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# Shabbos INSPIRE.

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## A Testimony of Forgiveness

By Rabbi Mordechai Becher

The parshiyos of Vakhel and Pekudei deal with the construction of the Mishkan. In שמות לח:כא the Torah refers to the Mishkan as “משכן העדות”—the tabernacle of testimony. To what does the Mishkan testify? The Midrash Tanchuma in Pekudei, cited by Rashi, writes that the Mishkan is a testimony to the world that Hashem forgave the Jews for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Midrash states, “When the Jews transgressed that sin, Moshe defended the Jewish people to Hashem, to the extent that Hashem forgave them. Moshe then said, ‘Master of the Universe, who will tell the nations that You have forgiven them?’ Hashem said to him, ‘Go tell them, Build Me a sanctuary and I will dwell amongst them’ (שמות:כח). That is why the Torah says ‘Mishkan of testimony,’ for the Mishkan testifies that Hashem’s presence rests amongst the Jewish people.”

There is, however, a problem with the explanation of the Midrash. We know that although Moshe broke the first set of Luchos, Hashem called Moshe up to Mt. Sinai a second time and gave him a second set of Luchos. Significantly, this second set was given on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, Yom Kippur. It would seem that giving the second Luchos is an act of forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf. Why is the Mishkan a testimony to Hashem’s forgiveness of the Jews and not the giving of the second Luchos? Isn’t it obvious from the giving of the Luchos that the Jews are forgiven; why is any more testimony required? Evidently there is something lacking in the giving of the Luchos that the Mishkan provides.

This question is raised by a number of the commentaries on Rashi – Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi, the Maharal in Gur Aryeh, and Rav David Pardo in the Maskil LeDavid. Rav David Pardo explains that the giving of the second Luchos was necessary to show that although the Jews had transgressed and broken the covenant, they were still obligated in the Torah. Not giving the Luchos again would have been interpreted as an “untying of the knot” that obligates the Jews to the Torah, so in a sense Hashem had to give us the second Luchos. The building of the Mishkan and the Shechinah however, shows Hashem’s forgiveness of the Jewish people.

In a similar vein, the Mizrahi answers that the giving of the second Luchos was in accordance with the principle that “an Israelite who has sinned is still an Israelite” (סנהדרין מד) and as Rashi comments, “He still retains his sanctity.” This principle even applies to a gentile

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## The Sky’s the Limit

By Gavriel Horan

It was a red eye flight, leaving Tel Aviv at 1 AM and arriving at JFK early the next morning. There’s only one way to beat jet lag and survive the next day in a productive manner, and that’s sleeping the entire flight. If you’re able to sleep on planes, you can actually arrive rested. That’s exactly what Mrs. Malky Greene\* planned to do. She had just finished a Project Inspire mission to Eretz Yisrael with Aish HaTorah’s Lori Polatnik. The trip had been a week full of inspiration and excitement, and she couldn’t wait to put all that she had learned into action when she returned home to Boro Park. In the meantime, however, she hoped she would be sitting next to someone boring so that she could sleep. Hashem, however, had other plans. Even 30,000 feet above ground, the Yiddish saying holds true: *Man plans, and G-d laughs*. She was not about to get a wink of sleep on that flight.

Mrs. Greene’s neighbor was 26-year-old Effie, an Israeli actor from Tel Aviv. Even before the flight took off, he apologized in advance if he ended up disturbing her sleep. He assured her that he wouldn’t be sleeping much himself, since it was his first time visiting New York and he was brimming over with excitement.

“I am so excited to finally visit New York, I can’t sleep a wink!” he said.

“That’s the way I feel when I visit *Eretz Yisrael*,” Mrs. Greene admitted.

“You people really love Israel, don’t you?” he asked with total innocence. “Most of my friends can’t wait to leave.”



“The truth is,” Mrs. Greene said, “If we weren’t talking right now, I would probably be crying like a baby. It always happens on the return flight home from Israel. *Eretz Yisrael* is my real home.”

Soon the conversation turned to the Aish HaTorah mission. When Effie heard the name Aish HaTorah his face lit up.

“You know, I have many questions about Judaism that I always wanted to ask, but I never have an opportunity to speak to *Charedim*. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

Naturally, Mrs. Greene was more than happy to oblige—especially after the week full of inspiration. Ever since she got involved with Project Inspire, she was always on the lookout for *not-yet-frum* people to speak to, and this one had literally fallen into her lap.

It was as if a floodgate had just been opened and the questions began flowing. They spoke for the next nine hours straight with Effie pouring out his heart about all the issues he had with Judaism and *Charedim*. He was amazed that she actually had intelligent answers for most of his questions. At one point, he broke down crying. He had never spoken about Judaism with a religious person before—in fact, it was the first time in his life that he had spoken to a *Charedi* person at all! From the Israeli media, he got the impression that all *Charedim* did was throw rocks all day, and he was moved by the experience of learning that they were also human.

As the flight neared its conclusion, Effie confessed that as nice as her answers were, he would still never dream of becoming more observant.

“I could never keep Shabbat,” he said. “It’s just too boring.”

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who converted to Judaism but returned to his former religion, to idolatry and abandoned Judaism completely (משנה תורה, אסורי ביאה יג:ז). Such a person is nevertheless still fully Jewish, obligated in the commandments and has the “sanctity of Israel” within his soul. Therefore, giving the Luchos again is “merely” a fulfillment of this law, but not evidence of Hashem’s forgiveness, whereas the Mishkan testifies to forgiveness, not only to obligation.

