

The Jewish Weekly

A Two-Way Surprise at the Tzfat Cemetery

By Yehuda Azulay

I almost never post these types of events that happen to me, but I feel I have no choice with this one.

I arrived in Israel yesterday with an amazing group of forty-five Moroccan Jewish business men from Toronto, called the "Sephardic Unity Israel Trip." After concluding a tour of Tsfat and visiting burial sites of the Tzadikim, nearly everyone was now gathered back on the bus outside the new cemetery of Tzfat, for the next leg of the trip, a visit to a winery. I, though, was late, as usual, as was my good friend, Ariel Picillo, and the three rabbis with the group.

Then the unexpected occurred.

It was scorching hot. I remembered seeing a soft drinks machine nearby, up a short hill. As I approached, two middle-aged Sephardic-looking women were standing near the cemetery 'chapel.' I said to them (in Hebrew), "Please, do you have any change for the coke machine?"

One of the women responded with a thick Israeli-Moroccan accent, "No, I have no change and anyway, the coke machine doesn't work. However, I am part of the Hevra Kadisha ('Burial Society') of Tzfat. Do you perhaps have ten men? We need a minyan to bury a woman. We have been here for nearly an hour, waiting to bury her. She is an elderly Holocaust survivor, and has no male descendants except for one grandson. He is in the chapel hoping a minyan can be assembled."

Astonished, I quickly blurted out, "Hold on a minute. I have a bus filled with about 50 men waiting for three Rabbis to return from immersing in the Arizal's mikveh. I will be right back."

I was stunned by the sudden turn in events. The woman was equally in shock and became extremely emotional, but I had no time to waste.

I ran down the small hill from the new section of the cemetery to our bus waiting outside the cemetery gates, and told two of the organizers, Victor Arrobas and Rabbi Leib Irons, the situation.

Victor said to me, "Look, it's 12:55pm, the rabbis are coming any moment and we have only five minutes left. We are very behind schedule and you know how Israelis are. They say "five minutes," and it can be over an hour. I know it is a big mitzvah, but at least first see if the body is even there."

I responded, "You are correct about the timing. I'll go right now to check if the body is there."

I ran back up the hill as fast as I could. Despite the mounting pressure on me from both sides. I said to myself, "I will not let anything stop me from arranging the minyan."

I approached the ladies filled with emotion, and asked them, "Where is this woman's body?" One of them answered "Bifnim" ('inside').

I went into the first room and found nothing there. I quickly reported back to the two women, who promptly replied, "Further in." After going through three more rooms I finally spotted the body of the woman in the fourth, wrapped in shrouds.

My heart stuttered. I said to myself, "She must be buried with the utmost respect." I ran out with not a minute to spare and told the women to delay the burial.

I ran down the hill and asked Rabbi Irons if the rabbis came back yet and he said "No."

I said to him "Perfect. We are going to help bury this lady. The body is there; now is the time."

I got on the bus filled with emotion and I raised my voice so that everyone could hear me. I didn't even pause to pick up the microphone. They were all wondering why I got up to speak.

I announced, "Listen, everyone. I was just up the hill and a burial is about to begin. There is no family present except for one grandson, so there will be no minyan and no Kaddish without us. Let's go help! I got permission to delay our departure. It's just up the hill, two minutes away."

Everyone was taken by surprise, but inspired. I ran up the hill with nearly fifty people behind me. I saw the two women's faces; they couldn't stop crying from joy over what just occurred.

As we all entered the chapel, it was as if this was all planned from above. Immediately the body was brought out on a stretcher. There were nearly fifty men including several rabbis present. Kaddish and other prayers were recited.

After, we escorted the body out of the chapel and only a one minute walk away was the burial spot. The body was lifted from the stretcher and carefully laid to rest. Several shovels were provided and we helped scoop the mounds of dirt into the grave. The rabbi said a few words, as did the grandson before reciting the Kaddish again. The Toronto group was greatly moved by the opportunity to participate in this unexpected mitzvah.

[Burial of the dead and respectful treatment of the deceased in preparation for proper burial is considered one of the greatest mitzvot. It takes

It Once Happened...

precedence over any other Mitzvat Aseh - a scriptural commandment to do a particular deed.]

After the very brief funeral, the grandson thanked me and then added, "You know, my sister, the only other living relative of my grandmother, lives in Toronto, but was unable to come."

"Really?!" we exclaimed. "Our whole group is from Toronto. In what part does she live?" "Her husband is the rabbi of the Romano synagogue, the Chabad Romenu shul," was the reply. One person on the trip knew the rabbi well, and was so excited to hear this that he whipped out his cell phone and immediately called the Rabbi .

