**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Pekudei 5771**

**Volume 2, Issue #26**

**It Once Happened**

**The Rich Man’s Demand**

**To See the Rebbe**

The anteroom adjoining the study of Rabbi Yitzchak Meir, founder of the Chasidic dynasty of Gur, was filled with people waiting to be received by the Rebbe and to be helped by his counsel and blessing.

Near the Rebbe's door stood his personal secretary, Reb Bunim, who presided over the waiting list; as soon as the door opened and a chasid would emerge from the Rebbe's room, all eyes would turn toward Reb Bunim, who would signal to the next in line to enter.

In the entranceway appeared a man, dressed in the manner of the wealthy Jewish merchants of the time: high boots of glossy leather, a heavy gold watch-chain draped across the vest, a fur-lined jacket enveloping a generous girth in defense against the Polish winter. But an anxious and care-worn face belied the luxurious attire; here was a man who had his troubles despite his wealth.

The man scanned the crowded room and a frown clouded his already despondent features. Impatiently, he made his way to the secretary. "I must see the Rebbe on an urgent matter," he whispered. "How much longer is the man inside going to be?"

"Have a seat," said Reb Bunim evenly, "and I'll put you on the list. What is your name, Reb Yid?"

"You don't understand," said the man, certain that the secretary indeed did not understand. "I must see the Rebbe now. I have an important meeting tomorrow in Warsaw, and I must be on my way shortly."

"But surely, Reb Yid, you don't expect me to let you in before all these people," said Reb Bunim. "Some of them have been waiting for hours..."

"That's exactly my point," said the visitor, who was beginning to lose his patience with the insolent secretary. "I cannot wait for an hour, or even half an hour. I wish to speak with the Rebbe immediately. You can save your lists for people with more time on their hands."

"I'm sorry," said Reb Bunim somewhat heatedly, rising to the challenge to his authority. "You must wait like everyone else..."

The crack of the merchant's palm against the face of the secretary resounded through the room, which fell into a shocked silence.

It took Reb Bunim several seconds to realize he had been slapped, and when he did, he just stood there, unable to utter a word. Nothing like this had ever happened in the Rebbe's waiting room, where no one dared even raise his voice at the Rebbe's secretary. In fact, the only one in the room not paralyzed by incredulity was the assailant himself, who, satisfied that he had at last made himself understood, proceeded toward the Rebbe's door.

At that very moment the door opened, and Rabbi Yitzchak Meir stood in the doorway. "How dare you raise a hand to a fellow Jew," he thundered. "I shall not receive you," he added, "until you have secured the forgiveness of the man you so unjustly attacked." With that, he closed the door behind him.

For a long second the merchant stood staring at the Rebbe's closed door. Abruptly, he turned on his heels and fled from the room.

Something in the man's face caught Reb Bunim's eye and caused him to hurry outside after his assailant. There he found him leaning against his coach, his large body racked with sobs.

"You?" said the man, when he saw who had followed him outside. "What do you want of me now? You have destroyed our last hope."

"Your last hope for what?" asked Reb Bunim quietly. "For fifteen years we've been childless, my wife and I," wept the man. "We've tried everything... We've been to all the doctors... I had hoped that the Rebbe would pray for us..."

"Come with me," said Reb Bunim, grabbing hold of the merchant's hand. Before the visitor knew what was happening, both were standing in the Rebbe's room.

"Rebbe!" said Reb Bunim, "I swear that I will never forgive this man, not in this world and not in the world to come, unless the Rebbe promises that he and his wife will be blessed with a child!"

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir looked from the anguished face of the merchant to the determined face of his secretary. Slowly, a smile broke out on his face. "May it so be the will of G-d," he finally said, "as Reb Bunim says..."

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**Chassidic Story #692**

**The Silver Cane**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

A middle-aged chasid of the Alter Rebbe used to go about with a wooden cane. However, whenever he had a private audience with the Rebbe he made sure to leave the cane outside of the room before entering, as he deemed it disrespectful to enter the Rebbe's room with a cane.

One time though, he forgot. The Rebbe eyed the cane for a few long moments, and then said to the discomfited chasid, “You know, a cane like that deserves a silver handle.”

