



A VOICE IN THE WIND

One of the great mashpi'im (men of influence) of the last generation, Rav Mendel Futerfas, told this tale, which speaks of the ability of one person to lift another — out of the depths of despair and the doldrums of misery — and bring him to a place of hope and possibility.

IN THE LATE 1800'S AND EARLY 1900'S, IF A PLAGUE BROKE out in Europe or Asia, it could decimate many small villages in a very short period of time. Nikolayev, a small town in Russia, had dodged numerous plagues in recent memory. However, when the disease of typhus broke out in the early 1900's, the village was not as fortunate as it had been previously. Aside from the devastating physical discomfort and pain that typhus inflicted, there was additional reason for despair. Anyone who was diagnosed with the disease was immediately quarantined and sent to a hospital on the outskirts of the city. No one was allowed to visit these people. They would languish there for weeks on end, lonely and miserable until they died a terrible death. Fear mounted throughout the village as the disease took its toll. It did not make a difference if one was rich or poor, successful or not. No one was spared.

Not even the rav.

In truth, no one thought it was possible. Rav Meir Shlomo Yanovsky was a gem of a human being. And yet, he too was caught in the clutches of the illness. He was diagnosed by the doctor and immediately taken away to the hospital to be quarantined — and to die.

The townspeople were devastated. They had always turned to their rav for encouragement in times of sorrow. And now, it was their turn to try to find a way to give *him* hope and encouragement. But they knew that the quarantine prevented almost everyone in the town from visiting him. Everyone — except Reb Asher Grossman.

Reb Asher was indefatigable; he never let anything stand in his way, and he certainly wasn't going to let doctor's orders prevent him from visiting Rav Meir Shlomo. Immediately upon hearing the news, he set out toward the hospital. But as soon as he approached, the authorities sent him away. Although he insisted that he was aware of the risks involved and was willing to expose himself to the danger, the doctors would not allow it as they were concerned about the lives of others. Although Reb Asher was less than pleased, he fully understood that he could not endanger others, and so he returned home.

Nevertheless, he knew that he had to do something. So he took his trusted *sefer*, the *Tanya*, and headed once again to the hospital. As before, he was stopped and prevented from entering the building. But this time he had a plan. He asked the authorities the location of the rav's room. When they motioned that it was located on the left side of the building, Reb Asher headed in that direction and opened his *Tanya* to the 11th chapter of the *Iggeres HaKodesh*. Then he stood close to the window of what he thought was the rav's room. Even though he could not be sure that the rav was there, he began to read in a clear, strong voice, "*Ein ra yoreid mi'leMaalah...* — No evil comes down from Above...." He continued to read about how we feel evil or suffering in This World because we don't see things clearly, and how everything is really good. "*Al kein hirchiku*

middas ha'atzvus be'me'od chachmei ha'emes — That is why the Kabbalists greatly encouraged people to stay away from the trait of sadness.”

As he continued to read, it may have appeared that his voice was trailing off into the distance. In fact, he had no way of knowing if anyone was hearing what he had said. But he was not deterred. The next day, he repeated this practice; he went back to the same place with his *sefer* and once again read aloud, “*Ein ra yoreid mi'leMaalah. . .*” He read until the end of the chapter: “And with this faith, one will merit to see that everything is good.”

Reb Asher came back day after day, week after week. He did not know if his friend heard anything he read to him. All he knew was that he was still alive. But he continued to read on. And finally, one day, a miracle happened and the rav was discharged from the hospital and given a clean bill of health.

As soon as the rav was released, word spread among the townspeople of Nikolayev, and the people were filled with joy and gratitude that their rav had recovered. People began to come to his house and visit him. Sure enough, among the very first to arrive was his dear friend, Reb Asher. As soon as the rav set eyes upon him, he walked over to him and embraced him, holding on for a long while. “Reb Asher, you saved my life. Without you, I would never have made it out alive.” He cried and held onto his friend as he explained.

“When I was first diagnosed, I was certain that I would succumb to the illness. But as I lay there in bed lamenting my fate, I heard your voice, a gift from Heaven. You didn't even know if I could hear you, but you had faith that somehow the words you were reading would reach my ears — and my heart. You believed in me even when I had lost faith in myself. Your words were like fresh water on a parched soul. Every day that you read to me, I gained strength and became healthier. It was you, Reb Asher, who healed me. It was you who saved my soul.”

