

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

ויאמר אלי הנני מפורד והרבותיך ונתתך לקהל עמים ונתתני את הארץ הזאת לורעך אחרך אחות עולם ... (מז-ה)

More than five centuries after his ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism, and more than 300 years after a relative was burned at the stake for secretly practicing Judaism, Miquel Segura of Mallorca, Spain, returned to the Jewish people.

In a ceremony that began with *Shacharit* prayers at *Shearith Israel*, the Spanish/Portuguese Synagogue of NY and continued with a double dunk into the warm waters of the West Side *Mikvah*, Segura reaffirmed his connection to his Jewish ancestors. The 65-year-old journalist can trace his family history back, in precise detail, for centuries. Segura is a Chueta, as descendants of Mallorcan Jews who were forcibly converted, are known. Over generations, the Chuetas were persecuted, often tortured and discriminated against. Even the name, Chueta (Xueta in Catalan) is offensive, as it is derived from the word pig in the Catalan language. Since other Christians wouldn't marry Chuetas, even as these "New Christians" lived in accordance with the Church, the Chuetas have remained an enclosed community. Today, there are an estimated 20,000 Chuetas, most in Mallorca, Spain's largest island, in the Mediterranean Sea. In Mallorca, persecution of the Jews began with a wave of violent pogroms in 1391. Jews in Mallorca were forced to convert, even before the edict of Expulsion in 1492. The Spanish Inquisition was formally abolished in 1808, but social, economic and religious discrimination against the Chuetas continued into the modern era. Only in the past 40 years or so, as society has opened up more, have Chuetas been let back in.

Now, formally Jewish, Miquel Segura, known in Hebrew as Michael ben Hayyim, emerged from the waters, dressed in his pinstripe suit. He was beaming, "I feel a relief, like I'm free, clean, purified." He greeted his family and other guests, who showered him with calls of "Mazel Tov" back in the waiting room. "I think this is the most happy day of my life." He showed the assembled group a family tree and was presented with a Hebrew/Spanish document that stated, "After five centuries, Miquel Segura of Palma de Mallorca returned to his people." Segura, who has written more than 20 books including "Raices Chuetas, Alas Judias," (Chuetas Roots, Jewish Wings), first learned of his Chueta background when he was 15 and was taunted in school. Previously, his parents avoided the topic. Soon after, when he heard a procession on the street saying that the Chuetas killed the Christian savior, he began to read about their history. Members of the community are easy to identify, as they have one of the 15 family names that have lasted over the centuries, including Aguilo, Forteza, Marti and Valleriola.

When asked about any traces of Jewish practice in their home while growing up, he recalls, "My father refused to cut cheese and meat with the same knife, and no one else could touch this knife. Other than that, we really lived as Catholics."

In 1994, with the publication of his first book on the subject of the history of the Chuetas, "Memoria Xueta," he stated publicly that he was a Chueta and was met with debate and personal attacks. He began thinking about returning to Judaism, to remove the stigma of being a Chueta. Over the last few years, he has traveled to South America, speaking about his books and his own story, and has received much support. Six years ago, at a conference in Barcelona for "Bnei Anousim," the sons and daughters of Jews forcibly converted, Segura met Michael Freund, founder of *Shavei Israel*, an Israeli organization that reaches out to descendants of Jews around the world and fosters their connection to Judaism. Freund, who brought Segura's story to Rabbi Angel's attention, came to New York for the ceremony. "This is proof of the power of Jewish memory and is the best possible revenge for what the Inquisition did to his ancestors. Ironically, it was the ongoing exclusion of Mallorca's 'Old Christians' that allowed the Chuetas to preserve their identity well into the 20th century." Freund said. To Segura, he said, "I hope that you open the doors to many in Palmas de Mallorca to return to the Jewish people."

