

These 3 stories about Rabbi Belsky were published last year in *Sparks of Majesty*

by Genendel Krohn, published by Feldheim

### **Miracle at Maimonides**

It was a frightening *Motza'ei Shabbos* in January 2012 as Rav Yisroel Belsky, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, was rushed to Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn in acute distress.

After undergoing a battery of tests, it soon became clear that Rav Belsky required a very complicated surgery to seal a rupture in his esophagus. His gastric juices had leaked, flooding his pleural cavity and causing his lung to collapse. As Rav Belsky was fighting for his life, Jews all over the world stormed the gates of *Shamayim*, entreating HaKadosh Baruch Hu to save him.

When the relatives accompanying Rav Belsky heard the prognosis, they approached the hospital staff. "How much time do we have left to repair the hole?" they queried.

"Not more than twenty-four hours," came the reply.

Dr. Igor Brichkov, the thoracic surgeon on call that night at Maimonides, had been sleeping peacefully in his home on Staten Island when he received a phone call to come to the hospital. The doctor jumped out of bed and rushed to Maimonides, arriving at approximately 2:00 a.m.

Meanwhile, concerned family members researched the matter and learned that the top esophageal expert in the entire state of New York practiced at NYU Medical Center in Manhattan. As they discussed various options, they concurred that it would be best to transfer the Rosh Yeshivah to NYU, where the top specialist could treat him.

Although Rav Belsky was in terrible pain, he was completely lucid, and his relatives presented him with the burning question: "Would you prefer to be transferred to NYU so that you can be treated by the top physician in the field or would you like to remain here?"

Barely able to speak, he managed to whisper, "To run off to another hospital would be a lack of *kavod ha-briyos*. It would be disrespectful to the doctor who got out of bed in the middle of the night and came here to tend to me. I wish to remain here under his care."

Once the decision had been made to remain at Maimonides, nurses with surgical masks wheeled Rav Belsky into the operating room so that he could begin the difficult surgery which entailed cutting a flap of the diaphragm and folding it over to seal the hole in the esophagus.

It was later discovered that Dr. Brichkov, the doctor who "happened" to be on call that night, was an expert on esophageal ruptures.

General anesthesia poses its own risks, and a sedated patient must therefore be monitored carefully. After Rav Belsky received general anesthesia, the doctor began the procedure when, just a few minutes later, machines started beeping furiously, signaling that the Rosh Yeshivah's blood pressure had dropped to zero, indicating cardiac arrest. His heart had suddenly stopped beating.

Although Dr. Brichkov succeeded in regaining a heartbeat, hospital protocol dictated that the surgery be discontinued in such a situation so that the patient could be immediately brought out of his anesthesia. Unfortunately, the majority of patients do not survive this type of setback. To complicate matters, once Rav Belsky's body had sustained the severe trauma of heart failure, it would not be able to handle the emergency surgery on the esophagus that needed to be performed within twenty-four hours.

Disappointed, the doctor prepared to close up the incision. When he turned around for a moment, he noticed a large esophageal stent, exactly the right fit for the Rosh Yeshivah's esophagus, sitting on a shelf nearby. Thinking creatively, Dr. Brichkov realized that it could serve as a temporary solution until Rav Belsky's condition stabilized. He made a spontaneous decision to insert the stent, which served to prevent further contamination. In addition, the stent bought critical time for the Rosh Yeshivah, enabling him to survive the postponement of the surgery, thereby saving his life.

The only reason that the stent was in close proximity to Rav Belsky was because he had remained in Maimonides Medical Center. One of the *poskei haDor* involved in the case pointed out that Rav Belsky's incredible sensitivity to the feelings of the doctor had saved his own life.

(Heard from Mrs. Sarah Hindy Gross, daughter of Rav Yisroel Belsky)

### **Uplifting Cry**

Joyful sounds of lively chatter filled the large dining room. It was suppertime at Camp Agudah in Ferndale, New York, in the 1950s. After an activity-packed day, campers and counselors alike looked forward to a hearty meal.

Sixteen-year-old Yisrael was exhausted from a day spent outside conducting sports activities for his campers under the hot sun and eagerly awaited the opportunity to replenish the calories that he had burned all day.

Stomach grumbling, he entered the dining room together with his campers and made sure they were all seated. When the waiter brought a tray of food, Yisrael correctly surmised that there wouldn't be enough for the entire bunk. Sure enough, after distributing portions to his hungry

campers, nothing remained on the tray for himself. “No problem,” thought Yisrael. “I’ll ask the waiter to bring me some more.”

