

The Jewish Weekly

The Rabbi Who Converted Out of Judaism

By Rabbi Chaim Mentz

Near the end of Shabbat, the Baal Shem Tov sat at the head of the table eating the 'Third Meal' with his Chassidim (followers). They were singing beautiful niggunim (Chassidic melodies) while he was immersed in deep thought seemingly in another dimension.

And in fact, he was in another dimension. He was scanning the entire world, everywhere where Jews were (or were supposed to be) to see what could be done to bring Moshiach (who will alleviate all pain and suffering) one moment sooner. Suddenly his face darkened.

This was no small catastrophe. One of his most talented followers; a great Rabbi, Rab Avraham, who was versed in all the holy texts and a leader of an entire town, had fallen to the depths of idolatry!! What could possibly have brought such a Tzadik to such a heinous sin? What went wrong?!

The Baal Shem Tov concentrated deeply and his soul soared to the upper realms. It was worse than he thought. This Rabbi had, somewhat like in the story of Job, been given into the hands of the Satan. But unlike Job, he had done something to deserve it.

In Rab Avraham's town lived a great Talmudic scholar that existed from community support. Once a week someone would go from house to house to collect money for him and take a small percentage for himself.

But when Rab Avraham discovered that people were using this as an excuse not to give to other causes, he expressed his dissatisfaction, which his congregants understood as an order to stop giving him donations. In time the income dwindled so that the unfortunate scholar didn't even have money to give his wife to prepare for Shabbat and when that happened he and his wife burst out in tears.

Shortly thereafter, a rich member of the Jewish community used his power and influence to try to force a simple man out of business. The latter complained to Rab Avraham who, for some reason, did not reprimand the rich man as strongly as he should have. So the injustice continued until one day the simple man had to close his store and on that day he wept.

The tears of both the scholar and the simple man burst through to the highest heavens and began to accuse; such deeds from such a distinguished Rabbi were a disgrace to both the Torah and to Judaism. Rab Avraham must suffer!! And his punishment was decided; he would be given into the hands of the Devil!

The Rabbi's custom each Shabbat, was to pray the first half of the daytime prayer alone in his home and then go to the Synagogue when the cantor began his repetition. But this Shabbat

suddenly, in the middle of his prayers, he felt strange lust enter his heart. Instead of being enraptured with the greatness, the awesomeness and the nearness of G-d as usual in his prayers, he only wanted a drink of brandy.

He stopped his prayers thinking that the idea would leave him but it didn't. It became a burning desire! Suddenly he felt that without brandy he would die! Before he knew it, he had downed three full cups, removed his prayer shawl and was running down the street in the direction of the ... church!

"I want to see the Bishop!!" the Rabbi yelled insanely as he pounded on the massive church door. "Let me in!!" the fire of apostasy was burning in his brain and heart and the Bishop, who was busy talking to some important people, heard the yelling and immediately understood what was happening.

He ordered his servants to take the Rabbi to his home and provide him with light refreshments and, of course, more brandy until he was free to deal with him. They did as they were told and as soon as he saw the food and drink he grabbed the bottle in one hand and the food in the other and began eating and guzzling like an animal while screaming blasphemies ... until he fell unconscious on the floor.

The Baal Shem Tov meanwhile was desperately occupied in the upper worlds urgently trying to find a way to save this unfortunate pupil. But the only thing that could save him were pure merits, and they were hard to find. It seems that every commandment that Rab Avraham had ever done contained some minute measure of ulterior motive. Nothing had ever been done with 100% love of the Creator. AHA!! Except for one custom! The Baal Shem Tov had found it! ... Eating the Melave-Malke meal after the Shabbat! As strange as it may seem, this was the only commandment that the Rabbi did purely for G-d.

The Baal Shem Tov knew that he had to work fast; his only chance was to somehow get him to eat this meal before the Bishop got to him!

The Baal Shem Tov took a piece from the loaf of bread he had just eaten from, added a whole loaf from the 12 he had on the table before him at each of the Shabbat meals, wrapped them in a cloth and handed it to one of his holy pupils saying,

"Take this and go. And HaShem will help!"

The pupil had already seen such things from his master. Often a necessary ingredient to fix the world was implicit trust in G-d.

He took the bread, put on his coat and walked into the cold Ukrainian night not knowing why or even where he was going.

He said words of Torah by heart as his feet led him out of Mezibuz (the Baal Shem Tov's town) to a lone, moon-lit, forest road. Suddenly the wind began blowing and the road became strewn with rocks and pebbles making it almost impossible to proceed.

It Once Happened...

