

The Jewish Weekly

Rabbi Yosef the Wagon Driver

By Rabbi Chaim Mentz

Over 150 years ago in Russia, there lived a scholar called Rabbi Yosef. He was an exceptionally gifted man both in mind and in humility. He knew all of the Talmud - both the Babylonian and Jerusalemite versions - by heart, and was well-versed in the books of Halachah and Kabbalah as well.

Now this Rabbi Yosef was considering applying for the post of rabbi in several large cities and, being a chassid of the second Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi DovBer, he traveled to Lubavitch to ask for the Rebbe's blessing and advice. But when he informed the Rebbe of his plan, the latter wasn't so enthusiastic.

Rabbi DovBer looked up at Rabbi Yosef from his desk and said solemnly: "Rabbi Yosef, if you're ever offered the opportunity of being an important rabbi, it's better for you to be a wagon driver."

Even two days later, when he arrived home and told his wife what the Rebbe had said, he himself still hadn't exactly absorbed it.

"If so", she said, "You must go down to the wagon drivers and ask their advice."

"Advice on what?" he asked.

"Advice on what type of carriage to buy. How much it will cost. How long it will take to learn." She answered.

"Learn what?" Rabbi Yosef was still in "neutral." He just nodded his head in agreement every time his wife mentioned it, and went back to studying Talmud or something else and the time passed.

Then about a month later a group of distinguished looking Jews knocked at Rabbi Yosef's door and officially offered him the prestigious position of rabbi of the city Minsk. They left with the promise that they would wait a week for his reply.

As soon as they closed the door behind them, Rabbi Yosef's wife reminded him that now he had no choice other than to finally go talk to the wagon drivers.

So the next morning Rabbi Yosef put on his fur coat and high boots and made a visit to the stables. At first the drivers thought he was a customer. Then they thought he was joking or crazy. But when they saw he was neither, one of the older drivers agreed to show him around, carefully pointing out how each of the many things that a wagon driver did in the course of his workday was difficult, dirty, or dangerous.

After several hours he returned home with a full report to his wife and a conclusion: a wagon and horse cost much more than they could afford, and that was the end of it.

"Yosef!" said his wife emphatically. "Are you a chassid or not? The Rebbe wants you to be a wagon driver. I'll sell my jewelry and our silver Shabbat candlesticks, and we'll buy a horse and a wagon."

The next day they sold the jewelry, found a driver to teach him the ropes and even bought a wagon and a pair of horses. Two months later Rabbi Yosef was one of the town's drivers.

He accepted his new job with as much joy as he could muster. He took good care of his horses and his carriage, and the other drivers always helped him and tried to give him the easiest trips.

He also tried to keep himself as holy as possible. While he was driving he would recite the Talmud he knew by heart, and he never began working until he had devoted one hour to the morning prayer, but nevertheless his heart was broken inside him.

One cold winter morning, as he was feeding his horses and getting the wagon ready for the day's work, a rich-looking, gentile businessman entered the stables and asked him if he was willing to take him to Petersburg.

"That's a two-day journey", answered Rabbi Yosef. "I'll gladly take you, but I'm telling you now that I don't begin at the crack of dawn, like the other drivers. I am a Jew that believes in G-d and every morning I must pray for one hour."

"Fine, fine," The businessman replied. "Maybe on the second day I'll get another driver. The main thing is that I set out immediately. All my baggage is here and I want to leave as soon as possible."

Rabbi Yosef wasted no time hitching up the horses and in fifteen minutes they were on their way.

"Oy," thought Rabbi Yosef to himself as he was driving some lonely road far from town, "What will become of me? All day I have to look at the backside of these horses. What will become of me?"

That night they stopped at an inn. Before they retired the businessman paid him for the day's journey, saying something about finding another driver that would leave early. They shook hands and the innkeeper showed them to their rooms.

Rabbi Yosef woke, as was his custom, at midnight, washed his hands and began to recite the midnight prayer mourning the destruction of the Holy Temple.

It Once Happened...

His heart was broken enough as it was, and when he began thinking of the terrible exile of the Jews the pain was too much to bear, he poured out his emotion into the words of the prayers.