Reb Asher's eyes filled with tears. He tried to express his great

admiration, love, and appreciation but he couldn't speak. He was too overcome with emotion, so grateful to have been given the opportunity to help.

TO SILENCE THE CRIES

RAV AVROHOM GANOCHOFISKY, THE ROSH YESHIVAH OF the Tchebiner Yeshivah, was a *gaon* (genius) and a tremendous *masmid* (diligent student). Every second of every minute of every day was precious to him. Thus, it came as quite a shock to the residents of Yerushalayim to see Rav Avrohom standing on a ladder next to the window of an apartment building, and then later sitting on the ladder's top step, looking into a window of that building.

Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz (not their real name) had gone out for a short while to do some shopping. Their children were asleep, and they did not expect them to wake up any time soon. In their neighborhood, everyone was religious and there was no crime. This provided them with a false sense of security, which made them think they could leave their home unattended for a short while. Little did they know that shortly after they left, their youngest child would begin to stir. Before long, the whimpers of "Abba. . . Imma. . ." turned to full-blown screaming. Eventually, his wailing woke all of his siblings. Soon enough, the heartrending cries of all of the children could be heard outside, as well.

Nobody suspected that the children had been left alone; passersby assumed that the children were simply cranky. Instead of doing anything about the situation, they continued on their way.

But one individual did not.

Rav Avrohom, who was on his way home from yeshivah, could not help but hear the crying, and the children's cries tugged at his sensitive heart. He realized that these were not the cries of a child to his mother who is right there with him. Still, he could have excused himself and rationalized that there was nothing he could do as the crying was coming from a window that was nearly 15 feet off the ground. But that is not the way Rav Avrohom thought or acted. Instead, he searched for a ladder. He knocked on the doors of a few stores, but nobody was able to help him. Finally, he went all the way to his house and retrieved his own ladder from his *machsán* (storage area).

Ignoring the fact that he was a rosh yeshivah and that no one of his stature would ever be seen holding a ladder in the streets of Yerushalayim, he walked purposefully toward his destination. After opening the ladder and assuring that it was steady, he climbed the steps and peered through the window into the room where the children were crying.

With his beautiful smile, calm demeanor, and sweet disposition, Rav Avrohom spoke to the children to alleviate their fears. When they peeked out the window, he reached out to them and handed each of them a candy from his rebbetzin. Almost immediately, the children stopped crying and happily took the candies from his hand. Although wrought-iron bars separated him from the children, he brought a smile to their faces. Their breathing slowly became less labored and they calmed down, as he proceeded to tell them a story. The children stared out the window at their new friend and listened intently to his wonderful tale.

Well into the recounting of the narrative, Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz arrived and immediately realized what had happened. They apologized to their children and promised never to leave them alone again. Then they thanked Rav Avrohom profusely and begged his forgiveness for having inconvenienced him and wasted his time. Rav Avrohom deflected their praise and dismissed their expressions of gratitude, insisting that he had done nothing. He climbed

down the steps of the ladder and waved goodbye to his new friends, assuring them that they could come visit him whenever they wanted.

Years later, when a talmid asked Rav Avrohom about this episode, he tried to deny it. But then, someone showed him a picture of him sitting on the ladder outside the apartment building, and he had no choice but to admit that the story had actually taken place. Then, in his inimitable way, he shared a few important lessons from the story.

First, there is no limit to how far one must go to silence the cry of a child.

Second, sometimes we cry to Hashem in pain and in anguish. Although we are unable to feel Him holding us in His arms, we should be aware that He sits right outside our windows and listens to our cries — and reaches inside to hold our hands.

THE CELL PHONE SITUATION

THE CHILDREN OF REB MENDEL GOLDENFIELD SAT IN the funeral home, ready to bid a final farewell to their father. The large crowd that had begun to assemble gave testament to the fact that their father had been an exceptional human being, beloved by all who knew him. While the family was discussing who should offer the eulogies, one fellow stepped forward. No one in the family recognized him, but he asked to be

allowed to give a eulogy, as well. Since so many dignitaries would be speaking, the children dismissed his request and told him that they could not fit him in. But he kept insisting that he had something to share publicly. He appeared to be an *ehrliche* (upright) person, and seeing how much this meant to him, they told him that he could give the final eulogy.

