

The Jewish Weekly

The Stay-at-Home Mom

By Rabbi Yisrael Gordon

Let me tell you a short story that happened in a small Belarusian town called Dokshitz in 1930. Dokshitz was what you might call a chasidic fortress. It had five or six synagogues for the two thousand Jewish people who lived there, and all but one of them were Chabad synagogues. One of those Jewish people was a chasid who served as the town shochet, the ritual slaughterer, like his father had before him, and his father had before him.

At the time of this story, this chasid's wife became pregnant. She was past forty – which is not very old, but neither is it very young for a woman to give birth. She had already lost one or two pregnancies, besides having a child pass away in infancy, so the couple was worried. The woman traveled to Vilna, which was the nearest big city with a hospital, to consult a doctor there.

"This time," the doctor said after conducting his examination, "you should do something different – give birth in a hospital, not at home with a midwife as you usually do. Not only that, but you must spend the entire ninth month here in the hospital. Otherwise you and your baby will both be in jeopardy."

Back then, this was considered radical advice. To go give birth in a hospital? So the husband asked the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, what they should do.

"Let her give birth at home the way she always does," said the Previous Rebbe, "and she'll have a healthy child."

The couple was concerned no longer. The doctor had given his opinion, but if the Rebbe said differently, they were going to listen to the Rebbe. The woman stayed home and had a healthy child – me.

I consider myself fortunate to have been born with the blessing of the Previous Rebbe. Not only that, but the blessing was for a child who will live and be well, which has also held true: Thank G-d, I've been around for quite a number of years now.

Around the time that I was born, the Previous Rebbe instructed my family to move to America.

"I'm afraid to go to America," my father, Reb Yochanan Gordon, had told the Previous Rebbe. He had heard that America was no place to raise a Torah-observant family. In those days, people who came here would cool off in terms of their Jewishness, their study of Torah, and observance of the mitzvot. Why would he want his children to be exposed to such a land?

"I promise that your children will remain faithful Jews," the Previous Rebbe told him.

But my father wasn't satisfied. He wanted his children to study in Tomchei Temimim, the yeshiva network headed by the Previous Rebbe, and in the 1930s, it had no presence in America.

"Your children will learn in my yeshivot," the Rebbe reassured him.

My father assumed this meant that when my brothers and I grew up, we would go back to Europe – maybe to Warsaw, or to Vilna – to study in a Tomchei Temimim yeshiva there. He couldn't imagine that the yeshivot would come to America. But in the end, our whole family arrived in New York in 1934, and in 1940, my older brother Sholom was one of the first ten students of the new Tomchei Temimim yeshiva that was founded there. After the yeshiva had moved to 770 Eastern Parkway, they opened a class for younger boys in 1941, which I joined as a ten-and-a-half-year-old.

By then, World War Two had broken out, and the Previous Rebbe had come to America with some of his immediate family. His daughter, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, and her husband Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, our Rebbe, were still stuck in Europe. To make a long story short, they managed to get out, and when they arrived in America in the summer of 1941, we were all elated.

The future Rebbe, who was then known as the Ramash, began to join us yeshiva students for the 9:00 AM prayers in 770, and a couple of days after arriving, he was with us for the morning prayers on Rosh Chodesh, the first of the month of Tammuz. In the middle of the Rosh Chodesh service, before the Musaf prayer, men remove their tefillin. Now, most Jewish men wear one pair of tefillin, following the accepted opinion of the sage Rashi. Some put on a second pair, as well, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam – which meant putting them on and removing them before Musaf as well. However, there are actually two more versions of the head tefillin, following the views of the Raavad and the Shimusha Rabbah, although they are only worn by such a select few that most people haven't even heard of them.

As we were about to learn, the Previous Rebbe's newly arrived son-in-law donned all four every morning, having been instructed to do so by the Previous Rebbe himself.

Not wanting to stand out, however, the Ramash practically hid in a corner of the room and, with his body covered by his tallit, started the whole procedure of putting on these three other sets of tefillin. Of course, we yeshiva students noticed, and we couldn't understand why he was taking his tefillin on and off; we didn't even know that there was such a thing as four sets of tefillin. We were just flabbergasted.

It Once Happened...

