



In Search of Hidden Treasures

AHUVAH GRAY

In Search of Hidden Treasures

Stories of Faith, Love, and Hashgacha Pratis

By

Ahuvah Gray

Dveikus Press

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***If you seek for it as for silver, and
search for it as hidden treasures.***

***Then you will understand the fear of Hashem, and
discover the knowledge of God.***

Proverbs 2:4-5

Rabbi Yehoshua Freilich

Chazal (our Sages) tell us **לכמ יתלכשה ידמלמ** – “From all those who teach me I have become wise.” More important than reading all of Ahuvah’s beautiful stories has been the opportunity to learn from the personal example of this special woman.

As we read in *Pirkei Avot*: **אמצבתא בדהתוש יוהוסהיר** – “One should thirst for words of *Torah*,” I cannot help but be astounded at Ahuvah’s tremendous excitement and energy in absorbing every word of the *Torah*.

השע רך – “Provide for yourself a teacher.” Ahuvah’s choice of selecting only mentors who are at the “top of the league” is to be truly admired. Outstanding personalities who have made an indelible impression on her character include the late *Rav* Aryeh Leib Heyman *z”l* (may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing), who was a prominent rabbi in *Bayit Vegan*, and *Lehavdil lechaim tovim* (may she be set apart for long life) his wife Rebbetzen Chaya Heyman, as well as *Rav* Aharon Feldman, *Rosh HaYeshivah* of Ner Israel in Baltimore.

רבח רל הנק - “Acquire for yourself a friend.” When I think of all the friends with whom Ahuvah associates, I notice that they include a class of people who are true *bnei aliyah* (seeking constant growth) and *ba’alei midos* par excellence (of exceptional character traits).

Ahuvah is truly a living example of the modern day Ruth. One can weave from all her amazing stories a colorful tapestry to be hung up in every Jewish home as a beautiful exemplar to be emulated.

May she continue to share with *klal Yisrael* her outstanding sincerity and enthusiasm for *yiddishkeit* (the Jewish way of life) in a way that we beckons us all to follow in her footsteps. Hopefully, these steps will lead us closer to the coming of the *Mashiach*, *bimhera beyameinu* (speedily, in our time).

Rabbi Yehoshua Freilich
Dean, Baer Miriam Seminary
Har Nof, Jerusalem

Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Knowing Ahuvah Gray is a spiritual adventure. The drama and sincerity of her search for a way of life in which her mind, spirit, and body are all dancing to the tune of the same fiddler is unforgettable. As a teacher, presenting the great heroines of the Bible has always been a challenge. Our concerns are so petty, and our desire to move forward is sometimes stunted by living in an era in which there are so few heroines. Ahuvah is one of these heroines. In her first book, *My Sister, the Jew*, she details for the reader her path to Judasim. In her second book, *Gifts of a Stranger*, she takes us on a journey with her around the world to fascinating Jewish communities. In her third book, *Journey to the Land of My Soul*, we fastened our seat belts throughout her adventurous journeys.

In her fourth book, *In Search of Hidden Treasures*, she retells incredible stories she heard worldwide of *hashgacha pratis*, interweaving them around the *chagim*. May each of you continue your search for the hidden treasures contained in the *Torah* as Ahuvah Gray shares these stories with you, the reader.

Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller Lecturer
at Neve Yerushalayim Author of
*More Precious than Pearls Our
Bodies Our Souls*

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I thank *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for His being in my life. To my new family, the Jewish people: you are the source of my strength and inspiration.

To the *seminary* girls worldwide: I owe everything that I have become to you and your encouragement and help with learning *Torah*, and yes, the mundane work of cleaning. You are the best and I can honestly say that I am learning from you.

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To *Luach.com* for posting my request for *hashgacha pratis* stories.