As soon as the chasid left the Rebbe's study, excited by the Rebbe's personal recommendation, he rushed over to the silversmith and requested a silver overlay for the head of his cane. The next day, when he returned to the shop and saw the result, he was not satisfied. No, he said to the astonished craftsman; “This won't do. You made it like a normal silver handle. But this has to be special. The Rebbe himself told me to put it on.”

The silversmith added another coat or three, but when his customer returned he still was not satisfied. “Not enough,” he insisted. “Not enough. Not when it is the Rebbe himself who said to make it silver.”

This time the silversmith added really a lot of silver. He actually worried that he had made it so thick and so heavy that it would no longer be practical for use.

The chasid, however, was ecstatic. “I have fulfilled the Rebbe's directive to the maximum, and beyond!” he thought to himself. He set off for home. But he did not progress far along the road before he was set upon by three highwaymen, marauding murderers who were intent on taking all his valuables, including of course the cane with its massive amount of glittering silver, and then disposing of all the evidence, including the victim.

“You want my cane?” he screamed. “I'll give it to you!” with the sudden realization that the handsome silver top was also a powerful weapon. He quickly reversed it, grasped it with both hands at the bottom, and swung it mightily at the head of the nearest robber.

The top of the cane connected solidly with the back of his head, and down he slid to the ground, unconscious. The chasid quickly dispatched the second attacker as well. He then wheeled towards the last man, but he was already speeding down the road, looking back a few times in shocked fright.

The next time the chasid arrived in Liozna he was soon admitted to private audience. But before he could tell the story of what had happened, the Rebbe spoke first: “Now your cane no longer needs a silver head.”

Source: Heard at a farbrengen from Rabbi Eli Friedman, who also helped with this English text version.

Connection: Weekly reading that mentions lots of silver.

Biographic note: Rabbi Shnuer Zalman [18 Elul 1745 - 24 Tevet 1812], one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, is the founder of the Chabad-Chasidic movement. He is the author of Shulchan Aruch HaRav and Tanya as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

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[www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:ascent@ascentofsafed.com)

**The Wheel of Life**

**By Shoshannah Brombacher**

A haughty and wealthy young merchant once came to visit the great chassidic master, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

People seeking an audience with the Baal Shem Tov usually came asking for guidance in their service of the Creator, or for advice and blessing in their material affairs. But this visitor lost no time in explaining that he had no special needs or particular problems which required any intervention or blessing. In fact, a rather lucrative business deal had brought him to a nearby town, and since it was so close, and having heard so many fanciful stories about the chassidic master, his curiosity led him to see for himself what all the talk was about.

“Well,” said Baal Shem Tov, “if there’s nothing you feel that I can help you with, perhaps you’d like to stay for a while and listen to a story?” The man agreed and so the Baal Shem Tov began:

“Once upon a time there were two childhood friends who were inseparable as they grew up together. However, when they become adults, their ways parted. One became wealthy and the other was very poor. In order to save his family from hunger, the poor man sought out his childhood friend and asked the rich man for help. The wealthy man did not hesitate. ‘Didn’t we always promise each other that we’d remain friends forever and share in everything that we have?’ he reminded his friend, and offered him half of his fortune.

As often happens with the passing of time, the wheels of fortune reversed, and the one who had before been wealthy was now very poor, while the friend to whom he had earlier given half his fortune had become quite rich. Confident that he would now receive reciprocal help from his now wealthy friend, the poor man sought him out and explained his situation. But instead of helping him, the man with the newly acquired wealth refused to part with any of his fortune.

Time again witnessed a reversal of fortune, so that the poor man became rich and the rich man again became poor, as each returned to their original situations. Now it happened again that the one who had before refused to part with any part of his fortune began to feel the hopeless despair of impoverishment, and went to his friend begging for forgiveness. The man who was now wealthy readily forgave his former childhood friend, but this time he insisted that the friend give him a written agreement that if he were ever in need again, the friend would share his blessings with him.

Well, in the passing of time the two men again experienced reversals of fortune. But, true to form, the man who had signed the note refused to honor it, and his friend and his friend’s family found themselves homeless and penniless.

