

The Jewish Weekly

Sanctifying the Memory of the Holocaust

By Mr. David Rivlin

I am a sixth-generation Jerusalemite. On my father's side, I'm descended from the famous Lithuanian branch of the Rivlin family that emigrated to the Land of Israel together with a group of disciples of the Vilna Gaon in 1809. On my mother's side I come from the Chabad branch of the same family; my great-great-grandfather, Rabbi Eliyahu Yosef Rivlin, was a pioneering member of the Chabad settlement in Chevron, which was founded a few years later, in 1821.

In my youth, before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, I studied in Jerusalem's Hebrew University, while also being drafted into the Jewish police brigade that operated under the British Mandate. My studies were, however, interrupted by the War of Independence, when I served as an officer in the IDF's Communications Corps, and afterwards I traveled to England and completed my studies in the University of London.

In 1950, I was one of the founding members of the Galei Tzahal radio station founded on David Ben Gurion's initiative, and from there I was invited to work for the Foreign Ministry, where I would go on to serve for thirty-four years.

While in the foreign service, I was sent for two postings to New York, the first as vice-consul from 1958-1962, and the second as consul-general from 1971-1975. Because my responsibilities included Soviet Jewish affairs, one of the first people I met in New York was the Lubavitcher Rebbe; I knew how close this subject was to his heart.

Already in my first audience with him, the Rebbe surprised me by noting my family's connection to the Rebbes of Chabad; one of the sons of Rabbi Eliyahu Yosef Rivlin married the daughter of Rabbi Dovber, the second leader of Lubavitch. It seems that he was well acquainted with the history of the Rivlin family, and knew about my mixed lineage of chasidim and their opponents – the mitnagdim.

"Tell me," the Rebbe once asked, "when you come here today, do you come as a chasid or a mitnaged?"

"When I come to you, I am a total chasid," I answered instantly. I could see that the Rebbe appreciated my response.

The Rebbe knew that, as part of my job, I would frequently visit Jewish communities throughout the country for various appeals and lectures, such as on behalf of Soviet Jewry. This issue, in particular, was one he

was deeply involved with and so he was very encouraging. He asked me to advocate and work on behalf of the Jews of Russia, and he continued to remain in touch with me during my next posting, as Consul General in Montreal.

While based in Montreal, I made an extended trip to the Soviet Union, visiting every major Jewish population center, from Moscow to Odessa. Before the trip, I asked the Rebbe whether I could tell the Jews I would meet that I knew him — he said I could, of course. He showered me with blessings, and asked me to bring back a "clear picture" of the Jewish people's situation there.

Although the pressure on Soviet Jewry had slightly eased during the Khrushchev-era, there were still two KGB agents who accompanied me wherever I went, which meant that none of the Jews I met could speak freely. Still, their amazement on hearing that I had brought with me real-life regards from the Lubavitcher Rebbe was hard to describe. They would ask to hold my hand, as tears flowed from their eyes, and I saw how their faces lit up upon hearing his name.

On my return, I was informed that the Rebbe's secretary had called, inviting me to visit with the Rebbe. I gave the Rebbe a detailed report and I shared the deep impression that the Russian Jews left on me.

Eventually, I was posted to New York once again. Throughout that time, I would meet with the Rebbe frequently, oftentimes on his initiative, as he saw me as a source of information and as a point man. Members of the consulate had a tradition to visit the Rebbe's court each year on Simchat Torah, but I would also come on other occasions, oftentimes accompanying Israeli political leaders or writers visiting New York. Most of them had heard from colleagues who had met the Rebbe and wanted to do the same. I would be in touch with the Rebbe's office and set up an appointment for them.

Among the personages I brought to the Rebbe were Binyamin Eliav, the Consul General in New York, who ran some of the Israeli government's secretive activities for Soviet Jews behind the Iron Curtain, and Eliyahu Eilat (Epstein), a Russian-born Orientalist who served as Israel's first ambassador to the US. I also came along with President Zalman Shazar on more than one of his meetings with the Rebbe, although there were times he would, with apologies, ask that I leave him alone with the Rebbe.

One of the finest men ever to work for the Israeli civil service was Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Herzog, the younger brother of President Chaim Herzog, and a highly gifted scholar. He served as ambassador to the United States, as well as to Canada, where he became famous for a public debate he had with the British historian Arnold Toynbee on Israel.

On one visit to New York, he told me, "David, we have to go to the Rebbe," so I joined him for a

It Once Happened...

long audience that went nearly until morning. The conversation between them was profound and fascinating, covering a broad range of subjects, Torah and otherwise, including his recent debate with Toynbee.

