

The Jewish Weekly

The Nazi's Grandson from Bordeaux

By Rabbi Yaakov Cass

Arriving early to shul one Friday night in 2016, I noticed a young man standing at the back of the shul quietly and demurely, looking a little bewildered and out of place. I walked up to him and asked him if he had a place to eat for Shabbos.

It turned out he spoke neither Hebrew nor English, but I managed to communicate with him in broken French. He said he would love to join us and so, after the prayers, we walked home together. He enjoyed very much the Friday night dinner and Shabbos lunch together with my family.

The guest, whom we will call David, did not tell us too much about himself. Still, it was sufficient to enable me to realize that he was a fairly new baal teshuva (returnee to mitzvah observance) who had studied for a short while at the Lubavitcher yeshiva of Brunoir on the outskirts of Paris, but was unable to cope with its high level of learning. So he came to Israel to study at the French speaking yeshiva in Ramot, where I live. He was older than all of the other boys and the only Lubavitcher.

We invited him a few times and told him he would always be welcome. Then he disappeared into the ether.

About a year later, one Friday night I was sitting in my place davening (praying) when somebody blocked my light and stood in front of me. I looked up. It was David. With a gigantic grin on his face and obviously in a really joyous and happy state of mind, he said, "Well, you said I could come whenever I want, so here I am."

We hugged, and back he came to eat with us again. This time we heard the whole long story of his life and how, amazingly, against all odds, he had become a baal teshuva.

He told us he came from the town of Bordeaux in France. He had been studying at the university, and was one of the only two Jews in the whole institute. His grandfather had been an officer in the Nazi (yemach shemam) army (!) and had escaped justice by running away to South America.

The officer's son, David's father, moved to France to seek his fortune. He remained a rabid anti-Semite throughout his life. After a lightning courtship, he married David's mother, a Jewess, but after she gave birth he disappeared, never to be seen again.

David's mother was vehemently anti-religious and warned him that if he were to become

involved in Judaism in any shape or form, she would immediately disown him.

That was how David was raised. Nevertheless, he developed a deep desire to find out about Judaism, learning and reading up as best as he could, but never daring to tell his mother. Furthermore, he befriended a young Lubavitcher family living not far from his university and they encouraged him in his quest.

One night he fell asleep and had a vivid dream: He was standing in front of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's desk and the Rebbe picked up a letter from a pile in front of him and read out loud:

"We have in our town, a young man named David who is searching for meaning in life and we have befriended him. However, there is no Chabad shliach (emissary of the Rebbe) in this section of Bordeaux who could help him. Would the Rebbe please send a shliach to help him become a properly committed Jew."

The Rebbe put the letter down and, addressing David, said, "No, I will not send a shliach. I will take responsibility myself to bring this young man fully to Judaism."

He then told me to leave university and go to yeshiva and that he would be with me wherever I went; there was nothing to be frightened or concerned about.

After hearing this story, I was captivated. I asked him what happened next. He told me what I knew; that he had been to Brunoir and had then come to Israel. He went on to relate that one fine summer's day, his yeshiva went to the tomb site of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron.

While he was there somebody pointed out to him a book that he was not familiar with, 'Igrot Kodesh (Holy Letters) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,' and suggested that he write to the Rebbe. He wrote a letter asking the Rebbe for help and guidance in his studies and placed the letter randomly into the book.

Upon opening the book to where he had placed his letter, he nearly passed out when he read the words, "Why are you concerned? I told you that I have taken responsibility for you. I will be with you in all your endeavors. Just concentrate on learning Torah."

That is exactly what David did from then on.

As mentioned above, there was only one other Jew in the university of Bordeaux. Now David revealed to us that the 'other' was a female medical student whom David had courted before becoming religious. After a couple of years, David returned to Bordeaux to renew this courtship.

It Once Happened...

How elated he was to discover that the girl had become religious as well, despite having a background as far away from Judaism as David's! She too had a non-Jewish father who had come to live in France; he was originally from Libya. And just like David's, her mother was fiercely against Judaism.

The young couple had agreed to marry and the reason why David was back in Jerusalem was to get married, on the very next day after that Shabbos! He told me that there was not a single guest from either side of the family who would be attending the wedding, apart from his mother. She had become reconciled with David's return to Judaism, and had even begun to keep mitzvot herself. Sadly, the bride's mother refused to travel to the wedding.