Dedication

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said: “Once I was walking on the road, when a certain man met me. He greeted me and I returned his greeting. He said to me, “Rabbi, from what place are you?” I said to him, “I am from a great city of scholars and Sages’.” He said to me, “Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us in our place? I would give you thousands upon thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and pearls.” I replied, “Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell no where but in a place of *Torah*.” And so it is written in the Book of *Tehillim* by David, King of Israel: *‘I prefer the Torah of Your mouth above thousands in gold and silver.’*¹ Furthermore, when a man departs from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones nor pearls escort him, but only *Torah* study and good deeds, as it is said: *“When you walk, it shall guide you; when you lie down, it shall guard you; and when you awake it shall speak on your behalf.”*²

“When you walk, it shall guide you”-in this world; “when you lie down, it shall guard you”-in the grave; “and when you awake, it shall speak on your behalf”-in the World to Come. And it says: *“Mine is the silver, and mine is the gold, says Hashem, Master of legion”*³ (*Pirkei Avos* 6:9).

As I have traveled the world as a Jewess, it has been a privilege to be a representative of a highly respected *Torah* observant community, *Bayit Vegan* in *Jerusalem*. Therefore, it is with deep gratitude and humility that I dedicate this book to my *kehillah* (community) in *Bayit Vegan*. As the rabbi in *Pirkei Avos*, I, too, have been

¹ Tehillim 119:72.

² Proverbs 6:22.

³ Chaggai 2:8.

privileged to dwell in a great city-*Jerusalem*-as well as to live among the *Torah* scholars and *Sages* of *Bayit Vegan*. As a result of observing their lives on a daily basis, I am a recipient of their *Torah* treasures that have awoken the seeds in my own *neshamah* and enhanced my path to *Judaism*.

If I have made any contribution to the Jewish people, it is due to the love and support that I have received from my *kehillah*; their life long commitment to the study of *Torah* has transformed my life. Especially the life of my teacher and dear friend Yosef HaKohen z"tl. He was a *Torah* scholar and hosted a bi weekly *Torah* teaching online called *hazon*: Our univerisal Vision (www.shemayisrael.com/publicat/hazon) for thirteen years with students world wide. He will be greatly missed by all of us who benefited from his vast knowledge. May his *nashamah* continue to be elevated!!

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Foreword

We are living in the times that the prophets described as *chevlei Mashiach*- the birth-pangs of *Mashiach*. Our *Sages* warned us about wars and rumors of wars, and the days when our sins would be “like scarlet.” We were also told that we would be unable to determine one season from another, and there would be floods and earthquakes. *Hashem* spoke to the prophet and said: “*Come, now, let us reason together, says Hashem. If your sins are like scarlet they will become white as snow; if they have become red as crimson, they will become white as wool. If you are willing and obey, you will eat the goodness of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword-for the mouth of Hashem has spoken*” (*Isaiah 1:18-20*).

Over the last few years we have witnessed the tsunami of the Philippines, cyclones in Bangladesh, earthquakes in Northern California, the flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina, and forest fires in Southern California. Crime is rampant, and the economic crisis in the United States triggered a worldwide economic catastrophe.

One day in the midst of all this confusion, I started singing a song Mahalia Jackson used to sing that simply says, “*He’s got the whole world in His hands. He’s got the whole world in His hands. He’s got me and you brother, in His hands. He’s got me and you sister, in His hands. He’s got the whole world in His hands.*”

When that beautiful Negro spiritual touched my *neshamah* (soul), in spite of the chaotic state of the world affairs, I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Rather than concerning myself with the perplexities of the

world, I simply decided to cast my cares upon *Hashem* because I know He cares for me-Blessed be His Name!

So, after singing that moving spiritual, which reminded me of the nurturing and love that I received during my upbringing, I decided to search for the hidden treasures contained in some of the beautiful and moving stories that I have heard.

Throughout my worldwide travels, I have been privileged to hear some amazing stories at a variety of *Shabbos* tables. In this book I have collected a number of these heartwarming stories of survival. One story describes the miraculous survival of a child with a serious illness, when the doctors had given up on. Another story tells of a mother who lost a child but with *Hashem's* help has been able to overcome her terrible pain. There are stories about looking death in the face and defying it, as well as stories of the invincible strength of a *Holocaust* survivor.

