**Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim**

**Bamidbar-Shavuos 5784**

# Peace through the actions of the wicked

## Introduction

This week I was discussing with a friend of mine the name of the leader of the tribe of Shimon, Shlumiel Ben Tzurishaddai, whose name is mentioned in this week's parashah (Bamidbar 2:12). I mentioned that the Ohr HaChaim (Bamidbar 7:36) writes that one possible reason that he was thus called was because his name alludes to the fact that shileim lo Keil al cheit Yosef vayeesof oso bamishmar, HaShem paid Shimon back for selling Yosef, by having Shimon locked up [when the brothers met Yosef for the first time]. Alternatively, writes the Ohr HaChaim, he was thus called because sheshileim HaShem bimaasei Zimri tzuri Shaddai, i.e. HaShem had Zimri killed by Pinchas, and HaShem's wrath was appeased, and HaShem amar likilyono dai, HaShem allowed the destruction to cease.

**Why would Zimri merit being called Shlumiel, which contains the name of HaShem?**

The interpretations of the Ohr HaChaim should lead one to wonder why Zimri, who was a sinner, merited having the Name of HaShem, which is Shalom, contained in his name. What is even more noteworthy is that Pinchas was the one who killed Zimri and brought an end to the plague that had been catalyzed by the act of Zimri who sinned when he had a relationship with Kazbi, the Midianite woman. Regarding the reward for Pinchas, it is said (Bamidbar 25:12) lachein emor hinini nosein lo es brisi shalom, therefore, say: behold! I give him my covenant of peace. Thus, Pinchas earns a covenant of peace, whereas Zimri is known forever as Shlumiel. How are we to understand this phenomenon?

**Through Zimri, HaShem's Name was restored**

To understand why Zimri is referred to as Shlumiel, it is worth examining the act that Zimri performed and its devastating effect on the Jewish People. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 106a) states that Balaam suggested to Balak that since the G-d of Israel despises immorality, they should cause the Jewish People to sin through immorality and then HaShem would become angry with the Jewish People. Balak had the Moabite and Midianite women sin with the Jewish People, and HaShem was prepared to

annihilate the Jewish People. Zimri fueled the flames by sinning with Kazbi, and Pinchas stepped in and killed Zimri and Kazbi, thus appeasing HaShem's wrath. In a simple sense, Zimri caused HaShem to become angry, and Pinchas appeased HaShem's wrath. On a deeper level, however, Pinchas was rectifying the breach that was manifest amongst the Jewish People through the sin of immorality. It is said (Mishlei 6:32) noeif isha chasar leiv, but he who commits adultery is lacking an [understanding] heart. This verse can also be interpreted to mean that one who commits an immoral sin causes a deficiency in the heart of the nation. Thus, whereas Zimri was bent on breaching the unity of the Jewish People, Pinchas was set on mending the breach and allowing the Jewish People to once again become unified with HaShem. Perhaps it is for this reason that Zimri was referred to as Shlumiel, as through his actions, HaShem allowed Pinchas to bring about unity amongst the Jewish People. When wicked people exist in the world, it appears that the Name of HaShem is not complete, as we find regarding Amalek that the Medrash (Tanchumah end of Ki Seitzei) states that as long as Amalek is in existence, HaShem's Name is not complete. Thus, when Pinchas killed Zimri, he allowed for HaShem's Name to become complete again.

**The Shabbos connection**

Throughout the week we struggle with issues of strife and discord, and it is only with the onset of Shabbos, which is called Shalom, peace, do all harsh judgments depart, and then we can truly experience peace and tranquility. HaShem should allow us to overcome our differences with others and bring us true peace. With the proper observance of Shabbos, we will merit that HaShem will bring us the Final Redemption, speedily, in our days.

## Shabbos in the Zemiros

**Shimru Shabsosai**

The composer of this zemer is Shlomo, a name formed by the acrostic of the first four stanzas. Nothing definite is known about him, although some speculate that he was the famous Shlomo ben Yehudah ibn Gabriol. The zemer concentrates on the requirement to honor the Shabbos with culinary delights and closes with the assurance that the observance of the Shabbos will herald the final Redemption.

וְחִשְׁבוּ עִם הַקּוֹנֶה, לְשַׁלֵּם אָכוֹל וְהוֹתֵר, reckon accounts with the Master, Who repays what you ate and what you left. One interpretation of this passage is that one should prepare an abundance of food for Shabbos and not be concerned that there will be leftovers, as HaShem will put it on "His account." Alternatively, the passage means that HaShem will reward the Jewish People with even more than they spent. We can suggest a third explanation, that this a command to eat and leave over, as it is said that one should make extra food for Shabbos to

eat during the weekday, as the Shabbos food permeates the weekdays with its holiness.