When he finished, he opened the volume of Talmud he always took along on his trips and began studying. At daybreak, he put on his tefillin and prayed the morning prayer.

He had just put away his tefillin after praying, and was about to sit down and have something to eat, when suddenly the door opened and there stood his passenger.

His clothes were disordered as though he hadn't slept all night and it was clear that he had been weeping.

"I want to ... put on ... your tefillin," he said as he burst into uncontrollable tears and fell to one knee. "Oh please forgive me!" He wailed "My G-d, please, forgive me!"

He collapsed on the floor with his face in his hands and his entire body shaking with heart-rending sobs. The astounded Rabbi Yosef watched with his mouth open in disbelief. He had never seen anything like this in his life!

When the man had calmed down he explained: he was a Jew, but his lifestyle was exactly the opposite. The night before, he was about to go to sleep when he heard through the wall the midnight prayers of Rabbi Yosef. At first he paid no attention, and then he got angry because it was disturbing him; but then, slowly it woke up something inside of him.


He remembered that when he was a boy, his father used to pray like that. He now had long forgotten his youth but Rabbi Yosef's prayers changed all that.

He decided firmly that he wanted to return to his true self - he wanted to be a Jew again.

Two days later they were standing before the Rebbe. Rabbi Yosef was informed that he had fulfilled the purpose of his strange career. For the wagon driver's passenger, the Rebbe wrote a treatise called *Pokeach Ivrim* to guide him on his journey back to Judaism.

(Editor's note: *Pokeach Ivrim* is studied to this day as an important work of Chassidic teaching. The story told above is related at length in the book's introduction)

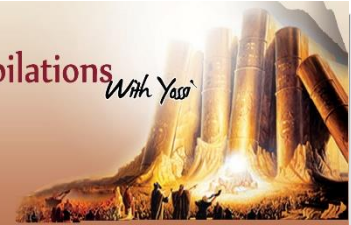
Reprinted from an email of "Chabad of Bel Air".



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Vayeitzei

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:01	5:15	5:53
Tel Aviv	4:15	5:17	5:50
Haifa	4:04	5:14	5:50
Be'er Sheva	4:19	5:18	5:54



The Helpful Hitchhiker

By Rabbi Elimelech Biederman

"The Toldot" (Rabbi Yaakov Yosef HaKohen of Polnoye) by nature had a quick temper. He sought counsel from Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk-Horodok (even though the latter was younger than he by 20 years, he admired his humility). He asked him what he could do to overcome his anger.

Rebbe Menachem Mendel didn't respond. It didn't take long, though, before the Toldot learned the answer.

The Toldot, together with a group of chasidim, was traveling on a wagon. A poor person stood by the road, and asked for a lift. The Toldot helped him aboard, but he explained to him that there wasn't much room. "If you want to ride with us, you will need to sit among the packages."

The man agreed. It was still better than walking.

The Toldot was concerned that the guest wasn't comfortable. As they were traveling, the Toldot turned to him and asked, "Are you alright? Are you comfortable?"

"Everything is fine," the man assured.

The Toldot was still concerned about the guest, so soon afterwards, he turned to the guest and asked, "Are you sure that you are comfortable?"

Once again, the guest told him that he felt fine.

When the Toldot inquired about his welfare a third time, the man replied, "We say, 'Ashrei ha'am shekachah lo'. This can be translated, 'Fortunate is the nation that whatever happens to it,' they say, 'Let it be that way.' No matter what happens, they say, 'let it be so. It is good the way it is.'"

The chasidim on board laughed when they heard the pauper's witty response, but the Toldot turned white. He realized that he had just received the answer to his dilemma. How can one overcome anger? By saying that the way things are, it is good that way. Perhaps someone said something that insults you, perhaps someone did something that upsets you, but you accept life as it comes. Fortunate is the nation that can do so.

With this perspective, the Toldot realized that he could overcome his negative trait of anger.

When the Toldot came to the Vitebsker another time, Rebbe Menachem Mendel remarked, "I sent you Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet) to answer your question."

