**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Beraishis 5773**

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My Song

**By** [**Ruchama King Feuerman**](http://www.aish.com/search/?author=48867547)

From singing with Gloria Estefan to women-only concerts. One of the most talented female singers in the Jewish world speaks her mind.

 *Miriam Sandler is one of the most talented, powerful female singers in the Jewish world today. Her performances are rare, but highly prized. Few are aware that Miriam sang with global pop stars in her pre-religious days. Miriam has passionate views about popular culture, women and modesty. I caught up with her to hear them.*

 *How did you come to sing and tour with pop stars?*

 One of my music teachers at the University of Miami was singing background at that time for pop star Gloria Estefan. He really believed in me and started recommending me for singing jobs. By virtue of him, I started singing professionally. Eventually he recommended me to Gloria’s band. It helped that I speak Spanish fluently.

 The Spanish-speaking market was a much easier market to break into in South Florida. When I graduated college, I went straight into singing internationally, traveling, singing background for [music industry legends] like Julio Iglesias, James Brown, Michael McDonald and many more.

 *What was the most exciting moment for you as a performer in those days?*

 The music starts and you are *on.* It’s an enormous rush of adrenaline that takes over your body.

 That moment just before the curtain goes up. The lights are dark, all the musicians are waiting backstage, I’m waiting for the countdown, which is when the music starts. And then it happens. And you are *on.* It’s an enormous rush of adrenaline that takes over your body. It dazzles you, the bright lights, loud music, thousands of people in the audience, a film crew in your face, other dancers you’re interacting with. It’s like a big explosion of feeling, movement, sound, visuals. We did that night after night in many different countries, Central America, Europe, Japan, Canada and throughout the United States.

 *You spent huge amounts of time with celebrities, as that proverbial fly on the wall. What were their lives like up close?*

 We traveled together, we lived together on the road, we saw very closely what their life is all about. I realized it was chaos. It’s really kind of like Hell, actually. When you become a famous person you have all these people at your beck and call – make-up artists, physical fitness people working you out, chefs making the food you like.

 Your ego explodes and you become a mini-god, a tyrant. No way can you trust anyone. If you are interested in having any real friendship, for who you are and not what you have to offer, you’ll never have that in your life. You have become your voice and your talent. You become enslaved to your record label or whoever is pulling the strings on top and you have to do and watch everything they say.

 *Did you, as part of the entourage, experience any of the trappings of fame?*

 Whenever I hung out with these famous musicians, I got the royal treatment also. That’s why people attach themselves to these entourages. That’s why the relationships with these performers are so fake.

 *When did your spiritual shift happen?*

 I was about to go out on a world tour with Gloria, and my dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given three to six months to live. At that point I put the brakes on my whole life. I just realized I had to be there for him. I didn’t go out on tour and decided to stay home. We started going to a Conservative type of shul.

 Neither of us read or understood any Hebrew so we ended up in a Reform temple where most of the prayers were in English. I started asking my self all those heavy duty questions that hopefully people get to. What’s our purpose, what does G-d want from me, and why do I have today to live? I saw that it wasn’t a given. Instead of living three to six months, my father lived 18 months. Three weeks after he passed away, I started learning Torah with a rabbi at a yeshiva in Miami Beach. When I saw my dad lose his life, I realized, today’s the day. I can’t wait.

 The ideas weren’t totally unfamiliar to me. My sister had moved to Israel and done *teshuva* hard core and had ten children and her husband learning in kollel. When I was 18, I remember having hours and hours of conversation with her about life and what it was all about. She primed me; she really introduced these concepts of Shabbos and modesty.

 It made a hundred percent sense to me, even though I wasn’t ready at 18 to swallow the pill. The prospect of singing, of traveling the world, it was too dazzling for me, too alluring. The brilliant relationship you can have with G-d, it wasn’t shining out to me. When I saw my dad lose his life, I realized, today’s the day. I can’t wait.

 *What happened to your music during that time?*

 For all those 18 months I did local gigs. I stopped traveling.

 *What did the bands say?*

 They got somebody else. I was just another number, another singer. My friends from the band knew where I was headed. Some of them are still jumping around on stage, like they’re in their twenties.

 *What was the transition period like?*

 Toward the latter part of my time in Florida, I was doing recording sessions for the song writers. They asked me to demo a song for some pretty major celebrities. By that time, I was keeping Shabbos. I was already in a long skirt and long sleeve shirt. That was very odd for Florida. People don’t dress like that, especially in the entertainment industry, and also because it’s so hot. The funny thing about my last recording session is, I remember singing very differently at that point. My colleagues said to me, “You sound so different. Your voice is so free, so rich. I’ve never heard you sound so great.”

