**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Bereishis 5776**

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**Story #932**

**Full Cycles**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

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The two neighbors, both of whom were wealthy landowners, had managed to live in peace and harmony until one day one of them decided to do some improvements on his land.

When the second man heard about the work his curiosity was aroused. He saddled one of his fine horses and went out to the outer boundary of his land to see what his neighbor was up to -- and what he saw made his blood boil. His neighbor's workers were busily digging up a tract of land that was part of his property, and they were doing it openly and in complete disregard of the law!

The second man, whose name was David, spotted his neighbor standing to one side as he oversaw the work. David gave an angry crack of the whip, which sent his horse into a gallop, and within seconds he was at his neighbor's side.

The neighbor was startled by the sight of the galloping horse that seemed to be charging right at him. As he quickly jumped out of the horse's path, he started to yell at the reckless horseman. But he was even more startled when he realized who the rider was.

"David," the neighbor said. "Why did you charge at me like that?"

"What got into me?" David angrily replied. "What got into you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the neighbor.

"Oh, really," David snarled. "I suppose these are not your workers."

"They are my workers," replied the neighbor, still perplexed.

"How could you give them permission to dig up my land?" demanded David.

"You are mistaken, my friend," said the neighbor, "this land is mine." "You are the one who is mistaken," said David. "It's mine."

The two men continued to argue along this line for quite some time, and the longer they argued the more heated the argument became. When the first neighbor's overseer saw that things were getting out of hand and the landowners were about to come to blows, he stepped forward.

"Gentlemen, arguing will not resolve the issue," said the overseer. "This is a legal dispute. Only a rabbi can decide who the land belongs to."

The two landowners recognized the wisdom of the overseer's words, and they both made an effort to calm down. However, when they tried to decide which rabbi to turn to, they once again began to get into a fight. Each man wanted to go to his own rabbi and refused to agree to present the case before the rabbi of the other.

"Gentlemen," volunteered the overseer a second time, "why not go to **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin**. Surely neither one of you doubts his honesty and fairness."

Since Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin was, without question, one of the leading rabbis of the generation, the two landowners readily agreed to the overseer's suggestion. And as they were both anxious to settle the matter, they set out for Volozhin at once. When they stood before Rabbi Chaim they each presented their claims to ownership of the property in dispute. Rabbi Chaim listened to the words of each man intently, and then he sat in silent thought for several minutes.

"There is something about this case that still confuses me," Rabbi Chaim said softly. "Perhaps if I see the land in question, I will better understand your claims."

The two landowners were more than happy to escort Rabbi Chaim to the field. Now that the land lay before them, Rabbi Chaim asked each man to once again present his case. After both men had finished speaking, Rabbi Chaim suddenly bent down and put his ear to the ground.

The two men didn't know what to make of this strange behavior, and so they glanced uneasily at each other. Because neither one of the men wanted to show disrespect to the distinguished rabbi, each one was hoping that the other would have the courage to ask Rabbi Chaim what he was doing. Finally, David could contain his curiosity no longer and so he spoke up.

"Rabbi Chaim," he called out, "what are you listening to down there?"

"I have given the two of you the opportunity to state your claims to this piece of land," Rabbi Chaim replied, still keeping his ear to the ground. "Now I would like to hear what the ground has to say for itself."

`The two men looked at each other and started to laugh. "Rabbi, does the ground really talk?" asked David.

"Not only does this ground talk," replied Rabbi Chaim, "but it also laughs. Do you know why it is laughing?" The two landowners shook their heads.

"The ground finds it amusing that the two of you are having such a heated argument over whom it belongs to," said Rabbi Chaim.

"It is telling me, 'This one says I belong to him, and that one says I belong to him.

But the truth is that eventually -- when they reach the age of 120 -- they will both belong to me.'

"Rabbi Chaim stood up and turned to the men, who had by now stopped laughing and were regarding the land with a sober eye.

"My friends, life is too short and too precious to be spent in arguing and harboring ill feelings toward one other," Rabbi Chaim said quietly. "Perhaps we can find some way to resolve this dispute through peaceful compromise."