Over the years having heard such moving stories has caused something to stir deeply inside of me. Those stories affected me exactly as that old Negro spiritual had. One of the most amazing techniques that I have learned throughout my life's journey is to sit on the sidelines and watch the *Yad Hashem*, (Hand of God). He causes events and circumstances to unfold before my eyes; it's almost as if He says to me, "Nu-what's your problem, Ahuvah?"

Therefore it is with deep gratitude to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that I am writing this book. It is my sincere prayer that this book will motivate each reader to search for their own hidden treasures.

Ahuvah Gray
Jerusalem, September, 2011

Prologue Remaining in Bereishis: Searching for Hidden Treasures

In life, change is often viewed with uncertainty and fear. Change is inevitable-growth is optional. I have often discovered that change is a silver lining hidden in the cloud, when we realize it is for our own benefit.

It has always been difficult for me to close the book of *Bereishis* (Genesis) and begin the book of *Shemos* (Exodus); I always feel that there's so much more to learn. How does one end the story of the Creation, the beginning of all things? How can one comprehend that *Hashem* created the world with the *Alef-Bais*, the power inherent in the Hebrew letters? How does one perfect himself after digesting the story of Yosef and his brothers? This past year had been no exception we are nearing *Pesach*, the month of *Nissim* our new year, and I still haven't finished learning enough of the book of *Bereishis*.

I am now nearing the completion of this book, *In Search of Hidden Treasures*.

The hidden treasures and mysteries embodied in the *Torah*, are exactly what I have been searching for my entire life. It's beautiful to see how *Hashem* reveals Himself through the seventy facets of the *Torah*, the facets that gives us seventy insights into each piece of *Torah* wisdom. With God's help I will continue to work on the book of *Bereishis* until one hundred and twenty years because I love the book of our beginning so much.

In *seminary* I was taught, that at the end of the book of *Bereishis* (49:1-4) the spirit of prophesy was hidden from Yaakov because *Hashem* did not want him to reveal

the secret of the end of days and the coming of the *Mashiach* to his children. Even so, in *Bereishis 50:24* Yosef revealed to his brethren the hidden words of *geula* (redemption) that his father Yaakov had passed down to him, “God will indeed remember (*pakod yifkod*) you. The book of *Shemos*, begins with a *vav* (the Hebrew letter meaning “and”-**and** these are the names) to relate it to the events at the end of *Bereishis (50:25)*. And so it was in the book of *Exodus (4:31)* the hidden words appear as the *Torah* states: “ *And the people believed and they heard that Hashem remembered (pakad) the children of Israel.* ”

The wise King Solomon adjures his son to take his words and to treasure his commandments: “*If you seek for it as for silver, if you search for it as for hidden treasure. Then you will understand the fear of Hashem, and discover the knowledge of God*” (*Mishlei 2:4-5*).

Chazal say that this is referring to the *Torah*. As we continue to search as our forefathers did, may we merit seeing the coming of *Mashiach* in our times.

May these stories of *hashgacha pratis* inspire each of us to continue our search for the hidden treasures contained in the *Torah*.

Introduction

I had heard the following story about my rebbetzin⁴ mentioned several times by various acquaintances. However, after Rebbetzin Chaya Heyman told me her story, I was speechless.

Once I heard the Rebbetzin explain at a lecture that when someone says *Shema Yisrael*.⁵ It may help that person to be saved. She then related the following story about her father: During the First World War, her father lived on the border between Russia and Poland. He was taken prisoner by the Germans, who commanded him to paint a bridge. But to his horror, her father discovered he had a fear of heights.

He found himself in quite a dilemma. If he went up on the bridge to paint, he envisioned himself falling off. If he didn't go up to paint the bridge, the Germans would surely shoot him. In the time it took to take a breath, he decided he would run away rather than risk his life. Therefore, he planned an escape into the forest.