## Shabbos Stories

**The enthusiasm of youth**

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky writes: A number of years ago a dear friend of mine, I'll call him Dovy, received a knock on the door of his home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A distinguished looking man stood at Dovy's door. The stranger had a beard and looked at least ten years older than Dovy. He appeared to be either a Rebbi in a Yeshiva or a leader of a congregation. Dovy went for his checkbook.

"I just came to your home to say thank you," he said gratefully. "Thank you?" asked my friend in astonishment. "I don't even know who you are! In fact, I don't even think I ever saw you in my life!" "Let me explain," said the visitor in a clear and reassuring tone. "About fifteen or twenty years ago, you must have been no more than ten, I visited Pittsburgh. At that time, I was totally non-observant. I was facing many paths in my life. I lacked vision and direction. I explored returning to my roots, but I was not moved. Then I met you."

Dovy looked at him incredulously. "Me?" He thought. "What do I have to do with this rabbi? And besides I was only about ten years old at the time."

The Rabbi continued as if he read Dovy's mind. "You were about ten years old and returning from a ball game. Your tzitzis were flying in every direction and beads of sweat were still on your face. And you were running.

"I stopped you to ask where you were going. You told me about Mincha, we spoke about what you were learning in your school. To you it was just the way of life, normal routine, but to me I saw something else. I saw a pure enthusiasm for everything Jewish from prayer to Talmud. All from a ten-year-old-kid. I asked for and made a note of your name.

"I left college to study in Israel. I did well. I am now a teacher in an Israel yeshiva. All these years I made sure to remember to thank the little kid whose little acts made the biggest impact on my life. You taught me something that no teacher had taught me until that time!"

**Torah Study - Pleasure or Responsibility**

Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffman writes: Perusing the Yahrtzeit section of an old "HaModia," I came across the following exceptional description of the Yeshiva established by HaRav Yehuda Rosner Hy"d, Rav of Szekelheid. While meritorious in its own right, perhaps it will shed light on a section of this week's parasha as well:

HaRav Rosner opened a yeshiva in Szekelheid, which he headed throughout his years there. Although he was eventually offered rabbinical positions in

larger towns such as Uhel (Ujehly), he refused them on account of his yeshiva. Szekelheid had only 120 Jewish families, and that allowed the Rav to dedicate most of his time and attention to the yeshiva, which ultimately grew until, in the 1930's, it housed over 300 bachurim.

R' Yehuda ran the yeshiva almost singlehandedly, serving as Rosh Yeshiva (dean), mashgiach (supervisor), maggid shiur (teacher), and administrator. His Rebbetzin too assisted him devotedly, running the yeshiva kitchen, and adding a motherly touch for the bachurim where it was needed. The yeshiva was always strapped for funds, and making ends meet was always on R' Yehduah's mind. Often there was not enough money to pay for Shabbos meals for the boys; HaRav Rosner's solution was to take the money needed out of his personal salary as town rav. His talmidim recall that when his only son married, and received a dowry of 100,000 lei, the money was used to cover the yeshiva's deficit.

Yeshiva in Szekelheid began at 4:30 a.m., when the vecker would go around the small town waking up the bachurim at their various lodgings. Sometimes the rav would surprise the bachurim by conducting an early- morning inspection to assure all had arisen.

Meanwhile, the Rebbetzin was already busy cooking breakfast for the students. Anyone not coming to yeshiva on time was not entitled to breakfast, unless of course they were sick, in which case warm, nourishing meals were sent to their rooms.

The learning at the yeshiva in Szekelheid was intense; tests were given every day or two. On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, HaRav Rosner delivered a shiur iyun (in-depth lecture) in the mornings and a shiur bekius (comprehensive lecture) in the afternoons. The shiur bekius progressed at the prodigious rate of three blatt a week.

On Friday, Shabbos (no days off!) and Sunday, the bachurim studied Chumash with Rashi, along with Orach Chaim and Yoreh Deah (two sections of Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law), on which they were tested Sunday evening.

Every Thursday, a notice was posted with a page of Gemara that the boys were obliged to cover on their own, in order to encourage independent study. On this too, they were tested, to ensure that they were attaining a true understanding of the underlying issues, and to verify that the bachurim were using their time efficiently.