 I no longer cared about any of them. That’s when my voice totally opened up.

 Listen to how ironic that was. Up until then, I was so enslaved to the pop stars and these other big producers. Every time they walked into a room I thought I had to sound great, I had to look great and impress them so that I would get the job and I would get the gig and be chosen.

 But what ended up happening was, as soon as I no longer had to impress them, as soon as I had one foot out the door, then I could *really* sing. I no longer cared about any of them. That’s when my voice totally opened up. I was able to sing like I’d never sung before. I didn’t care about them anymore.

 I also remember going out to do my errands. People looked at me differently in my long skirt and long sleeves. Instead of gawking and checking me out, all of a sudden the people I was attracting were people who were treating me with respect. I automatically attracted deeper, mores refined interactions. I wasn’t expressing myself like a body walking around waiting to get attention.

 *What was it like when you started performing for women only?*

 I remember the first time I saw an all women’s band. I’d ended up learning at Neve Yerushalayim. The rabbi interviewing me suggested I go to an all-women’s concert that was playing that night, and it would be cool to see them perform.

 I went into this room with hundreds of women. Quite a sizable band --10 to 15 women on stage. It was like nothing I’d experienced. For one, there were no men in the audience. All the songs were about prayer, the Temple, God, *teshuva* -- and it was holy. It was the first time I’d ever experienced music being holy. It was very powerful. Eventually when I started performing with that band, I remember thinking, “This is why God gave me a voice. Wow, I finally got here, I finally figured it out, this is where I was supposed to be.”

 Sometimes I cry when I’m singing on stage. I have to gird myself so that I don’t lose it.

 *It almost sounds like you’re praying as you perform, like your singing is a form of prayer.*

 Songwriting feels a bit like prophecy.

 Yeah. I think that another reason I feel so emotional when I get on stage. I feel to a certain degree these songs, these messages, these tunes and notes, they just come into your head from God, they get inserted there. Any songwriter who takes the credit, it’s really ridiculous. Songwriting feels a bit like prophecy. I get so emotional because I’ve been on both sides of the fence. I know what it’s like to get up and sing trashy lyrics and sing elevated lyrics. The extremes blow me away.

 *Do people ask if you miss those days of being able to perform before the world, whenever, wherever you wanted?*

 People say: Isn’t it a bummer you can’t perform on Shabbos, isn’t it a bummer that you have to cover your hair, isn’t it a bummer about *Kol Isha* (the prohibition against men hearing a woman sing)?

When I think what it’s like to be non-religious, to see how men and women were so lax about relationships, I feel like all these laws of modesty were the biggest blessing for me. Thank G-d, I can put on a long skirt, long sleeve shirt and cover my hair, and now men and women look at me like I’m a soul, not just a body walking around with a beautiful face. It’s my salvation. A woman who doesn’t have that, she’s missing out.

 *I’ve seen you perform. It’s like there’s an electric energy field around you. It’s coming out of your fingertips and the way you hold yourself and of course your voice. It’s not something I’ve seen too often. It’s as if you gathered up all that passion and energy from your pre-religious days, gathered up the sparks of life there, extracted it, distilled it, and funneled it into a holy experience. It’s a life force that’s unusual.*

 I’ve had other performers come up to me who said, “Miriam, when you go on stage, it’s like a volcano. It’s an explosion of power. You’ve got to go on a road tour.” I poo poo this. Right now, I just have to be a mom. You know what I mean? When I have a performance, my whole family life has to be put on the brakes.

 I have a unique gift, the voice that G-d stirred inside me. Performances for me are like magical experiences. But sometimes overexposure makes it not so special. That’s why I can’t over-use my voice. I used to be a singing telegram girl, and go into a public place and sing to a person. It’s fun to blow people away like that. But I can’t do that anymore. Because what I have is so special, I have to use it in a special place.

*Visit Miriam’s site at* [*miriamsandler.com*](http://miriamsandler.com/)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com. A modified version of this article originally appeared in* [*Ami Magazine*](http://amimagazine.org/)*.*

**Chassidic Story 776**

**The Substitute Prayer Belt**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=00016g00:001GO6Lz00000Vzi&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1348528351&randid=1567300916&content=central)

 Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen of Izmir [a city inTurkey], author of *Shevet Mussar*, was once searching for his prayer sash so that he could wear it for prayer. Unable to locate it, he finally spied a black rope on the floor. He stooped down, picked up the rope, and tied it around his waist.