The rabbi was very moved. He excitedly informed us that the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote in his HaYom Yom (daily wisdom) book in the entry for this day's date on the Jewish calendar all about Hashgacha Pratit (Divine supervision of the individual). There it states, "One should learn about Divine Providence - there is no such thing as 'coincidence,'" and "each particular movement of every human being is directly related to the overall intent underlying the creation...." "Thus", the rabbi concluded, it was no coincidence that the granddaughter was from Toronto and the group burying this stranger is from Toronto.

Rabbi Irons turned to me after the burial, saying, "Your mission in Eretz Yisrael is complete. Even if you go home now, you did your job." I responded, "Thank you, but as long as I am alive, I am never done."

This ninety-five year-old lady from Vilna who went through the Holocaust must have had a great merit. She passed away on the same date as her birthday. May the merit of Ida bat Chunya obm be a source of blessing to us all. I wrote this with the hope that her story will be told - and especially about her large funeral.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.

Editor's Note: An addition, later submitted from a different member of the group:

"Absolutely incredible! I am in a bus with almost 50 men who do not stop speaking about what happened. I want to add one more thing...

We all had immersed in the mikveh of the Arizal just minutes before. So we were all properly purified and prepared for this mitzvah! She must have been a very special person."



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Tetzaveh

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:56	6:09	6:50
Tel Aviv	5:11	6:11	6:47
Haifa	5:01	6:10	6:48
Be'er Sheva	5:14	6:12	6:50



Challenging the Rebbe

By Dr. Rivkah Blau

In the late 1950s, Jewish day school graduates began finding themselves in Ivy League and Seven Sisters colleges – and I was one of them.

On campus, we encountered an environment that was often hostile to Jews. Classes were held on Shabbat and exams were often given on holidays; we bought our own kosher food, but we still had to pay for room and board and could not bring our food into the dormitories. We also found that people were asking us questions about Judaism that we couldn't answer. Despite our years of yeshivah education, many of us felt that we didn't know enough, and we wanted to continue learning.

We began organizing different groups: At Barnard, where I was, we called our group Ari; at Columbia, they called theirs Yeshurun and used to gather for afternoon prayers in the laboratory of a doctoral student; in Harvard, they called it Taryag; while Cornell had a Young Israel House with a kosher kitchen.

Once we heard about each other, we decided to establish a single body to coordinate all the groups. We called it Yavneh and our founding convention was in February 1960. Our goal was to promote Jewish learning and observance on campus, to ensure that Jewish students wouldn't feel alone, and that if they wanted to learn more, we would be there to help them.

Everybody had his or her own reason for the name, but I was trying to carry on an organization that my father, Rav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz, had started before immigrating to America, when he was a fourteen-year-old in Latvia. After coming home from the Ponevezh yeshivah and discovering that the boys he had grown up with had joined the Communist Party, he founded a club – Yavneh – for Jewish boys to learn and have fun while getting a better feeling about their Jewishness.

Communal leaders took a keen interest in our new group and rabbis like my father and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik thought it was a wonderful initiative, as did the Lubavitcher Rebbe. They helped us by speaking on our behalf, raising money for us, introducing us to influential people, and doing whatever they could to help Yavneh flourish.

At first, I was the secretary of the organization; by the next year, 1961, I was its vice-president. At around this time, the Rebbe had a representative, Rabbi Moshe Feller, who would come to Columbia and who became friendly with the president of Yavneh, Joel Levine. This young man told Joel, who then told me, that the Rebbe wanted to meet with two officers of Yavneh, to discuss our activities and how we had gotten started.

Our appointment was for ten o'clock at night, but when we came to 770 Eastern Parkway there were so many people waiting to see him that we only came into his office at midnight. The Rebbe greeted us warmly; I brought him regards from my father, and he sent regards back. He was behind a desk, and he asked us to sit in two chairs across from him.

The Rebbe started listing the languages in which we could conduct the meeting – it was a funny moment, since he was giving so many options, and he did it with a smile. When he reached Russian or French, we settled on English as our language of choice.

He began asking us many detailed questions. He wanted to know how we had started Yavneh and how we had found each other; the problems, the possibilities, and the opportunities for people who were interested in finding out more about their Jewishness; our plan for reaching those people; what we found worked well and what did not. He had a purpose, and his questions were to the point.

I didn't know it at that time, but it became evident to me later on that since Chabad was planning to set up activities for Jewish college students, he wanted to have a sense of what exactly was going on from people who were in the thick of it. At the end he said, "I've asked you a lot of questions; would you like to ask me some questions?"