Testing was taken very seriously at the yeshiva. All bachurim were tested, although among the advanced bachurim only one boy was tested each week. Since the boy to be tested was chosen by lottery immediately before the test, every boy in the advanced group always needed to be prepared. The rest of the boys were called in to the rav four boys at a time, according to a list he had prepared. He would ask them questions;

those who were clearly fluent with the material were sent off at once, while a weaker student might be held for additional questioning to determine where he was lacking, and what needed to be reviewed. All this contributed to an intense atmosphere that was felt by every bachur in the yeshiva.

Each bachur was assigned a card, on which the rav would write the results of each exam. At the end of the semester, the rav would write each boy a letter, along with a copy of his card, summarizing his achievements. The most advanced students often received an approbation designating them as "chaveir" or "moreinu" - titles of distinction. One would be hard pressed, I believe, to find present-day yeshivos where testing and examination is taken so seriously and with such intensity. (www.Torah.org)

**From Skinhead to Jew**

The incredible, true story of Frank Meeink, former white supremacist who embarked on a path to fight hate and embrace his Jewish heritage.

by Turx

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"Hey, Josh," rasped the voice on the other line. "There's a party tonight. At my place. Why don't you swing by?"

Josh agreed.

What Josh had no way of knowing at the time was that there was no party. In just a few moments, as he'd walk through the entrance to that apartment, he would be kidnapped, tortured and put up for ransom by Frank Meeink, one of the most feared names in skinhead circles at the time.

What Frank had no way of knowing at the time is that by kidnapping Josh, the leader of a rival skinhead gang, he would set things in motion for a wild ride down an unexpected path that would, over the years, lead him to forever terminate his association with the neo-Nazi movement, begin to fight hate and eventually bring about the discovery that he himself is Jewish.

**A Dark Dawn**

For Frank Bertone Meeink, growing up in South Philadelphia wasn't easy. An abusive, alcoholic father would be replaced by an alcoholic abusive stepfather, along with an apathetic mother. Frank grew up exposed to the gang violence that came along with the turf wars between the neighborhood's Irish and Italian hoodlums, never feeling he had the protection of the adults in his life.

The only way to survive hate, he figured from a very young age, was by becoming a better hater and becoming a grown-up quickly. In this climate, it did not take much for the seeds of hate already planted within Frank's soul to flourish. And at his uncles' farm near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the conditions were just right.

"When I was a kid, my uncles would use expressions like 'Don't Jew me,' meaning, don't cheat me, or 'Someone tried to Jew me today,'" Frank recalls. "I never understood that, though. When I would hear jokes about Jews and money, everyone around me would laugh, but I wouldn't because I didn't know anything about it.

"Later on, I went to my uncle and asked, 'What does that mean?' And he said, 'You'll get it when you're older.'"

One day, when he was 14 years old, something clicked.

**Spending his formative years in the presence of hate has made Frank, now 43, quite the expert.**

"I was at my first neo-Nazi meeting and one of the guys started talking about how the Jews secretly run the Federal Reserve and siphon money from there to support Israel. In that moment I had no idea what the Federal Reserve was, but when he said that, it unlocked the joke. It unlocked the power of having heard people say, 'Don't Jew me.' Until that time I never understood what that meant."

All at once, Frank felt like a grown-up. Like one of them. Like he belonged. Somewhere. Finally.

"At that moment, I felt like I must be older – I got the joke, so I'm older now. I wanted to know what the adults in my life knew."

Frank took an interest in white pride, believing whites to be supreme over all other races. It was in this setting that Frank felt safe for the first time.

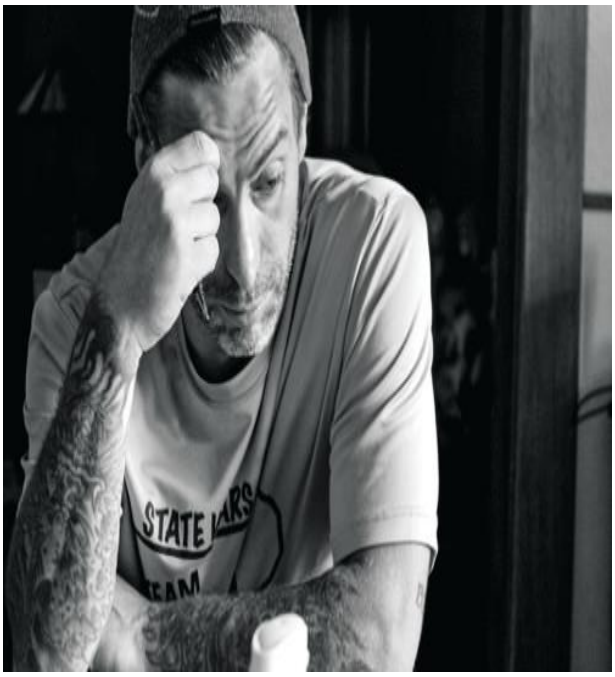
"My parents were drug addicts who broke up soon after I was born. I never really saw much hope anywhere. The way I saw the world back then was with fear; I was scared when I was a kid. There were times when I didn't know where my next meal would come from or who would be taking care of me. My view of the world became that I had to get mine whenever and wherever I could – I had to get mine before you get yours. I felt that no one would give me anything, and I had to take what I could."

