

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Dovid Horowitz The Boy in the Driveway

Once worked with a young man from an exceptionally distinguished family. His father was a respected rabbi, his mother a true tzaddekes, and his siblings were fine, accomplished individuals. He had been raised in a deeply committed Torah environment and embodied the values of that world.

Yet during his post-Beis Midrash years, when he was in his early twenties, he began experiencing a profound spiritual struggle. Questions emerged and doubts surfaced. The convictions that had once sustained him seemed to weaken. We were very close, and I did everything I could to support him and hold him steady. But despite our efforts, the decline continued. Slowly but steadily, he drifted further away until, as far as I could tell, he was observing very little, if any, of Jewish practice.

Then, late one night, my phone rang. "Rabbi, are you home?" "Yes," I replied. "I'll be in your driveway in a minute," he said. "I need to tell you something."

I stepped outside, and minutes later, car pulled into the driveway. The boy jumped out. "I'm done," he said flatly. "Done with what?" I asked. "I'm done with Judaism. I'm done with mitzvos. I'm finished with all of it."

He pointed to his car. "I've packed everything. I'm driving north right now to the University

of California, Santa Barbara. I'm going to join a fraternity, live like everyone else, and leave this Jewish life behind. I want nothing more to do with it." I looked through the window. The back seat was overflowing with suitcases, clothing, shoes, and personal belongings. It was all there.

At that moment, I realized he was serious. He was preparing to drive off into the darkness and, perhaps, never return. Silently, I began to daven. "Ribbono Shel Olam, please help me. Tell me what to say." Then I asked him, "You're done with everything?" "Everything," he said. "No mitzvot at all?" "None," came the reply.

I paused. "Listen, Moshe. You grew up in such a beautiful Torah home. You can't throw everything away, can you?" "Yes, I can." He was firm and I believed him. "How about one mitzvah?" I asked, almost pleading. He looked at me. "Just one," I continued. "Even in Santa Barbara, even in the dormitory, even if you join the fraternity. Could you keep one mitzvah?"

He thought for a moment. "Okay. One mitzvah I can do. Which one?" Again, I davened silently. "Hashem, please give me the right answer."

Then I said, "Tefillin." "That's it?" "That's it," I said. "Put them on and then take them off. No lengthy prayers and no expectations. Just put on tefillin every morning for thirty seconds. Can you do that?" He nodded. "I can do that. In fact, my tefillin are already in the car." It was near-

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Dovid Horowitz

The Boy in the Driveway

Mrs. Sarah Pachter

Your Mother-in-Law

Rabbi Avrohom Stulberger

The Prayer of Twenty-Five Years

Rabbi Yisroel Majeski

Just Keep Going

DEDICATIONS

L'iluy Nishmat

R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel
Pinchos

Manish ben Esther

Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov

Bechor ben Rivkah

Shlomo Zalman ben
R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi

Esther bat haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l

Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber

Miriam bat Yeshayahu

Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim
Yehoshua Aaron Ben Yisrael Yehuda
Mordechai Dovid Ben Zalman Halevi
Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok
Adina Liba bat Zev Chaim

L'refuah Sheleima

Deena bat Shoshana

Chaya Raizel bat Dena

Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva

Reuven ben Rochel

Paysach Yosef ben Hinda

Avrohom ben Leah Golda

Shmuel Zev ben Tzipora

ly midnight on a Tuesday night. He drove away toward Santa Barbara, and I remained behind davening. "Ribbono Shel Olam, please watch over this young man."

The next night, around 11:00 p.m., my phone rang again. "Rabbi, are you home?" "Yes," I replied. "I'll be in your driveway in a few minutes," he said. I was confused. "Aren't you in Santa Barbara?" "I'll explain when I get there."

A few minutes later, the same car pulled into the driveway and he jumped out. "I couldn't do it!" I wasn't sure if he couldn't put the Tefillin on or if he couldn't throw away his Yiddishkeit. "You couldn't do what?" I asked. "I couldn't leave." He then took a deep breath.

"I got to campus. But the next

morning, I remembered the one mitzvah I had promised to keep. I took out my tefillin and stood there in the dormitory wrapping them around my arm. But as I began putting them on, I suddenly thought to myself, 'Who am I kidding? I'm a Jew. I'm a child of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves me. Am I really going to throw everything away because I have questions? Because I'm going through a difficult period in my life?'" He shook his head. "No. I can't do it. So I packed up my things and came home."

That story took place many years ago. Baruch Hashem, he eventually found his way back completely, and today, he is a respected member of his community, a devoted husband,

a loving father, and a successful professional. He is involved in communal affairs, supports tzedakah causes, and dedicates himself to helping others.

This is not a made-up story. It happened exactly as I mentioned. And all because of one mitzvah.

