

SICHA STORY

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Vayakhel-Pekudei (*First Sicha of the week*)

- Rabbi Yossi Nemes, Metairie, Louisiana

לזכות יצחק בן חנה, לרגל יום הולדתו כ"ג אדר

In the Wine of Torah section, we have the following lessons:

- 1) *When Hashem gives a Yid a special talent or ability, he must know that this is not for him alone, but rather to utilize it in his Avodah to make of the world a Mishkan, to transform the world into a home for Hashem.*
- 2) *An example of extra ability would be when Hashem grants us more usual for the purpose of using it for Tzedakah and thus contributing to Hashem's home. When the Alter Rebbe's chassidim had a profitable week, they were certain that upon returning home, they would either find a letter from the Rebbe appealing for funds, or an emissary from the Rebbe collecting for the poor in Eretz Yisrael.*
- 3) *When we encounter a Jew in pain (and a most painful situation is a Yid who is naked of Mitzvos), then we don't follow the common practice of first studying our Shiurim of Torah, enhancing our own mitzvah observance, taking care of our business, and then helping another yid with Yiddishkeit. Rather first, we cover the nakedness of our fellow, through practical Mitzvah observance and study of the Torah. Only after this do we focus on our own spiritual growth.*

We share a story relating to each of these ideas.

An article from Yener Velt!!

For those seeking to meet the Rebbe, one opportunity to do so was at the conclusion of a farbrengen held at the close of every festival, when the Rebbe would distribute kos

Shel berachah to thousands of people. Long lines would crisscross the large synagogue on Eastern Parkway and spill out into the street; to receive his ounce of wine from the Rebbe's cup and a brief blessing from the Rebbe's lips.

One night, a most unlikely visitor was standing online for kos Shel berachah: the writer and publicist, Natan Yellin-Mur, waited in line for his moment with the Rebbe.

Natan was born in Vilna to Torah-observant parents and was educated in that city's world-renowned yeshivot. As a young man, however, Natan abandoned the beliefs and practices of Judaism in favor of secular Zionism. He became a leading Zionist activist, finally making his way to the Holy Land. There he joined Lechi ("The Stern Gang"), the most radical of the Zionist groups.

But after the establishment of the state in 1948, as mundane politics replaced the ideological fervor of the pre-independence years, Natan became disillusioned with the cause for which he had fought with such vehemence. He turned fiercely anti-Zionist. An eloquent writer, he regularly published articles defaming everything Jewish, particularly the Jewish state and its policies.

Natan was by his acquaintance, Gershon Ber Jacobson, editor of the Yiddish language newspaper, The Algemeiner Journal. As the two men approached the Rebbe, Gershon Ber introduced his guest. The Rebbe turned to Natan, smiled broadly, and said: "I read all your articles."

Natan's idea of a Chassidic rebbe did not prepare him for a person who reads newspaper articles such as his own. But what surprised him, even more, was what followed. "When G-d blesses someone with a talent such as yours," the Rebbe was now saying, "one must utilize it to the fullest. This is a divine calling and an immense responsibility. It is your G-d-given power and duty to make full use of your capacity to reach out to others and influence them with your writing."

Thinking that the Rebbe was perhaps mistaking him for someone else, Natan asked: "Does the Rebbe agree with what I write?" The Rebbe replied: "One need not agree with everything one reads. What is most important is that one utilizes one's G-d-given talents. When one does so, one will ultimately arrive at the truth."

The Rebbe's next words struck a place in his heart he'd long thought to have been silenced forever. "Tell me," said the Rebbe in a gentle yet firm tone, "what is happening in regard to the observance of Torah and mitzvot?"

Not wanting to lie to the Rebbe by pretending to be observant, nor wishing to offend him with his atheism and anti-religiosity, Natan replied: "A Jew thinks." "But in

Yiddishkeit,” countered the Rebbe, quoting the Talmudic maxim familiar to Natan from his yeshivah years, “it’s most important to do. ‘The primary thing is the deed.’”

Natan responded, “At least with me it’s like in the story with the Berditchever.” Natan was referring to the story told of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev’s encounter with a Jew who was smoking a cigarette on Shabbat. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, famed for his literal inability to see anything negative in a fellow Jew and his persistent advocacy on behalf of his people, said to the transgressor: “Surely you’re not aware that today is the holy Shabbat.” “No,” said the man, “I’m perfectly aware that it’s Shabbat today.” “Then perhaps you don’t know that it’s forbidden to smoke on Shabbat,” said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. “No,” said the man, “I know perfectly well what the law says about smoking on Shabbat.” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lifted his eyes to heaven and cried: “Father in Heaven! How precious are Your people, a Jew is simply incapable of telling a lie.”

The Rebbe rejoined: “The difference is that the Berditchever said this in defense of another person, while you are saying it in defense of yourself...”

The Rebbe then poured some wine into Natan’s cup, blessed him, and turned to the next in line.