 After he had completed his prayers, Rabbi Eliyahu began to untie the rope, when it suddenly uncoiled itself and slithered away! It turned out that the "rope" he had worn was actually a poisonous snake!

 In memory of this miracle, R' Eliyahu entitled the next book he wrote, Eizer Eliyahu ["The Helper of Eliyahu"].

 When the chasidic rebbe, R. Moshe of Kobrin, would recount this story, he would always add the following postscript: "It is really not so wondrous that the snake neither bit not choked Rabbi Eliyahu. No living creature can harm a person who has not damaged his *tzelem Elokim* -- his Divine image. For it is written, 'The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth' [Gen 9:2]. And the fact that the snake did not try to flee while R' Eliyahu prayed is also not astonishing; the snake was afraid of the *tzadik*, so he stayed absolutely still.

 "The truly striking point about this story is Rabbi Eliyahu's greatness. In his tremendous devotion to G-d even before he began praying, he never noticed that the 'rope' he was picking up was actually a living snake."

[Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "Stories my Grandfather told me" (Mesorah) by Zev Greenwald]

*Connection*: Weekly Readings (2): serpents this week and a specific verse next week.

*Biographical notes*: Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen of Izmir, Turkey [1650 - 1 Adar B 1729], is best known as the author of Shevet Mussar, a major work of Torah ethics and morality. He also wrote Midrash Talpiot. In the historical work, Shem HaGedolim, it states, "Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir wrote almost 40 books and turned many away from sin with his public lectures."

Rabbi Moshe Pallier of Kobrin [1784 - 29 Nisan 1858] was a close follower of the Rebbe, R. Mordechai of Lechovitch and afterwards of his son, R. Noach. In 1833 he became the first Rebbe of the Kobrin dynasty, with thousands of chassidim, many of whom subsequently moved to Israel. His teachings are collected in Imros Taharos.

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[*www.ascentofsafed.com*](http://www.ascentofsafed.com)[*ascent@ascentofsafed.com*](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=00016g00:001GO6Lz00000Vzi&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1348528351&randid=1567300916&content=central)

**A Slice of Life**

**Shabbat in the Gulag**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

*(Ed.'s note: The following story epitomizes the saying "More than the Jews kept Shabbat, Shabbat kept the Jew.")*

 I heard the following story directly from Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Gurevitz of Migdal HaEmek, Israel

 Rabbi Gurevitz lived in Russia during Stalin's regime. He was arrested for being an anti-revolutionary and a suspected capitalist. His real crime, though, was that he was a religious Jew. He was sentenced, after a 10 minute trial, to seven years in Siberia for "correction by forced labor."

A Commitment to be Positive and Happy

 Most people did not last long in these forced labor camps. But from the moment Rabbi Gurevitz learned that he was being sent to Siberia, he made up his mind to be positive and happy.

 When asked if he had any skills, Rabbi Gurevitz remembered what he had been told by friends: if you don't say you are skilled they'll put you to hard labor and you won't survive. So he said he was a tailor.

 Now the fact is that Rabbi Gurevtiz was not a tailor but his mother had had a sewing machine and he had watched her work a few times. Rabbi Gurevitz thought he would be able to figure out how to sew. He was taken to a huge factory where they made sacks for the soldiers. He was ordered to sit down at one of the machines, then he was given several large, neatly stacked piles of leather cut to various sizes. He was shown the finished product, directed about how to make it, and then left to work.

 There was only one problem: it was Shabbat. And Jews are forbidden to sew on Shabbat. Rabbi Gurevitz sat in the chair and stared at the sewing machine. Why, he was even forbidden to touch it on the Sabbath according to Jewish law.

**Praying for an Inspiration**

 What could he do? He prayed for inspiration. If he didn't work it could mean... the worst! But breaking the Shabbat was out of the question! Suddenly it dawned on him that sitting and doing nothing while everyone else was furiously busy was also out of the question. He stood up and excused himself to the bathroom, where he holed himself up for a half an hour.

 Upon exiting the bathroom, Rabbi Gurevitz noticed a room filled with beds. It was the room where everyone took a rest in the afternoon. He walked straight into the room, got into a bed, pulled the blanket over him and did not move for the rest of the day.