It was interesting to see how the Rebbe always knew exactly who he was speaking to and he communicated with them in their own language. When he spoke with Avraham Krinitzi, the charismatic mayor and founder of Ramat Gan, rather than discussing Torah or Jewish history, he inquired about state-building efforts in Israel and the growth of his city in particular. "I heard that many well-to-do Iraqi Jews have settled there," he said. "They no doubt will contribute to the city's standing."


One of the most prominent people I ever had the privilege of accompanying to the Rebbe was Moshe Sharett, the former Prime Minister. It was during the Eichmann Trial, and one of the things they discussed in their long conversation was the subject of Holocaust remembrance. The Rebbe emphasized the imperative of such initiatives, remarking that the memory of the Holocaust served as a "guide for our times, for the continued survival of the Jewish people." However, referring to the painful disregard of Jewish tradition in parts of Israeli society, he added, "sanctifying the memory of the Holocaust is important, but there needs to be at least the same attitude towards what is holy in Judaism, towards strengthening Torah and mitzvot – the rock of our people."

After we left, Sharett was immersed in his thoughts. "He is undoubtedly a very impressive person," he remarked to me. "I need to think a lot about what he has told me."

It was my great fortune to have been in such close contact with the Rebbe, a central figure in American Jewry with global influence, who had a deep concern for the Land of Israel and the people who live in it. It was no surprise that everyone wanted to meet the Rebbe. They were curious as to the secret of his influence, and wished to see for themselves what everyone was talking about: His blue eyes and radiant smile, his refined ways, the respect he showed all people, and the wise words he had to say.

Reprinted from an email of <http://myencounterblog.com>.

Editor's Note: Mr. David Rivlin was a longtime Israeli diplomat who held various positions in the Israeli Foreign Ministry's civil service. He was interviewed in his home in July of 2010.



YF GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Chayei Sarah

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:05	5:18	5:57
Tel Aviv	4:19	5:20	5:53
Haifa	4:09	5:18	5:54
Be'er Sheva	4:23	5:21	5:58



Abraham's Synagogue

Many years ago, in the old city of Hebron, on the road to the Cave of Machpelah, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, there was a small Jewish settlement. So few Jews lived there that they did not even have a regular minyan (prayer quorum of ten) for Shabbat.

Only occasionally, if they were fortunate enough to "catch" a Jew or Jews visiting the famous, historic Cave of Machpelah, did they manage to pray with a minyan. At such times the Jews of the settlement were simply overjoyed, for they were very anxious to serve G-d in the best way they could.

One year, they were particularly troubled because Yom Kippur was approaching with no prospect of being able to get a minyan together.

The day of Yom Kippur eve came, and they were still one Jew short of the required ten to make up a congregation.

The Jews of the settlement began to feel desperate, and busy as they were, they scattered towards all the main roads, hoping against hope that even at this late hour a miracle would happen and they would find a tenth Jew to complete the minyan.

The sun was rapidly sinking, as their hearts too were sinking, and they returned home and prepared to go to their small shul to pray, minyan or no minyan.

The man who was acting as chazan (cantor) was just about to begin the prayer when, to the astonishment of all present, in walked an old Jew, dressed in old, plain clothes, his back bent, with a sack slung over his shoulder.

They all felt like embracing him, but the hour was too serious for such things. Their thoughts all concentrated on the sacred chanting of the age-old, haunting melodies and soulful prayers.

The shamash (beadle) would have liked to talk to this mysterious visitor after the Service was over, but the stranger seemed so deep in his thoughts and prayers, that the shamash decided to leave him undisturbed.

The visitor spent the night in shul as did most of the other worshippers. As you have already learned, the Jews of the settlement were very pious and G-d fearing, and they humbly thanked the Almighty for having graciously answered their prayer by sending them a tenth Jew, so that they could pray with a minyan on this holiest of days—Yom Kippur.

As soon as Yom Kippur was over, there was almost a rush to get to the strange old man who had appeared like an angel from heaven. Everyone wanted to have the honor of taking him home with them to break the fast. They almost began to quarrel, till the shamash very wisely suggested that the fairest solution would be to "cast lots."

Everyone agreed. To the great joy of the shamash, who was a great Torah scholar, he was the lucky one to have the honor of being host to their visitor.

The shamash was anxious to please his guest, and did not bother him with questions. All that the shamash was able to get out of the old man was that his name was Abraham. They walked out of shul together, and the shamash was satisfied to carry on a more or less one-sided conversation.

All of a sudden the shamash felt an ominous stillness and, peering in the darkness of the night, he realized he was alone! His guest had disappeared!

Horror of horrors! What had happened to Abraham?