Several months later, Natan was diagnosed with terminal cancer, G-d forbid. The doctors gave him but a few months to live. Shortly before his death, he sent a sealed envelope to Gershon Ber, with a note stating that it contained an article that he wished to be published posthumously. Gershon Ber complied, and following Natan’s death, the article was printed in The Algemeiner Journal. “My dear reader,” Natan had written. “As you read this article, I am standing before the heavenly court being judged for all the actions I took and the choices I made in the course of my life. No doubt, I will be severely judged for living a life totally antithetical to anything Jewish. In fact, I have severe doubts that I will even be allowed to speak in my defense. This is why I asked your editor to print this now, as I stand before the heavenly court, in the hope that what is being read and discussed at this moment on earth will attract the attention of the Supernal Judge. For I have one merit which I want to present to the court in the face of all my failings and transgressions.”

At this point, Natan related his exchange with the Rebbe at kos Shel berachah. “The Rebbe said to me,” he concluded, “that I have a G-d-given talent, and that it is my sacred duty to utilize it to influence others. This I did to the best of my ability, however sometimes misguidedly. This is the only merit I can claim; may it lighten the destiny of my soul...”

Excerpted from <https://www.meaningfullife.com/natan-yellin-mur/>

Sharing it all!

In 5724 (1964) at a farbrengen, the Rebbe told of an episode that had recently occurred. A young family had been having a difficult time with their livelihood, and the mother had been owed a lot of money from the school where she had taught. Years later, she unexpectedly received a check for \$5,000 (about \$45,000 in today's value).

Instead of using it for her own needs, she decided that because she had managed for so long without those \$5,000, she would give it to tzedakah. With the agreement of her husband, she sent the entire sum directly to the Rebbe. The Rebbe describes what kind of sacrifice this entailed: "I don't know if they have put away another \$5000 in savings! And Bli Ayin Hara, this is a family with many children. This is a young, American-born woman, and her husband is also American born. He has worked hard to make ends meet, and he continues to do so. Yet, in her mind, the only reason this old debt was paid was in order that it should all go directly to Hashem, without leaving anything out!"

"She didn't take half for herself and give half for Hashem; she didn't even save some for the education of her children—rather she gave it directly to Hashem, and with a happy heart!

"There should be many more like her among Yidden— to give, and with joy. If they give more, that's even better, but at least they should give the equivalent of \$5,000 to someone in her situation. As mentioned, this was done by people who weren't educated with mesiras nefesh behind the Iron Curtain, rather they were raised in a country considered a physical and materialistic country, where the dollar is above all."

Translated by "The Derher"

Your trip home can wait but not sharing a mitzvah!

Bentzion Rader, A"H, of London related:

This happened some ten years after my initial meeting with the Rebbe, and it taught me an invaluable lesson.

I was on business in Detroit, and there I met a man who asked me all sorts of questions about tefillin: "Why must they be black? Why are they square? Can't they be round?"

After a while, I asked him, "Do you put on tefillin?" He said, "No." So I said, "You should."

His response to me was: if you feel it's so important, then meet me at 6:30 in the morning at the bakery where I work, and I'll put them on."

This was a challenge, and though it was difficult, I went to his place of business. And very early the next morning, amongst sacks of flour, I helped him put on tefillin.

I was amazed to see that he really didn't need help. He knew exactly what to do, and what blessings to recite, and he could read the prayerbook fluently.

When he finished, I asked him, "Why don't you put on tefillin regularly?"

He said, "Tefillin are expensive, and I don't own a pair. But if someone gave me a pair, I would put them on regularly."

I promised him that when I returned to Detroit next time—which I anticipated happening in six weeks—I would bring him a pair of tefillin."

That night I flew to New York on the way back to London, and I wrote a note to the Rebbe telling him about what had happened in Detroit. Immediately I got a response "Do you think it's right that a Jew who has put on tefillin for the first time in twenty years should wait six weeks to do it again? You should buy him a pair today. And if you can't get them to him as soon as possible, you should go back to Detroit yourself, to make personally sure he gets them without delay."

I heard the Rebbe's words. And even though I had to overcome all kinds of difficulties in the process, I found a pair of tefillin—which I bought on credit—and sent them to him via American Airlines. I did not leave New York for London until I knew for certain that he had received them, and I reported to the Rebbe that the mission had been accomplished.

Six weeks later I went back to Detroit as planned, and I met this man again. I asked him, "Do you put on tefillin regularly now?"

"Yes," he said, "and let me tell you this: Once, when I was coming home from work, I got caught in traffic, and it looked like I would miss the time for doing it, so I ditched my car and went home on foot. I had to put them on because it meant so much that you gave these tefillin to me."

His words echoed the very words that the Rebbe had written: "When this Jew sees how much it means to you that he has these tefillin straight away, this mitzvah will have a special importance to him."
