

Fascinating INSIGHTS

כט' אלול תשפ"ו

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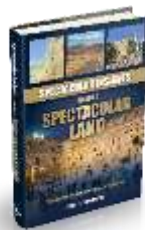
פרשת האזינו

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Lord George Gordon

Lord George Gordon (1751–1793) was a British nobleman and politician who served in the House of Commons from 1774 to 1780. In 1779, he founded and led the Protestant Association.

On June 2, 1780, Gordon led a crowd of approximately 50,000 people to Westminster to present a petition opposing Catholic emancipation.



The demonstration quickly spiraled into the infamous Gordon Riots. Over several days, rioters destroyed Catholic chapels, looted Catholic homes, burned Newgate Prison, broke open other prisons, and attacked the Bank of England and other public buildings. Order

was restored only after the army intervened, leaving about 450 people dead or wounded.

For his role in the riots, Gordon was charged with high treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Although confined, he was allowed visitors, including the Methodist leader Rev. John Wesley. Thanks to the brilliant defense of his cousin, Thomas Erskine, he was acquitted after the court ruled that he had acted without treasonous intent.

Gordon's legal troubles, however, were far from over. In 1786 he was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury for refusing to testify in an ecclesiastical suit. The following year he was convicted of libeling Marie Antoinette, the French ambassador to Great Britain, Jean-Balthazar d'Adhémar, and the English judicial system. After briefly fleeing to the Netherlands, he was ordered to leave, returned to England, was arrested in Birmingham, and in January 1788 was sentenced to five years in prison in Newgate Prison under especially harsh conditions.

In 1787, at the age of thirty-six, Gordon underwent a remarkable transformation. While in Birmingham, he converted to Judaism, underwent bris milah, and took the Hebrew name Yisrael ben Avraham Gordon.

Even while imprisoned, Gordon lived as a scrupulously observant Orthodox Jew. He donned tzitzis and tefillin every day, fasted on the halachically prescribed fast days, and observed Shabbos and Yom Tov. The prison authorities supplied him with kosher meat, wine, and Shabbos challos. They even permitted him to affix a mezuzah to the door of his cell, display

the Aseres Hadibros on its wall, and gather a minyan on Shabbos.

His devotion to Torah and mitzvos was uncompromising. Gordon associated only with sincerely observant Jews and refused to have dealings with anyone who disregarded the Torah's commandments. Although he welcomed non-Jewish visitors, he instructed the prison guards to admit Jewish visitors only if they wore a beard and a head covering. He also spent time visiting other prisoners, comforting them with words of encouragement and even playing the violin to lift their spirits.

In October 1793, a typhoid epidemic swept through Newgate Prison, and Gordon contracted the disease. Crowds of prisoners gathered outside his cell awaiting news of his condition, while friends remained at his bedside despite the danger of infection, praying for his recovery. On November 1, 1793 (26th of Cheshvan), Yisrael ben Avraham Gordon passed away at the age of forty-one.

Believing and Achieving

When someone believes in another person, it can change the trajectory of their life. Ordinarily that person may not have mounted to anything special and because someone believed in them they became extraordinary. It can be a parent, mentor, a friend or someone else who believed in them.

The pasuk says, וַיִּהְיֶה אִמֶּן אֶת הַדָּסָה, he had reared Hadassah who is Esther.¹ Now, Esther had neither a father nor a mother, so how did she manage to accomplish extraordinarily with her life?

The word אִמֶּן hints to the secret behind her success. אִמֶּן is related to the word אִמּוּנָה. Mordechai believed in her. He looked beyond her difficult background and circumstances and conveyed a powerful message: "Your past does not determine your future. You can accomplish great things."

Sometimes, the greatest gift we can give another person is simply to believe in them—to see their potential even when they cannot yet see it themselves.

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¹ Esther 2:7.