After he had reached the forest he sighed with relief. Suddenly he looked up and saw some German soldiers coming towards him. They immediately demanded to see his identification papers. When he said he didn't have any, he knew what the results would be. He asked the soldiers if he could say a prayer before they killed him, and they agreed.

He cried out from the bottom of his soul, *Shema Yisrael*, with great fervor, realizing he was about to give up

⁴ The Yiddish term for the rabbi's wife.

⁵ The prayer, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One," said by religious Jews world wide.

his soul to *Hashem*:⁶ “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokaynu, Hashem Echad.*”

To his surprise, instead of gunfire, he heard a horse galloping through the forest. It was a German officer, who immediately demanded of the soldiers, “What are you doing?” They explained that they had captured a spy and were going to shoot him. The officer responded, “Don’t you dare touch him! Anyone who prays like that isn’t a spy.”

* * *

It was an exciting winter morning for Rabbi Chaim Adams and his family. His son was to be married that day in Albany, New York, and the whole family was driving up to the wedding in Far Rockaway, New York, in several cars. The weather seemed to add to their joy, as it was a fine sunny day. The sun’s rays shone on the deep white snow that had already fallen and covered the ground. They set off for their destination in high spirits.

All seemed to go well for most of the trip. There wasn’t much traffic to disturb them, and the six passengers in the rabbi’s car were relatively comfortable. When they reached the last leg of the journey, they drew up in front of a service station to refuel and to stretch themselves a bit. It was then that another car pulled up and a voice called out, “Hello, Uncle Chaim,” to Rabbi Adams. It was his nephew, Rabbi Theodore Adams, who with his wife, Bernice, was traveling to the wedding from Jersey City, New Jersey. “I see you have a full car and mine is almost empty, Devorah,” he called to the oldest sister. “Come and join us-

⁶ Literally, “The Name,” a respectful way of referring to God.

you'll be more comfortable than sitting three in the front seat."

"I can't," she responded. "I have to read the signs for my father to make it easier for him to drive!" However, the youngest sister, Chaya, (who is today Rebbetzin Heyman) decided it would be better for her to leave the crowded front seat, so she hastened to the back of her older cousin's car. She had always admired her cousins, and was delighted to be with them for the rest of the trip.

All was going well in the younger Rabbi Adams's car until, with no warning, the car spun dangerously on an icy piece of road. Chaya, who was sitting in the back seat, thought it was all over for them, and she quickly and fervently recited *Shema Yisrael*, giving her soul up to its Maker. Miraculously, the car righted it self, and even more miraculously, there was no other car there to crash into. The shock of the episode passed, and soon afterward they drove up happily and excitedly in front of the home that was their destination.

With all the commotion welcoming the many guests, time passed quickly. However, Chaya began to wonder about her father, worrying that too much time had passed-her father's car should have arrived by then. "What is taking them so long? Where are they?"

Her answer came with a phone call from her brother. Yes, he was calling the house to tell them that there was some terrible news he had to relate. There had been a devastating accident. Their father and mother were both dead: "Momma and Poppa dead! What about Devorah?" Chaya cried out in deep grief and despair. Her brother's voice was broken and filled with grief. "Her too!"

That finished Chaya. She passed out. After reviving her, her relatives put her hand into her brother's arm-she, in place of their mother, would lead him to the *chuppah* (the wedding canopy) for his marriage ceremony. Her mother's brother, uncle Ralph Price, supported him on his other arm in place of their father, and so they proceeded toward the chuppah, using all their inner strength to uphold the *mitzvah* of maintaining life while praying for the future.

Rabbi Chaim Adams was my rebbetzin's father. Chaya the little girl is my Rebbetzin Chaya Heyman. When she finished telling me her story, I saw my rebbetzin in a different light.

I had always felt she was a strong person and full of wisdom, but at that moment I fully realized her greatness. Her father, with the Almighty's help, had survived the Germans. But on that day, the day of his son's marriage, he was destined to depart from this world. His daughter, Chaya, went on with her life and eventually married Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heyman *z"tl*, who is a *talmid* (Torah student) of *HaGaon*⁷ Rabbi Aaron Kotler *z"tl*⁸ in Lakewood, New Jersey. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heyman *z"tl* had a *yeshivah* in Boston and taught *talmidim* who are now great men filling important positions all over the world.