* * *

Rebbe "Yankeleh" (Yaakov) of Pshevorsk was once walking with his gabbai (administrator) through a scenic park, and throughout their walk, the Rebbe was saying "Ashrei ha'am shekachah" - "fortunate is the nation who [knows that] whatever happens to him, "lo" - it is for his benefit."

The Rebbe repeated this thought many many times during their walk, as he sought to engrave on his heart and mind this fundamental lesson. To know, and to believe, and to trust, that whatever happens to a person, it was destined that way because this is best for him.

When they were ready to get back into the car to return home, the Rebbe asked the gabbai, "So now do you know the meaning of 'ashrei haam shekachah lo'?"

The gabbai replied, "Of course I know." ('How wouldn't I know,' the gabbai thought, 'after hearing it so many times.') "It means to know that G-d leads us in the very best way..." and then quickly repeated the Rebbe's lesson.

The Rebbe said, "No. You didn't understand. Ashrei ha'am shekachah lo means..." and the Rebbe repeated the idea once again. He could hear that the gabbai was just repeating his words, that he hadn't yet internalized the message.

We should also review this truth over and over again, until we know and believe and accept that every issue of our life is exactly the way that G-d wants it. Everything is part of the Divine Plan and has a purpose. When one believes this, he will remain calm and tranquil with everything that happens to him; he will always be happy with his lot, and then, he will also find grace before the Al-Mighty.

Reprinted from an email of Torah Wellsprings.

Success in life doesn't just fall into our laps. We learn this important lesson from an intriguing passage in Parshat Vayeitzei.

Yaakov came to his father-in-law Lavan and demanded that he be paid for his many years of service, during which he hadn't received a penny. The Torah provides for us the details of the negotiations between the two. Lavan said to Yaakov, "I can see what has happened; I can read the signs; "נחשתי ויברכני ה' בגלליך" - Hashem has blessed me because of you."

Yaakov then replied by saying, "ויברך ה' אתך לרגלי," which we usually translate as, "Hashem has blessed you on my account."

But the term 'לרגלי' literally means 'because of my feet!' What was Yaakov trying to convey?

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsh explains this beautifully. He explains that when Lavan said to Yaakov, "נחשתי ויברכני ה' בגלליך," what he meant was this: "What has happened Yaakov, is that Hashem has blessed me – it's not you – you're a holy man, and that's why Hashem has always helped you. It is Hashem who has performed these miracles for my flocks. It's to Hashem that I should give thanks, not to you. You don't deserve a single penny – Hashem has done it all."

When Yaakov then replied and said, "ויברך ה' אתך לרגלי - Hashem has blessed you because of my feet!" what he meant was, "For all these years, I've been standing in your fields. Under all weather conditions, I've given the utmost service. It has been a partnership. Of course, I've got my ביטחון, my trust in Hashem, but throughout this time, Hashem was turning to me for my השתדלות, for my efforts, as well. I did it with Hashem, and therefore you should be paying me."

From Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only succeed if you try hard together with faith in Hashem. The way that the Talmud puts it, is that Hashem says to us, "פתחו לי פתח כחרודו של מחט ואני אפתח לכם פתח כפתחו של אולם" - Open for me just the space of the eye of a needle and I will expand that to be the space of an entire hall."

We may be the junior partners, but it is always a partnership. 'אין סומכין על הנס' – never rely on miracles, the Talmud tells us. We have to do our bit. So it is from Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only win the lottery if you buy a ticket. Success doesn't automatically fall into our laps. It's a partnership and together with ביטחון in Hashem, we need to always try our hardest.

So let us therefore strengthen our ביטחון in Hashem and join together to pray with all our hearts for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, Police officers, medical professionals, Firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

Yossi

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 148
NUMBER OF WORDS: 2021
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 7512

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Hoshea 12:13-14:10
Sephardim: Hoshea 11:7-13:5
Chabad: Hoshea 11:7-12:14

To subscribe to THE JEWISH WEEKLY or to dedicate a single issue, please contact us by email: editor@thejewishweekly.org or www.thejewishweekly.org