

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Paysach Krohn

The Fire of Shabbos

The year was 1906. Rabbi Hillel Borkowsky lived in a town outside of Vilna, Lithuania called Voranava. As much as he wanted to remain ensconced within the vibrant European Jewish community, he knew he needed to move to America and earn the financial means of resettling his family on new soil in the United States. And so he did.

His trip overseas brought him to the Landfield Avenue shul in Monticello, New York. He went on to serve as a chazzan, shochet, mohel and shamash in the community. His hours were long and his work ethic went above and beyond, lasting from early morning to late at night. Two years later, in 1908, Rabbi Borkowsky contacted his wife, Hinda, and their six children and relayed the long-awaited news: he'd be able to bring them all to America.

Of his six children, Rabbi Borkowsky knew that his youngest five would need to take up permanent residence somewhere else than Monticello or Manhattan. Even though Yiddishkeit flourished in Manhattan, it was a city that would bring its own set of new and difficult challenges to maintaining strong ties to a Torah life. Likewise, Monticello had its handfuls of residents who expressed disregard and apathy toward Judaism. On the other hand, Rabbi Borkowsky and his wife knew that

their eldest daughter, Chaya Elka (or Ida as she was otherwise known), would need to live in Manhattan in order to forge a future for herself.

With the decision in place, Ida moved in with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Schultz, and obtained a job during the day while attending school at night. In addition, the hope was that when she'd reach marriageable age, she'd meet a nice boy in Manhattan and begin a family of her own.

Upon completion of her school, she sought to obtain a decent job. And to her fortune, there was a job available in one of the most reputable company—the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. There had been a recent strike, and they were now looking to hire several employees and make up for loss of time and orders they had to fulfill. But there was one catch. It was a known fact that if you worked for the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, you had to work on Shabbos. Unfortunately, many Jewish girls facing this dilemma buckled under pressure and signed on anyway. Ida too was in this quandary. She knew that she wanted to earn a good income, but she equally remembered the standards of her parents, R' Hillel and Hinda. Her father had always said, "Countries change and cultures change, but the Torah never changes." As much as he could, R' Hillel sought to impress upon his children the values, warmth and dedication inherent to Torah and Jewish life. Chaya Elka

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had indeed woven such ideals into the fabric of her life. Even though she now went by Ida and lived in Manhattan and went to night school, not much had changed inside her. Taking a job, however lucrative it might be, couldn't and wouldn't translate into discarding her Jewish past and heritage.

And so, her answer to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was such — “No.” She turned down the job.

The first week after she declined the job offer and would have been expected to work seven days, including Shabbos, shares a place in history. March 25, 1911, marks the tragic outbreak of a raging fire that destroyed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The ten-story building rose engulfed in flames, and with large tables and machines blocking the safety exits and other fire safety measures not yet in place by law, 146 workers tragically perished, many of them young, Jewish women.

Ida had not been there.

It is not coincidental that March 25, 2011, was not a Monday, Tuesday or Friday. It was Shabbos. And that very day, the Parsha read in every single shul in every single Jewish community around the world was Parshas Vayakhel. There, the following words were read: “Do not burn a fire in your dwelling places on the

day of Shabbos” (Shemos 30:3).

To this day, this tragic incident has become a turning point and historic moment for legal safety and fire measures. After extensive investigation and rigorous discussion, a series of standardized fire regulations were established across many factories and industries in the United States.

I have spoken Ida's daughter, Mrs. Hanna Markowitz, who lived in West Haven, Connecticut, along with Ida's granddaughters and great-granddaughters who live in Baltimore, and they all said the same thing: if Ida had been at the factory that Shabbos, they wouldn't be alive today. Because of her observance of Shabbos, Ida has children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who continue to observe Shabbos and live a rich Jewish life.

But I want to tell you something else. The Gerrer Rebbe, as well as many other Rebbes, homiletically interpret the above Pasuk—'Do not burn a fire in your dwelling places on the day of Shabbos'—to mean that Shabbos should not be a day of 'fire,' or anger. Make Shabbos a day of tranquility and peace in your home. But this interpretation is not simply homiletical.