When a Jew remembers who he is—when he reconnects with the essence of his Jewish identity—something profound awakens within him. He remembers that he is created in the image of Hashem and that he is a child of the Ribbono Shel Olam. And once he thinks of that, the next natural thought is that Hashem has not forgotten him, and therefore he cannot forget Hashem. And when that realization takes hold, the journey home is never far away.

Mrs. Sarah Pachter

Your Mother-in-Law

What comes to mind when you hear the words "mother-in-law"?

You might flinch, thinking to yourself, "You won't believe what mine did last week." Or you might let out a smile, thinking, "I hit the mother-in-law jackpot."

In teaching brides and speaking with mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, I've come to some realizations which I believe can be helpful to any in-law relationship, no less than to the mother-in-law relationship. I'd distill them into five principles

Let us understand the challenge first.

The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is unique because both women deeply love the same man. It's not a natural relationship. It's essentially a love triangle with plenty of drama. As a journalist, I interviewed mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and one discovery stood out above all

the others.

Almost every mother-in-law longed for more inclusion, while almost every daughter-in-law longed for more space. In other words, while one is dreaming about Sunday brunch together, the other is quietly hoping someone cancels it.

So here are the five rules.

Rule #1: Play Fair. As a mother-in-law, once your son is married, treat your daughter-in-law like one of your own. If you're giving gifts, doing favors, or making plans, don't unintentionally create insiders and outsiders. One bride shared that when her brother-in-law got married, her mother-in-law paid for every daughter to have professional makeup done, but not for her only daughter-in-law. The message wasn't intended, but it was certainly received. Whenever possible, do for everyone or do for no one.

For daughters-in-law, the same principle applies. Treat your mother-in-law with the respect you

would want your own mother to receive. Call both mothers and visit both families and give your children the gift of knowing both sets of grandparents. Remember: the more you include, the less they intrude. And mothers-in-law, the more you intrude, the more they'll feel the need to exclude.

Rule #2: Q-TIP. Quit Taking It Personally. This one changes everything. Most of us create stories in our heads. "My future in-laws barely spoke when we first met; they must hate me." Or maybe...they were simply nervous. "My mother-in-law brought dinner over. She must think I can't cook." Or perhaps... she was simply trying to help. The same action can have two completely different interpretations. Choose the kinder one. Because when every interaction becomes personal, everyone begins walking on eggshells and relationships become exhausting. Most misunderstandings aren't acts of malice. They're simply misunderstandings.

Rule #3: Thank and Praise. Gratitude changes relationships. For

mothers-in-law, this woman chose to build a life with your son and that deserves appreciation. For daughters-in-law, this woman spent decades raising the man you now love, and that deserves gratitude too. Say thank you and offer compliments. Look for what they're doing right. Interestingly, my research led me to find something almost universal. Most daughters-in-law crave praise, while most mothers-in-law crave thanks. Neither costs anything and both are priceless.

Rule #4: Choose Connection Over Control. Control and connection cannot coexist. The more you try to control someone, the less connected they'll feel. One woman told me her mother-in-law insisted they come every Friday night. She asked for it every week and there was no discussion about it. If she hesitated, her mother-in-law would have check with

her husband. What was meant to create closeness ended up creating distance. Real connection requires freedom. If people come because they choose to and not because they have to, the relationship becomes genuine. For mothers-in-law, don't tell your daughter-in-law how to raise her children. And for daughters-in-law, don't use the grandchildren as leverage. Control damages everyone involved.

Rule #5: Accept and Respect. You don't have to like your in-laws. You don't. But you do have to respect them. You cannot change who they are. You can only choose who you will be. Respect begins with healthy boundaries. In many Jewish wedding ceremonies, the bride circles the groom seven times, symbolizing the home they are now creating together. That circle belongs to them. No one else—not even parents—lives inside it. For mothers-in-law, your relationship with your child

has changed. He doesn't love you less. He's simply building his own family, and that transition is to be respected. For daughters-in-law, remember that your in-laws also have limits emotionally, physically and financially. Respect those as well. Respect is never about whether the other person deserves it. It's about the kind of person you choose to become. At the end of the day, you should be able to look in the mirror and be proud of the person looking back. Because when you honor your in-laws, you honor yourself.

So will this relationship ever be perfect? Probably not. It isn't supposed to be. But when we stop asking, "Who's right?" and start asking, "What's right?" everything begins to change. These five rules won't eliminate every challenge, but they will transform the atmosphere.

And that's how we build families that last.

Rabbi Avrohom Stulberger

The Prayer of Twenty-Five Years

There is a remarkable story that took place in Brooklyn.

Two men—let's call them Reuven and Shimon—had been inseparable since childhood. They learned together, grew together, built businesses together, and remained the closest of friends throughout their lives. Both were successful businessmen, but what defined them most was their friendship. Every morning, without fail, they would spend several hours learning Torah together.

