

The Jewish Weekly

Forty Captured Torah Scrolls From Iraq

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

Rabbi Yisrael Gliss was the adviser to Professor Shimon Sheerit, the minister of religion, and on the side, he worked as a businessman, entrepreneur, and journalist. Rabbi Gliss heard about a clothing factory in Jordan that manufactured suits for a great price. By purchasing these suits wholesale and reselling them to the religious public, he could turn a nice profit and help haredim (Orthodox Jews) by dramatically reducing the price of menswear.

Rabbi Gliss traveled to Jordan, where he visited the factory, bringing along two suits from Israel to use as examples of what he wanted. The factory manager told Rabbi Gliss to come back a week later.

When he returned the next week, Rabbi Gliss saw that the factory had already created a number of suits according to the requested style. He negotiated a good price for them and was going to sign a contract for more with the manufacturer.

As Rabbi Gliss sat there, holding the pen, the manager said he wanted to show him something: he had forty Torah scrolls he was willing to sell for a thousand dollars apiece.

Right then, Rabbi Gliss recalled a story he had heard from his parents, when he was only a young child.

When the Jordanian Legion conquered Jerusalem in the War of Independence, Rabbi Gliss's relatives were among the people they captured and took as prisoners. As they were transported to Jordanian territory, the prisoners saw a Jordanian truck stuffed with Torah scrolls.

The scrolls had once been used in synagogues in the Old City, but they were now jammed in a truck, traveling towards Jordan.

Realizing Torah scrolls had economic value, someone had decided to take advantage of the situation by pilfering some for later resale.

Rabbi Gliss felt that somehow, he was an important link in the chain of his parents' story and the current one, and he hoped he would participate in closing this circle. He wanted the honor of returning the Torah scrolls to their original homes.

Following the factory manager to a side room, Rabbi Gliss watched as he opened a chest and displayed what he had: one Torah scroll, cut by hand into forty pieces. He must have thought that if he presented each of the pieces as an individual Torah scroll, he could get a lot more money.

Rabbi Gliss was in complete shock and distress at seeing a Torah desecrated like that, and

making matters worse, it was quite clear that the chopping had taken place recently. He assumed that the factory manager had done it himself.

Rabbi Gliss decided then and there that there would absolutely not be a deal - not with the Torah scrolls and not with the suits. He felt that he could not do business with a dishonest person who so ruthlessly defiled holy Jewish objects.

Rabbi Gliss turned to his contacts in the government and the Mossad, asking if they could ascertain where the factory manager had obtained that Torah scroll. After some research, they told him there really were forty scrolls, and they were available for sale.

More of the story was soon revealed.

During the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein ordered a certain Iraqi air force officer to blow up Baghdad's Great Synagogue. He thought it would somehow discredit American forces in the eyes of the Jews. The officer visited the site before bombing it to see what was there. He found numerous Torah scrolls inside, which he then removed to a storeroom off-site. Several days later, he blew the synagogue to smithereens.

After the war ended, the officer was obviously not able to return the Torahs to the synagogue. So he decided to do business with them. The Torah scrolls found their way to book dealers - and into the Mossad's purview.

Upon hearing this account, Rabbi Gliss went to Professor Sheerit, whom he was working for at the Religious Affairs Ministry. He told Sheerit the whole story, and they approached the ministry's legal team about reclaiming the scrolls. They gave Rabbi Gliss the green light to go ahead and work to bring the scrolls back home.

Rabbi Gliss began making numerous trips to Jordan, bringing Torah scrolls back with him each time. They were the scrolls from synagogues in the Old City, as well as from Babylon (now modern day Iraq). The Torahs were then taken to Machon Ot, where Rabbi Yitzhak Steiner carefully and lovingly repaired and restored them.

When Rabbi Gliss finally brought back the last Torah, he went to see Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, bringing this Torah along with him. Rabbi Elyashiv took the opportunity to examine and learn from the Torah scroll, making observations about the spacing between the lines, the shape of the letters, and more.

Afterwards, Rabbi Gliss took the same Torah scroll to the Vizhnitzer Rebbe. When the Rebbe saw the Torah and heard the story of its rescue, along with the other Torah scrolls that had been saved and returned to the Jewish people, he became quite emotional. He wept so much that he needed a towel to dry his tears.

Finally, Rabbi Gliss went to visit Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu with the Torah. He hadn't even managed to open it when Rabbi Eliyahu said, "That scroll belonged to Shaul Tzadkah's family. The Torah was in the genizah closet above the ark."

It Once Happened...

He went on to describe a second Torah scroll that had belonged to the same family, explaining that it had been sitting in the ark itself. He wanted to know where that Torah was, as it was kosher for ritual use. Rabbi Eliyahu knew so much about that Torah, including who had financed it, which scribe wrote it, and other tidbits of its history. But the best was yet to come.

He said there had been a third Torah scroll there, too, which had been written by the Ben Ish Chai himself. Rabbi Eliyahu mentioned that the Ben Ish Chai had signed the scroll, at the very end, on the back of the last piece of parchment. Rabbi Eliyahu wanted to know if that scroll had been among those that had been rescued - and if so, he wanted to know where it was. Rabbi Gliss promised to do his utmost to find it.