"This is obviously from the Devil!" he thought to himself as he forged ahead, and began praying.

Then the road turned into deep sand but he only closed his eyes, prayed more intensely and pushed himself on trying not to become discouraged.

So it was a third time; darkness and snow engulfed him. But this time when he opened his eyes from his prayer he found himself in a different place altogether. It was as though he had jumped hundreds of miles away.

The snow was gone, in the moonlit distance he saw a Church and in just moments he was standing outside of the house that he sensed was his destination. He entered and saw an unconscious Jew lying on the floor in soiled Shabbat garments filthy with vomit and mud surrounded by idols and icons. Gevalt. it was Reb Avraham!! He recognized him! This must be what the Baal Shem Tov sent him for!

He took some water, splashed it on the poor Rabbi's face to awaken him but when he woke he began mumbling anti-Semitic remarks and demanding brandy. The Chassid, however, paid no attention and just insisted that Reb Avraham wash his hands for bread. Miraculously he consented.


"Come, now lets eat some of this bread" coaxed the Chassid. It took some maneuvering to get the Rabbi's attention away from the bottle but as soon as he took the first bite of the Baal Shem Tov's bread a startling change came over him.

He let out a deep, frightening moan, looked down at his dirty garments then at the crosses and statues that hung on the walls and stood up in amazement. "What happened to me?" he screamed. "What have I done?!! NO.. NO!!!!!! What have I done!!! We must leave here quickly!"


He grabbed the Chassid's hand, staggered, weeping and moaning, out of the room, away from the house, back to the forest path from whence he came. They began running in the darkness and suddenly they were back in Mezibuz. another miracle the Baal Shem Tov had arranged.

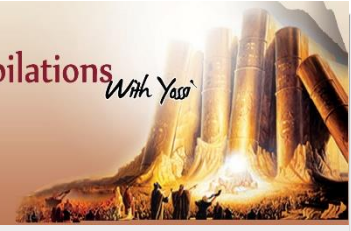
The Baal Shem Tov was still sitting at the table surrounded by singing Chassidim when Reb Avraham stumbled in, filthy and heart-broken and collapsed on the floor. Another soul had been saved.

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



Shabbat Times - Parshat Ki Tisa

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	5:01	6:15	6:55
Tel Aviv	5:16	6:16	6:52
Haifa	5:07	6:15	6:53
Be'er Sheva	5:19	6:17	6:55



Roi Assaraf, Oct. 7 Survivor, Shares His Powerful Story with the YU Community

By Mijal Gutiérrez

Roi Assaraf, who survived Hamas' attack at the Supernova Music Festival on Oct. 7, shared his story of miracles and survival to a crowd of hundreds of Yeshiva University students on Jan. 24.

Roi told students, who had gathered to hear him in Furst Hall, that he had looked forward to attending the festival. Due to the pandemic and other economic hardships the family endured, Roi, a hairdresser by trade, and his wife, Yonah, had been unable to enjoy many leisure activities for almost four years prior to Oct. 7. A friend had recommended to Roi that he and his wife take some leisure time to enjoy the festival, so the couple, along with Roi's brother and some friends, agreed to attend the event together.

Roi and Yonah had set an alarm to wake up early on the morning of Oct. 7. Strangely enough, it did not ring in time, and consequently, they were late to the event by a couple of hours. Due to being late, they were only able to enter a parking area far from the main stage once they reached the event. The group went inside the festival and as they were enjoying the music, Roi took out his cellphone in order to film himself and the festival around him. As he was recording, he noticed something strange at the left corner of his camera: a dark cloud growing bigger and bigger. It quickly became clear that rockets were being fired, and the sound of distant gunshots and cries grew stronger and nearer.

"My mind went blank besides the two faces that appeared in my mind — the faces of my daughters. Before I knew it, my flight response had kicked in, and I grabbed my wife and began turning towards the exit, desperate to survive and be able to see my daughters once more."

Roi then recounts a series of incredible, miraculous, and scarring events. As he and his wife made their way out, he saw a man inside a car who lay calmly asleep, unaware of the chaos around him. Roi recalled the Jewish idiom which states "that who saves one life is as if he has saved the world" and, although this placed his life at risk, Roi stopped to go wake the man and inform him of the situation so he could save himself before the attackers could reach them. Roi later found out that the man they had awoken ended up saving over 20 lives that day.

He continued to seek his way to the car, desperately trying to get in touch with his brother and friends who had accompanied him to what had just been an innocent music festival. Though Roi and his wife and brother were able to escape — through an emergency exit that he was only able to access due to being late -

many of his friends could not. Some of his friends were able to survive by hiding for over 6 hours. Some friends were taken hostage by the Hamas terrorists, and are still being held in Gaza. Others were tragically murdered in the attacks.