**Hiding in the Hot Summer**

**Under a Winter-Weight Blanket**

 It was actually the middle of the summer and quite warm, certainly too warm to be comfortably hiding under a winter-weight blanket. But Rabbi Gurevitz was happy that he was able to not desecrate Shabbat. At the end of the work-day, as if nothing had happened, Rabbi Gurevitz emerged from the room and left like all of the other workers.

 Since he was new, his supervisors had not noticed that he was gone the entire day. However, they did notice that next to his name on the daily production list was a big zero.

**Met by Two Huge Soldiers**

 The next day when Rabbi Gurevitz reported to work, he was met by two huge soldiers who informed him that he was to appear before a board of judges for sentencing. He stood trembling before the judges. Then, to his surprise, one of the judges began speaking to him in Yiddish! "What are you doing such stupid things for? You could get 10 more years for not working! Why don't you work for mother Russia?"

 "It was Shabbat, your honor! I couldn't work on Shabbat!" was his answer.

 "But it was permissible! To save your life it's permissible! I know the law. You could get killed for refusing to work!"

 "You are probably right, your honor, but I will not work on Shabbat. I am a Jew and Jews don't work on Shabbat."

 The judge stared at him for a minute with no expression on his faces. Then he turned to the other judge and began whispering.

 Although Rabbi Gurevitz was expecting the worst, he prayed for a miracle.

**Judge Proposes a Solution**

 "Okay Gurevitz," said the Jewish judge in Russian. "We have the storehouse where all the leather is kept. The leather is very valuable and we have not yet found a way to stop the leather from disappearing. It would seem that the guards themselves are stealing the leather."

 "Well, we see that you are a man of principle Comrade Gurevitz! If you are willing to risk your life for your principles, we do not think that you will steal the leather. Do you understand?"

 Rabbi Gurevitz nodded in agreement. "I never stole anything in my life." He said.

**Amazed by His Honesty**

 The judges were incredulous "Never? Never stole?! Ha, that is what everyone here in this prison says! That is what all the previous guards said also! Ha haaa! But you are different, we SAW what you did. Now what do you say? With this new job you can keep your Shabbat too. Just make sure you keep the leather safe!"

 Sure enough, for his remaining years in Siberia, Rabbi Gurevitz did not have any problem with keeping Shabbat. In addition, he was able to study Torah and fulfill many, many mitzvot (commandments) , but was also able to learn and observe the Torah and even help others to do so as well from his position as guard of the leather bank.

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**Simcha’s Torah Stories**

**Parshas Bereishis**

**It Keeps The**

**World Running!**

**By Simcha Groffman**

 Chaim, wake up! You don't want to oversleep. Today is your big class trip.

 Oy! What time is it, Mama? Am I late?

 No, Chaim, you have time. But hurry.

 I'm so excited, Mama. Today we are going to the Electric Company's big power plant.

 It sounds great, Chaim. Have a great time. And tell us all about it.

**A Huge Generator**

 Wow, look at that, Avi! A huge generator. It's as big as a four story building, and half a city block long. I have a question to ask of our tour guide, the Chief Engineer.

 There he is Chaim. You can ask him now.

 Excuse me sir, but what makes this huge generator run?

 That's a very good question, young man. This hydrodynamic generator is fueled by the combustion of liquid petroleum fuel oil.

 Do you mean sir, that fuel oil contains enough energy to run this huge generator?

 Yes, that is correct young man.

 Excuse me sir, but where does the fuel oil get the energy?

**Another Good Question**

 Young man, you have asked another good question. According to current theories, fossil fuels get their energy from the decay of organic matter.

 Wow, organic matter. What's that?

 Trees, plants, and even animals that have died and become buried deep in the earth.

 I am sorry to ask so many questions sir, but where did the plants and animals get the energy from?

 What is your name young man?

 My name is Chaim.

 Chaim, all energy on the earth ultimately comes from the sun. The sunlight is captured by living things and stored as energy within them.

 Where does the sun get its energy from?

 Chaim, the sun generates energy with nuclear fusion. Atoms and molecules are changed at their simplest levels to generate huge amounts of energy.

 And where do the atoms get their energy, sir?

 Chaim, it's time to continue with the tour.

**One Unanswered Question**

 Well, Chaim, how was your tour of the power plant today?

 Great, Dad. We saw a huge generator, and I asked the Chief Engineer all kinds of questions. There was only one question that he didn't answer.