Spending his formative years in the presence of hate has made Frank, now 43, quite the expert.

"It always starts with fear," he tells me, when I ask what's the biggest common denominator between all these haters.

**A Painful Childhood**

As it would become clear from his answers, Frank wasn't fueled by the fear of being murdered by a rival gang or a former ally, it wasn't the fear of being spat upon by locals or arrested by law enforcement. It was the fear that came from constantly being rejected by his parents that he identifies as the lowest point of his childhood.



"I was a very good football player when I was a kid," he recounts. "I was a really good athlete and I was unbelievably fast. My mother was getting remarried to a guy who hated me, and who never passed up a chance to degrade me." They would intentionally miss the highpoints of his sports activities, and they wouldn't give him the support he expected.

"It really hurt," Frank adds emotionally.

I ask Frank about the lowest point in his adult life.

"It was when I relapsed on drugs and started using heroin again that I broke into my father's house [when] he and his family had gone away for a few days. I was sitting there, trying to feel comfortable, but as I looked around the

house I realized that there wasn't a single picture of me. There were pictures of all of his other children, but there wasn't one picture of me.

"I went upstairs and got his gun, and I came very close to using it on myself. That was probably the lowest point for me. I tried to commit suicide a bunch of times. I was admitted into mental hospitals. I once had to break out of a mental hospital in Indiana to get to Springfield, Illinois, for a meeting. I was very lonely and depressed, and no matter how high ranking I became in the movement, I still felt that sitting inside my own skin wasn't a good place for me."

Being abandoned by his parents gave Frank the feeling of inferiority on the inside and a sense of superiority on the outside. How does he reconcile that?

"That goes with being an egomaniac with no self-esteem. If I would have self-esteem, it would be telling me that I'm okay and I can achieve things, but my ego is telling me that I'm better than everyone – and I have to be better than everyone, because I don't feel good enough about myself to stand on my own merit."

**I traded my humanity for acceptance.**

"Tony McAleer, who is a former neo-Nazi like me, put it very well once. We were talking about our lives, and I said, 'What happened? I lost my humanity.' And he said, 'You didn't lose it, you traded it in for acceptance.'"

"Racism on its whole is the greatest bait and switch ever pulled – on all of us. Every person I know who ever joined a hate group – and this goes all the way to the Tutsis against the Hutus – is the victim of a bait and switch. They find people who want to be proud of their heritage but feel like they can't be proud because they will otherwise be labeled a racist.

"But then when he comes to the meeting it's an entirely different story. At our meetings we would never talk about our heritage; it was always about 'look at what they're doing.' It's a big bait and switch."

**Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Abyss**

For Frank, identifying as a neo-Nazi wasn't simple at first, especially as his grandfathers had fought against the Nazis in World War II, so he avoided the label. But over time, that last barrier would crumble.

"I was taught that my grandfathers had been duped and they were wrong," Frank says ruefully, "and that they were just drawn into a big Jewish conspiracy. That turned me against them, which is a

pity, because they were good men (one is still alive). They had told me stories, but there I was saying that it was all a Jewish conspiracy.

"I couldn't believe them, because if I had believed them I wouldn't have been able to argue for what I believed. I had to completely disbelieve everything they had told me."

Within the movement, Frank climbed through the ranks quickly. He appeared on ABC News to discuss his beliefs, and he eventually began his own foray into the world of the media.

"I had a television show in Springfield, Illinois, and it was really popular in the movement. We didn't do what the other neo-Nazi shows were doing at the time – these guys were older people who would just talk for an hour about their beliefs.
**In no time, Frank became recognized as one of the top neo-Nazi recruiters in the country.**

"It was boring; I believed what they believed in and I still thought they were terribly boring. Instead, we had little skits on our show, we had bands, we played music, and we were kind of funny."

In no time, Frank became recognized as one of the top neo-Nazi recruiters in the country.

"I was running a pretty fresh group – guys who were just getting into this. I recruited a bunch of kids in high school – I didn't go to high school myself, but I recruited them out of high school. The numbers became really big really fast, which is kind of hard for any group."