"Abraham! Abraham!" the shamash called out, frantically running this way and that. But there was no response, and no sign of Abraham.

Sadly, and with a heavy heart of misgiving, the shamash quickly retraced his steps and told the Jews who were on their way home from shul of the terrible thing that had happened.

The poor shamash was desolate. The good Jews of the settlement were as concerned as the shamash to find their lost visitor, so they all set out with torches, afraid he might have stumbled into a well, or came to grief, G-d forbid.

After hours of searching without results, they all turned sadly home. The shamash, though, could find no rest, and only as dawn was breaking, did he finally fall into a troubled sleep, out of sheer exhaustion.

He had hardly closed his eyes, it seemed to him, when Abraham appeared to him. But now he was most beautifully dressed and he looked radiant.

"Do not worry, my friend," he said gently to the shamash. "As you see, I am perfectly alright. I am the Patriarch Abraham.

"Your prayers reached me here in the Cave of Machpelah and I came to you so that you should have the spiritual satisfaction of praying on Yom Kippur with a minyan.

"As soon as my mission was over, I returned here to my resting place. Go back to your friends and tell them not to worry. No harm has befallen me. I am at peace. Peace be with you."

As soon as the words were spoken, the vision disappeared and the shamash awoke. He could hardly get to shul fast enough to inform his fellow-Jews of the wonderful dream he had just had. At first they could hardly believe him, but they knew him to be a pious man so they could have no doubt that it was indeed the Patriarch Abraham who had come to be the tenth man to their minyan. Their hearts were filled with a great and abounding joy. Humbly they gave thanks to the Almighty - the G-d of their father Abraham.

Reprinted from an email of Chabad.org Magazine.



Torah Compilations Parshat Chayei Sarah

Our sages teach, 'יפה שיחתן של עבדי אבות לפני המקום מתורתן של 'בנים' – the everyday mundane conversation of the servants of the founders of our faith, is of greater relevance to us than the formal instruction that follows.

They are referring to Eliezer, sent by Avraham Avinu to Mesopotamia, to find a wife for Yitzchak. This is featured in the longest chapter of the whole book of Bereishit – Chapter 24. In sixty-seven long Pesukim, we are told about Eliezer's thoughts, his plans for the test at the well side, how he executed it. It's all very expansive.

However, later on in the Torah, when we are given the specific do's and don'ts of Jewish law, then everything is very concise. So what we find here is that from a person who is not a member of our faith, we learn so much about our lives.

Now if, let's say, in a classroom at school, the children will be performing a play about this week's Parasha, and a kid arrives home and he announces to his family – I'm going to be Eliezer! I think that everybody will be really delighted, because that certainly would be the key role.

Interestingly however, let's have a look at the number of times in which people's names are mentioned in the Parasha. Avraham's name is mentioned on no less than 37 occasions; Yitzchak's – 13; Rivkah – 12, Sarah – 9; Ephron – 9; Bethuel – 4; Lavan – 3; and Eliezer – 0.

His name actually doesn't appear. He is the main character but he is either referred to as העבד – the servant, or האיש – the man.

I think that this presents to us a very profound message. We have internalized his values, we have taken on his message, he is there as that role model in that longest chapter but it's not his name that counts, it's what he taught the world that matters.

From Eliezer we learn, Hashem helps those who live their entire life in order to help others. In similar fashion, the great heroes and heroines of this world are mainly those men and women who behind the scenes are great family people, who contribute to their community. Their names might not be in neon lights, but they are our most outstanding characters. They are the Eliezers and his name says it all. אלי עזר – my G-d is my help. The Almighty certainly helps those, who live an entire life in order to help others.

Let us see G-d's help by praying together with praise and gratitude to Hashem for the great miracle we have witnessed - the release and safe return of the living hostages. With hearts full of thanks, we acknowledge His endless kindness and mercy, and we pray that those who have returned home find healing, strength, and peace after all they have endured.

We also continue to pray for the release of the remaining hostage bodies and Divine Protection over our courageous IDF soldiers, police officers, medical teams, firefighters, ZAKA members, security forces, and every individual who stands in defense of our people - in Israel and throughout the world.

May all who are in need, be blessed with healing, yeshuot, shidduchim, children, and parnassah tova, and may we be blessed to have just continuous joy and to only go from one simcha through to the next, the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, happy, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

Although none of the 613 mitzvot are counted from Chayei Sarah, we learn about burial of the dead, and funeral practices such as eulogizing the dead. We also find lessons relating to marriage in this Parshah.

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 105
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1402
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5314

HAFTORA: Melachim I 1:1-31

Shabbat Mevarchim Chodesh Kislev
Rosh Chodesh - Friday, Nov. 21, 2025

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