Those who daven Nusach Ashkenaz on Friday night and recite the passages of 'Bameh Madlikin,' a com-

pilation of the Mishnayos from the second chapter of Mesechta Shabbos, state (Shabbos 2:7): “A person should say three things to his family in his home on Friday afternoon, entering into Shabbos—'Did you give maaser (tithes)?' 'Did you prepare the eruv?' 'Have you lit the candles?' The Tiferes Yisroel, commenting on this Mishnah, asks why the Mishnah emphasizes that a person asks of his family these questions b'soch beiso, literally “inside his house”? Why couldn't the Mishna simply have stated that a person should ask these questions b'beiso, “in his house”?

The Tiferes Yisroel remarkably explains: This wording comes to teach us that these questions should not be said in a “loud, angry voice, so that others will hear it outside.” Talk nicely and softly and keep your words to a pitch and tone that leaves your words resonating only inside your home. This is the additional layer and idea embedded behind the Pasuk of not lighting a fire within our homes on Shabbos.

The commitment to the observance of Shabbos serves as a foundation of blessing to our world and lives. It was true for the Borkowsky family and it is true for us all as well.

Rebbetzin Slovie Jungreis-Wolff

From London to Plano

I was once invited to speak in Plano, Texas. I had never heard of Plano before, yet soon enough, there I was. When I arrived, the community rabbi picked me up and began driving to my destination. That day happened to be pouring rain all around. As I took in my surroundings along our way down the road, I couldn't help but feel like

I was in the middle of nowhere. “Who would live here?” I remember thinking to myself. The Jewish community couldn't have been too large, I figured, and so any Jew living there would likely be one of a few.

“Rabbi,” I finally said, “why do you live here? Did you grow up here?” He gave way to a chuckle,

and clarified. “No... I grew up in a place that I'm sure you never heard of. It's the tiniest community and you'd never spot it. If you think Plano, Texas is little, where I'm from is even smaller.” Catching my curiosity, I probed. “Where did you grow up?” “London, Ontario,” he replied.

“London, Ontario?” I said, a rising wave of excitement filling my face. “I can’t believe it.” “Why?” asked the rabbi, unsure why the smallest and most random city would be of interest or relevance to me. “I will never forget the chesed of London, Ontario.” Having broached the topic, I began to detail what had unfolded many years before...

“When I first got married, my husband and I decided to travel to Toronto for Shabbos to visit family. At the time, I had one baby and I was expecting another. It was the middle of the summer, and so we figured that a short flight on a very long Friday day would give us ample time to arrive in time for Shabbos. Mid-flight, the pilot announced that there was a windstorm over Toronto and we’d be landing in London. I remember sitting still in utter confusion. London? In Canada? Until it was clarified: London, Ontario. I had never heard of London, but now I would.

By the time we landed, it was a half-hour until Shabbos. With the plane on the runway and time inching closer and closer to Shabbos, my husband and I looked at each other and knew we needed to do one thing: get off the plane. Turning to the flight attendant, I said exactly that. “We need to get off the plane. We have the Sabbath starting very soon.” “There are other Jews on the plane too,” replied the flight attendant, insinuating that we could cut ourselves some slack with regard to our Shabbos observance just this once. “G-d understands.” As I realized, she didn’t understand the serious sense of our urgency. “We have to get off,” I repeated, trying

my very best to make myself clear. “The entire plane, including everyone on the passenger list, is going to be put on a bus and taken to Toronto,” she went on. “It’s going to take a few hours. If you decide to get off the plane now, that means you’re refusing to get on the bus, you’re refusing to get your luggage, and you’re going to be sitting in this airport. And you don’t know what this airport is like.” But no matter what would be, my husband and I knew one thing. “We need to get off,” I replied softly.

So there we were, off the plane and now sitting in the middle of a cornfield. The entire airport was maybe the size of a single apartment, and there was no one else there but us. All I knew was that I had one baby, three lollipops, one snack, maybe one diaper, and it was one hundred degrees. Looking around, I noticed that there was one woman behind the ticket counter. All of this was enough to make me sit down and cry.