There was also an elder chasid by the name of Dovid Shiffrin who was present. He had been a chasid of the Rebbe Maharash, the fourth Rebbe of Lubavitch, and had known the Previous Rebbe as a child. He watched how the Ramash conducted himself, as he was doing things quietly, trying not to be noticed or observed, and he recognized that this was someone very special.

"Children," he said to us about the future Rebbe, "this is the real merchandise – the real thing."

A few years later, there was another interesting thing that happened in 770 with the future Rebbe. One day, he suddenly came into the study hall from upstairs, where the Previous Rebbe's quarters were, walked over to the large Torah-reading table in the center of the room, and gave a little bang on it with his hand to get our attention.

"I have an announcement to make," he began. "I am coming from my father-in-law, who told me that his father just visited him, and that I should tell you what he said." The Previous Rebbe's father, the Rebbe Rashab, had passed away twenty-five years earlier, in 1920. And yet, somehow he had come to his son and asked him a question: "Why is it that in your synagogue, people are talking during the Torah reading?"

Having made this announcement, the Ramash left the room.

For a long time after that, maybe ten or fifteen years, you could hear a pin drop in 770 during the services, although once our family of chasidim grew a little bigger and there were more little children around 770, things began to change.

I still remember the way the Rebbe gave us that message. We realized then that 770 was truly a holy place. G-d is there, as He is in every synagogue, and along with Him were the saintly founders of our yeshiva. We had to behave differently there.

Reprinted from Here's My Story, www.myencounterblog.com.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Yisroel Gordon was a Chabad emissary and educator in Worcester, Massachusetts, and Morristown, New Jersey, for over sixty years.

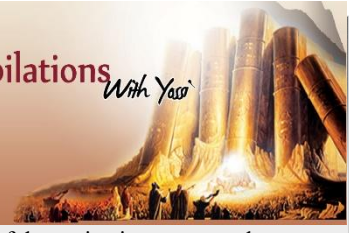
He was interviewed in December 2010.

He passed away in 2023.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Ki Tavo

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:33	7:45	8:24
Tel Aviv	6:48	7:47	8:22
Haifa	6:40	7:47	8:24
Be'er Sheva	6:50	7:46	8:24



The War-Time Saga of an Orphaned Fur-Sewer

By Yehuda Z. Klitnick

The 'Yosef' in this story was orphaned of his father at a very young age, and as he was the oldest child, the burden of supporting his mother and family fell on him. He went to learn how to sew fur, and that brought income to the family.

But, after several years, when he turned eighteen, he was drafted to enlist in the Romania army, and since he had a profession, he could not avoid serving. Being a Chassidish boy, he was worried about maintaining his Yiddishkeit (Jewish observance), and also who would support his mother and family while he was in the army.

The chasidim among the draftees would go to their Rebbes for a blessing to be freed from serving. Yosef traveled to the [2nd] Shtefaneshte Rebbe, grandson of the "Holy Rizhiner" Rebbe, with another group of chasidic boys who also received an order to join the army! Every boy stood in line and the Rebbe blessed each of them in turn: "May you be freed from the army and from the hands of the Gentiles."

Surprisingly though, when his turn came, the Rebbe blessed him "May G*d arrange you an easy service in the army!" This struck him like a thunderbolt! The Rebbe clearly said that he will have to join the army! What will happen to his Judaism and the income for his family?

He decided to try his luck again and went to the rear of the line of those other boys still waiting for a blessing from the Rebbe. Yosef was hopeful when the Rebbe blessed them all to be freed from the army and the hands of the Gentiles, but when came his second chance, the Rebbe blessed him with the same words as before: "May the One Above give you an easy service in the army!"

He began to cry in front of the Rebbe and asked what about his Torah observance, and who would support his mother and his family! The Rebbe reassured him not to be worried, because his serving would be easy and G*d will guard you that your service would not affect your Kashrus or Shabbos observing. "G*d will also help you to continue to support the family even while in the army."

After hearing this clear declaration, Yosef calmed down and said goodbye to the Rebbe, who then gave him another warm blessing.

When the day arrived to report to the army, Yosef was relaxed, due to his full trust in the Rebbe! When he arrived at the army center, an officer sent him to serve in the city of Chernovitz. This greatly comforted him because there were many chasidic Jews in Chernovitz.

The first two days he really worked hard to keep up with the military training. On the third day though, there was an announcement made - if anyone among the soldiers had knowledge how to sew fur, he should come forward. Yosef stepped forth and announced he was an expert in sewing fur.