I now understand why my rebbetzin was motivated by *Hashem* to leave her father's car to join her cousins. I am so grateful to *Hashem* for having placed me in the care and love of Rabbi Aryeh Leib *z"tl* and Rebbetzin Chaya Heyman-*Lehavdil lechim tovim*- ("may she be set a part for a good life" *). They have loved me and embraced me

⁷ Meaning genius or gifted, a title given to rabbis of very high standing.

⁸ An abbreviation of "may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing."

*An expression used traditionally to separate between two people mentioned in the same sentence, one who is living and one who has passed away.

as their child. So thank God for their lives that are totally dedicated to the *Torah* and the 613 *mitzvos* and acts of *chesed*. In retrospect I don't feel that I have done anything in my life to merit their acts of loving kindness, but *Hashem* thought so and wanted it that way.

Burach Hashem for our teaching that the *Shema* is a potential saving of lives; and thank God for the privilege of living a *Torah* Observant life as a *Chareidi* Jew.

***THE HIDDEN TREASURES OF
THE YOM TOVIM***

The hidden treasures that I discovered in these incredible stories are heart warming and inspiring. I pray that they will touch your heart in a like manner as they did mine, and may you go from strength to strength as we, the Jewish people, continue our search for the treasures contained in the Torah.

Chapter One Pesach: The Redemption of the Jewish Soul

R. Shimon bar Yochai says: “The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gift, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are: The Torah, the Land of Israel and the world to come” (Berachos 5a).

Our sojourn in Egypt was a microcosm of every future Jewish exile, while the departure from Egypt was the prototype for every future Jewish redemption.

The Exodus narrative has always fascinated me. When I was a child, I would read it with my grandmother, who explained that the Jews in Egypt and the Black slaves in the Southern states in the U.S. were bound by a common bond. “It’s our belief in God and our suffering that binds us together, Delores,” she would say.

“Our Belief in God and our Suffering.”

It took me many years to fully appreciate the significance of my grandmother’s beautiful profound words. It was only after I understood the cliché “to live is to suffer” that their meaning really resonated within me. This is certainly the case for many African Americans, and now that I live in Israel as a *Torah*-observant Jew, I see the truth of this idea even more than ever.

In Israel today the expression, “The land of Israel is acquired only by suffering”

(*Eretz Yisrael niknais b'yisurim*) has taken on more of an altruistic meaning. On a more personal level, as a Jew, I have developed a deeper appreciation for suffering. My faith has brought me to the realization that *Hashem* sends us suffering to draw us closer to Him. As King David stated: “*It is good for me that I was afflicted so that I might learn your statutes*” (*Tehillim 119:71*)⁹.

This verse has taught me to view my own personal sufferings as a springboard for more *tefillos* (prayers).

Since I became a Jew, I have found that when I read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, I am strengthened. It gives me hope and makes enduring hardship more natural to me. Whenever I experience a problem I think to myself, *if Hashem still redeemed the Jewish people with His strong Arm even after they had sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity, surely my present suffering will end as well.*

Until I learned better, I used to view *Pesach* cleaning as suffering. My perspective changed in November 2006, when I was on a lecture tour in the religiously observant community of the Fairfax area of Los Angeles. I had become accustomed to spending *Shabbos* with Rabbi Avroham and Rivki Czapnik, as well as the host families they arranged for me whenever I visited Fairfax. In fact, I even call Rabbi Czapnik, the founder of the JLE-Jewish Learning Exchange, “my Los Angeles Rabbi.” That November, at the *Shabbos* table of one of my host families, the conversation shifted to *Pesach* cleaning. I certainly wasn’t looking forward to cleaning after returning from a strenuous lecture tour, but I was hoping that by April, I would be rested. However, when I saw the joy and sincerity

⁹ Tehillim is the Hebrew name of the Book of Psalms.

on my hostess's face, it gave me hope as well as new insight.

