

From Reiki to Rabbi

Rabbi Yitzchak Fanger from Israel tells the following story about himself.

After finishing his army service in the IDF, he decided to learn *Reiki*, a Japanese technique for healing. After taking courses and excelling in his new trade, his Reiki teacher urged him to go to the Far East to become a Reiki master.

Fanger obeyed and traveled to India. He pursued more learning and he became heavily involved in Buddhism. Eventually, he became a Buddhist priest and was encouraged to go for an extended stay at a type of monastery up in the mountains to further enhance his career. There, one was forbidden to speak. Their task was to concentrate on meditation and yoga, and to try to achieve *Nirvana* ('enlightenment').

A few months went by and Yitzchak was becoming antsy. He had an urge to talk, to hear his own voice. So he ran away far from earshot of the retreat. He arrived at a brook and he opened his mouth to speak. The first words that came out of his mouth, after months of silence, were from his Bar-Mitzvah portion that he read from the Torah, 13 years before. He was shocked. Why those words? He had no affiliation with Judaism and no desire for it either. He came back to the monastery and put the incident out of his mind.

A few days later, Yitzchak was ready to go to sleep, but he had an uneasy feeling about sleeping in his room. He decided to pick up his sleeping bag and go sleep outside. As he reached for it, a scorpion jumped out from the part of the bag where his head was supposed to be. He realized then his life was just saved, and there was somebody watching over him.

About a week later, in the evening, after practicing his meditation, the candle in Yitzchak's room went out. He went to search his bag for more candles and found a card with Hebrew print on it. It was then that he remembered; when he was in an airport in Israel, a [Chabad] Chassidic man was passing out cards to people. He told Yitzchak, "Keep it and it will protect you."

He picked up the card and figured he'd meditate on those words instead of the Japanese words that he was used to meditating on. He held up the card and started to read, and it said, "שמע ישראל' ה' אלוקנו ה' אחד" (*Shma Yisrael...echad*). At

that moment, Yitzchak had a burst of spiritual enlightenment and decided, enough was enough, he was going back to Israel.

In Israel, Fanger right away began attending lectures on Judaism and became inspired. He started to grow in Jewish knowledge, awareness and lifestyle, until eventually he became fully religious.

To earn a living, he opened up his own Reiki Center in Israel and it caught on fast. Throngs of people were flocking to his center, and he was making an exorbitant amount of money. His mother, who was also his secretary, called him one day and said, "Yitzchak, you are booked for the next two years and you are almost a millionaire!"

A couple of days after that, a religious Jewish woman attended his class. Afterwards she approached him and asked if what he was teaching was Kosher.

Yitzchak was taken aback. He decided to consult with an authoritative rabbi, and was advised to consult with Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein.¹ The rabbi's answer was that what he is doing is based on Avodah Zara ('idol worship') and forbidden to teach.

But this was his whole career, and a highly prosperous one at that. What would he do?

After letting the leading rabbi's words settle on him, he said, "I'm willing to give up everything for you, *Ribono shel Olam*, (Master of the Universe) just please don't leave me, ever."

Still uncertain what to do, he was told to consult next with Rav Chaim Kanievsky² for advice. The Rabbi told him, "Before you decide what you are going to do, go learn Torah in a *Yeshiva* for three months."

He listened and went to Yeshivat Ohr Sameach. He was so mesmerized by the learning, he decided to stay in *Yeshiva*. He got married a year later and continued to study Torah full time in *yeshivas* for nine more years.

Finally, he went back to Rabbi Zilberstein and consulted with him again. He said, "I gave up my career, I gave up Reiki; I studied Torah intensively for ten years. Now I'm ready to start something. What should I do now?"

¹ One of the most respected authorities on Jewish Law in Israel.

² One of the most respected authorities on Jewish Law in Israel, and unofficial leader of the Lithuanian Yeshiva world.

Rabbi Zilberstein's reply changed Yitzchak Fanger's life forever. He told him about a Holocaust survivor who comes to him every year on a certain day to cry over the losses of his loved ones.

Rabbi Zilberstein asked this man why he chose that particular day each year? The man replied that he had lost his family at the beginning of the war and all he had left was his older brother. He and his brother were forced into doing slave labor every day in a concentration camp.

One night, they had to work until 4:00 am. They were exhausted, but they knew they had to be up for roll call at 5:00 am, or else it would be over for them. He decided he wouldn't go to sleep because it was too risky, but his brother didn't have an ounce of strength left. His brother said, "Please, I'm going to go to sleep, wake me up in 45 minutes."

A short while later, a Nazi grabbed the man and forced him to do a job. He got so caught up with it that he forgot to wake his brother. After roll call, he went to the barracks to find his brother, and found that he was killed. He screamed in anguish, "Why didn't I wake up my brother?" This thought haunts him, and, every year, on his brother's *yahrtzeit*, he gets emotional and comes to talk to the Rabbi.

Rabbi Zilberstein then looked at Yitzchak Fanger in the eye and said, "G-d woke you up and saved your life, but there are still so many of your brothers asleep who don't know anything about Judaism. You have talent; you have charisma. You don't want, *Chas v'Shalom*, ('G-d forbid') after 120 years for your brothers to ask you why you didn't wake them up. You should dedicate your life to spreading Torah and waking up your sleeping brothers."



Rabbi Fanger took this advice and he has spent years now teaching Torah all over the world. Tens of thousands of people are listening to his classes online. One of those classes has had over 140,000 people listen to it [so far, as of 1/1/19 -- ed.]. The Holy One led him in the right direction to fulfill his purpose and he made the right decisions. The few inspired words of encouragement from Rabbi Zilberstein went a long way.

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the emailing of "Shabbos Stories for Parshas Vayechi 5779" (keren18@juno.com), based on the article by **Rabbi David Ashear** in the December 4, 2018 email of *Emunah Daily*.

Connection: Weekly readings – Last week's contained the first section of the *Shma Yisrael* prayer, and this week has the second.