The officer was glad, and seemed relieved. He sent Yosef to the home of the chief commander of the army who was also the minister of Chernovitz. His wife had torn her precious coat of fur and an expert was needed to fix it, so well that people would not recognize that it had ever been torn.

Yosef examined the coat and said he could fix it, but added that he needed to take the coat with him to match to fur that would blend in perfectly. The minister agreed and turned over the expensive fur coat to Yosef.

Yosef took it with him to the garment center in the city. The first business that he entered that sold fur belonged to a chasidic Jew. But when the man saw a soldier entering, he became terrified; what did the soldier want from him?

Yosef reassured him not to be afraid, and introduced himself as a chasid of the Shtefaneshte Rebbe. He told him of the Rebbe's blessing, and the minister's wife's coat that he was given to fix.

The owner visibly relaxed and guided him to where he could find the right colored fur. He also provided him a corner where he could sit and mend the coat.

As Yosef worked, the owner quickly perceived his expertise. He exclaimed: "I want to hire you. I have a very close connection with the army, as I am the one to whom they bring their uniforms to fix! I will arrange that they free you in order to work for me."

Yosef agreed. He realized that the blessing of Rebbe was already being fulfilled. True, he had actually worked really hard as a soldier for two days, but now he will be able to work for a chasidic Jew, keep up his Yiddishkeit, and still earn money to support his family.

Yosef went back to the minister with the repaired coat, accompanied by the shop owner. When he showed it to his wife she was totally delighted, as there was no indication that it had ever been torn. He offered Yosef a handsome amount of money for his expertise work.

When the manager of the business then asked the minister if he could take Yosef to work for him, he immediately agreed, and said that whenever he would need the services of Yosef, the employer should make sure that Yosef reports promptly.

Thus, Yosef received his temporary discharge from the army and began to work for the chasid. Not so long after that, Yosef became engaged to a fine chasidic girl, and his boss arranged for Yosef to be released from the army. Just as the Shtefaneshter promised - "an easy service!"

Reprinted from an email from Pardes Yehuda.



Despite campaigns of demonization, we can always stand tall.

There is a fascinating connection between stones and the Jewish people. In Parshat Ki Tavo, for example, our nation was commanded with the mitzvah "וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל הָאֲבִנִּים" - "write all the words of the Torah on these stones". Just as we were entering into the Holy Land, stones had a position of prominence. Similarly, at the end of the book of Bereishit, when Yaakov was just about to pass away, he refers to his beloved son Yosef as being "אֶבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל", "the stone of Israel". Targum Onkelos has a wonderful commentary on this which he says that the word 'even', stone, is actually a composite word, it is made up of two different terms 'אב' and 'בן', making 'אבן'. אב is father, a parent, בן is son, a child. And therefore, Onkelos explains, Yaakov was saying to Yosef that thanks to your leadership, parents and children, people of all generations in Egypt and around the world have been blessed by you.

But I believe that there is an added implication of this. A stone is indestructible in the face of natural elements. So too, Jewish tradition can never be destroyed if we convey the beauty of our heritage faithfully from parents to children through all ages.

Being compared to a stone, therefore, is a reference to Jewish survival. And now we can understand, with this in mind, a reference to stones in the psalms of Hallel. "אבן מאסו הבונים היתה לראש פינה", "the stone that the builders have rejected has become a cornerstone". This is a description of, sadly, so many instances in Jewish history when the builders and sustainers of civilizations have preferred to leave the Jews out. However, despite their efforts, we have continued always to be the cornerstone of our civilizations. It is significant that this verse, this message appears in our Hallel, our songs of joyful praise and the message to us is despite the thoughts, the efforts, the intentions of those who have malevolent intent with regard to Jews, Judaism and the State of Israel, we must always stand tall and be proud of who we are and what we are about.

So let's stand tall by joining me in unity by praying that Hakadosh Baruch Hu bless our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, 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, loving and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 6
MITZVOT ASEH: 3
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 3

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 122
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1747
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6811

HAFTORA:
Yeshayahu 60:1-22 (קוּמִי אוּרִי) (this is the sixth of seven Haftorot, [the Seven Haftorot of Consolation] that precede Rosh Hashanah).

This week we study Chapters 3 and 4 of Pirkei Avot

פרשת כי תבוא

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