**The Kidnapping**

Not only was Frank's not the only violent gang in town, it wasn't even the only group of skinheads. There were other skinheads, SHARP – Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice – who saw themselves as better than the neo-Nazis. Like some in Antifa today, there were few points that these SHARP skinheads would make without resorting to violence.

"The whole skinhead thing didn't start as a racist thing," Frank explains. "They were poor kids in London who were mostly on welfare, and they were against the hippies, the mods and the punk rockers in the '60s.

"It was a working class English thing. There were black kids who were part of that, too, and there were all types of kids there. As their numbers grew and they became more popular, the national front came in and started recruiting them and so did the socialists. Both sides saw a large group of kids doing the same thing and felt it was a good place to try to

recruit. That's when the split started and there ended up being racist skinheads and anti-racist skinheads. These two groups have been fighting each other since the '70s."

One day Frank came up with the idea to kidnap Josh, the leader of the anti-racist skinheads.

"My biggest problem with him was that I thought he was trying to steal all my new recruits," Frank says. "A lot of the new skinheads thought he was cool and he was very popular, and I thought that he would steal all of my new recruits after I put in all the work to get them to join."

"You personally kidnapped him or did you give the order?" I ask.

"I did it myself. I wouldn't trust someone else to do a job like that. I was 17 years old, but they charged me as an adult, which was the correct thing to do. I wasn't a good person."

I ask Frank to walk us through the story.

"I tricked him into coming to my house; I told him that we were having a party and that he would be welcome, because he was friends with some of my friends. He even knew my roommate very well. There were three of us involved.

"When we called him, we had music in the background and noise to make it sound like there was a real party. He showed up, and I said, 'I'm so glad you made it. Listen, I have to talk to you about something.' He walked in and we went into the bedroom.

"I started accusing of him of various things. A couple of them were true, and he defended himself for doing them, but when it came to the made-up accusations he, of course, said that he didn't know what I was talking about.

"I told him that he better confess. He said, 'Confess?' I said, 'Yes,' and then I pulled out a shotgun and held it to him. We decided that we would hold him for ransom."

This hadn't been Frank's initial foray into the dark world of abduction, he admits. But this time something went wrong.

"I had done this type of thing in the past, but those were well-planned; this one wasn't well-planned at all. We had no ending to it; we didn't even know who to ask for the ransom. I just didn't like the guy and I acted off my instincts. The other times I had done it, there were plans in action right away. When we found out that we couldn't get any money for him, we tortured him for hours.

"The next morning we decided to just let him go, but we told him that we want protection money so it doesn't happen to him again."

**I made amends with Josh, and that's what I do with anyone I've ever wronged in my life.**

Josh went right to the police.

Frank didn't know this at the time, but the fact that Josh came to his place willingly saved Frank from a 20-year prison sentence. Instead, he was handed down a far lighter, three-year term.

"Josh and I are now friends," Frank says, telling me about a chance encounter at a bar in St. Louis many years later. "I made amends with him, and that's what I do with anyone I've ever wronged in my life; I make amends. And amends doesn't mean that I simply say that I'm sorry. I go to the person and ask how I can make it right."

**Behind Bars but Forward Looking**

That prison sentence turned into the first few pebbles on Frank's road to recovery.

"I was running with the Aryans in prison; we had our own gang, and I was a high-ranking member because of who I was on the outside. I was a bit of a celebrity in that world; remember, I even had my own television show.

"Now, most Aryans in prison weren't Aryans when they got there; they become Aryans because they need to belong to a group in order to have their protection. I didn't have to be worried about being attacked, because I had a whole gang of people who felt honored to protect me.

"But I didn't have anything in common with them. They were talking about Harleys and fixing transmissions, which I had never done in my life.

"I played football and basketball when I was a kid, and there were times when the Aryans would play football, and I would go with them, but they were very bad at it. I hated it because I'm very competitive. I played with them a couple of times, and then I said that I can't do it anymore. I wanted to play with people who actually knew how to play, and the only ones there who did were the black kids.

"When I finally asked one of the black kids if I could play football with them, he said, 'No, you have a swastika on your neck. You're not playing with us.'

"Then one of the older black guys said that they should just let me play, but his idea was to put me in a position where I would be hit very hard by the other team and then I wouldn't want to play anymore.

But they didn't know how fast I was until I caught the first ball, and my speed combined with how scared I was meant that no one was going to catch me. They were really impressed by how fast I was."

By the time he'd leave prison, Frank's mind had been opened to the idea that skin color wasn't that big of a barrier, after all. But he was still a carrying neo-Nazi who'd faithfully attend group meetings and rallies. His offensive tattoos reminded the world of his allegiances.