Rabbi Chaim's words hit their mark and the two landowners wholeheartedly agreed to make peace and abide by whatever decision the rabbi reached.
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*Source*: Lightly edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition on //lchaimweekly.org (#1038), with permission.

*Biographical note*:  **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin** [8 Sivan 5509 - 14 Sivan 5581 (June 1749 - June 1821 c.e.)] was the main disciple of the Gaon of Vilna, who selected him to establish a yeshiva in 1802. The Volozhin Yeshiva became the most important and most influential in Lithuania. His major work is the Nefesh Ha-Chaim (perhaps inspired, some say, by the popularity of Tanya), dealing with complex spiritual issues.

*Connection*: Weekly reading - "You will return to the ground, for from it you were taken." (Gen. 3:19)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalahOnline.com, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**The Importance of Bentching Birchas HaMazon from a Written Text**

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit”a, cites the Sefer Yesod V'Shoresh Ha'Avodah (Shaar HaGadol, 5) which mentions a Tzaddik by the name of Rav Moshe Eiveyer, who would perform specific customs in honor of Hashem. He proceeds to describe the areas in which this righteous man distinguished himself.

Rav Zilberstein writes that for some time he had searched for information concerning Rav Moshe Eiveyer’s life, and he finally found a story in the Sefer Bais Avraham from Rav Avraham of Slonim, which records the following episode.

Prior to his passing away, Rav Moshe Eiveyer assembled members of his community in his home and attempted to inspire them concerning the significance of Birchas HaMazon, Bentching after meals. He said, “I assure you that whoever recites Birchas HaMazon from a written text, from a Bentcher or a Siddur, his house will not sustain the damages of fire!”

This was stated during a time in history when every blaze carried the potential for destroying an entire community. Everyone in the community listened to Rav Moshe Eiveyer’s advice, except for one individual who simply refused to read Bentching, and insisted on saying it by heart. He reasoned that it just was not convenient for him to use a Bentcher.

One night, the wife of this man woke up to the strong smell of smoke. There was a fire! She quickly looked out the window and saw the home of a non-Jew down the block was ablaze. She immediately woke her husband and they both stared in shock and disbelief, as their home was in the line of the fire. What were they going to do? They could lose everything they had!

Suddenly, the wife looked at her husband and said, “Quickly, I want you to run to the cemetery and daven at the grave of Rav Moshe Eiveyer. Ask for his forgiveness for your disregard of his warning, and ask him to intercede on our behalf!”

The man agreed. He ran straight to the cemetery and threw himself in front of the Tzaddik’s grave, begging forgiveness for ignoring his teachings. He promised that he would never again separate himself from the community and would always recite Bentching from a written text.

It did not take long for the miracle to occur. The man returned home to notice that all of the homes belonging to goyim had burned to the ground, while his home was standing, untouched, because the fire had just been put out— at his door step. The Jewish community was spared from the fire as a result of their adherence to Bentching from a Bentcher!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ha’azinu email from Torah U’Tefillah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**9 Great Quotes about**

**Jews by Non-Jews**

**1.** “The preservation of the Jews is really one of the most single and illustrious acts of divine Providence… and what but a supernatural power could have preserved them in such a manner as none other nation upon earth hath been preserved.  Nor is the providence of G-d less remarkable in the destruction of their enemies, than in their preservation… We see that the great empires, which in their turn subdued and oppressed the people of G-d, are all come to ruin… And if such hath been the fatal end of the enemies and oppressors of the Jews, let it serve as a warning to all those, who at any time or upon any occasion are for raising a clamor and persecution against them.”

Thomas Newton, Bishop of Bristol (1704-1782)

**2.** “What is the Jew?...What kind of unique creature is this whom all the rulers of all the nations of the world have disgraced and crushed and expelled and destroyed; persecuted, burned and drowned, and who, despite their anger and their fury, continues to live and to flourish. What is this Jew whom they have never succeeded in enticing with all the enticements in the world, whose oppressors and persecutors only suggested that he deny (and disown) his religion and cast aside the faithfulness of his ancestors?!

“The Jew – is the symbol of eternity. ... He is the one who for so long had guarded the prophetic message and transmitted it to all mankind. A people such as this can never disappear.