With my husband pacing across the room and me in tears, the woman behind the counter knew something was amiss. “Can I help you, sweetheart?” Lifting my eyes, I looked at her, and my words came tumbling out. “I doubt it... We keep the Sabbath and we’re Jewish, and we can’t drive and we don’t have food...” I gave her the whole run-down, uncertain what it would all mean to her, and moreover, what she would be able to do with it. Suddenly, the woman grew into a glowing reverie. “I think there’s one Jewish family in town.” My husband and I looked at each other, and we both knew. “There’s no way these people keep Kosher,” I

whispered, “and there’s no way these people keep Shabbos. What are we going to do with them?” But before I could say anything further, the woman was already dialing a phone number.

Within a few seconds, the woman placed my husband on the phone, and from the voice in the background, I could make out echoing words that sounded quite like home: “Shalom Aleichem!” As soon as I heard this, I knew we were in good hands.

It was now twenty minutes until Shabbos. We had a baby, I had no extra clothing as our luggage still remained on the plane, and it was scorching hot outside. But none of this mattered to our new friend. “Don’t worry, don’t worry,” we were assured.

Within a short while, we had arrived at the family’s house, and we were amazed by what we were met with. A taxi had been called to bring extra diapers and the wife gave me some of her own clothes. On top of this, only when Shabbos was over did we realize that there was one room in the entire home that had air conditioning: the master bedroom. And guess who slept in the master bedroom? The rabbi and rebbetzin gave us their own room in their own home, and slept elsewhere in one hundred degree, sweltering heat.

Thinking back to this all, I turned to the rabbi who was now driving me and said, “I’ll never forget London, Ontario, because that was a place of chesed.” As I said this, the rabbi began to cry, tears moistening his cheeks. “You were in my parents’ home... My parents did not want to live there,

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but my father was a huge professor—Rabbi Dr. Yitzchok Block—and the Lubavitcher Rebbe said, ‘You stay there because you never know if somebody will need you.’”

Reeling from this entire astounding exchange, I asked the rabbi if I could call up my husband on speaker. I hadn’t spoken to him beforehand, and he had no clue what I was about to ask

him. I dialed my husband and said, “Mendy, when I say London, Ontario, what do you think?” “Chesed,” he said straightaway. It remains one of the most incredible places of chesed I have ever been a part of.

The power of chesed is eternal. It touches a soul, reverberates to the heavens and back, and rings to the end of time. And sometimes, just sometimes, we come to appreciate

just how precious and special it is right before our eyes. Even if that place is as foreign to us as London, Ontario or Plano, Texas. But then again, precisely those most unexpected of places are often the perfect oasis for the most profound acts of kindness.

Rabbi Yoel Gold

What Does Mrs. Weinberg See?

Some time ago, I had the opportunity to be in Atlanta and spend Shabbos with Rabbi Ilan and Rebbetzin Feldman. Rebbetzin Feldman is the daughter of Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt”l, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisroel, Baltimore. She shared with me the following.

Her mother, Rebbetzin Chana Weinberg a”h, used to teach in Baltimore in the 1950s in the Liberty Jewish Center every Sunday afternoon. It was a modern Jewish school, and each week she would have her lesson prepared and teach it to the students. One day she entered the building and saw the maintenance worker walking around with his six-year-old son. The worker looked quite agitated and in a bad mood. He was talking to his son sternly, berating him and calling him names. Seeing this unfold right before her eyes made Rebbetzin Weinberg feel terrible. And so, she decided to approach the father.

“Excuse me, but I could borrow your son for just a few minutes?” The maintenance worker looked back at Rebbetzin Weinberg confused. “Why do you need my son?”

“I want him to help me set up the classroom upstairs,” she responded plainly. The worker, almost reflexively, started hurling his familiar insults, wondering aloud why anyone would want his son who was lazy and “no good” to help. “He can help me,” Rebbetzin Weinberg assured.

Leading the boy upstairs, Rebbetzin Weinberg began looking around for a mirror. Finally, she headed into the woman’s restroom and lifted the boy up so he was face to face with the mirror. “When you look into the mirror, what do you see?” she asked. “I see you when I’m looking into the mirror,” the boy responded playfully. “No, I want you to look at yourself and tell me—when you look at yourself, who do you see?” The boy began echoing his father’s insults—“I see a lazy, good-for-nothing kid.”