"I love *Pesach* cleaning, Ahuvah," she said. "It's my favorite time of the year because I have learned to do my *Pesach* cleaning *b'simchah*-with joy."

There was no pretense in her words, and there was also no doubt that I had not yet acquired her positive perspective on *Pesach* cleaning. However, I was willing to give it a try.

I returned home to *Jerusalem*, where I spent a lovely *Chanukah* before starting to think about *Pesach*. I used to start my *Pesach* cleaning right after *Chanukah*. This year, I decided, would be different. I waited until after *Purim* to start my honorable task, and the words of that lovely lady at the *Shabbos* table in Fairfax still reverberated in my ears: "*I love Pesach cleaning.*" Obviously, it would take me years to develop such a noble attitude, so I began by organizing my thoughts as well as my cleaning schedule. With *siyata dishmaya* (Divine assistance), I was determined to do my cleaning this year *b'simchah*.

This was easier said than done. I found that *Pesach* cleaning while trying to write a book at the same time was beginning to put my nerves on edge. I would later learn from my Rebbitzin that *Hashem* told the Children of Israel if they don't do all the *mitzvos B'shimcha* (joy). He would send them into exile (*Devarim 28:47*), "*Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things; therefore you shall serve your enemies which the Lord will send against you.*" In the meantime, in a much needed break from *Pesach* cleaning, during a much needed break, I received the following e-mail:

Dear Ahuvah,

I have just finished reading both of your books, and I feel very inspired. Your books have made a great impression on me, and I am only thirteen years old!

I am on medication and am having many problems in my life, but I feel that *Hashem* is right there for me because you have just lit up my *neshamah* again. It had lost its light for a long time now, but you rekindled my light by sharing your stories.

Please e-mail me back, I am a big fan of yours and hope that others can see in Jews what you saw. I also hope you will be touring America with your new book. It is great, and I can tell you that God will help you.

I wish you luck in writing another book. Please try with your busy schedule to e-mail me ASAP. Thanks so much. I owe you so so so so so much. You have really saved a soul from going off the *derech* (the path of *Torah*).

After reading this beautiful e-mail from this lovely child, I thought, before sending her a reply, *this is all measure for measure*. This young girl had just rekindled my light as well, giving me the determination to move full speed ahead-*b'simchah*-with my cleaning. Feeling inspired, I started to sing a song that I learned in my childhood: “*Go down Moses, way down to Egypt land; tell, Oh Pharaoh, to let my people go.*”

Connecting my past with the present always seems to comfort me, taking me back to that affinity between Blacks and Jews that my grandmother had often spoken about. Now I wonder what my grandmother would think if she were still alive, knowing that one of her grandchildren had whole-heartedly followed her teaching about the suffering of God's people.

As the days progressed, so did my singing and my joy. In addition to singing, I again began to recall inspirational stories.

This would be the first time ever in my life that I was away from *eretz* Israel for *Pesach* through *Shavuot*. I was in America completing a four-month lecture tour from March through June, 2006. Having my speaking engagements extended was no surprise to me because once the schools found out I was visiting, I would be asked to lecture to the young people.

So when Mrs. Chaya Newman of the Bruriah High School in New Jersey, called me in Passaic, New Jersey (my home base for the four months lecture tour) and, invited me to lecture at a *Shabbaton* on March 10-11, 2006, for the same young girls I was overjoyed to learn that I would be on the lecture roster with Rabbi Paysach Krohn. I was really looking forward to spending a *Shabbos* with Rabbi Krohn and his wife Miriam after having read his books.

The *Shabbaton* was held at the Marriott hotel, and there was a welcoming committee to greet the guests who were hurrying to get to their rooms to prepare for a wonderful, enjoyable *Shabbos*. Once I received the schedule, I was pleased to see that Rabbi Krohn would be opening and closing the *Shabbaton*, and I would be

lecturing twice during the day. Being a morning person, I felt relieved; reading that was like music to my ears.