**Enter, Keith: A Jew**

"You get out of prison, you still have the swastika tattoo on your neck, and you're trying to get a job. That didn't go very well, right?" I ask.

"That doesn't present itself as good people skills," he says humorously. "The best thing I can say is that when having 'skinhead' tattooed on my knuckles, a swastika on my neck, and 'Made in Philadelphia' tattooed on my head – those are all things that people can see when I go to fill out a job application."

There was only one person who considered giving Frank a chance – an antique dealer from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, named Keith Brookstein. A Jew.

Keith wasn't intimidated by people like Frank. "Keep your enemies closer," is what he would tell people.

"He wasn't necessarily practicing Judaism," Franks points out, "but he always had certain Jewish mannerisms and expressions like '*oy vey.*' He fit all the stereotypes when I looked at him.

The first weekend on the job, Frank didn't say more than two words to Keith. "I just wanted my money and I wanted to do my work."

Throughout the week, Frank was certain about one thing. "He was going to 'Jew' me."

But did Keith "Jew" him?

"Not at all!" Frank exclaims.

And that blew his mind.

"I had already been prepared to argue with him knowing that he wouldn't give me my full paycheck. So I acted very abruptly with him all day. At the end of the day, he says, 'So what do I owe you?' And I rudely threw back at him, '$300.'

"Now I had already made double that amount in tips, and he knew that – that was one of the landmines I had set to see what he would do.

"He handed me $300 in cash, and without even knowing that I'm trying to fight with him, he says, 'You're a really good worker,' and then he handed me an extra $100."

Being given his full wages plus a tip infuriated Frank. "We were supposed to be fighting now," Frank remembers thinking.

But for the next few months, Frank was still expecting Keith to reveal his "true colors." He was hoping to catch him at something.

**Sometimes You Break Your Marbles, Sometimes You Lose Them**

Frank is very open that spending a few years behind bars in the company of blacks, Latinos and Asians gave him insight into the fact that they weren't so different, after all. But Jews? Well, they were different.

"I kept that to myself because while I didn't have anything in this world, I still had seniority in the [neo-Nazi] group. I wouldn't talk about blacks, Asians and Latinos anymore during meetings. I would hear people say very stupid things that I used to say when I first joined the movement, and I would think to myself, 'That sounds so dumb. Did I used to sound like that?'"

But Jews is where he still drew line.

"I still could be part of this group as long as I still had this feeling about Jews, and hating Jews was so much easier, because I didn't know any Jews."

Except Keith Brookstein.

"He would pick me up all the time and we would go on trucks to pick up furniture together. He would drive, and I would read out loud from the newspaper. We would talk and I realized that he was really smart. He taught me everything I know about the business. I started to admire him and looked up to him in a certain way but decided to keep it secret.

"One day I broke something at work, a marble-top table, and Keith was very upset. Breaking something in our business was very bad, because with antiques they're really irreplaceable. I was really embarrassed because it was in front of a customer and I turned to Keith and I said really loudly, 'I'm so stupid, I'm so sorry.'

"Calling myself stupid was something that I would always do whenever I made even the smallest mistake throughout my life. It was just the easiest way to get out of something. When he finished dealing with the customer, he came over to me, grabbed me by the neck and said, 'Stop saying that you're stupid, you idiot.'

"I cleaned up the table and then we went out on the road together to someplace in New Jersey. We were driving in the truck, and he just unloaded on me about how smart I am. He said, 'If you think that you're so stupid, then you're questioning my judgment, because I think that you're one of the smartest people I've ever met. Are you going to tell me that I'm stupid for believing that you're smart?'

"Then he said something to me that has stuck with me forever. He said, 'Smart people can fake being dumb, but dumb people can't fake being smart. You just are smart; you can't fake it.'"

Keith then dropped Frank off in Philadelphia.

"It was Friday, which was payday, but I had broken the table and I was just grateful for the fact that he hadn't fired me. I get out of the truck and I'm walking away, all the while thinking that I'm in trouble because I don't have any money for the weekend.

"He beeps the horn and yells at me to come back. I go back and he says, 'You didn't get your pay yet.' I was waiting for him to open my envelope and take out the money that I had cost him by breaking the table, but he just handed me the whole envelope and he said, 'See you Monday.'"

That was the point of no return for Frank. His old life was over.

"I was absolutely done after that. I didn't tell anyone. I just stopped going around to where they were. I didn't know what I felt. My emotions were all over the place. I was afraid to tell someone, because I was afraid that he would convince me to change my mind. I didn't want to agree with them on anything, so I just stopped going there."