"No, thank you." I declined. It had been a wonderful meeting and I had nothing to ask him. However, the fellow who was with me did have a question. "I have spent a Shabbat or two here in Crown Heights and I hear all kinds of wonder stories about you. I hear that you know whether a person should have surgery, and you know which way to proceed with a legal case. Do you know more medicine than the doctors? Do you know more law than lawyers? What is this?"

The Rebbe smiled, apparently unperturbed by the audaciousness of the question. "You know," he replied, "when a house is built, the architect draws up a blueprint. He gives the blueprint to the contractor and then the contractor tells the plumber how to do the plumbing, the mason how to do the masonry, the electrician how to do the electrical work. It's not that the contractor can do the tasks better than everybody, but he can read the blueprint, and that's why he can give the instructions."

He then quoted the Zohar which states that the Torah is the blueprint for the world and explained that by understanding Torah, one can determine what should be done in other realms as well. "No, I don't know law better than the lawyers or medicine better than the doctors but based on what I have learned in the Torah, I can give people advice."

I thought that was a beautiful answer and was ready to go, but unfortunately this young man had another question. "Alright," he persisted, "but I hear these miraculous stories about you. Can they all be true?"

I thought this question was inappropriate but the Rebbe wasn't taken aback at all. He had a sense of humor, and he knew how to respond to this young man. Laughing, he said, "People don't tell me stories about myself – they figure I know them already – so I have no idea what stories are being told about me, and I can't vouch for them." He then gave a list of great Torah sages who were either not chasidic or were opposed to the movement, and said, "I have read stories, in books that I trust, about these people and the wondrous things that they did. You can believe those stories, but I would have to check out the stories that are being told about me." It was such a wonderful answer, and he handled the interaction graciously.

When we came out, I saw Rabbi Herschel Schacter waiting in line, and I apologized that our audience had gone on for so long. "Oh, don't worry, this is going to go on until 3 or 4 in the morning," he said. "This is what goes on every night at the Rebbe's."

Three important lessons about successful Jewish parenting appear at the commencement of Parshat Tetzaveh. The Torah gives us a mitzvah, להנלה נר תמיד, - to guarantee that there would be a continuous flame" in the Sanctuary in the wilderness. From the book of Mishlei, we know that "הנורה אור - Torah is the greatest light of our lives". For this reason, many of our commentators compare the imperative to kindle the light in the Sanctuary to the importance of conveying the essence of the light of our Torah through to the generations to come.

When it comes to kindling lights, I can identify three rules. We all have experience of lighting menorah, birthday, or Shabbat candles. Rule number one is that you can never predict whether that wick will co-operate or not. Rule number two is that you have to have patience. Sometimes you'll need to use match after match after match. Sometimes you'll have to hold a long match next to a wick, waiting patiently for the wick to take on that light. And rule number three is presented to us by Rashi on Shemot 27:20, at the beginning of our parsha. Rashi says, "מדליק - You must kindle that light," – עד שתהא שלהבת עולה מאליה - Until you can step back knowing that the flame will be burning of its own accord."

In a similar fashion when it comes to הנינוך - Jewish education', in our homes we have to be mindful of these three rules. Rule number one: you can never predict how any one particular child will respond – and sometimes the response of the same child can change from one age to another. Rule number two: we have to show an enormous amount of patience and love, often giving the warmth of our presence and our encouragement to our children. And rule number three: we discharge our responsibility when we successfully raise our children so that they can stand up and be proud of their Judaism, independently of ourselves, enthusiastically embracing the values, the content, and the practices of our Torah.

No wonder therefore that here the Torah is describing the 'נר תמיד - the continuous flame' which stands as a symbol of the continuous flame of our Judaism in this world. So to be successful parents, let's be mindful of these three rules. First, you never know how our children might respond. Secondly, we have to show an enormous amount of patience and love and thirdly, let's guarantee that our children will be fired up with enthusiasm and passion about their Judaism, not performing it only because we want them to, but performing it because they appreciate how fortunate they are to have the privilege of following a life filled with Torah to the extent that one day, they, in turn, will pass on the glorious flame of our Judaism through to the generations to come.

Let's also teach them the importance of prayer by joining together to pray for our soldiers, police and medical professionals safe, 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.

Moshe Feller

The Jewish Weekly's
PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 7
MITZVOT ASEH: 4
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 3

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 101
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1412
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5430

HAFTORA:
Yechezkel 43:10-27

Purim Katan begins sundown Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024, and goes thru Friday evening, Feb. 23, 2024. Shabbat is Shushan Purim Katan.

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