As Roi and his family drove in an attempt to escape, they passed by a military vehicle with what appeared to be Israeli uniforms and soldiers. His wife expressed relief believing these were our soldiers, who had finally come to protect them against the attack. The relief was short-lived, as the moment they got closer to the vehicle, the undercover attackers began to fire at all the people nearby. They were terrorists disguised as soldiers, mass shooting at anyone fleeing from the festival. Roi immediately yelled at his brother who sat in the back seat to duck and held his wife's head under the dashboard before ducking himself. Pure fear and panic rushed through his body as he kept his foot on the pedal and drove — without a clue as to where he was headed — as bullets rained all throughout their vehicle. He drove until they were sure they weren't under fire anymore, until finally, they were able to make their way back home to their daughters.

They had barely survived.

Roi and his wife were reunited with their daughters, one of whom could barely recognize him after he walked in shaken and shocked from what he had just survived. They soon found out about the bloody attack that had taken place. Little by little they began to find out about the friends who had been taken hostage, whose bodies had been found, or those who had managed to survive. Roi recalls that life has not been the same since that day.

On one hand, he shares about how this experience helped him realize what a real "worry" is. All his life he had spent worrying about how he was going to provide for himself and his family, how his business as a hairdresser would continue, and so on. Now he was more than sure that these things are, and have always been, in Hashem's Hands. They were not real objects of true worry.

The days following the attack he and his wife took part in efforts to assist in providing aid for soldiers or fellow Israelis. Roi closed his hair studio and he and his business partner gave free haircuts to soldiers in the army. As he watched the Jewish nation come together as a family, after suffering from such a terrible loss, he understood how it shouldn't take for such a horrible tragedy to take place for the Jewish nation to come together. Sinat Chinam had been plaguing us, Roi believes, meaninglessly standing as an obstacle to the Jewish brother and sisterhood. Since the attack, Roi began to see Hashem's works more and more, and he found a profound sense of meaning in his life and a renewed and strengthened sense of Emunah in HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

In search of establishing an even stronger connection with G-d, Roi began to take on more and more mitzvot. Though his family had always been traditional and strong believers, he was not used to an observant lifestyle but now more than ever felt the desire to connect with Hashem through his actions. Roi and his wife wrote a book based on their experiences on October 7th, along with the stories of approximately 80 other survivors, and now go around the world sharing their miraculous stories and inspiring attitudes.

Reprinted from an email of yucommentator.org.

With how many hands was Moshe holding the Luchot?

In Parshat Ki Tisa, we are told how Moshe came down from the summit of Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments in his hands. And then when he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf the Torah says, "וישליך מידו [מידין] את הלחת" - He threw the tablets down from his hands."

But the word 'מידו [מידין]' - 'from his hands' - is missing a yud, and therefore it can be read literally as 'מידו' - 'from his hand'. What sense can we make of this?

Reb Yisrael Salanter gives a marvelous commentary. This is how he puts it. Moshe had two Luchot. One, which was held in his right hand, was the Luchot bearing the laws between ourselves and Hashem. The other, which he held in his left hand, bore the laws between ourselves and our fellow human beings. That's how Moshe came down the mountain.

When he saw the Bnei Yisrael worshipping the calf, he recognized that they were breaking the first two of the commandments: 1. We have to believe in Hashem, and 2. We cannot worship any idols. These commandments were on the Luchot held by his right hand and therefore the thought crossed his mind, "וישליך מידו," - that he would cast that tablet down from his 'hand' because what they were doing related only to the mitzvot between ourselves and Hashem, not to the mitzvot between ourselves and others.

But then Moshe realized that actually we should never separate the two Luchot - because ultimately our responsibility towards our fellow human beings must always be seen as an integral part of our relationship with Hashem and that's why "וישליך מידו [מידין]" - he cast down the Luchot from both of his hands.

Here we have yet another reminder of the centrality of our responsibility towards others within the mitzvot of the Torah because ultimately what Hashem wants of us is to have a full deep and meaningful relationship with Him and at the same time to always see our responsibility to others as being part of our belief in Hashem.

So let's show Hashem how we have a deep and meaningful relationship with Him by praying for our soldiers, police and medical professionals, especially through these trying times by adding a special prayer 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

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 9
MITZVOT ASEH: 4
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 5

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 139
NUMBER OF WORDS: 2002
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 7424

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Melachim I 18:1-39
Chabad & Sephardim: Melachim I 18:20-39

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