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Soul Journey

The gemara² tells us that R' Meir was a descendant of Niron Keisar, Nero Caesar. The Rema Mipano writes that Niron Keisar was a gilgul of Somlah Mimasreikah³ who was from the early kings of Edom. After Niron Keisar converted, his soul began to come for a tikkun, rectification and in the end he was reincarnated as R' Meir who was his descendent and with that he was rectified.

Fruitless Flowerpot

In a letter to R' Avraham Genichovsky's sefer *Bar Almugim*, R' Chaim Kanievsky wrote: "My friend, the gaon R' Avraham Genichovsky, left many writings encompassing all parts of Torah. He was an extraordinarily great man, like a flowing spring of Torah, chesed, and outstanding character traits. It is a great mitzvah to publish his writings." R' Yitzchak Shaul Kanievsky, R' Chaim's son, later remarked that he could not recall his father ever expressing such praise about anyone else.⁴ In fact, R' Chaim Kanievsky's father-in-law, R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, would stand up when R' Genichovsky entered the room, a sign of the tremendous respect he had for him.



In his sefer *Bar Almugim*, R' Genichovsky cites a novel insight from R' Dov Landau. He raises the following question: What is a fruit over which the correct bracha is *Borei Pri Ha'eitz*, yet if one mistakenly recites *Borei Pri Ha'adamah*, he is not yotzei, even *b'dieved*?

The answer is the fruit of a tree grown in a flowerpot without drainage holes. Since the soil in the pot is not halachically connected to the ground, the bracha of *Borei Pri Ha'adamah* is not appropriate, even *b'dieved*.

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thereby having a hand in spreading Torah and changing the lives of others.

The Mystery of the Caper Tree

The gemara⁵ tells of a story where a person rode a horse on Shabbos during the period of the Greek occupation of Eretz Yisrael. They brought him to Beis Din and he was stoned as if he violated Shabbos biblically. This was not done because he deserved it since it was only a rabbinic prohibition, not a capital offense. This was done because the times demanded it.

Why did this happen to this person that never happened to anyone else, that he got stoned for a rabbinic prohibition? This never happened before until this era?

The Rema Mipano⁶ explains that this person was a gilgul of Tzelafchad⁷ who was the *mekoshaish* in the desert.⁸ Therefore when he transgressed a rabbinic prohibition he was punished stringently and that's how he received atonement.

Now, the gemara tells of a pious man where a hole was breached in the fence of his field and he decided to fence in the breach. He then remembered it was Shabbos and he refrained from fencing it. A miracle was performed and a caper tree, called a צלף, grew in the breach and it provided his livelihood and the livelihoods of the members of his house.⁹ This story begs the question: Why was this pious man was stringent on himself since such thoughts are permitted on Shabbos?¹⁰

The answer is because this person was a gilgul of Tzelafchad. The Arizal¹¹ says that what grew was specifically a צלף, caper tree, which is חד, sharp, as it was to hint that this was a gilgul of צלפחד which is comprised of the words חד, צלף, a sharp caper tree.

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Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of Rabbi Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of thirteen fascinating and popular books. His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Spanish and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lectures, writes and teaches, and is passionate about inspiring Jews of all levels of observance. He can be reached at yalt3285@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at +972 54 849 5217.

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² Gittin 56a.

³ Breishis 36:36.

⁴ R' Nissim Karelitz wrote about R' Genichovsky in a letter dated Motzaei Shabbos Parshas Bereishis, 5748 (1987): "I believe that Reb Avraham is one of the few people through whose merit the world exists."

⁵ Yevamos 90b.

⁶ Erech Tzelafchad.

⁷ He died during the stay in the desert and was inherited by his five daughters (see Bamidbar 26:33 and 27:1).

⁸ Shabbos 96b. This story is recorded in Bamidbar 15:32-36 which is the incident of a person who was executed for gathering wood on Shabbos.

⁹ Shabbos 150b.

¹⁰ Shabbos 113a.

¹¹ Likutei Hashas, Siman 46, p. 107.