 What was that, Chaim?

 Where do atoms get their energy from?

 Chaim, we learn that from Parshas Bereshis, the very first portion in the Torah. G-d created the Torah before He created the world. The Torah is the blueprint for the world. G-d used the blueprint to create the world. Why did G-d create the world? For the Jewish people to study the Torah and keep its commandments. Besides, the Torah being the blueprint of the world, it provides the energy that keeps this world running.

**The Secret of the World’s Energy Source**

 Really Dad? How is that?

 Our Sages tell us that if for one moment all Torah learning would cease, the world would collapse. It would return to the nothingness that existed before creation. So you see, it is your Torah study that provides the energy that keeps the atoms, the sun, the earth, the electric power station, and all of the world running.

 Dad, I'd love to talk longer, but I had better get back to my Torah studies.

 Chaim, you're the greatest.

Written by Simcha Groffman

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**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov’s**

**Blessing to His Caretaker**

 The shammes (caretaker) of the Baal Shem Tov's shul (synagogue) had completed most of his work there and as usual, went to sweep up the Rebbe's private room. When he entered he was surprised to see the Baal Shem Tov stretched out in his bed taking a nap. The shammes moved around the room soundlessly, tidying up, when he came upon the shoes of the Baal Shem Tov.

 He stopped for a moment, as if considering his next move, and then he said to himself, "Should I move his shoes, or should I just sweep around them?" After a brief moment of thought he decided to leave them alone and clean as best he could without touching them.

Shortly after the shammes finished his work the Baal Shem Tov asked him, "Did you move my shoes?"

 "No, Rabbi, I didn't," was his reply.

 The Baal Shem Tov nodded and a bright smile appeared on his face. "I promise you that you will have long and healthy years," he blessed the shammes.

 Many years passed and one day a chasid happened to visit the home of the shammes. In the main room there were two elderly men. He noticed that one man was warming himself by the stove while a younger man was busy cleaning up the house. Suddenly the younger of the two began to scream at the old man, "Why do lie there all day and do nothing! Get up and make yourself useful! Do you think I should do all the work around here?"

 The chasid was deeply shocked and offended to see a younger man abuse someone so much older than himself. He couldn't restrain his anger and he raised his voice saying: "How do you dare to insult the old man like that? Haven't you learned to respect your elders?"

 The man broke into a hearty laugh. "Elders? Do you think he is my elder? Why, he's my son! Many years ago when I was the shammes of the Baal Shem Tov he gave me a blessing that I would have a long, healthy life, and here I am as you see me today, as strong as a boy and younger-looking than my own son!"

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization of Brooklyn, NY.*

**How Nobody**

**Became Somebody**

**By Tzvi Freeman**

 In the beginning, G‑d created everything out of nothing. He could have decided to make everything out of something, but He knew that nothing is better material than something. Because something is already whatever something is, but nothing can become anything.

 That’s why, at least as far as this universe is concerned, the only way to become a real somebody is by being a nobody first.

**A Baal Shem Tov Story**

 While you’re trying to figure that one out, let me tell you a Baal Shem Tov story. It’s about two tailors—let’s call them Berel and Shmerel—who traveled from village to village somewhere in Eastern Europe, offering their services to the villagers, saving a few kopeks here and there until they would have enough savings to return home to their families.

 On their way home, Berel and Shmerel stayed at the inn of a Jew who managed the properties of a feudal landlord. The innkeeper seemed very distraught, and when the two tailors insisted he confide in them, he explained his predicament.

 “The landlord received some fine cloth as a gift from a prince. He got it in his head that this cloth must be made into the finest royal garb. But no tailor I bring him is good enough. And now he’s telling me that if I do not find a first-class Parisian-style tailor who can do the job to his *meshugeneh* standards, he’s throwing me and my family into the dungeon!”

**Eager to Help a Fellow Jew**

 Berel and Shmerel were eager to help a fellow Jew. “We are fine tailors. We can do the job!” they insisted. Reluctantly, the innkeeper agreed. “What do I have to lose?” he said.

 Miraculously, the landlord also agreed to hand over the precious material into their hands. Within two weeks, they stood before him, the finest robe imaginable in their hands. The landlord was happy. The innkeeper was happy. Berel and Shmerel were very happy—and made 30 rubles each, too.