Since then, another man from the Chueta community has moved to Israel, undergone a formal conversion and was ordained by the chief rabbinat. Rabbi Nissan ben Avraham travels frequently to Mallorca and Barcelona to lecture and teach. Segura says that others in the community are also very interested in their Jewish roots and in Jewish culture, but many cannot trace their family trees as he did. He plans to encourage others in the community to reclaim their Judaism. (As seen in the Jewish Week)

אנכי הקד בדרך כל הארץ חוקת
הייתה לאיש ... (מלכים א' ב-ב)

A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY
HAFTORAH BY AN UNEQUALLED HISTORIAN

תורת הצבי על הפטרות

With *Dovid Hamelech* laying on his deathbed, he instructed his son Shlomo to remain steadfast in his belief in *Hashem*, as well as to ensure the continuation of *Malchus Bais Dovid*. *Dovid Hamelech* praised Shlomo's wisdom and encouraged him to "be strong and be a man."

Rabbeinu Azariah Figo ז"ל (Sefer Binah Le'itim) writes that obviously a person is obligated to strive to achieve perfection on his own, but the merit of his ancestors can definitely help him reach that goal. He explains that one's "זכות אבות" - ancestral merit, is like a platform upon which he stands. Depending on the extent of the merit, that platform can be higher or lower, and aside from the fact that he can benefit from that high spiritual status, he must be wary lest

he falls from that elevated platform. Therefore, while there are surely many benefits to having ancestral merit, there are always risks involved as well, for when falling from a higher platform, the fall can be more catastrophic than falling from a lower platform.

Shlomo HaMelech - the next link in the Davidic Dynasty, had an obligation to follow the "דרך הישר" - the straight path, so that he would not detract from his father Dovid's, values. As a result, *Dovid HaMelech* imparted this message to Shlomo and commanded him to remember this lesson for all time and always refer to himself as the "Son of Dovid" since that will always oblige him to strive to be like him - a lesson we can surely take to heart as well.

ארור אפם כי עז ועברתם כי קשתה
אחלקם ביעקב ואפיצם בישראל ... (מט-ז)

CONCEPTS IN AVODAS HALEV FROM THE
FAMILY OF R' CHAIM YOSEF KOPMAN ZT"l

מחשבת הלב

In the *Birchas Yaakov*, the first three *shevatim* were slightly admonished, according to their level. Yaakov "criticized" Shimon and Levi for acting "rashly" in wiping out the city of *Shechem*. He also chastised them for their complicity in the sale of Yosef. The above *posuk*, according to **Rashi**, says that Yaakov wished to separate them by appointing these two brothers as scribes and *melamdei tinokos*. These jobs necessitate constant travel, thus keeping them apart, albeit in a respectable fashion.

R' Yaakov Kamenetzky ז"ל asks, if they were rebuked for their actions, why would it be appropriate for them to be the emissaries in transmitting *Torah* to the next generation? He answers that although *Yaakov Avinu* was not happy with their actions, he observed in them a positive trait. While all the brothers saw what had happened to their sister Dina, they alone took action. That ability to act so courageously, with such zeal and conviction, is a necessary ingredient to do these two jobs. Only a person who is filled with passion, will agree to always be on the move and serve as scribes and teachers. Therefore, it was specifically Shimon and Levi who were selected. One only has to direct those strengths in the proper direction.

On the *posuk* in *Mishlei*, "טוב עץ הוא יבורך" *Chazal* tell us that this refers to Yaakov and the *Birchos Yaakov*. Because the word טוב has a numerical equivalent of 17 and represents the 17 years that he was in *Mitzrayim*. Added to "עין" which equals 130, representing *Yaakov Avinu's* years prior to Egypt, the total is 147. Only a person, who exemplifies a "טוב עין" as the *posuk* says, has the ability to distinguish between a bad act of a good human being, and the intrinsic person himself. In other words, a bad action doesn't necessarily define the essence of the person. Rather, that trait can be channeled to good use.