Then one morning, Shimon did not arrive. Concerned, Reuven called him, only to hear devastat-

ing news. Shimon had just received a grave diagnosis from his doctors. The prognosis was bleak.

Reuven immediately called Shimon. "Shimon," he said, "we're going to fight this together." He mobilized an entire community and Tehillim was recited, Torah learning initiatives were undertaken, and tzedakah was dedicated in Shimon's merit. Virtually every Jew in the neighborhood became involved in one way or another. The outpouring of prayer, concern and love was extraordinary.

Yet despite all the tears, all the prayers, and all the efforts, Shimon

passed away several months later.

Reuven was shattered. He could not understand it. How could so many heartfelt prayers seemingly go unanswered? How could such an outpouring of merit fail to save his dear friend?

For twenty-five years, the question haunted him. Then, a quarter century later, an answer emerged from the most unexpected place.

By that time, Reuven had a daughter in her mid-twenties. She was exceptional in every respect, from kind to intelligent to accomplished and deeply committed to her values. Yet despite many introductions, nothing seemed to lead anywhere. Each young man she met was respectable, but none ap-

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peared to be the right match.

As the years passed, her parents naturally became concerned. One day, they received a suggestion about a young man from Florida. "A boy from Florida?" they responded. "We're looking locally." But those making the suggestion persisted. "Trust us. This is someone she must meet." Reluctantly, they agreed.

The two met and immediately connected. Conversation flowed effortlessly and there was a natural sense of understanding and warmth between them. At one point during the date, the young man asked her, "Do you have a particularly meaningful story about your life?" She smiled. "Not really. What about you?"

He paused. "Actually," he said, "I shouldn't be here. I'm a miracle."

He then shared his family's story. Years before he was born, his father had suddenly become critically ill. His condition deteriorated rapidly and doctors were baffled. An overwhelming infection ravaged his body, and eventually he slipped into a deep coma. The physicians

had no hope. They called his mother and urged her to come immediately. "Your husband is dying," they told her. "There is nothing more we can do."

His mother rushed to the hospital to say goodbye. But when she arrived, something astonishing had happened. His father's eyes were open. The fever had broken and the infection had disappeared. Against every medical expectation, he was recovering. To this day, the case remains documented as an inexplicable medical event. The doctors could offer no explanation for how he survived.

Months later, the young man himself was born. Seeking answers, his parents eventually traveled to Israel and consulted a revered mekubal. After hearing the story, the mekubal told them: "The miracle had nothing to do with you personally. One day, you will understand why Heaven granted your husband life."

The years passed. Twenty-five years later, that understanding arrived. The young man looked

across the table and smiled. "Now I understand. If my father had not survived, I would never have been born. If I had never been born, I never would have met you." Not long afterward, the two became engaged. And suddenly, Reuven understood as well. Twenty-five years earlier, he had cried out to Heaven asking why all those prayers had not saved his beloved friend.

Now he saw the answer. Those prayers had not been lost. They had simply been redirected. The prayers that could not preserve one life became the prayers that preserved another. The tears shed for Shimon became the miracle that saved a man in Florida, who would one day father the young man destined to marry Reuven's daughter.

Sometimes our prayers are answered as we ask. Other times, they are answered in ways different than we ask. They are redirected to accomplish something we do not comprehend. At least not at first.

Sometimes it takes twenty-five years before Heaven reveals what it was doing all along.

Rabbi Yisroel Majeski

Just Keep Going

It was twenty-five years later when a high school principal in Queens ran into one of his former students in a pizza shop in the Five Towns. She immediately came over to him. "I want you to meet my family," she said. She went on to introduce him to her husband and children. As any educator knows, there are few things more gratifying than seeing former students years later and witnessing the lives they have built.

Then she added something else. "I also need to tell you something. You changed my life." The principal smiled politely and thanked her. But she continued, "No, re-

ally. You really changed my life." At this point, he became curious. "What did I do?" he asked. "Do you remember my graduation?" He thought for a moment. "Vaguely," was his answer. "Do you remember handing me my diploma?" He couldn't recall it. "Do you remember looking me straight in the eye and saying, 'Just keep going. Just keep going'?" The principal looked at her, puzzled.

"I can't tell you," she continued, "how many difficult moments I've had in my life. Times when I felt overwhelmed. Times when I wanted to give up. But over and over again, I would hear your voice in

my head, saying, 'Just keep going. Just keep going.' Those words carried me through some of the hardest periods of my life."

The principal later admitted that he was deeply embarrassed by the story. Because the truth was, he had no recollection of giving any profound advice at graduation. In fact, what he had really meant was, "Please keep moving. You're holding up the line."

We never truly know the impact, and sometimes the unintended outcome, of our words and actions. But alongside this message, what this girl heard is equally important to always remember.

Whatever is going on in your life: just keep going.

Always.