

SICHA STORY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Volume 20

Vayetze, Sicha 1 (Second Sicha of the week)

- Rabbi Yossi Nemes, Metairie, Louisiana

This week's Sicha discusses how the descent of Galus is for a purpose and a greater ascent and therefore we should not despair when facing the hardships of Galus. It also references אֲנִי בְּעֵדוּתְךָ יְיָ in connection with this. Here are stories on the theme.

Taking a step back to jump ahead!

A week ago, I attended the celebration of the circumcision of the eight-day old son of a good friend: Tamir Goodman. Close to a hundred friends and family were there. In the middle of the festive meal, a well-dressed, perhaps sixty-year-old woman suddenly stood up, asked for silence, and began to speak.

She introduced herself as the widow of the departed Knesset member Professor Avner Shaki, of blessed memory (a native of Tsfat –ed.). She then went on to explain the reason for her being there. About a year ago Tamir called her home, asked for her husband, and when he heard that he had passed away, asked if he could speak to her. He introduced himself and began thanking her profusely saying repeatedly, “You and your husband saved my life!”

At first, she thought it was a prank from some old political enemy or from a madman until she calmed him down and heard his story.

Tamir Goodman, an observant Jew, is well known in Jewish circles as a star basketball player from Baltimore. In high school in the USA he had averaged 35.4 points per game. In 1999, he was featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated and interviewed by ESPN, 60 Minutes, and Fox Sports. A follower of Chabad, he wore both a kippah head covering and a tallit katan fringed undergarment during all his games and continues to do so until this day. In 11th grade, he was ranked the 25th-best high school player in the country.

In university all the games his team played were re-scheduled to not fall on the Sabbath, an unheard-of precedent in America.

When he graduated college, the best team in Israel, Macabbee Tel Aviv, signed him to a long-term contract. It was in all the papers. He became the darling of the Israeli media and was interviewed countless times in all the newspapers and on television. He made Aliyah, served in the IDF, married and had a daughter before this son.

But suddenly his luck changed. He began having troubles with his left knee. It was giving him such pain and discomfort that the team doctors were pessimistic. He had to sit out many games. The team that brought him over traded him away, he was demoted to a minor league, and the future looked dim. And the Israeli media that once adored him began attacking him like crows. Every week someone had a vicious remark to make about him which made his life almost unbearable.

Intense physical therapy helped only temporarily. There was no other recourse than to operate. But the experts told him that the chances for success were very small... maybe five percent.

So, being a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, he decided he needed the Rebbe's advice and blessing. He went to the Ohel (the place in Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, N.Y. where the Rebbe's grave is), wrote a letter asking for help and read the letter aloud. He poured his heart out asking for some sign as to whether he should have the operation or not.

Then, exhausted, he left the Ohel and went to the Chabad House which is located adjacent to the cemetery. He sat down to rest in the reception room, where a screen shows around the clock thousands of hours of videos of the Rebbe speaking, often to individuals.

Mrs. Shaki continued, "The reason he called to thank me has to do the video that 'happened' to play at that very moment! But I must first give you some background.

"In the early 1980s there was a vote in the Knesset that would mark a change, in Israeli law, from the traditional definition of a Jew. This is where my husband of blessed memory, Professor Avner Shaki, came in. His party, the National 'Religious' Party, was officially part of this ruling coalition, and their orders were to abstain, which everyone understood is the same as token support of the change. So, although he, personally, was abhorred by and totally opposed to all this, he was obligated by party loyalty to keep his opposition to himself.

"We discussed it and decided he had no recourse other than to bite the bullet. In any case his one vote would have no real swing value anyway, and if he broke coalition discipline, we would lose everything.

“But then, the night before the vote we received a long-distance telephone call from New York. It was the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself!

“The Rebbe asked for my husband and when he answered the Rebbe introduced himself and begged my husband to stand up and vote ‘No’!

“My husband explained that to do so would mean the end of his political career. The secular media would make mincemeat from him, and he would almost certainly get expelled from his party. And in any case his nay vote wouldn’t be significant; one hundred votes were against him, and the law would go through in any case.

“But the Rebbe replied as only the Rebbe could. He said SOMEONE had to be willing to sacrifice themselves for truth, to M’kadeish Shaim Sh’maim (publicly sanctify G-d’s Name).

“Well, it was hard to believe and, look, after all, we are not Chabad Chassidim. But the next day my husband did it! He stood up, raised his hand and voted against it! I don’t know if such a thing ever happened in Israeli politics.

“The Israeli newspapers and television ridiculed him; his fellow party members were blazing mad! They despised him. He made hundreds, if not thousands of political enemies. We were suddenly alone. But we refused to sell out.

“Shortly thereafter we went to New York to visit the Rebbe. When my husband entered the huge auditorium where the Rebbe was speaking to thousands of Chassidim, the Rebbe stood for him. Afterwards we had a private audience with the Rebbe that was videotaped.

“The Rebbe thanked us for our bravery, especially thanking me for supporting my husband. But then when my husband complained of how he was fired from his party position and the media was descending on him, the Rebbe replied “Pay no attention to the media. And regarding your job; you are like a professional athlete; you are just taking a step back to jump ahead with doubled and redoubled power and success.”