This is a great tool for us to utilize, with which to model our interpersonal relationships, and how we view the youngsters in our care. May we follow in the path of our *Avos Hakedoshim* and be *zoche* to *beracha* from the *ultimate meitiv*. אבנו שבשמים

משל למה הדבר דומה

הכלילי עינים מייז ולבן שנים מהלב ... (מט-יב)

משל: There is a *Rav* in *Bnei Brak* who is well-known for helping couples with *shalom bayis*. One day he approached a particular young man and congratulated him. "Well done! You succeeded in making *shalom bayis* in so-and-so's home, something which I was unsuccessful for a long time!"

The young man was certain that the *Rav* was mistaken and had approached the wrong person, however the *Rav* was insistent. He smiled and explained: "Some years ago, there was a young *yeshivah bochur* who learnt assiduously. You approached his father, tapped him on the shoulder with a big smile and said to him, "Ahhh! What a son you have! He is such a diligent learner, a true *masmid*. Happy are the parents who merited to bring up such a child!"

The young man thought for a few seconds and remembered

the incident in question. The *Rav* continued and said to the young man, "You should know my friend, that these few nice words that you said to the father, re-established his *shalom bayis*. And without intending to, you merited to fulfill the great *mitzvah* of establishing peace between a man and his wife. If only more people would realize what a few kind words can do," said the *Rav*, "I would be out of business!"

משל: *Chazal* explain the *posuk*, "His teeth are whiter than milk," as follows: *Rebbi Yochanan* said, "Greater is one who whitens his teeth to his friend than one who gives him milk to drink." This means that a person who smiles at his friend, (through which he reveals the white of his teeth), and through his smile lights up his face to his friend, and relates to him with a friendly appearance, is greater than a person who gives a glass of milk to his friend. You never know what you can accomplish with one good word and one broad smile!

וידו ועקב בארץ מצרים ... וימת יוסף בן מאה ועשר
שנים ויחנמו אתו וישם בארץ כמצרים ... (פר-כתיג-ב)

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON MIDDOS TOVOS FROM
THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

דרגה יתירה

The *parshiyos* in *Chumash Bereishis* depict the lifespan of a person. *Bereishis* is the beginning, when a baby is born. *Noach* means to rest, which is what a baby does most of the day, sleeping and resting his tiny body. *Lech Lecha* is when that baby begins to walk and pitter patters around taking his first baby steps. *Vayera* is when he begins to see and makes his appearance as he grows into adulthood. *Chaye Sarah* is the *parsha* of *shidduchim* when he finds his *bashert* and settles down. *Toldos* is when he starts having children and begins to raise a family. *Vayeitzei* is when he starts to go out and make a *parnassah*. *Vayishlach* is when he marries off his own children and sends them to build homes of their own. *Vayeshev* is when he retires and settles down in his older age. *Mikeitz* is the end of his life. *Vayigash* represents his meeting with *Hashem* and the *Bais Din shel Maalah*. And finally, *Parshas Vayechi*, the last *parsha* in *Sefer Bereishis*, represents that his soul lives on forever.

Why is *Vayechi* the *parsha* which lives on if it is the *parsha* when *Yaakov Avinu* physically dies? Let it be called *Parshas Vayamas*. The *Parsha* of Death. But that is just the point. A *yid* never dies. His deeds and *mitzvos* live on forever. A person will come up to *Shamayim* after 120 and will be shocked at the amount of good things he has done. He will see for the first time, the amount of people he influenced, not by anything "earth shattering" that he accomplished, but just by being himself and doing something that to him seemed small, but to someone else was huge and actually changed his life!

Parshas Vayechi concludes all the amazing stories about our *Avos* and *Imahos*, the last chapter of the "Avinu family"! But it is called *Vayechi* because it is the beginning of life. It is the beginning of the birth of an entire *Am Yisroel*. The smallest actions of our forefathers, shaped the entire nation of Jewish People. We, too, are the molders and shapers of the next generation. May all of our wonderful deeds live on forever and may we all be *zoche* to greet *Moshiach Tzidkeinu B'mhera B'yameinu*.