When he investigated the matter, Rabbi Gliss discovered that the scroll in question had indeed been recovered - and that it was currently in the hands of the Mossad. After the Mossad had helped locate and retrieve the Torah scrolls, the security agency had received one of them to use in their synagogue for the weekly readings.

As it turned out, the Torah in the Mossad's synagogue was the very one Rabbi Eliyahu wanted to see: the Ben Ish Chai's scroll. There was just one problem: the Mossad was - and still is - one of the most guarded, enigmatic organizations in the world.


The secret underground base, where the synagogue and Torah scroll were located, is known as "the Hole." No one knows where the Hole is - unless he needs to know. Rabbi Gliss was able to arrange for Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu to visit the synagogue in the Hole and see the Ben Ish Chai's Torah scroll.

The Mossad agents were delighted by his visit, and the agency's heads even came to greet him. When Rabbi Eliyahu opened the scroll and revealed the Ben Ish Chai's signature, he began to tremble and weep at the sight.

Everyone stood there, dumbstruck - and then joined in Rabbi Eliyahu's tears. They believed that the Ben Ish Chai's soul had guided the Torah scroll to where it needed to be. The head of the Mossad, who was not a demonstrative man, was standing there crying too - unabashed tears of joy and emotion. The Torah scroll was finally home.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.

Editor's Note: HaRav Mordechai Tzemach Eliyahu zt"l's, 13th Yahrzeit was Wednesday, 25th Sivan - June 14th of this year



Shabbat Times - Parshat Chukat

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	7:13	8:31	9:06
Tel Aviv	7:28	8:34	9:03
Haifa	7:21	8:35	9:07
Be'er Sheva	7:29	8:32	9:04



A Brachah twice not to fly

By Rabbi Shea Harlig

It took place in my home in Vegas. As a shliach (Chabad emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe), One of the guests at the Shabbat meal was a chassid from Antwerp by the name of Yechiel who was in town to participate in a diamond convention.

He ate his Shabbat seudot - meals in the Chabad House. During the meal, the guests were encouraged to share a Torah thought or a story, and Yechiel shared the following personal narrative:

"In the late 1980's, my mother visited the Rebbe in 770, to get a dollar and a bracha (blessing) because there was a family member in need of a refuah shleimah - healing. After giving her the dollar and blessing, the Rebbe said: 'Tell your son not to travel'. My mother was surprised. 'My son is not traveling anywhere', she clarified, but the Rebbe repeated: 'Tell your son not to travel'.

"As soon as she came out, she contacted me, sharing the strange exchange that she had with the Rebbe. I was able to shed light on it. 'In fact,' I explained, 'I had been planning a trip to Colombia, where I was going to do a deal in emeralds that would be worth a million dollars to me. I hadn't told you about this (I explained to her) because I didn't want you to worry about my traveling to such a dangerous part of the world. But, if you say that the Rebbe said that I shouldn't travel, then I will immediately cancel my trip'.

"I called my Italian partner and informed him of my change of plans. My partner became angry with me, warning me that I wouldn't get any share in the profits if I would stay behind, but I was adamant. I told him he could take the entire profits. I wasn't coming.

"I subsequently learned what had taken place. As soon as my partner, the Italian, concluded the deal, and handed over the emeralds, they handed him the

cash, and then, on the spot, shot him in the back and killed him instantly.

"I realized that the Rebbe's timely directive had saved my life!

"In 1995 (after Gimel Tamuz*) I was in the NY area. I have a brother, David, who lives in Texas, and it's easier to call him from NY than to call him from Antwerp, so I decided, prior to departing back home, to use the opportunity to call him and say 'Hello'.

"As soon as I reached him, my brother David exclaimed to me excitedly, 'Yechiel, how amazing that you're calling me, I've been trying to reach you all day, I need to tell you about a dream that I had last night!'

"And he related the following: 'Last night in my dream I saw a painting, and in the painting, I saw a Rabbi which was the Lubavitcher Rebbe. And the Rebbe said to me - 'Tell your brother Yechiel זכור ואל תשכח את הדברים [Remember and don't forget the words]. That was the dream, I don't know what it means, but I felt I must share it with you'.

"So, I thought to myself, what were the last words, the last communication that I had from the Rebbe?

Why, it had been when he had instructed me (through my mother) not to travel. And here, I was about to travel back to Antwerp, and the Rebbe sent me a message to remember his words. The Rebbe must be telling me again not to travel!

"I decided immediately to cancel my travel plans. "But there was one problem. I was supposed to give a ride to the airport to the wife of a friend, who was supposed to be on the same flight as me. But if I shouldn't be taking the flight, surely neither should she. But how can I stop her? If I tell her my brother had some kind of a dream, she'll think that I'm crazy, but she definitely won't change her plans because of that.