Rebbetzin Weinberg then turned to the boy. “Now I want to tell you when I look at you what I see.” She proceeded to tell him that she sees a good-natured kid, a sensitive boy, a boy who tries hard. And then she went on to take out

a small makeup mirror from her pocketbook. Along with this, she wrote on a piece of paper, “What does Mrs. Weinberg see?” She folded the paper, placed it into the mirror, folded the mirror and gave it to the boy. She then said to him, “The next time you feel bad about yourself, I want you to open the mirror, take out this note and ask yourself, ‘When I look into the mirror, what does Mrs. Weinberg see?’”

The way Rebbetzin Feldman knows this story is because years ago at the shiva of her mother, a man in his mid-sixties walked into the shiva home, sat down and told this story. He then he took out a mirror, unfolded an old note, and said, “Your mother empowered me to go through life and play music, because she reminded me of who I am.”

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Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 2 Shevat)

עמרי בן אסתר (מירן)	יודן בן פנינה (ביבס)	ארבל בת יעל (יהוד)	אבינתן בן דיצה (אור)
פרננדו סימון בן טניה (מרמן)	כפיר בן שירי (ביבס)	אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
צחי בן דבורה (עידן)	כרמל בת כנרת (גת)	אריאל בן שירי (ביבס)	אברהם גלעד בן ליאת (מונדר)
קית' שמואל בן גלדיס (סיגל)	לואיס נורבטו בן נורה (הר)	בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)	אגם בת מירב (ברגר)
קרין בת אירינה (ארייב)	ליאור בן מיכל (רודאיף)	גד משה בן שרה (מוזס)	אוהד בן אסתר (בן) עמי)
רום בן תמר (ברסלבסקי)	לירי בת שירה (אלבג)	גיא בן מירב (גלבוע דלאל)	אוהד בן אסתר (יהלומי)
רומי בת מירב (גונן)	מישל בן סולמירה (ניסנבאום)	גלי בן תמר (ברמן)	אור בן טלי (לוי)
רון בן חנה (בנימי)	מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)	דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	אורי בן עינב (דנינו)
רן בן טלי (גואילי) שגב בן גלית (כלפון)	מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)	דולב בן יעל (יהוד) דורון בת סימונה (שטיינברכר)	אוריאל בן נעמי (ברוך)
שגיא בן נעמית (חן דקל)	מתן בן ירדנה (צנגאוקר)	דניאל שמעון בן שרון (פרץ)	איתי בן אורית (סבירסקי)
שירי בת מרגיט (ביבס)	נדב בן חנה (פופלוול)	דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבוע)	איתי בן חגית (חן) איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
שלומי בן רוזיטה (זיו)	נועה בת ליאורה (ארגמני)	דרור בן דורית (אור)	איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
שלמה בן מרסיל (מנצור)	נמרוד בן יקי (כהן)	הירש בן רחל (גולדברג פולין)	אלון בן עידית (אהל)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	נעמה בת איילת (לוי)	זיו בן תמר (ברמן) חיים בן נחמה (פרי)	אליה בן סיגי (כהן) אליהו בן חנה (שרעבי)
	עדן בת שירית (ירושלמי)	חן חנן בן ורד (יבלונקה)	אליקים שלמה בן אבישג (ליבמן)
	עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)	טל בן ניצה (שוהם) קורנגולד)	אלכס בן אוקסנה (לובנוב)
	עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)	יאיר בן רות אדית (הורן)	אלכסנדר סשה בן ילנה (טרופנוב)
	עומר בן שלי (שם) טוב)	יאיר בן פלור (יעקב)	אלכסנדר בן נינה (דנציג)
	עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר (נאוטרה)	יגב בן אסתר (בוכשטב)	אלמוג בן אורית (מאיר ג'אן)
	עידו בן כוכבה (קלדרון)	יוסף בן חנה (שרעבי)	אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי)
	עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)	יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)	אלעד בן חנה (קציר)
	עידן בן דלית (שתיו)	יורם בן בלה (מצגר)	אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
	עמירם בן שרה (קופר)	יצחק בן אנטה (אלגרט)	אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס (דמארי)
	עמית אסתר חיה בת אילנה אלן (בוסקילה)	יצחק בן גילה (גלרנטר)	אנדריי בן יבגניה (קוזלוב)