

The Jewish

Weekly

Summer Camp for Life

By Rabbi Simcha Piekarski

My father was Rabbi Yisrael Yitzchok Piekarski, who served as the Rosh Yeshivah — head of the central Chabad yeshivah at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, for forty-two years, from 1951 until 1993.

This may be curious in and of itself, as we were not followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. My family were followers of the Amshinover Rebbe. I, myself, was enrolled as a student in the yeshivah of Chatam Sofer on the East Side of Manhattan, where the word “Lubavitch” didn’t usually come up.

In fact, I knew nothing about Lubavitch until the passing of the Previous Rebbe in 1950, when every newspaper in New York had a picture of his funeral on the front page.

Seeing this on every newsstand, I came to yeshivah and asked “Who is this? What is Lubavitch?”

Not getting an answer that satisfied me, I decided to ask my father. But I got nowhere with him either. I think this was because my father did not want me to have too much connection with Lubavitch because it contradicted the way he was brought up.

But then, some months after the Previous Rebbe’s passing in 1950, my father got a call from Rabbi Shmaryahu Gurary, the administrator of the Tomchei Temimim yeshivot, telling him that Lubavitch was looking for a rosh yeshivah and that he had come highly recommended by a number of people. (My father was considered a Talmudic prodigy from an early age and he had developed a reputation as a Torah genius.) Although he was reluctant at first, he took the job after several meetings with Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who had succeeded his father-in-law as the seventh Rebbe.

I, myself, did not come to study in the Chabad yeshivah until 1952, when I left Chatam Sofer yeshivah. My life was forever changed as a result.

In 1956, while I was a student there, the first Lubavitch summer camp opened up on the initiative of my friend and classmate Moshe Lazar. I recall the day he burst into our study hall all excited. “I got the okay!” he exclaimed. And then he told us that the Rebbe had approved his idea of starting a summer camp in the Catskills — to be called Camp Gan Israel — which would be a religious camp geared to Jewish boys from all backgrounds.

I worked at Gan Israel for a total of five years, both when it was located in Ellenville, and later when it moved to Swan Lake. And I vividly remember when the Rebbe came to visit there in the summer of 1957.

It is a well-known fact that the Rebbe never left New York City, and it was highly unusual for the Rebbe to travel more than a hundred miles. But the camp clearly meant a lot to him.

We prepared the kids for his visit so they would appreciate what an honor this was. Many of them did not know who the Rebbe was, because they did not have a Lubavitch background and some of them were not even religious.

As it happened, no camper there — and certainly no staff member — would ever forget that visit. The main thing that impressed me was how happy the Rebbe looked. He was clearly thrilled with the camp. He greeted every child and he gave out a small prayer book to each one. And he went into every single building — into the shul, into the canteen, into every bunkhouse. He was interested to see for himself and learn the minutest details of the camp’s operations.

Just how much this camp meant to the Rebbe was brought home to me when, during that same summer, I had a private audience with him on the occasion of my birthday. In that audience the Rebbe asked me whether I teach the children at the camp, and I answered that I did not. My position in the camp was assistant head counselor and, as such, I did not teach regular, organized classes, although every day after prayers I would spend five minutes with the kids explaining one line from the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch — the Abridged Code of Jewish Law. But I didn’t think that’s what the Rebbe meant when he asked whether I taught the kids.

The Rebbe asked me again, “You don’t teach the children at all?” In the heat of the moment, I still didn’t realize that the Rebbe wanted to know about my brief lessons after prayers, so I again replied, “No.”

But, amazingly, the Rebbe was more familiar with my schedule than I was, and he pressed further, “Do you perhaps study a point of Jewish law with the children after prayers?”

After the Rebbe posed his question that way, I finally understood what he was asking about and replied that I did.

The Rebbe gave me a big smile, which dispelled any embarrassment that I might have felt for the misunderstanding. Then he asked me which section of laws we were studying at the time and I answered that we were studying the laws of blessings.

The Rebbe thought for a moment and said, “It would be appropriate that tomorrow morning,

It Once Happened...

when you teach the laws of blessings to the children, you should also share a concept that instills reverence of G-d and sheds light on what a blessing is.”

Now, by that time it was almost three in the morning and I still needed to drive back to camp. I was willing and able to do what the Rebbe wanted but I just didn’t know when I would have a chance to research something to share with the kids that morning. Just as that thought passed my mind, the Rebbe said, “I see you are not sure what you should tell the children, so I will tell what to say. But you don’t need to tell anyone who told this to you.”

This was what he told me: “Explain to the kids that when they are making a blessing they should think for a moment about what they are saying. It’s pointed out in the Tanya and in other chasidic works that we start each blessing with ‘Blessed are You...’ In so doing, we are using the second person pronoun ‘You’ as if we are speaking directly to G-d one on one. And then we end each blessing in the third person — describing the awesome things the Creator does for us: ‘Who brings the bread out of the earth,’ or ‘Who gives sight to the blind’ and so forth.”

The Rebbe instructed me to explain to the children that a Jew is so close to G-d that he addresses the Creator of the Universe as “You,” and that this is just astounding. He wanted them to appreciate the closeness that they had with G-d.

I gave over his teaching to the kids, and I know the message got through because I heard from people forty years later that they still remembered this particular point.

The Rebbe knew that this camp was not a one-day thing, not a one-month thing, and not a one-year thing. What these kids experienced and learned at camp would stay with them for the rest of their lives. Many of the kids that attended the camp had little Jewish background, but for the rest of their lives, they remained connected to Yiddishkeit because of what they had learned at Camp Gan Israel. And that was the Rebbe’s intent.