Many eulogies were given that day, extolling the deceased's Torah scholarship and stellar character traits. He was a beloved family man who had meant so much to so many people. Finally, it was the stranger's turn to speak. The family was a bit on edge, wondering what he was going to say. As he began to speak, they noticed that his voice was trembling. He apologized for being so insistent about speaking, but he repeated that he had something very important to share.

The truth is that I met the deceased only once in my life. And that was only for 10 minutes. But those 10 minutes made an incredible impression on me.

I learn in a yeshivah with 340 other boys. Twice a week, our rebbi gives a shiur to the whole yeshivah. He is very particular that anyone who is not part of the yeshivah may not be present at the time of the shiur.

One day, as the shiur was about to begin, an uninvited guest arrived: the niftar, Reb Mendel. He was informed that anyone who is not part of the yeshivah is not allowed to attend the shiur. But he had heard about the brilliance of the shiur and very much wanted to be able to attend. "Torah hi ve'lilmod ani tzarich — This is Torah and I must learn it"; echoing the sentiment uttered so many centuries ago by Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi [Megillah 28a], he begged for permission to stay. The request was brought to the attention of our rebbi, and he reluctantly allowed the man to remain.

The shiur began and all seemed to be forgotten when suddenly, the ringtone of a cell phone sounded throughout the

room. It was coming from Reb Mendel's area. Anyone who has ever attended our rebbi's shiur knows that such a disturbance is not tolerated. Our rebbi seemed agitated as he glared in the direction of the cell phone noise. Reb Mendel put his hands in his pocket and fumbled with his cell phone, trying to figure out how to shut the ringer. However, he was clearly not very astute in this particular area, and it took him a good 10 seconds to turn off the ringer. The maggid shiur seemed upset about the disgrace the cell phone had caused, but immediately thereafter, he continued the shiur.

Five minutes later, the cell phone shrilled loudly and everyone looked anxiously toward our rebbi to see how he would react. Predictably, he stopped midsentence and declared in a sharp tone, "Kach lo lomdim Torah! This is not the way we learn Torah!" He seemed ready to walk out of the room, but then decided that he would try to continue the shiur one more time.

The crowd was aware that the next disturbance would most certainly bring an end to the shiur. They glared angrily at their uninvited guest, as if to warn him that it better not happen again. But it seemed that the phone had been set to alarm mode, and instead of turning off the alarm each time, he had just been pressing the snooze button, causing it to ring again five minutes later.

And so, five minutes later the phone rang again. This time, nothing was said. The rebbi simply closed his sefer, and to the disappointment of everyone present, walked out of the room.

Chaos erupted. All 340 members of the yeshivah expressed their displeasure and voiced their protest over Reb Mendel's negligence and unacceptable behavior. On their way out of the room, each person made sure to make some kind of cynical comment or grimace in his direction. Reb Mendel felt terrible about what had happened, and was filled with remorse that all the young men would not be learning because of him.

At this point, the young man who was eulogizing stopped, while all those in attendance wondered where all of this was heading. What kind of eulogy was this?

After a long pause, and in a voice filled with emotion, the young man cried out, “*Rabbosai*, I was standing next to Reb Mendel the entire time. You cannot imagine the horrible shame he had to endure. I have never seen or heard anything like it in my life.”

Once again, the young man paused as he tried to stop his crying. Finally, he blurted out, “I have something to tell you. It wasn’t even his cell phone that kept on ringing. *It was mine!* And I didn’t know how to turn it off. All the screaming and yelling that was directed at him should have been directed at me. But in order to save me from shame and disgrace, he acted as if it were his cell phone — and he only pretended to turn it off.

“I feel it is important to tell everyone, in a public setting, that just as he endured the shame publicly, he should be given the honor in the same fashion.”

Perhaps what makes the story noteworthy is the fact that this was not a calculated act to help another person. Rather, Reb Mendel had trained himself to save others from embarrassment, even at his own expense.

And so, when the opportunity presented itself, he was ready.