The waiter returned to the kitchen and filled up his tray with more food for the bunk. On his way out, campers and counselors started snatching food from his tray, and by the time he reached Yisrael’s table, everything was gone. “Don’t worry,” the waiter reassured Yisrael. “I’ll go back inside and get you some more.”

The waiter returned to the kitchen for the third time but by then, there wasn’t much left. It seems that there was a shortage of food in camp that day and he gathered whatever remnants he could find. Attempting to ward off the hungry campers, he held the tray high above his head, but unfortunately, the previous scene repeated itself and by the time the waiter reached Yisrael, his tray was empty.

Yisrael was starving. Tall and broad-shouldered, he was a growing boy with a large appetite and he felt devastated that there was nothing left for him to eat! Afraid that he would burst into tears and embarrass himself in front of his campers, he whispered to his junior counselor, “I’ll be back in a few minutes. Please take care of the bunk while I’m gone.”

Yisrael quickly left the dining room, walked down the hall, and exited the building. Then he began to run farther and farther away from the building until he reached a quiet spot behind one of the bunkhouses. Convinced that no one would find him there, he allowed his tears to flow unchecked. After sobbing for a few minutes, Yisrael suddenly regained control of himself and thought, “Isn’t this a ridiculous reason to cry? After all, I know that I’ll be given more food tomorrow — and I ate lunch today!

“There are so many more important things to cry about,” the young man chastised himself. “Did I ever cry about the *churban* Beis HaMikdash?”

As he began to contemplate the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, Yisrael started to cry even harder. He thought of the severe hunger that the Jews experienced at the time of the siege and he thought of the casualties of the wars. As he pictured the flames engulfing the holy Beis HaMikdash and tried to imagine the pain of the *Shechinah*, his body racked with sobs.

After a long time, he finally composed himself, washed his face, and returned to his bunk.

Recalling this incident from his youth, Rav Yisroel Belsky, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, commented that it can sometimes be difficult to cry over the *churban* Beis HaMikdash. But when a person feels saddened about something else and the tears are already flowing, he should channel his tears to cry for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash as well.

(Heard from Rav Yisroel Belsky)

## Dividends

*Parnasah* was difficult for R' Tzvi Lieberman(\*) and his wife, Dina(\*), as they struggled to cover the exorbitant costs of fertility treatments in addition to their regular monthly bills. The couple had been married for a number of years and had not yet been blessed with children.

One day, the bank erred and mistakenly credited the Lieberman's account with a sum of \$10,000! The couple was ecstatic.

"Perhaps this is Hashem's way of helping us out," enthused R' Tzvi optimistically.

Before using the money, though, R' Tzvi went to consult with his *rebbe*, Rav Yisroel Belsky, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, to ask if he if was permitted to keep it.

"*Gezel akum is assur*," explained Rav Belsky. "That means that it is forbidden to steal from a non-Jew — like from a Jew — under any circumstances. However, there could be various leniencies in this particular situation due to a number factors, including the fact that the error was theirs.

"Still," added Rav Belsky, "I would strongly advise you to return the money and make a *kiddush HaShem*."

Removing the *Shulchan Aruch* from his shelf, Rav Belsky flipped through the pages until he found the piece he was looking for. Then he read the words of the Be'er HaGolah (*Choshen Mishpat* 348:5):

"... ראיתי רבים גדלו והעשירו מן טעות שהטעו העכו"ם ולא הצליחו וירדו נכסיהם לטמיון ולא הניחו אחריהם ברכה ... — I have seen many people become rich from mistakes of non-Jews, but their successes did not last. Eventually, they lost all their wealth and did not leave anything over. There are many who made a *kiddush HaShem* and returned money that they received through the error of a non-Jew. They eventually became wealthy and successful and left over riches for their offspring".

Pointing to the words inside the *sefer*, Rav Belsky looked up at his *talmid* and said, "R' Tzvi, you've been married for many years and have not yet been blessed with children. The Be'er HaGolah writes that a person who returns money from *ta'us akum* will leave over riches for his offspring. Included in his holy words is a *berachah* to have children.

"If you return this great sum of money," continued Rav Belsky, "it very well might be a *zechus* for you to be blessed with children."

R' Tzvi did not need any more convincing and immediately returned the large sum of money to the bank, creating a tremendous *kiddush HaShem*. The following year, a child was born to R' Tzvi and his wife, Dina. And every year after that, for the next few years, the Liebermans were blessed with another baby. The Be'er HaGolah's *berachah* for offspring had indeed come true.

(Heard from Rav Yisroel Belsky)