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Mending a Broken Heart

Having grown up in Detroit, Rabbi Lazer Avtzon flew there during the week after July 21, 2016, to comfort the family of veteran educator **Rabbi Shmuel Kaufman**, the beloved teacher in Yeshiva Beit Yehudah in Detroit. While there, he learned additional details of the incredible *yechidus* (private audience) Reb Shmuel had with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, resulting in the blessing to him and his wife to have children. [The story had been printed for the first time in *Kfar Chabad Magazine* several years before, but some details were not verified until the week of mourning.]

Reb Shmuel came to Detroit as a single young man to teach at Yeshiva Beit Yehudah, a Jewish day school consisting of two campuses: in Southfield (boys - from pre-kindergarten to grade 8) and in Oak Park (girls - from pre-kindergarten to grade 12), Michigan.

Thursday nights and Shabbats, Shmuel would spend at the home of Rabbi Meir and Cheyena [Bina] Avtzon, o.b.m. He remained close to them after he married his wife Risha and returned to live in Detroit. After several years of Shmuel being married and not being blessed with children, Rabbi Avtzon suggested to him that they travel together to New York and ask the Rebbe for a blessing.

Initially, he refused, but after visiting nearly all of the other leading rabbinical scholars of the time and still no results, Shmuel finally relented and came with Rabbi Avtzon to Lubavitch World Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn.

After he detailed his situation and asked the Rebbe for a blessing, the Rebbe responded by asking him whether he ever unintentionally hurt a girl's feelings to the point she might have a '*kepaida*' (resentment, grudge) against him.

Shmuel answered, "No, to the best of my recollection."

The Rebbe pursued the topic, "Is it possible you dated a girl and led her to believe you were interested in her and then broke up without asking her forgiveness?"

Again, he said he did not recall.

My father, who was present at the Yechidus, intervened at that point. "If the Rebbe is asking you twice, you should think harder and remember, because there must be

something!"

After further thought, Shmuel remembered being on a date and loaning the girl a sweater to warm her from the cold. He later decided it was not meant to be and merely informed the *shadchan* ('matchmaker') that it was over.

The Rebbe replied, "You must ask her forgiveness with a full heart."

"How do I even find her?"

The Rebbe replied, "If you really try, you will see how easy it is."

The Rebbe then blessed him and said, "Once you ask *mechila* and she truly forgives you, you will be blessed with children."

"And what if she doesn't want to forgive me?" he asked.

The Rebbe replied, tell her that if she forgives you with a full heart, she will soon find her *bashert* (her destined match).

The *yechidus* then turned to another subject. The Rebbe asked Shmuel what he does and was told that he is a teacher.

The Rebbe asked, "Do you tell stories of *tzadikim* (holiest of Jews)?" Shmuel replied that he does not because he considers the time can be better used for Torah.

The Rebbe answered, "Telling stories of *tzadikim* is in itself Torah! Tell stories!"

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The next day, Shmuel began to look for a way to contact the girl. He searched and searched and ultimately found the phone number of a brother of the girl. He called and spoke to the brother and asked if there was any way for him to get in touch with his sister.

"Why would you want to speak to her now after all these years, and after breaking her heart?" was the disdainful reply.

Unbeknownst to Shmuel, the girl had felt strongly that by his loaning of the sweater during the date that he really liked her. She was so grief-stricken from being left cold-turkey that she bore a tremendous resentment towards him.

Her brother then said, "She's actually here visiting me now, but she doesn't want to talk to you."

Shmuel begged and said, "I just came from private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He told me that the reason my wife and I were still not blessed with children is because I hurt your sister and must ask her forgiveness. Please believe me, I had no idea how she interpreted my lending her the sweater, Now that I know I am terribly sorry."

A meeting was arranged, but the girl initially did not agree to forgive him. When he told her that the Rebbe said that if she forgives him it will open the doors of blessing for her as well, she relented and said, "I forgive you with a full heart."

Some 3 months later, my mother called Reb Shmuel at 6:00 AM, waking him up, and shared the good news that the girl he had dated was now engaged to be married.

One month later, his wife became pregnant with their eldest son Yona. Over the years, they were blessed with another 6 children.*

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Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by Rabbi Lazer Avtzon for COLive.com.

**Rabbi Eliezer ('Lazer') Avtzon** is the founder and Executive Director of the Global Jewish Assistance & Relief Network. He is the 13th of 15 children born to Rabbi Meir & Cheyena (Bina) Avtzon, o.b.m.

*Connection--Seasonal:* One long-standing Jewish custom on the days before *Rosh Hashana*, the "Day of Judgment", is for people to ask forgiveness from each other.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Shmuel-Yerachmiel Kaufman**, whose maternal grandfather was Rav Yaakov-Yosef Herman (the hero of the popular memoir, "All for the Boss"), was a graduate of Torah V'Daas and Telshe Yeshivas. For 55 years he was a beloved teacher in Yeshiva Beth Yehudah in Detroit. He passed away on 15 Tammuz 5776 (July 2016), at age 82.

\* *Editor's supplement:*

Rabbi Kaufman is fondly remembered as a devoted and beloved teacher and one who inspired thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of students to live Torah-observant lives.. His influence was spread even further by his central role in the afternoon Talmud Torah that Yehuda Beit Yehudah operated during the 1960s for Jewish children attending public school.

What was his secret ingredient? Stories.

Throughout his career in Jewish education, Rabbi Kaufman told stories in a way you never heard. When he told a story, you felt you were actually there, witnessing. He brought to life the characters, the setting and the pure faith they exuded. Clearly their Torah-observant lives were indirectly inspired by the Lubavitcher Rebbe who, as related above, *ordered* Rabbi Kaufman to tell stories.