

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

Story #1305 (5783-12) 21 KISLEV 5783 (Dec. 15, 2022) FREE [email subscription](#)
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THE TEAM OF STORY AND PRAYER

In 1977 there was a movement in the Israeli Knesset to try to pass a bill that would legalize abortion. Spearheading the campaign was the Minister of Justice [under PM Menachem Begin from 1977-1980], Shmuel Tamir.

When the rabbis and most all Torah-observant Jews in Israel and throughout the world heard that Israel was trying to legalize killing fetuses in the womb, there was tremendous consternation and concern. Leading rabbinical authorities and leaders in Israel decided to send a delegation of prestigious rabbis to speak with Shmuel Tamir, to try to dissuade him from going ahead with this terrible idea.

Included in this delegation were Rabbi Michael Stern, the highly respected rabbinical authority of Ezrat Torah [a district in Jerusalem], and Rabbi Raphael Levin, the son of one of the most beloved rabbis in 20th century Israel, **Rabbi Aryeh Levin**.¹

The thinking behind the selection of R. Raphael Levin was because many of the members of *Etzel* [Irgun] and *Lechi* ['Stern Gang'] had great respect for R. Aryeh Levin.² The hope was that Shmuel Tamir, a prominent Israeli independence fighter for the Irgun, would at least listen to Reb Raphael Levin, the son of Reb Aryeh.

Two days before the meeting, R. Raphael got on the phone and called each of the rabbis in the delegation and begged and pleaded with them that they should storm the gates of heaven with prayer; they should supplicate and pray before the Heavenly Throne that they should somehow be successful in their incredibly important mission of dissuading the minister from this terrible destructive idea.

Two days later the delegation sat with Shmuel Tamir in his office. At one point, R. Raphael spoke up. " I am the son of R. Aryeh Levin."

¹ You can read all about him in English—and it is certainly worthwhile to do so!--in the book "A Tzaddik in our Time" by Simcha Raz (Feldheim 1976).

² Especially those arrested by the British and incarcerated in the Russian Compound jail in Jerusalem. For them he was known as "the Father of Prisoners" because of his extraordinary dedication to their welfare and their souls.

The eyes of Shmuel Tamir lit up in delight. Facing everyone in the delegation, he exclaimed: "Ah, he was our beloved rabbi,". Then, turning his gaze towards R. Raphael, he said, "What do you want to say? Please. Go ahead."

R. Raphael spoke up, saying, "I would like to share with you a short story. When I was much younger, a secular couple knocked on our door one day. They wanted to speak to the great man, my father, *HaRav* Aryeh Levin. My father invited them in and sat them down, whereupon a large argument ensued between the husband and the wife.

It turned out that the wife was expecting a child, and the husband, who was in medical school, didn't want to bring the child into the world. He felt it would impede his studies, and anyway, in general he didn't want a child at this time.

"The wife equally strongly wanted the child and they couldn't come to an agreement. They decided to consult my father -- everyone respected Rabbi Aryeh Levin, even the secular.

"My father listened to both sides. He sat with them for over an hour, trying to persuade the husband that they should bring the child into the world. He emphasized that the child would only bring *nachas* [pleasure, satisfaction], and would have a major positive impact on the family.

"By the end of the hour the father was persuaded; he agreed to let the fetus live, that they would bring the child into the world and raise it with love."

Upon concluding the story, R. Raphael leaned across the desk toward Shmuel Tamir, looked him in the eyes intently, and said quietly, "Not long after this disagreement the couple had a baby boy. They called him Shmuel. He grew up to be the important person whose name is Shmuel Tamir.³ It was you!"

Shmuel Tamir was utterly shocked. "I never heard this story," He insisted.

R. Raphael quickly responded. "Call your mother, Call her right now!"

³ The original family surname was 'Katzenelson.'

On the spot, Shmuel Tamir picked up the phone and called his mother. At first, silence. Then his mother stuttered and then she mumbled, "You have to understand, times were different then... etc. etc."

Mr Tamir slammed the phone down, looked up at the silent rabbis, and said firmly, "You have nothing to worry about. This bill will never hit the Knesset floor as long as *I* am the Minister of Justice."

Amazing, *yeshuat HaShem keherev ayin*.

On their way out, R. Michael Stern questioned R. Rephael. "I don't understand something. You knew this story two days ago, right?"

R. Rephael smiled. "Yes. I did."

"So why did you call each of us to insist that we *davven* (pray). It must already have been clear that the story would be a 'slam dunk'."

R. Rephael's powerful reply astonished the entire delegation, and made a lasting impression.

"Slam dunk *ahin* (there) slam dunk *aher* (here); story this way, story that way. Without *tefilah* (prayer) we are nothing. *Ferkert* (on the contrary), the reason that the story had impact is only because of our *tefilah!*"

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*Source:*

Freely Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a transcript of an email report by Rabbi Shlomo Landau, "Why 'Pro-Choice' never made it to the Knesset floor."

*Biographical note* [excerpted and adapted from the excellent profile on [Lehi.org.il/en/levin-rabbi-aryeh](http://Lehi.org.il/en/levin-rabbi-aryeh) (plus one sentence from the Jerusalem Post)]:  
**Rabbi Aryeh Levin** [1885 – 9 Sivan 1969], studied at the Yeshivas of Volozhin, Slutsk and Slonim, he was known for his scholarship and genius. In 1905 he emigrated to the Holy Land, where he became the spiritual director of Talmud Torah Yeshivat Etz Hayim in Jerusalem, a position he held for the rest of his life. In the five decades plus since his passing, he has become a legendary figure -- remembered both as the "Father of the Prisoners" for his loving and supportive devotion to the members of the Jewish underground imprisoned by the British during the Mandate period, and as the "Tzadik of Jerusalem" for his limitless generous acts of kindness, and his love and tolerance of all Jews.

*Connection* – Weekly Reading of *Vayeishev*:

Like Yosef when he was jailed in Egypt and cared for Pharaoh's two ministers, Rabbi Aryeh Levin was "The Father of Prisoners."