**Infiltrating the Movement**

But eventually Frank began confronting the hate. He wrote a book about his experiences, and he began giving lectures about racial diversity and acceptance to schoolchildren for the ADL. He created a hockey program, Harmony Through Hockey, which promotes sports and respect for others. He also co-founded the organization Life After Hate, which helps former neo-Nazis move beyond their former beliefs. And that has meant reaching out to people who are in the process of leaving, or who are wavering, and convincing them to reject hatred of others.

**Besides fear, there is one thing most neo-Nazis have in common: they've never met a Jew.**

Besides fear, there is one thing most neo-Nazis seem to have in common. Most of them had never met a Jew.

“I have a list of Jewish people whom I trust and know that I can do an intervention with, and they won’t be easily offended; they have a thick skin and they can deal with it.

“The idea is that you have to make it comfortable and then awkward. Everyone in the room knows what they’re there for, but I make sure that they have something in common first. It might be about sports or about gaming or whatever.”

After the conversation between the young Nazi-aspirant and the Jew has gone on for some time, Frank will interrupt and ask the Jew, usually a rabbi or Holocaust survivor: “When you see a swastika, how does that make you feel?”

Frank highlights one particular case:

“One kid, either in 10th or 11th grade, was drawing swastikas on his books and on his hockey equipment He was just doing it because he thought it was a rebel thing to do; he didn’t really have any belief in it. The issue was that he didn’t understand what his actions were and who was seeing them.

“I introduced him to a couple of rabbis, and Rabbi Leib Bolel [formerly of Des Moines] decided to arrange for him to meet two Holocaust survivors.

“We went back to meet with the Holocaust survivors, and I set up the conversation the same way – with casual conversation. They were very frail, and they were telling him that he looks like their grandson, and so on. And then in the middle of the conversation, I just turned and said, ‘Sir, what do you feel when you see a swastika?’ This frail old man started shaking, and tears were coming out of his eyes. He said, ‘That symbol took everything from me. That symbol took everything from my wife.’ Then he started to go through everything that they took.

“When he finished, I said, ‘This boy here is writing swastikas without knowing what he’s really doing. What would you say to him for that?’ He said, ‘That symbol has tormented me for my

entire life. My life is almost over, but how can it still be around and how can people still wear it after what it did to me? It makes me lose faith in humanity sometimes.'

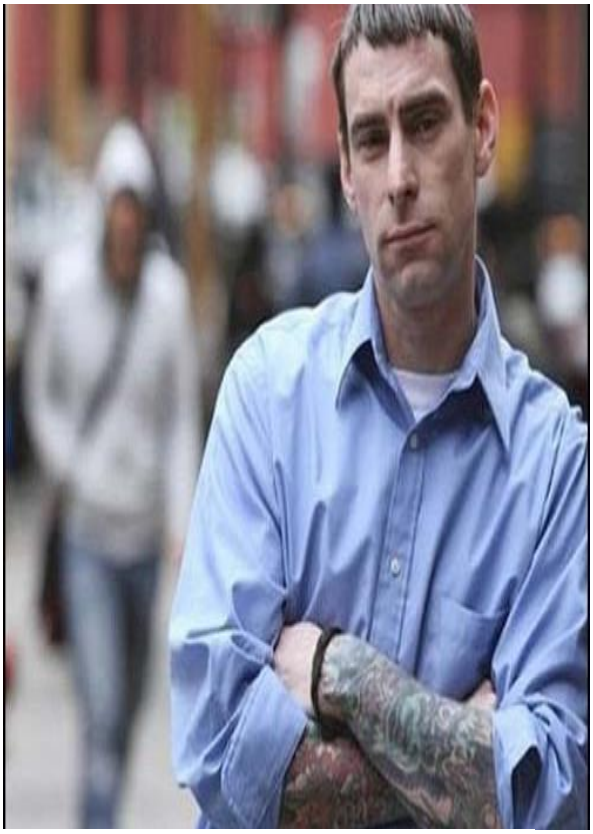
"This kid was just in shock," Frank concludes. "After that we went back to the small talk; they gave him a hug and we all left. A few days later, I checked in with his mother to see how he was doing. She told me that he took down or ripped up any swastikas that he had."

**Hating Haters Is Still Hate**

Frank has some raw truth for haters.

"When I would march in neo-Nazi or Klan rallies and I would be holding the banner, I would be the first guy walking down the street with cops on all sides of us and hundreds of protesters throwing things at us. I never once ducked a bottle and thought 'I better rethink my beliefs here.'