“The Jew is eternal. He is the embodiment of eternity.”

Leo Tolstoy, *What is the Jew?*printed in Jewish World periodical, 1908

**3.** “I will insist the Hebrews have [contributed] more to civilize men than any other nation. If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations ... They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their empire were but a bubble in comparison to the Jews. They have given religion to three-quarters of the globe and have influenced the affairs of mankind more and more happily than any other nation, ancient or modern.”

John Adams, Second President of the United States (From a letter to F. A. Van der Kemp [Feb. 16, 1808] Pennsylvania Historical Society)

**4.** “None of the resplendent names in history – Egypt, Athens, Rome – can compare in eternal grandeur with Jerusalem. For Israel has given to mankind the category of holiness. Israel alone has known the thirst for social justice, and that inner saintliness which is the source of justice.”

French pastor, Charles Wagner, 1918, as quoted in *A Book of Jewish Thoughts*, ed. J. H. Hertz (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), 134.

**5.** “The Jews started it all – and by ‘it’ I mean so many of the things we care about, the underlying values that make all of us, Jew and Gentile, believer and atheist, tick. Without the Jews, we would see the world through different eyes, hear with different ears, even feel with different feelings ... We would think with a different mind, interpret all our experiences differently, draw different conclusions from the things that befall us. And we would set a different course for our lives.”

Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*, New York: Nan A. Talese/Anchor Books, p 3.

**6.** ”...If statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky way. properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and had done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it.

“The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed; and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

Mark Twain, *Concerning The Jews*, Harper’s Magazine, 1899

**7.** “Mankind, East and West, Christian and Muslim, accepted the Jewish conviction that there is only one G-d.  Today it is polytheism that is so difficult to understand, that is so unthinkable.”

T.R. Grover, *The Ancient World,* p. 186

**8.** “Some people like the Jews, and some do not.  But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are, beyond any question, the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has appeared in the world.”

Winston Churchill – Prime Minister of Great Britain

**9.** “Certainly, the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place. Humanity might have eventually stumbled upon all the Jewish insights. But we cannot be sure. All the great conceptual discoveries of the human intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they had been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of human person; of the individual conscience and so a personal redemption; of collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without Jews it might have been a much emptier place.”

Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, Epilogue

*Reprinted from the current website of Aish.com*

**A Baal Shem Tov Story Regarding the Pope**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

"Rabbi Yaakov you have a visitor" announced Rab Yaakov's servant. The Rabbi looked up from his desk and saw entering the room a Russian nobleman dressed in his most formal and elegant uniform like a king.

Rabbi Yaakov, the head of the Jewish community in Bohemia, a Chassid (follower) of the Baal Shem Tov and also a very successful businessman, was well acquainted with the gentile nobility.

"Welcome" he said cordially as he stood and extended his hand to his visitor, "With whom do I have the honor of speaking".

"I cannot tell you my name" said the stranger, shaking Rab Yaakov's hand, "but I come on a very important and desperate mission; I must borrow from you five hundred Gulden (about $100,000)."

"Excuse me, but how do you expect me to….” Rab Yaakov stood back a half-step and looked the visitor in the eyes to see if he was normal, "…to loan you such a sum without knowing you? Have you any backers, any letters of reference, any credentials, any collateral, anything at all?"

"I have nothing and I can say nothing. You only have my word and my oath to G-d that I will pay.

Rab Yaakov couldn't believe his ears. He wanted to just tell the man to leave but something told him not to.

He sat for a minute deep in thought as the visitor just stood looking straight ahead and he finally answered. "I cannot give you an answer now. I won't say no or yes, I must travel to my rabbi, the Holy Baal Shem Tov, and ask him. Please return tomorrow night." The nobleman agreed and early the next morning the Rabbi set off to the Besh’t (acronym for Baal Shem Tov)

But Rab Yaakov was in for a surprise. The Baal Shem he enthusiastically encouraged him to make the loan but only on condition that he get some sort of written receipt.

Rab Yaakov returned home, that evening the nobleman reappeared, took the money, wrote an IOU that contained only the words "I owe Rab Yaakov 500 gulden" with no name or address and walked out the door into the night.

