

Touched by Tefillin

[Lessons You Can Touch / Issue 640]

Rabbi Zevi Trenk's practical teaching methods took me back about 40 years to when I was director of Jewish Studies at the Jewish High School in Liverpool, England, a school where the majority of the pupils came from non-observant homes.

I made a point of having courses entitled "Practical *Dinim*," in which actual objects were used to teach the *dinim*. One such course was on tefillin, which I gave to a class of the bar mitzvah year. For this course, I "dissected" the *batim* of old tefillin, (including separating a *bayit* of a *shel rosh* into its four sections), so that pupils could see the component parts. I also showed the pupils the different *parshiyos* in the tefillin and gave them pieces of parchment and feathers to make quill pens, which they then used to write some Hebrew letters on the pieces of parchment.

The pupils enjoyed this course and in the written examination that followed, the results were, on the whole, excellent.

I heard that one of these pupils had put on tefillin on the Shabbos of his bar mitzvah before going to shul. I afterwards spoke to him about it and he said that he knew that one does not put on tefillin on Shabbos but he regarded the Shabbos of his bar mitzvah as a special day. In a way I was happy about this incident, since it showed that he appreciated the importance of tefillin.

When I came to live in Israel, I brought most of the teaching tools with me and a few months ago I mentioned it to a teacher of the Talmud Torah "Kinyan Torah" in Kiryat Arba, who was teaching his class of 12-year-olds about tefillin. He asked me to give a lesson using these props to his pupils, which I did to the great enjoyment and excitement of the boys.

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Mishpacha issue 642

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Finding Forgotten Facts

Lost and Found / Issue 534

The excellent article by Brachi Blumenberg about Michal Vaknin and the way she finds friends and relatives whom people lost touch with reminded me of the research I did a few years ago for my book, *Carmel College in the Kopul Era: 1948-1962* (Urim Publications, Jerusalem).

Carmel College was an Orthodox Jewish boarding school for boys, established in the south of England by Rabbi Kopul Rosen in 1948, and managed by him until his early death in 1962. While researching for this book, I learned that the Carmel alumni knew almost nothing about the biographies of their teachers (the majority of whom were non-Jewish) — not even their first names.

With extensive research, since contact had been lost with them for over half a century, I was able to build up biographies of almost all the teachers, in some cases with gaps in their lives, and I included this information as the second part of the book.

My methods included tracking down relatives of the teachers (not an easy undertaking after so long a period), use of the records of educational institutions, obituaries, yearbooks, army records, naturalization certificates, questions submitted to Wikipedia Reference Desk, to quote just some of the methods used. With married women teachers, there was a further problem since I did not know their surnames before marriage.

In some cases, one small fact led to a mass of material. Examples included finding the name of a teacher on a receipt of an item purchased by the teacher; an alumnus recalling that a teacher's only son had been killed in the Yom Kippur War; and another alumnus's recollection that a teacher had been involved with the "Little Missenden Festival."

Most of the schools and universities the teachers had attended were cooperative (or even over-cooperative) in supplying me with information, which included sending me the pupils' or students' marks, form positions, and testimonials. However, some wanted me to send proof that the teacher had since died, quoting the Data Protection Act. In all but one case, I was able to send such proof. In the case of the one exception, I pointed out that the teacher would have been by then 118 years old. They still insisted on proof of death and I pointed out that such a teacher would be world news. They then relented and sent me the requested information with "apologies for the confusion"!

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Mishpacha Family First

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In Family First issue 540, 'Build Your Best... Quinoa' you write that one may eat quinoa on Pesach. However, this is not completely correct. Although there are some rabbanim in America who hold that it is not kitniyos, there are many others in America who hold that it is kitniyos. In Israel, it seems that all the rabbanim hold that it is kitniyos and therefore Ashkenazim, at least in Israel, do not eat quinoa on Pesach.

-Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons

Mishpacha Family First
14 Iyar 5777 10 May 2017

Lists of Tragedy

[Field of Silence / Issue 669]

I read with interest your article "Field of Silence" on the Lodz ghetto and those buried in the Lodz Ghetto Field.

Several years ago, I was researching my family genealogy and came across two lists (from 1940 and around 1942) of the Lodz ghetto residents. On these lists I found the names of the wife and two young children of my mother's cousin Reuven Zielinski. However, the name of Reuven was missing from both these lists. It was suggested that he may have died at an earlier date. I accordingly examined the list of those buried in the Lodz Jewish cemetery, (which was only a partial list) but could not find his name on it.

At a later date, one of my daughters was on a Holocaust Study Trip that included a visit to this cemetery. While there, she went to the office and they found his burial registration. (He had died in 1937 at the age of 28.) With this information she was able to find his grave and saw that his tombstone was still in excellent condition.

From the second Lodz ghetto residents list, one can see that, sadly, his widow and two children did not survive and were deported to Chelmno on March 25, 1942.

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Mishpacha issue 670

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Eternal Exchange

[Dust to Ashes / Issue 670]

Your excellent and informative article titled "Dust to Ashes" reminded me of what could have happened, but fortunately did not, with my uncle's body.

Nearly 50 years ago, my uncle died in a London hospital. After his death, the hospital authorities handed over a body to the *chevra kaddisha*, who then did a *taharah* and put it in a coffin. The *levayah* started from the area of my parents' house and proceeded to the Jewish burial ground.

While the coffin was being taken to the prepared grave, one of the *chevra kaddisha* happened to ask my father what they should do with my uncle's clothes.

My father replied, "But he was wearing pajamas."

"No," they said, "he was fully clothed."

My father immediately realized that something was wrong and demanded that they open the coffin. They discovered that they had the wrong body, almost certainly that of a non-Jew.

Immediately, together with my father, the *chevra kaddisha* drove back at top speed to the hospital with the body of the stranger, identified the body of my uncle, and performed a *taharah* on it in the presence of my father, who insisted on being present this time in order to make sure that there were no further mistakes. They then returned to the cemetery and my uncle was given a proper Jewish burial.

Fortunately, in this case, there was a positive ending, but one shudders to think what would have happened had the member of the *chevra kaddisha* not made this remark to my father. It was surely *siyata d'Shmaya* and not just "chance." The non-Jew would have had a Jewish burial and in his place my uncle might well have been cremated.

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