshelf where he kept the sefarim which were written with Ruach Hakadosh (Divine Inspiration). That man's sefer was stored on that shelf.

Rebbe Elazar Mendel of Lelov zt'l was one of the honored rebbes in Yerushalayim, and his son was engaged to the daughter of one of his chassidim.

The chassid (overjoyed that his daughter did such a fine shidduch) sent gifts to the chattan, as customary, but Rebbe Elazar Mendel's family didn't send anything back, and this upset the chassid's wife. "I understand that the Rebbe doesn't have money," she said, "but they could send at least a pin to the kallah. Why don't they send anything?" (Primarily, this was because the Rebbe gave every penny to tzedakah to support the poor of Yerushalayim. Nothing was left for gifts.)

"Speak to the Rebbe," she told her husband. "Tell him that he isn't acting properly. He should send a gift to the kallah!"

The chassid promised to do so, but he kept pushing it off. He was, after all, a chassid of Reb Elazar Mendel and now a mechutan too (father of a son or daughter in law), and felt uncomfortable demanding a gift from him. But his wife was extremely upset, and he knew that he had to do something about it.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to mention something about the gifts, but the chassid was always in awe of the Rebbe's presence and couldn't bring himself to discuss it.

During the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah, the Rebbe's custom was to daven Maariv and count Sefiras Ha'omer at the kever of Shimon HaTzaddik, and then he would go to the Kosel haMaaravi to daven some more.

The chassid was planning to go along with the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "Tonight, you must speak to the Rebbe. I've asked you many times, and you keep pushing me off. This time you must take action. Otherwise, don't bother returning home!"

That's what she told him, and her husband knew that her threat was real. Later that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he waited for the Rebbe to open, he thought to himself, "My wife is right, after all. The Rebbe is a holy man, that's true, but it would be proper that he give a gift to our daughter, the kallah. Even a small pin would be sufficient. Why doesn't the Rebbe do so?"

The Rebbe answered the door and said, "Mechuten shlita! I am surprised that during the Sheloshet Yemei Hagbalah you are going around with pins in your head." The chassid was astounded. It was Ruach Hakadosh! The Rebbe knew exactly what he was thinking. The chassid went home and told his wife, "We have a mechutan, a baal ruach hakadosh. Don't talk to me about the presents anymore, or you can leave the house."

Reprinted from an email of Torah Wellsprings.

Can one be truly humble and also be the greatest of them all?

The Chief Rabbi of England and the Commonwealth, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis said, that that is exactly what happened in the life and times of Moshe Rabbeinu. Our Parasha, of Behaalotecha, describes him as being, "ענו יותר מאד מכל האדם" – He was more humble than any other person." This is referring to the past, present and the future.

At the end of the Torah, accolades are given to Moshe. He is described as being the greatest of all the prophets and he had the privilege of speaking "פנים אל פנים – Face to Face" with The Almighty.

In the Mishna, Masechet Sanhedrin our Rabbis taught that when Adam was created, the entire world existed just for him. And since each and every one of us are as unique as Adam was, we should all declare "בשבילי נברא העולם – This world was created for me."

This statement, however, sounds quite arrogant. Rather, the Mishna is encouraging us to appreciate the potential each and every one of us has and that our ability and our talent comes from Hashem.

It should not be a case of "כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה" – That it is my power, my might and my ability that has brought this all about. But rather, when one is paid a compliment, one should respond "Baruch Hashem – It is not me, it is thanks to Hashem, Who has enabled me to achieve all of these goals."

The great rabbinic master of the nineteenth century, Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa, would always carry with him two pieces of paper, one in each pocket. On one piece was written the words "בשבילי נברא העולם – This world was created for me." On the other piece of paper were the words of Avraham to Hashem, "אנכי עפר ואפר" – I am just dust and ashes." He would always be mindful of these two messages. First of all to recognize his own, incredible potential and at the same time to know that he was just dust and ashes.

That was the secret to the success of Moshe Rabbeinu. He was indeed more humble than any other person but he knew he had talents, he knew he had ability. However, when he achieved much, indeed more than all others, he ascribed that success to Hashem.

Similarly, let each and every one of us recognize the talents and potential we possess, in order to make the maximum impact on the world around us. However, at the same time we should recognize, it is not thanks to our greatness, it is all Baruch Hashem, thanks to the gifts, the Almighty has given us.

So let's try to recognize all of Hashem's gifts 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.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 5
MITZVOT ASEH: 3
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 2

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 136
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1840
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 7055

HAFTORA: Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7

This week we study Chapter 2 of Pirkei Avot.

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