In the course of the next few years, when he happened to see the strange IOU among his papers, Rab Yaakov remembered the loan for a few seconds and thanked G-d that his businesses and investments succeeded so he didn't really feel the loss. But still it puzzled him as to why the Besh't insisted on such a worthless IOU and in the course of time he totally forgot the entire incident.

Fifteen years later tragedy visited.

The local Bishop, a vile anti-Semite spread a blood libel against the Jews and succeeded in getting all the local clergy to sigh an edict evicting all of them from Bohemia. The decree was to become effective six months from its signing and spelled disaster for tens of thousands of families.

Rab Yaakov sped to the Baal Shem Tov for help and again his advice was surprising; the Besh’t said that the only man in the world that had the power to rescind the evil decree was…….the Pope

Someone had to travel to Rome and convince him.

The very idea sent shivers down Rab Yaakov's spine. According to Catholicism, the Jews were the murders of god, the enemies of mankind and were it not for the hope they could be 'converted' there was no reason not to simply exterminate them. Any Jew caught traveling in Italy especially in the 'holy' city of Rome, would almost certainly be killed.

The next day Rab Yaakov bade his wife and family farewell, perhaps for the last time, set off on a ship and after several weeks, arrived on the shores of Italy.

Disguised as a simple peasant, he rented a donkey and cart and began traveling according to a map he brought along.

He just kept praying that the holiness of his task, the Baal Shem's blessing and his excellent disguise would protect him. After all he did know a bit of Italian; certainly HaShem would make a miracle. How to get to the Pope would definitely be a problem but he would cross that bridge when he came to it.

On the third day of his journey as he was driving slowly through some town saying Psalms by heart suddenly he noticed his wagon was becoming surrounded by peasants.

He only understood a bit of what they were saying but he got the point quickly when someone jumped on the cart, grabbed his nose and yelled 'It's a Jew all right! Kill the Jew!!" and rocks started flying at him from all directions.

Rab Yaakov sensed that this was the end. Possibly this is why the Besh't sent him; sacrificing his life would save the Jews of Bohemia. He closed his eyes, said 'Shma Yiroel!' and prepared to meet his Maker when suddenly a voice rang out and everyone became quiet.

Yaakov opened his eyes and saw an imposing figure striding through the crowd waving a sword. He walked up to Rab Yaakov took a close look at his face, smiled wickedly, grabbed him by the neck and yelled out 'I'll take care of this Jew' myself. Move aside!

He motioned to his victim to get off the wagon, to put his hands behind his back and to walk before him. They walked this way for about fifteen minutes until they reached a large mansion. He told Rab Yaakov to enter and as soon as they were inside he closed the door, told Rab Yaakov to turn and face him, dropped his sword to the ground and threw his arms around him hugging him for several minutes saying in Russian, "Ahh thank G-d!! It is you. It is you!! Thank G-d I came in time."

Rav Yaakov was sure it was some sort of miraculous mistake; he had never seen this man before in his life.

"Do you remember me?" the man said as he held Yaakov at arms length and gazed lovingly into his eyes "You saved my life!!"

Yes, it was he. It was the nobleman that borrowed the money fifteen years ago. They shook hands gratefully both exclaiming "It is a miracle!!! Thank G-d a miracle!!"

They sat and when Rab Yaakov explained the
reason for his trip the stranger seemed even happier. "My dear friend, I can help you, I am nothing less than a Duke and a very influential one at that. Do you know how much power a Duke has here in Italy? And to top it off I have very good connections in the Vatican. I can arrange you a meeting with the Pope.

It was like some sort of a dream. The next evening they were actually sitting before the Pope and Yaakov the Jew was explaining how it was the Pope's duty to dispel these anti-Semitic superstitions and teach forbearance and tolerance and true justice.

The next day the Pope called a meeting of the Cardinal Court and put forth the suggestion that they rescind the Bohemian expulsion. When they objected, as he knew they would, he clapped his hands and a huge book was brought forth, put on an ornate table before him and the Pope announced;

"This book contains all the Papal decisions in history from the foundation of the Church. It is, needless to say, full of cases against the Jews. I suggest we open the book and to whichever page it falls we will take it as a sign from heaven what to do in this case."