Following *Kabbalas Shabbat* (welcoming the *Shabbos*) and *Ma'ariv* (the evening service) we were escorted into the dining room. I was seated at the table with school staff members as well as Rabbi Paysach Krohn and Rebbetzin Miriam Krohn.

I had been privileged to hear Rabbi Krohn before, but each lecture I heard was totally different, informative, and equally enjoyable.

Before I knew it, I had already delivered my lectures and Rabbi Krohn was already concluding the *shalosh seudas* (third meal of *Shabbos*) with another of his inspirational lectures. After *Ma'ariv* and *Havdalah* we were surrounded by those young girls who expressed their deep appreciation and gratitude. Soon afterwards we were on our way back to Passaic, New Jersey.

While returning on the bus with the girls who had attended the *Shabbaton*, my mind began to focus on *Shavuos*. It was going to be a kind of shock for me- my first *Yom Tov* (holiday) outside of the Land of Israel. I was praying that I wouldn't panic and try to catch the first available flight back to Israel!

However, after a restful night's sleep, when I came to the place in the liturgy during my morning *davening* (prayer) that allows for a spontaneous request, I merely said, *Hashem, the only place I am going to enjoy Shavuos abroad will be at Ner Israel Yeshivah in Baltimore. That's as close as I'll be able to get to davening in Jerusalem.*

With that thought in mind, I called Rebbetzin Leah Feldman in Baltimore and left a message asking to spent *Shavuos* with them. I then posted a message on the *Luach's* e-mail list¹⁰ asking if anyone could give me a ride from Teaneck, New Jersey (where I was over nighting with a family following a lecture) to Baltimore.

Later that day, Rebbetzin Feldman called back and said that she would be delighted to host me for *Shavuos*. In the meantime, I still needed to organize my transportation since it was Wednesday and I would be traveling on Friday morning. To simplify things, I decided that if no one replied to my message about a ride, I would rent a car.

After my *davening* the next morning, I checked my e-mail and found that I had gotten a response to my request. I called the number, and was privileged to meet Rena Jacobs,¹¹ a young *Chareidi* woman. She assured me that it would be a pleasure for her to drive me to Baltimore. She was coming from Teaneck¹² and would pick me up.

Rena arrived promptly at 9:00 A.M. the next morning once we loaded my luggage into her car, we started our journey. The first thing that Rena asked was if I would mind if she played the music that she normally enjoyed. "Why not?" I responded "What is it?"

When she replied, "It's Ruth Brown," I started laughing hysterically. I hadn't heard that name in years. My parents used to listen to Ruth Brown when I was young, and I wondered if she was still alive. I also never imagined that a young, religious Jewish girl would reintroduce me to the singer.

¹⁰ A website of classified ads for the Orthodox Jewish community.

¹¹ Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

¹² The location has been changed.

Because Rena was so honest about her musical preference, I asked her if she would mind if I listened to Stevie Wonder. This didn't bother her at all, and I knew we would have a most enjoyable trip. I was thankful that I could enjoy good, wholesome music from my past that reminded me of the nurturing love of my parents.

Rena wanted to relax and enjoy her music, and I also wanted to relax and be myself, without being on stage, so to speak. As Rena began to share her story with me, I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Ahuvah," she began, "I rarely go on *Luach*. But something spoke to me and just said 'check *Luach*,' and so I did. When I saw your e-mail requesting a ride to Baltimore, I said, '*Hashem*, I don't want to be with someone for four to five hours if I can't be myself.' But when we spoke on the phone, I knew I didn't have to worry. I sensed that we would be a good match."

And we were a very good match indeed!

"The reason that I am still religious is because of my parents," Rena told me. "I watched their lives and how they treated me. They allowed me the dignity to be myself. We are *Chareidim*, but for some reason my thoughts, personality, and demeanor were different. Not because I didn't believe in God. I have a very strong belief, but for some reason I am different than that mold. I didn't fit into the fold. But because my parents loved me and gave me the latitude to be my own person and gave me my space, they saved me from going off the *derech* (path).