My local Chabad shul in Ramot arranged an impromptu *ufraf* (Yiddish for An aliyah to the Torah on the Shabbat preceding the wedding, and a joyous kiddush-celebration after the Services.) for David. The French yeshiva sent students to sing and dance at the wedding, and then sent them again to live up each night of the sheva berachot (For the 7 nights and days after the wedding ceremony, any time the new couple is at a meal in which ten Jewish men are present, a special set of seven blessings is recited in their honor at the end of the meal.)

The end of the story is even more astonishing. While in Bordeaux, David had gone to visit his Lubavitcher friends and told them about his dream and the letter that the Rebbe had read to him and his comments.

The wife turned pale. She barely managed to articulate, "On what date was your dream?"

David told her and she promptly fainted.

When she had recovered somewhat she told him that the letter the Rebbe had read out to him was the very same letter that she had written asking the Rebbe to help him, and she had placed it into *Igrot Kodesh* on the morning immediately preceding his dream.

Reprinted from an email of Living Jewish.

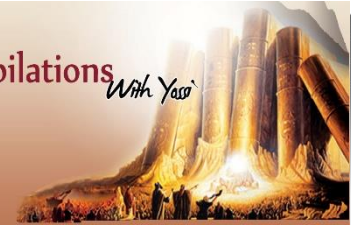
Editor's Note: Rabbi Yaakov Cass is a Lubavitcher chasid living in Jerusalem. Until recently, he was a senior official in the Israel Ministry of Health.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Mikeitz

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:01	5:17	5:55
Tel Aviv	4:15	5:18	5:51
Haifa	4:05	5:16	5:51
Be'er Sheva	4:20	5:20	5:56



The Wedding By Rabbi Chaim Mentz

Once there lived a wealthy Jewish forester named Yosef. Yosef was very kind and generous. He understood that G-d had blessed him with great wealth so that he could help others, and he was always ready to give to the poor. Not only did he give them money, he gave them jobs. He was happy that by giving employment to his fellow Jews, he could enable them to support their families.

As Yosef's wealth increased, so did his charitable deeds. One day, a group of Jews from a nearby village came to see him. "We've come to ask you to help a needy bride and groom," said one of the group, Yonah the shoemaker. "They are both orphans, and there is no one to help them. They're getting married on Chanukah, and they haven't any money."

"How much money do you need?" asked Yosef.

"One thousand rubles should be enough," said Yonah.

Yosef went to his desk and took out a packet of money. He counted out a thousand rubles, and handed it to Yonah with a smile. The villagers were stunned. They thought that Yosef would give part of the amount, and expected to collect the rest from others. They could not thank Yosef enough.

As they left, Yosef said, "Remember to invite me to the wedding. I want to participate in the great mitzva of rejoicing with the bride and groom."

Some weeks later, Yosef travelled to Danzig where he had to collect payment from a number of his customers. He expected to be away for at least three weeks and told his family regretfully that he did not think he would be home in time to kindle the menorah with them on the first night of Chanukah.

Yosef's stay in Danzig was blessed with success. Not only did he collect over 40,000 rubles, he signed on many new customers. He finished up his business more quickly than expected and was delighted that he would be able to surprise his family and arrive home in time to light the first Chanukah candle.

Yosef purchased a ticket for the train ride home and entered a car that was not too crowded. He sat down, closed his eyes and dozed off. Suddenly, he heard voices whispering next to him. Opening his eyes, he saw two men sitting across from him, eying him suspiciously.

Yosef's heart skipped a beat as he thought, "They are planning to rob me!" Yosef quickly got up. He went from one car to the next, until he came to a car that was packed with people. He looked for an empty place, and sat down.

"Thank G-d, I managed to escape from those men just in time!" he said to himself. The car was crowded with farmers and peasants. Yosef felt much safer surrounded by people.

The train sped on its journey. Gradually it grew dark outside and all the passengers fell asleep, except for the wary Yosef. Suddenly, he noticed the two strangers standing at the doorway of the car. Yosef opened his bag and took out the gun that he always carried. He made sure the men could see that he had it. The men quickly disappeared. Yosef realized his suspicions were right.