"I decided that there was only one solution: I would have to ensure that she misses her flight! So, I picked her up on schedule, but instead of driving her directly to the airport, I pretended to get lost and kept on making wrong turns. She kept on screaming at me that I didn't know what I was doing (now she really thought I was crazy), but I just continued to feign confusion.

"Only when I was certain that it was much too late for any chance at the flight, did I finally let her off at the airport. At that point she was fuming at me, and she stomped out of the car in a rage, without a backward glance, and headed straight for the phones to inform her husband of her predicament (and what a mess his friend had gotten her into). "However, when she finally reached her husband, she let out a horrified shriek, and fainted. The flight that we had been scheduled to take was TWA flight 800, which (as she learned from her husband) had exploded into a fireball 12 minutes after takeoff, killing all 230 people on board.

"Twice, the advice of the Rebbe miraculously saved my life, once before Gimel Tamuz, and then again afterwards!"

With this, Yechiel concluded his remarkable narrative.

Reprinted from a whatsapp message.

Editor's Note: the Lubavitcher Rebbe - Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the 7th Chabad Rebbe z"l's, 29th Yahrzeit was Thursday, 3rd Tammuz - June 22nd of this year

In this week's Parshah we learn about the Mei Meriva. Hashem tells Moshe, take the stick, and gather the nation, talk to the rock, in front of their eyes, water will come out of the rock and there will be enough for all to drink. Moshe took the stick as he was told. Moshe and Aharon gathered the people around the rock and said to them "שמעו נא המרים המן הסלע הזה נוציא לכם מים" - Now listen you rebels, from this rock water will come out." Moshe picked up his stick and hit the rock twice, and the water came out and the nation had what to drink. Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon, "because you did not trust Me in front of the nation, therefore you won't be the ones to bring the nation into the land."

Where exactly was the lack of belief in Hashem in the actions of Moshe? Rashi says, that had Moshe spoken to the rock instead of hitting it, it would have created a greater impact. Hashem told him to take the stick. What did Hashem want him to do with the stick asks the Ramban. Remember this is the same Moshe, who used the stick for the ten plagues and Kriat Yam Suf, and all those places when he was told to take the stick, it was to use, why not here?

The Ramban in the fourth perek of Shmona Perakim explains. Moshe was punished for getting angry at Klal Yisrael when he said "שמעו נא המרים" - Now listen, you rebels. Because the people around him, knew that Moshe doesn't just get angry. If Moshe is angry, it is because Hashem is angry. We don't find anywhere to indicate that Hashem was angry. They complained they were thirsty, Hashem said to bring them in front of the rock and tell the rock to give water, and the water will come. Since Moshe gave the nation the false impression that Hashem was angry, he was punished.

Perhaps what Rashi is saying is, had he just spoken to the rock, i.e. the heart of Klal Yisrael at the time, without blasting them or calling them rebels, and just shown them look, dear friends, lets show you how much Hashem loves you, then spoken to the rock and the water would have come and flown, the Kiddush Hashem would have been massive.

Friends, we need to know that Hashem loves us so much more than we can imagine. No matter how far we have gone, our Father is waiting for us right behind the door, waiting for us to come home, so He can give us a hug and kiss to express the love He has always had for us. Though sometimes, we make ourselves unresponsive of that love, through our actions, Hashem's love for us is infinite, and if you ever hear otherwise, that some individual told you, that Hashem is angry at you, or that Hashem does not love you, they are lying and have no authority to tell you this. כי Hashem does not anticipate the death of a person, he would rather he do Teshuva and live. ועד יום מותו תחכה לו, אם ישוּב מיד תקבלו. - Until the day a person dies, Hashem is waiting for him, if he returns, he is immediately accepted. ואתה יודע צרם, כי הם - בשר דם. - It is true, You have created them and understand their temptations as they are human. Let us pray that we should merit to just come back home where we feel that love of Hashem, without any barriers, He is waiting for us. The electricity is flowing strongly in the outlet, unfortunately, some of us unplug from the outlet, or we strip our wires, but that does not mean that the connection is not there, we just need to replug in and we will feel that flow of energy just as strong as ever.

B'ezrat Hashem this year Shiva Asar B'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av will be turned to Chagim when we come home and give our Father back the hug He has been giving us this whole time.

So let's try and replug ourselves in, 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 parnessah 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: 3
MITZVOT ASEH: 3
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 0

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 87
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1245
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4670

HAFTORA: Shoftim 11:1 - 33

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot.

חַקְתָּ קְרָה
מִשְׁתַּחֲוֹתֵינוּ (אֲנֵינוּ) (אֲנֵינוּ)

This week has been sponsored by Shmuel and Dina Halpern In memory of his mother פראדל בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה A Holocaust survivor Whose fourth Yahrzeit is ט' תמוז

And in memory of her parents ר' מרדכי בן ר' יעקב יצחק וזנה בת ר' יואב מיכאל and her five brothers יואב מיכאל, אברהם לייב, משה שמעון, חיים אליה ויונה murdered in Auschwitz and who's yahrzeit is י"ז בתמוז

May all their Neshamot have Aliyot