“Of course, it was just like the Rebbe said. Several years later my husband, Professor Avner Chai Shaki, was asked by his party to return, but this time as its leader! He truly jumped to redoubled success. But we never understood why the Rebbe talked about athletes. After all, my husband was certainly no professional athlete.

“Well, about a half a year ago; twenty-five years after the Rebbe said those words to us, we found out.

“Tamir Goodman was sitting in the Chabad House near the Ohel wondering about his operation, when suddenly our video appeared on the screen before him, and the Rebbe said the words he was waiting to hear:

“Pay no attention to the media. You are like a professional athlete; taking a step back to jump ahead with doubled and redoubled power and success.’

“The words perfectly fit his predicament! The Rebbe was encouraging him. He returned to Israel and made the operation, despite the reservations of the Professor who was to operate. It was, thank G-d, a complete and miraculous success! That is why he called to thank us and that is why I’m here at this meal today!”

(As told by Rabbi Tuvia Bolton)

Your help will come from **מֵאֵין!**

Reb Shmuel Brin sat in a waiting room packed with Chasidim who had traveled far and near to seek the advice of the Rebbe Maharash--the Fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe. A tense atmosphere prevailed and showed itself in the serious and worried faces of all. Reb Shmuel was well known, the owner of a distillery which produced vodka, and an ardent follower of the Rebbe Maharash. He had been waiting to see the Rebbe for days, and now his turn had come, and he sat reciting Psalms with a broken spirit

He entered the Rebbe's study, and was overcome with emotion--what had he done to bring this terrible calamity upon himself? He began to explain the situation to the Rebbe: "As the Rebbe knows, I earn my livelihood from my distillery. A certain tax is paid to the government for the amount of liquor produced, and a special meter attached to the fermenting vat measures each quart. From time to time an inspector comes to assess the taxes due

"Until now there has never been any trouble, but it seems that one of my employees has found a way, through making a small hole in the vat, of siphoning off some of the vodka, and thereby bypassing the meter. The vodka he managed to steal he sold to his friends, and so he cheated both me and the government. I have no idea how long this has been going on, but this is how it came to my attention

"A second worker caught the first thief red-handed and demanded a share in the take. The first thief agreed, but later they had an argument, and the second "partner" went to the police. Upon investigation, the police discovered the swindle and arrested the thief. When questioned, he admitted the theft, but he claimed that it was done on my orders. "I don't know why, but then the police freed the thief and arrested me instead. My family barely managed to bail me out and I came here right here away to seek your advice. The penalty for cheating the government is very severe--there is even the possibility of life imprisonment or slave-labor in Siberia." a

With that, Reb Shmuel broke into uncontrollable sobs, crying "Rebbe! Help me! me'ayin yavo ezri--From where will come my help." 1

The Rebbe was thoughtful for a while, and then responded: "Yes, your help will come from me'ayin, from the Unknown, from G-d. Return to your home, and when you meet a Jew in trouble who will say: 'Me'ayin yavo ezri' help him; then G-d will also help you

Reb Shmuel left very much encouraged. Not long after, Reb Shmuel heard about a terrible misfortune that had befallen his old friend Reb Chaim. He had become destitute in a devastating fire which destroyed his entire inn. With a house full of children, Reb Chaim was desperate. Reb Shmuel went searching for his friend and found him sitting near some scorched wooden logs where his inn had previously stood

The two friends greeted each other warmly. Reb Shmuel eagerly offered his friend a loan, but he shook his head. "Where would you get the money? You have enough troubles of your own," he replied. "As we say in Psalms: 'From where will come my help? My help will come from G-d". As soon as he heard the words of his Rebbe echoed by Reb Chaim, he was even more anxious to extend his help. He didn't let Reb Chaim go until he finally accepted the proffered money

Weeks passed and finally the day of the trial arrived. Many members of the community appeared to testify on behalf of Reb Shmuel, but things didn't go well for him. The two accusers swore that they acted under orders of their boss, and the prosecutor made a fiery speech denouncing Brin as a swindler of the worst type. Brin could only repeat over and over again that he was innocent of the charges.

After the lawyers had concluded their arguments, the judge proceeded to summarize the case and instruct the jury. He concluded his speech saying, "I want to recount the following episode which has a bearing on the case: Once, the young son of a nobleman was traveling by train. He left his luggage on the platform to get some refreshment. On his return it was missing, and along with it, all of his money and ticket. For a couple of days he hung around the station hungry and miserable, noticed by no one

"Then a man descended from an incoming train, and with one look at the boy, invited him to partake of a meal at his expense. The boy accepted gratefully and told the stranger about his predicament. The man reached into his pocket and gave him money for a ticket. When the boy requested his name, so that he could repay him, he refused, saying that one day the boy would pass on the favor to another, and that would be his reward

"Members of the jury," concluded the judge, "this man that you see before you is the very man who helped me so many long years ago! Such a man could not be a liar and a thief! A man who could so graciously help a complete stranger with no thought of recompense could never

commit this crime! I leave it up to you to decide!" In a few minutes the verdict was returned. "Not guilty!" Reb Shmuel Brin did not immediately hear the verdict. His mind was on the words of his saintly Rebbe: "Fill the void of another in distress, and G-d will fill yours."

(From L'chaim weekly publication #22 – 2 Tammuz, 5752)