 Now, the landlord’s wife was also standing there observing all this. She figured out what was going on—that these two tailors weren’t just happy about making 60 rubles between them. What they were *really* happy about was that they had saved their fellow Jew and his family from the dungeon. So she turned to her husband and said, “Tell them about the family in the dungeon. Maybe they will pay the ransom.”

**The Stiff Penalty for Not Paying Your Rent**

 That’s the way they did things in those days: if you couldn’t pay your rent, you sat in the dungeon until it was paid. Ingenious, right?

 So the landlord told them about this Jewish family sitting in the dungeon, waiting to be ransomed. “How much?” they asked.

 “Forty rubles.”

 “Sure,” said Berel. “We can put that together to save a family from the dungeon, can’t we, Shmerel?”

**One Partner Was Not So Sure**

 But Shmerel didn’t look so sure. His share of 40 rubles meant over half his savings. He had been traveling almost a year without seeing his family. Sure, this family was suffering, but why should *his* family suffer on their account?

 When Berel saw he was getting nowhere with Shmerel, he counted up his entire savings, asked Shmerel for just a few more rubles, and came up with exactly 40 rubles for the landlord. It all happened so fast, he didn’t have time to think what he was doing. Next thing he knew, the family was released from their hell in the dungeon, pale and sickly, kissing and hugging his feet for saving their lives.

 Then Berel and Shmerel went home. Shmerel’s family was happy to see him. He used the money he earned to set up a tailor shop, with merchandise ready for sale, and became successful.

**Berel’s Family Sank Deeper into Poverty**

 Berel’s family was not so happy. He didn’t want to tell them how he had lost all his money. It was a mitzvah, after all, and you don’t brag about mitzvahs. And besides, they wouldn’t understand. So they thought what they thought, and the family sank deeper into poverty.

 Slowly, Berel became more and more depressed, until he could do nothing but stand on a corner, his open hand stretched out for alms. He stood there through the heat of summer, the autumn rain, and the freezing wind and snow of winter, a hollow and forlorn soul. Whoever dropped a coin in his hand received a blessing, but beyond that, he spoke not a word to anyone. He was nothing, he was nobody.

**The Merchant Makes a Discovery**

 Then, one day, a merchant walked briskly by Berel, late for an important deal. He dropped a coin in Berel’s hand as he marched by, barely hearing Berel’s blessing as he passed.

 “May G‑d bless you in all you do,” said Berel.

 And He did. The business worked out better than the merchant could have ever imagined. And maybe, he thought, it had something to do with this beggar’s blessing.

 So next time the merchant had a deal to make, he made sure to pass by Berel the beggar and hand him a coin. And this time he waited to hear the blessing and answer “amen.” And once again, the blessing had a miraculous effect.

**Becomes One of the Wealthiest Men in the District**

 As you can imagine, this became the merchant’s regular practice. Rapidly, he became one of the wealthiest merchants in the district. Everyone wanted to do business with him, knowing that whatever he touched made profit.

 The merchant bought a new mansion for his family, and held a grand party at which he got rather drunk. That’s when he spilled the beans.

 “You think I’m rich because I’m smart? Or because I’m shrewd? Or because of my good deeds? It’s none of those! It’s all due to the blessings of a ragged beggar who stands almost motionless at the corner on the way to the market!” he announced.

 The next morning, there was already a lineup of customers waiting for Berel. People gave, Berel blessed, miracles happened. Berel was oblivious to it all, so lost was he in his depression. Yet his fame spread quickly. Soon barren women were blessed with children, the sick were healed, and the biggest *shlemazel* in town actually got a job—all in consequence of Berel’s blessings.

**The Baal Shem Tov Intervenes**

 That’s when the Baal Shem Tov came into the story. He also heard about this beggar-*tzaddik* whose blessings were as guaranteed to be effective as the spring rains bring seed to sprout. He traveled himself to see firsthand. And he took Berel aside and said, “Now tell me your story.”

 The Baal Shem Tov was that way. He could talk to anybody, and that person would open up to him as though he was his closest friend. Berel told him the story of his life. But the story of the 40 rubles came hard. “You must tell,” said the Baal Shem Tov. “You must remember and tell.”

 And when he did, the Baal Shem Tov hugged and kissed him. He took him back to his town of Medzhibuzh, to his study hall, and made him one of his closest students. Berel studied Talmud and Kabbalah, and became a master of the secret lore. He became a *tzaddik*. He became a real somebody.

 Many of us today are nobodies. That’s okay. The moon must disappear before it becomes full again. The seed must rot away before it becomes a great oak.

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