For the remainder of the trip, Yosef stayed alert. He prayed to G-d to protect him, pledging to give charity even more generously when he returned home safely. When Yosef got off the train, he went over to a policeman, handed him several rubles, and asked him to escort him home.

When he finally arrived at home, Yosef breathed a sigh of relief. But no one was home. He realized that his family and servants were all still in the city as they had not expected him to arrive until later in the week. "What a shame," Yosef thought to himself as he began preparing the oil and wicks of the menorah for the first night of Chanukah, "after all my efforts to get here, I am still alone."

Yosef placed the 40,000 rubles in his safe. Then he retraced his steps back to the family's silver menorah, recited the blessings with much joy and watched the first light of Chanukah dance with delight.

All was still in the house. Yosef sat by the candles for a while, and then took out a book and began to study. The stillness was shattered by the sound of splintering wood. Yosef jumped up and saw his two "travel companions" from the train bursting through the front door.

Brandishing guns, the thieves demanded that Yosef open up his safe and empty it out for them. They then tied him up with heavy rope and threw him on the ground. Yosef prayed to G-d, knowing that his life was in grave danger.

Suddenly, sounds of voices and musical instruments could be heard from outside. The music kept getting closer and louder. The thieves turned pale, and began looking for a way to escape, but it was too late.

From outside they heard happy shouts. "Reb Yosef. Open up. We've come to bring you to the wedding." The villagers marched through the open door. They saw Reb Yosef lying tied up on the floor and then they saw the thieves. They pounced on the villains, and easily overpowered them.

Yonah the shoemaker untied Reb Yosef. "We came to bring you to the wedding, as you asked," he said. "And look at this!"

"You saved my life!" Yosef exclaimed. "They would have killed me!"

"Surely your mitzvot of endowing a bride, looking after orphans, and the desire to rejoice at a wedding saved you," said Yonah.

The villagers escorted Reb Yosef to the wedding with much joy. As Yosef watched the happy dancing, he thanked G-d for all the miracles, the wonders and the salvation that had just occurred for him

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

Who has been the most arrogant person who has ever lived?

A candidate for this dubious title would certainly be Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

Parshat Mikeitz commences with the words, "ויהי מקץ ויהי עמד על הניר" - And after two years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream and behold, he was standing over the river."

The Egyptians deified the river Nile, because they depended on its waters for their very lives. Pharaoh was 'עמד על הניר', - he stood over the river, indicating that he saw himself as the ultimate, supremely powerful 'god of gods'.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his sefer Oznam laTorah, points out that this explains why the Egyptian sages interpreted Pharaoh's dreams as being connected with Pharaoh's own self - his self-importance, his personal life, his personal future, etc. But they were wrong.

Yosef stepped forward and he gave what Pharaoh knew to be the true interpretation because Yosef saw in Pharaoh not just somebody who was living for himself. A true and great leader is somebody who is concerned about his people and about the entire world. Therefore Yosef's interpretation related to all of Egypt and all of humankind at the time.

Pharaoh liked Yosef's interpretations and in turn he lived up to the aspirations for his kingship, and as a result he entrusted Yosef with the responsibility to guarantee that Egypt and the world would be prepared for those seven years of famine.

Rav Sorotzkin adds a further word. The Torah tells us, "ופרעה חלם והנה עמד על הניר," in the present tense, that is, not "Pharaoh stood over the river," but "Pharaoh is standing over the river," indicating that Pharaoh, King of Egypt would not be the only ruler who would be in power for his own sake.

Unfortunately and tragically, there are some Pharaoh-styled rulers who exist to this day - rulers of nations, who are only concerned about their own grandeur, about their own power, about their own control; rulers who are willing, at the expense of their people, to engage in dangerous pursuits; willing to sacrifice the lives of tens of thousands of their people, just to guarantee that they will have more power on earth.

Yosef's timeless message for us is that a great leader uses their seat of power not for their own sake, but for the sake of all others.

Let us therefore 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.

מקץ

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NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 112
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1558
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5972

HAFTORA:
Melachim I 3:15 - 4:1

Friday, Dec. 22, 2023, is עשרה בטבת Asara B'Tevet The fast of 10th of Tevet falls on Friday only once every few years and it is the only fast day that can fall out on a Friday.