Years passed. The two men died. When they came before the heavenly court to account for their lives, the meanspiritedness of the selfish man’s life weighed heavily against him and he was condemned to punishment, while the forever kind and forgiving friend was sent to his eternal reward in paradise. However, the good friend could not accept the destiny of his fellow’s soul and petitioned the Heavenly court that, in spite of selfish and shameful manner in which his friend had repeatedly treated him, he nonetheless still loved him and did not wish to see him suffer on his account.

The heavenly tribunal was in an uproar,” the Baal Shem Tov continued his tale. “This was certainly a very unusual case! It was decided that the only way to solve this case was to return both men to earth, so that the sinful man would have one last opportunity to atone for his egotistical behavior. And so, the sinful man was returned as a prideful wealthy merchant while the other was returned as a common street beggar.

And so it came to pass that, one day, the righteous beggar knocked on the door of the rich man begging for food. He had not eaten for a long time and was literally on the verge of starvation. But he was rudely and callously turned away. And so, the beggar died . . .”

At this point in the story, the rich man, with tears streaming down his face and a lump in his throat, could barely speak. “Yes …yesterday …yesterday I turned a beggar away from my door. Later I heard that a beggar was found dead in the street. Was…was he the beggar in your story?”

No answer was necessary. By now the tears were flowing freely. The man was overcome with remorse and repentance. He was desperately anxious to know how or what he could do to make amends for his shame.

The Baal Shem Tov explained that his former friend, the beggar, had a widow and orphaned children, and that he was to go and give three-quarters of his fortune to that family in order to atone for his sin.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine*

**New Zealand Policeman Rescues Torahs from**

**Quake-Hit Synagogue**

**By Hillel Fendel**

A New Zealand policeman forbade a Chabad rabbi from rescuing an earthquake-destroyed synagogue’s Torah scrolls - and instead, did it himself. A few days after last week’s calamitous earthquake, Rabbi Shmuel Friedman of the local Beit Chabad (Chabad House) – which was nearly totally destroyed in the quake – attempted to enter the ruins, rogether with Israeli backpacker Noam Diamant, in order to extricate the two Torah scrolls.

However, police detective Chris Bell stopped them even before they could enter the stricken area and told them that the entire area was cordoned off. “I pleaded with him,” Rabbi Friedman later related to J-Wire, Jewish Online News from Australia and New Zealand. “I explained how the Torah was hand-written on special parchment and that it was the Jewish Bible and how much importance was attached to them.”

Bell heard them out, and took them in a police car to what was left of Chabad House. “It was a five-minute drive,” Rabbi Friedman said, “but it was a horrifying experience. The entire block which houses Chabad House is red-tagged and will be totally demolished. I didn’t recognize the street.” When theyreached the building, the detective again said that they could not enter, as it was too dangerous.

“I pleaded with him again,” the rabbi said, and in response, Detective Bell said nothing, but rather headed for his car, donned a safety helmet and work gloves, and headed into the remains of Chabad House.

A few minutes later he emerged carrying both large Torah scrolls – with red and white covers, respectively - under his arm. “He looked like a fireman rescuing a baby from a blazing home,” Rabbi Friedman said, adding that the two saved scrolls will “form an integral part of the rebuilding of Chabad House in Christchurch.”

Rabbi Friedman was in Chabad House with one Israeli backpacker last Tuesday when the earthquake hit – and the two managed to make it downstairs and out of the collapsing building without a scratch. “There are usually about 20 Israelis in Chabad House at any given time,” he said. “It was a miracle that there was only one with me at the time. I don’t know how 20 could have gotten out. The whole building started shaking and we could see the walls beginning to separate from the ceiling…” The disaster killed 160 people, including three Israelis.

Beit Chabad, only two years old, managed to survive a more powerful earthquake last September without any damage. No one was killed in that trembler, which occurred deeper down in the earth than last week’s quake.