"The two aspects about my parents that helped me stay religious during my most volatile times are probably what had the most impact on my siblings and I. First and

foremost, they were extremely careful of their own religious actions. They never demanded anything from their children that they didn't practice fully themselves-and they acted like this even when no one else was around. There was no, 'outside the home we do this and inside the home we don't.' Therefore, we never felt any feelings of hypocrisy. When I was older I was exposed to what I called 'fake *yeshivish*,' and I felt "turned off". I never had an excuse to write off religion wholly. There were times when I felt as if everyone else was faking it, but I knew my parents were not. The stability and consistency in our home (even when I felt my home was in the minority especially during my most questioning times), kept me 'on the path.' In short, the honesty in my parents' home would not allow me to leave the fold.

"As I matured, my parents held the belief that since they would not control my life forever, I should be allowed to make my own decisions and live with the consequences. Though they certainly did not give me free rein, they did allow me to be as 'modern' as I wanted. This freedom grew in proportion to my age. At sixteen, I was allowed to make certain decisions, and at seventeen others were allowed, and by the time I was eighteen, I could make up my own mind. My parents had strict rules about what was allowed at home, but regarding my outside life there was no judging, yelling, or degrading. They didn't care what their '*yeshivish*' neighbors would say, or their friends or rabbis. When I was young they made choices for me. After spending years instilling their values in me, their job was done. As an adult they allowed me the dignity to choose how I wanted to live, they stepped back and held tight. Even when they felt I was making a big mistake, they were silent. I respect them tremendously for that.

“They used *chochmah*, (wisdom) Ahuvah. When I went to them for advice, I didn’t hear any reprimands; there was no yelling, no meddling, and this paid off for them. I always felt loved, and this unconditional love is what kept me on the *derech*. As a result, I always stayed religious-though maybe not as strict as they were-but I knew they loved me and were proud of me.”

When Rena finished, I had tears in my eyes. *What a courageous young woman*, I thought. *She is beautiful both inside and out, very much to the credit of her parents, whom I haven’t had the privilege of meeting as of yet.*

Our return trip to Teaneck was just as pleasant as our trip to Baltimore. We continued to talk about many things, including certain dilemmas that Rena was facing. As we had gotten a little more acquainted, I told Rena how impressed I was by her story. I asked her permission to use it for the book I was writing, and she immediately agreed. She also told me that she would be in Israel during the summer and would give me a call.

Rena proved to be a woman of her word, and several months later she called me. She was in Israel on summer vacation, and she wanted to come by with a friend for a visit. She also joyfully told me that she had something she wanted to share with me. When I hung up the phone, I said to myself, *I bet she’s a kallah* (bride)!

Within an hour, my beautiful Rena arrived. When she walked up the stairs, we embraced and she introduced me to her friend. Then she got directly to the point:

“Ahuvah, remember I said, I was dating a guy, and I said that I needed more time and I wasn’t sure? Well, we’re engaged!”

This announcement led to more laughter and embracing, and lots of questions. I even got an invitation to the wedding, to be held two months later.

I always think of this wonderful story as I prepare for *Pesach*. Just as *Hashem* lovingly reached out with a strong arm and redeemed the Jewish people from a corrupt lifestyle, this beautiful young woman was saved from going “off the *derech*” by her devoted parents, whose unconditional love and faith in *Hashem* preserved their daughter’s *Yiddishkeit*. For me it was a blessing to have met such a lovely young woman and have her share her story with me. Yes, she married a *Chareidi* young man, and she and I are still in close contact. I am just waiting to hear some good news about a firstborn, Praise God.!

As I continue to travel world wide, it has been my privilege to meet some exceptional young Jews from South Africa, London, Australia, Antwerp, Gibraltar, America, and Canada, as well as Israel. I have learned so much from all of them. These young people educate me, because they have such pure *neshamos*. They have no hidden agendas and are very much “for real!”