"When someone sat down with me and had a conversation, I couldn't fight him. I couldn't fight him because I was being treated like a human being. I realized right away that when I talk to guys who I am intervening with or who are trying to get out, and I tell them that I understand why they believe, that way I can get somewhere.



"I don't fight ideology with them. It's not what I'm there for. You can never corner a racist like that, because any time you get him with a good question or fact, he'll just say that it's a Jewish conspiracy. Everything that they can't explain becomes a Jewish conspiracy. What I do is try to relate to them as a human being and find something that we have in common. Usually it's the pain of a breakup, a divorce, alcoholism, the alcoholism of a relative, etc. I get down to the real part of him being a human being and I treat him that way. I'm not sitting there and telling him that he's stupid for having those beliefs. Whenever he says something that's really outrageous, I'll say, 'I used to say

things like that. I was there. I understand you.'

"I don't treat him as evil, I treat him as a human being, and it just works. He lightens up and he realizes that he hasn't had a good talk like this with someone other than people in the movement."

**Funny, You *Do* Look Jewish**

These days, Frank's ideology has changed when it comes to religion, too.

"I'm a huge believer in a higher power," he says, but it's no longer the Catholicism he'd grown up with. It turns out, as he discovered quite recently, his maternal grandmother was actually Jewish.

"Meeink is a Jewish name," Frank reveals. "My mother's family were leftovers in the neighborhood from when it used to be Jewish. My grandmother just kind of stayed, but over the years they started marrying Catholic men and they became Catholic."

**Turns out, my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother are all confirmed as Jewish.**

"Turns out, my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother are all confirmed as Jewish," Frank concludes.

What was his reaction upon discovering that he's the very person he had been conditioned to loath?

"I thought it was awesome. One of my uncles had actually said something one day about us being Jewish, and I thought he was messing around with me.

"I started looking into things, and then my uncle wrote to me saying that I should look into Grandma Mullen. She had stayed in the Jewish neighborhood even after it turned Irish. I don't really remember her very much; I remember going to her house when I was a little kid and she always had candy. I think that she even practiced Judaism with her family when she was a little girl, but as she got older they stayed in the Irish neighborhood and she married an Irish guy. When I found out, I was really cool with it."

It came out during a conversation he had with Rabbi Yossi Jacobson, the Chabad rabbi in Des Moines. "About five or six years ago, Rabbi Jacobson and I were talking for this documentary we were filming, and he told me that I look Jewish and that my last name sounds Jewish. He pointed out that having an *eei* in a last name was an old Jewish spelling that isn't used anymore. It turns out that it comes from my mother's father's side, who were Jewish cheese makers. It's just the craziest thing. I told

him about my mother's mother's family and then he showed me his *[tefillin]* and how to put them on. It was a very special moment."

The fact that Frank has been going by his maternal surname Meeink is in itself interesting.

"I was born Bertone, which is my father's last name; he's an Italian. We moved back to the Irish neighborhood, and the Irish and the Italians don't get along. Having an Italian last name in an Irish neighborhood would've been difficult for me.

"The first person who told me that I had to write Meeink as my last name was my Catholic school nun. I remember being happy about having a shorter name to write because I was lazy."

Somehow, deep down, Frank believes he'd always known.

"Before I even found out about it, there was one year when my wife and I taught the kids about Chanukah and celebrated it instead of Xmas because we wanted to give them an experience from everyone.

"We put a picture of us with a menorah on Facebook, and my cousin sent back, 'I didn't know your wife was Jewish.' That's when my uncle messaged me privately and started telling me about Grandma Mullen."

Frank's message is that "we can't fight hate with hate – it makes them feel good when we do that. When we fight them with love, compassion, caring and empathy, they can't fight that. As I said before, if people throw a bottle at me, I can fight them; but if you sit down to have a conversation with me, I can't get up and punch you in the face." (www.aish.com)

## Shabbos in Halacha

### Opening Food Packages

#### A. קורע -Tearing

It is an Av Melacha to tear any soft material in a constructive manner, Thus, tearing cloth, leather, cardboard, paper, plastic, or any such material (in a way which improves the usefulness of the item) is a transgression of the melacha of קורע: tearing.

Tearing in a destructive manner is forbidden by Rabbinic Decree. The Sages, however, made an exception to this rule and allowed one to tear in a destructive fashion in order to obtain an item needed for the Shabbos meals. Thus, tearing open a bag, wrapper or cardboard box, even to remove food, is forbidden unless the packaging is damaged in the process.

## Shabbos Ta'am HaChaim: Bamidbar-Shavuos 5784

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