The story is told of the Gaon of Vilna (מעשי הרב, אדור הגר”א) who was staying at an inn. A Jewish apostate asked the innkeeper for a drink and the Gaon said not to give it to him for he would not recite a blessing. The apostate laughed and said that he transgresses every sin in the book. Why is the Gaon worried about him not saying a blessing?! The Gaon replied, “You should know that transgressing serious sins does not exempt you from more lenient sins. You are still obligated in every mitzvah that applies to you without exception, and you will be

called to task in the Heavenly Court, even for not making a blessing over the drink!” The story concludes that the words of the Gaon entered the apostate “like the poison of a snake” and he collapsed in tears and repented fully. Now, while I don’t suggest this as an outreach technique, the principle that the Gaon expounded is well worth keeping in mind.

The Maharal, in Gur Aryeh, answers that the second Luchos don’t prove forgiveness, since the Torah is an obligation upon the Jews, “a yoke.” However, the fact that the Shechinah dwells amongst us, even in our impurity and sin, that is evidence of Hashem’s forgiveness and love. In the words of the Maharal, “One does not live with someone he hates, but only with one whom he loves.” Hashem’s presence amongst the Jewish people, enabled by the Mishkan, shows that He loves us. The Talmud in Yoma (יב), cites the verse in Vayikra (טו:ט), which states that the Mishkan “dwells with them in the midst of their impurity” and explains that this actually refers to Hashem’s Divine Presence, the Shechinah, which dwells amongst the Jewish people despite their impurity.

Anyone involved in reaching out to Jews who are not observant, in teaching Jews who are ignorant of their heritage or in trying to bring back those Jews who have strayed from Judaism, must always keep these ideas in mind. A Jew, even though he has sinned, is always a Jew, obligated in the Torah, and with the sanctity of a Jewish soul. No matter what a Jew has done, no matter what sins he has committed, he can never really leave the Jewish people. Hashem loves the Jewish people, and chooses to dwell amongst us, even in the midst of our impurity.

May we merit seeing the building of the Third Beis Hamikdash, where the whole world will see and hear that Hashem is with us. **PI**

**Hashem loves the Jewish people, and chooses to dwell amongst us, even in the midst of our impurity.**

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“Shabbos, boring?” she snapped back. “Do you mean to tell me that you’ve never had a genuine Shabbos experience? You must come to join us for a Shabbos while you’re in New York!”

Before parting ways at the baggage claim, Mrs. Greene gave him her contact info and extended the invitation once more for a Shabbos in Brooklyn. She hoped that their conversation had made some impact on him but didn’t expect to hear from him again. Two weeks later, however, she was shocked when Effie called to say that he was coming for Shabbos! The entire Greene home was filled with excitement, preparing for their special guest. Since getting involved with Project Inspire they had hosted kiruv guests before, but no one had ever come for the entire Shabbos.

The experience changed all of their lives!

Effie was initially a little nervous. It was his first time in a *Chassidish* home, however that Shabbos was going to be full of many firsts, and countless stereotypes and preconceptions would melt away in the next 25 hours. A magical experience began for everyone from the moment the sun began its decline in the western horizon Friday afternoon until the first three stars appeared in the *motzai Shabbos* sky.

Mr. Yaakov Greene took Effie to *daven* with him in *shul erev Shabbos* in Bobov. At first, the massive *Bobover shul* seemed impassive and intimidating to Effie. The sight of hundreds of *Chassidim* dressed identically in *shtreimelach* and *bekeshes* was overwhelming, and he was afraid that if he lost sight of Mr. Greene for a moment he would never be able to recognize him again! From his past exposure to *Charedim*, he expected to be looked down upon, but despite his misgivings, Effie was in for a surprise. Instead of looks of disdain, he received love and acceptance. Everywhere he looked, Effie was met with friendly smiles, handshakes, and words of welcome. Each warm face broke down more walls and dispelled misconceptions. It didn’t seem like much to the *Chassidim*, but to Effie it meant everything.

Each moment of Shabbos was more exciting for him than the last—from *davening*, to *Kiddush* and the *seudah*, to the *tisch* Friday night, to learning *gemara* with the Greene boys Shabbos afternoon—Effie had no idea Shabbos could ever be so fun and meaningful! *Motzai Shabbos* came before they knew it. During *Melave Malka*, Effie addressed the entire family with tears in his eyes: “I want to thank you for the experience of my life! You don’t know what a gift you have that you get to do this every week—you are the luckiest people in the world! When I get back to Israel I am going to tell all my friends that they are completely wrong about *Charedim*. We just never took the time to get to know each other. We always thought you people were lazy, and that’s why you choose to learn all day instead of working. Now I understand; there’s so much wisdom to learn in these books, if you don’t learn all day you will never even scrape the surface. I grew up thinking I had family in Haifa—I never knew about my family in Brooklyn!”

Even though Effie’s friends were planning to do something in Manhattan Saturday night, he didn’t even turn his cell phone on until midnight. The Greens insisted on driving him back to his friend’s apartment, despite the late hour. When he finally got back to the apartment, he burst into tears.

“What’s wrong?” his friend asked.

“Who says something’s wrong?” Effie asked back. “I’m crying tears of joy!”

Effie’s parents were shocked when he told them about his experience in New York. Being that they were fairly traditional Jews, they weren’t outright opposed to his decision to take steps in becoming more observant. Although they had always recited a traditional *Kiddush* on Friday night before returning to their regular activities, Effie made sure the whole family sat down for a proper meal together on his first Shabbos home. Since his return to Israel, he has been in touch with the Greens every single day, and they managed to connect him to the local Aish HaTorah Rabbi in Tel Aviv. They have already begun a daily *chavrusa* together!

Don’t think this is the end—it’s just the beginning of Effie’s story. Thanks to a simple act of caring from Mrs. Greene, only the sky’s the limit for Effie and his growth in Yiddishkeit. **PI**

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