The Cardinals agreed, the book was opened to an arbitrary page and the scribe read:

"In the year 1456 a Jew called Yehuda was accused by Cardinal Thaddeus of poisoning the well of the Church grounds in Venice."

The Cardinals winked and smiled at one another in glee.

"But" the scribe continued reading, "the charges were discovered to be false and Cardinal Thaddeus was relieved of his position for two months because of the trouble he caused to the court."

The Cardinals had no choice but to agree with the 'sign from heaven'! A decree was signed nullifying the Bohemian expulsion and Rav Yaakov returned joyously and full of gratitude with the Duke to his palace.

When they arrived the Duke took Rav Yaakov into his study, closed the door, took out a stack of money out of one of his desk drawers and said.

"I'm returning the loan; exactly 500 Gulder. I would like to give you interest but I cannot, it is forbidden for me to do so. You see ……." he was unable to finish and tears were streaming from his eyes. Suddenly he burst out weeping and fell to his knees …

"I am a JEW!!!"

It took several minutes for him to calm down but finally he sat Yaakov down and began to tell the story.

"You see, I was born to a Jewish family in Russia, my name was Ariah Leib but poverty drove us from place to place until finally we ended up in Paris. It's not important how, but I got involved with the wrong crowd and before my parents knew what happened I left Judaism and began traveling the world.

"I lived a totally wanton life until fate brought me to Italy and I found favor in the eyes of a very powerful and rich Duke. He was an old man when I met him and my keen wit and business sense made him so fond of me that, because he had no children of his own, he adopted me as his son.

"I had everything one could ask for, power, youth, success, pleasure and when he died I inherited even more.

"But it also brought me enemies; people that were jealous of my power and riches. They were very clever, they plotted behind my back bribed witnesses, forged papers and before I knew it I was charged with treason and sentenced to death.

"My friends, who believed I was innocent, succeeded after several years of court battles in getting the court to agree that if I would pay an exorbitant fine to release me from prison and even return my title and the rights to my properties.

"My friends helped me with some of the money I took loans on my properties but after all I still lacked some five hundred gulden, a small fortune, and had exhausted all my sources in Italy.

"So I asked for permission to return to Paris to collect there and it was granted but it wasn't so easy. First of all people didn't remember me and I was simply ashamed to ask for loans but also something else was happening inside of me.

"I didn't understand what it was until one day as I was walking in the streets I happened to pass by a Synagogue and suddenly heard from inside the sound of a Shofar, the ram's horn the Jews sound on Rosh HaShanna. Suddenly I felt drawn into the building and once inside I began to feel a strange revulsion for everything I had done in my past and a great yearning for the G-d of my fathers, the G-d of Israel.

"I took a prayer shawl out of the box at the door, put it over my head entered and began weeping uncontrollably.

"Then after several minutes I was approached by one of the congregants who took me aside heard my story and told me that as soon as the holiday is over I should travel to the Baal Shem Tov in the city of Mezibuz in the Ukraine and ask his advice.

"Well I did so, it took me a while but when I saw the face of the Baal Shem Tov I decided then and there to forfeit all my money, title and past and never return to Italy again but become a totally new man….a Jew!

"But he didn't agree. He told me that the only way to completely cleanse my soul is to return to Italy, take back my title and lands and live secretly as a Jew but most important to develop connections with the Pope.

"He gave me your address, told me to dress up in my finest clothes go to your house and ask you for the money I needed but under no circumstances to divulge my identity. That is why I couldn't sign the IOU.

"When I asked him how will I know when and if I have been completely forgiven, he answered, 'When you save an entire Jewish community.' That means …….. now."

*Reprinted from this week’s email of* ***Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in******Kfar Chabad, Israel.***

**It Once Happened**

**The Ksav Sofer’s “Unique” Half Shekel Coin from the Times of the Holy Temple**

Rabbi Avraham Benyamin Sofer was the son and successor of the illustrious rabbi known as the Chasam Sofer . Rabbi Avraham Benyamin, who was called the Ksav Sofer, was appointed by the secular government to the head of Austro-Hungarian Jewry. To mark the Ksav Sofer's appointment, a gathering was made with all the heads of the Jewish communities throughout Austro-Hungaria.