*Reprinted from the March 3, 2011 email of Arutz Sheva (Israel National News.com)*

**Good Shabbos Everyone.**

**Yiddish Anyone?**

The Torah tells us this week how Moshe Rabeinu set up the Mishkan (the Holy Tabernacle).  At the conclusion of the account of setting up the Mishkan, the Torah tells us how the Shechina - Hashem's holy spirit filled the Mishkan.

The Torah tells us that the Shechina dwelt on the Mishkan (the Holy Tabernacle) of the Bnai Yisroel "throughout their journeys."  (Shemos 40:38)   Because we know that the lessons of the Torah are eternal, we can learn out an inspirational lesson from this verse.

Namely, that wherever the Bnai Yisroel will travel in exile, the Holy Shechina will escort them, as is hinted to in the verse "throughout their journeys."  The following amazing true story shows how the Shechina escorts even those Jews who are the farthest from Hashem.

Ohr Somayach, both in Monsey, New York and in Yerushalayim is one of the foremost Yeshivas for Ba'aley Teshuvah, those who are returning to their Jewish roots.  Every student at Ohr Somayach has his own special story of how Divine Providence led him back to his roots. The story of Jonathan Goldberg (not his real name) revolves around a T-shirt with some Yiddish letters on it.

It all goes back to a Jew in Massachusetts who watched with pain as refugees who had arrived in the U.S. after World War II daily threw away Yiddish newspapers and books as they stopped speaking and reading Yiddish in order to assimilate into the American culture. Appalled by this abandonment of Jewish culture he began collecting the material left on the curb by his neighbors, and eventually established the International Yiddish Book Library in Boston.

Jonathan Goldberg's parents had little knowledge of Orthodox Judaism but were curious to see what went on at the book fair hosted by this library. For their son they bought a souvenir T-shirt, with the library’s name and logo imprinted on it in Yiddish.

Years later, Jonathan begrudgingly attended a Sunday morning class in a Conservative Hebrew School in the southern community to which they had moved. The class was taught by the wife of the rabbi of the local Orthodox synagogue.   Jonathan wore the Yiddish T-shirt to the class.  The teacher was curious about the T-shirt and she began to speak the young man. The conversation about the T-shirt led to a relationship with the family, which eventually resulted in the entire family becoming observant and sending their son to Ohr Somayach. (From Rabbi Mendel Weinbach)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Good Shabbos Everyone.*

**The Golden Column**

**Rabbi Ssiyon Meir**

**Of Baghdad zs"l**

Rabbi Ssiyon Meir zs"l, father of the great ssadik Rabbi Salman Mussafi zs"l, was a member of the study hall of the Hid"a zs"l. He ensured to always recite Shaharit precisely at sunrise, in accordance with the practice of the "vatikin" (pious ones), about which Hazal say that those who are strict in this regard are not harmed the entire day.

In the year 5674, with the breakout of World War I, the authorities announced a general draft, and sent the recruits to the snowy Caucasus mountains to fight the Russians under the most horrid conditions, both physical and spiritual. Many Jews fled from their homes in fear of the conscription law and hid in the wastelands in the western parts of the country, in small crevices and caves in the mountains.

Rabbi Ssiyon was among those who fled. A Moslem guide led the group along their hidden journey through far-out paths in the midst of the night, and during the daytime hours they would hide from the soldiers scouting out the defectors.

One night the group was traveling in an open wasteland, and they saw the eastern sky beginning to brighten - morning was soon arriving.

Afraid of being seen, the people hurried to the nearby mountain chain in order to hide from the soldiers. Only Rabbi Ssiyon Meir remained along the shore, wrapped in tallit and tefillin and preparing for Shaharit, so as to ensure that he would reach Shemoneh Esreih with the sunrise, in accordance with the verse, "You shall be seen by Him with the sun."

By the time he completed his tefilah, the sun shone brightly, and he stood all alone in the middle of the desert. He looked to the mountains to try to locate his comrades, and suddenly he froze in his tracks: in the distance he could see the group surrounded by a unit of soldiers, who beat the fugitives cruelly, preparing them for a life of pain and danger.

He raised his eyes to the heavens and offered thanks and praise to Hashem for saving him. He said, "How great are the words of the hachamim, for indeed, one who recites Shaharit at dawn is not harmed the entire day!"

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