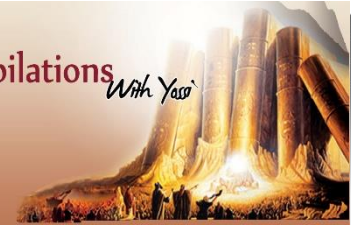
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Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Eikev

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:58	8:12	8:50
Tel Aviv	7:13	8:15	8:47
Haifa	7:06	8:16	8:51
Be'er Sheva	7:15	8:14	8:49



The Curiosity – Attracting Shoes Salesman

By Leibel Gniwisch
adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles

It was Belarus towards the end of the 19th century and Jewish-run inns dotted the rural areas like poppy seeds on a bagel. Rabbi Shmuel Weinberg didn't frequent inns; he preferred the comfort of his straw bed at home and his wife's cooking. But he was the Slonimer Rebbe and his people needed him, so from time to time he set out on the road and stayed for a few days at different inns in his area.

On the first night of his stay in this particular inn, Rabbi Shmuel noticed an interesting stranger. Rabbi Shmuel couldn't help but analyze him: "He's stately, well dressed. He has an inner calm that I don't see often." Rabbi Shmuel was even most impressed by the man's glow; he sensed a holiness in the man. He wanted to know the source of the man's aura, yet he didn't feel it appropriate to approach him right away.

Night two at the inn found the Slonimer tired from a long day of activities on behalf of the Jewish community. Weary, he opened the tractate of Talmud he had brought with him to study a certain passage in depth before he retired. "Why would the defendant be obligated to take an oath in this case and not...?"

Then he noticed the man was present again. He was sorting through documents in his attache case, his appearance illuminated by contentment.

"I must approach him tonight," Rabbi Shmuel decided. But he didn't because he wanted to finish his committed time for learning, and by the time he was done, the man had gone back to his room. "Tomorrow night," he promised himself. That is when he would discover the source of this man's holiness.

The third night the haze in the common room was even thicker than usual, a mixture of cigarette and furnace smoke, and it was difficult to see clearly, but the Rebbe had no trouble finding the man. "My dear fellow Yid! Vos macht du? (How are you doing?)" Rabbi Shmuel asked, approaching the man with slow determination.

The man looked up. He was eating soup. "I'm doing well, Rabbi."

"Can I ask you something?" Rabbi Shmuel asked.

"Of course!"

"Who are you?"

The man wasn't perturbed by the rabbi's forwardness. "I'm a simple man. I sell shoes for a living. I'm doing well, thank G d."

"I mean, what do you do spiritually?" Like, he was concerned with the man's holiness, not his income. "How long do you pray? How much Torah do you study?"

"I don't pray. I mean, I try to but I don't know how to read, so I'm able to say the three paragraphs of the Sh'ma Yisrael prayer by heart every morning and evening, but nothing else. Same goes for learning."

The man cast his gaze downward.

Of course, the Rebbe didn't judge the man. How could he? Nevertheless, he pursued.

"I'm sorry to ask, but can you tell me about your day? I see something in you that I don't usually see."

"Of course, Rabbi. But I'm afraid that I'm quite ordinary. I wake up at 5 am every morning..." said the man as he launched into a detailed review of his day. He was nearing late afternoon and Rabbi Shmuel was still at a loss. Why did the man glow?

The man concluded, "And before I go to sleep, after I recite the Sh'ma, I say to G-d:

"Master of the world, I ask only one thing from You. If I don't have what it takes to fulfill the mission for which You created me, don't wake me up tomorrow. Wake me up only if You believe I can do everything You need me to do in the world."

Rabbi Shmuel Slonimer had his answer.

Reprinted from an email from KabbalaOnline.org.

Do we sometimes unfairly confuse our children?

It is possible, for example, that at school, a child is given direction and inspiration, but that child comes home to find that the family values and what is practiced at home are incompatible with what has been taught at school.

The Torah gives us instruction in this regard. In Parshat Eikev the famous second paragraph of the Shema gives us the mitzvah to educate our children: "ולמדתם אותם את בניכם לדבר בם" - And you (plural) must teach your children to speak these words of Torah." This mitzvah is in the plural, Chazal explain, in order to teach us that as communities we must build, we must fund and we must run outstanding Jewish schools.

Then the Torah continues: "בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך" and "ובשכרך ובקומך" in the singular – you must speak these words of Torah, "when you are sitting in your home, when you are on the way, when you get up and when you lie down."

The sefer Menachem Tzion teaches us that from here we learn that what children are taught in school needs to be matched by the home environment. So when we are sitting at home, when we are engaged in our daily pursuits, when we are also on our way outside of our home, when we're at work, when we are on a family vacation, when we get up, when we lie down and at all times, we should be living a true and authentic Torah way of life, just as the children have been taught about when they are in school.

Now fascinatingly just after this, the Torah reverts back to speaking in the plural, "למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם" - in order that your (plural) days and the days of your descendants may be increased."

What we therefore find is that a holistic approach to Jewish education, getting it right both at school and in our homes, will be the ultimate guarantor for the continuity of the Jewish people.

So let us join together to pray with all our hearts, for all those suffering, 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, sweet Shabbat.



The Jewish Weekly will be releasing a Tishrei guide of Stories, Halachot and Minhagim

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 8
MITZVOT ASEH: 6
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 2

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 111
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1747
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6865

HAFTORA:
Yeshayahu 49:14- 51:3 (ותאמר ציון). (this is the second of seven Haftorot, [the Seven Haftorot of Consolation] that precede Rosh Hashanah).

This week we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot.

פרשת עקב

This week is sponsored
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