At the gathering, the Ksav Sofer addressed the crowd: "In honor of my illustrious guests, I would like to make a surprise presentation." All eyes turned to the rav as he removed his wallet and withdrew from it a small silk pouch. He opened it and took out a silver coin. "This coin is a half-shekel, the same coin used in the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple for sacrifices, and other needs."

Everyone in the room craned their necks to get a better look at the coin. Each person wanted to see it and hold it in his own hands, to experience a personal brush with history. The Ksav Sofer continued, "I received this half-shekel from my father, who received it from his father and so on through all the generations of my family from the times of the Holy Temple. This coin is the only one left; it is unique in the entire world."

An excited murmur passed through the crowd as the coin was passed and lovingly examined. While this was occurring on one side of the room, the rabbis across the room sat discussing its weight and shape and exchanging their differing opinions. A short while passed when suddenly one voice rose above the others saying, "Where is the half-shekel now?"

Everyone started searching for it, but it was as if the coin had disappeared into thin air. The Ksav Sofer turned white. He turned to the assembled crowd and said, "I do not, G-d forbid, suspect anyone of taking the coin. It is forbidden to suspect another Jew. But, it is possible that while your thoughts were so absorbed with the coin, one of you might have accidentally laid it down amongst his other possessions. Therefore, I ask you to please look through your things, and perhaps you will find it."

Everyone did as the rabbi requested, but the coin was not found. Then, the Ksav Sofer had another idea. "Since the coin has not been found, please check your neighbor." Everyone agreed, but suddenly one elderly rabbi who was known as a great scholar, opposed this idea. "It would be good to wait for fifteen minutes. Perhaps the coin will be found."

The Ksav Sofer agreed, but after the fifteen-minute wait, the coin failed to turn up. The elderly rabbi requested another fifteen-minute waiting period, but again it wasn't found. When a third time the rabbi asked for another fifteen minute period, everyone was coming to the conclusion that the rabbi had quietly pocketed the coin and was stalling in the hopes of finding a graceful way to extricate himself from the situation. Even the Ksav Sofer said, "Despite the request of the honorable rabbi, I won't extend the time. In the next five minutes please check your neighbor."

The rabbi again rose and with tears in his eyes, pleaded with the Ksav Sofer to wait yet another fifteen minutes. The Ksav Sofer stood in silence for the allotted time while the elderly rabbi stood in a corner and prayed. Many of the assembled notables were confident that the rabbi would soon admit that he had taken the coin, and waited expectantly.

Suddenly the shammes (orderly) rushed forward and exclaimed, "We found it! After the meal we removed the tablecloths and shook out the crumbs. I started thinking maybe we accidentally shook the coin into the garbage. I searched for it and just now I managed to find it in the garbage."

When everyone settled down, the rabbi asked permission to speak. "Gentlemen, I also have in my possession a gold half-shekel which has been passed down in my family as well. When I set out to attend this worthy gathering, it was my intention to share with you my prized possession, and so I brought it with me.

"But when our host surprised me by bringing his coin, and in addition saying that his was unique, I left it in my pocket. Imagine what would have happened if we had searched and the coin had been found in my possession! I would have been considered a thief. Each time I requested another fifteen minutes, I prayed that in the merit of the Chasam Sofer I would not be shamed. Thank G-d, my prayers were answered and the coin was found." The rabbi removed the coin from his pocket and solemnly looked at the half-shekel, which was identical to the other.

When the gathering drew to a close the Ksav Sofer again addressed the crowd. "Do you know why we gathered today? It was to explain the words of the Mishna which teach that we should judge every person in a meritorious fashion, rather than assume that he is guilty. At first glance, the Mishna appears clear and simple. But we can see for ourselves that if we had found the coin in the rabbi's pocket, would anyone have believed that he hadn't stolen it?

“Especially when I had stressed that it was the only one like it, would anyone have believed that there was another like it in this very room? So we are gathered here to understand that sometimes circumstances point to someone's guilt, but we should still see him as innocent. We see how deep is this Mishna and how far we must extend ourselves to really fulfill this commandment."

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