**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas meTZoRA 5771**

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**Chassidic Story #697**

**The Repulsive Beggar Test**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel**

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Eliezer Lippman and his wife, Mirush (a diminutive from Miriam” editor), were unusually hospitable people. Weary travelers, hungry beggars, and itinerant rabbis were never turned away from their home. They were known far and wide for their kindness toward the masses of poor people who sought them out. And, in those days especially, the number of poor people who needed to rely on the kindness of their brethren was seemingly limitless.

Reb Eliezer and Mirush's boundless hospitality did not go unnoticed in the Heavens. Certainly their lavish performance of the mitzva of hospitality deserved a great reward. A discussion ensued as to how best to reward the couple. But then the Adversary stepped up and commented:

**The Merit of Their Mitzvah is Debated in Heaven**

"What they are doing is not really so difficult. They do not go without in order to feed their guests. And what of their guests? So, some of them are poor and dressed in rags. A bit disheveled or even smelly. What of it? Would they treat a repulsive beggar with as much kindness and care as anyone else?" questioned the Adversary with a cynical smile.

It was decided that Eliezer and Mirush would be tested. If they passed this test, their reward would be even more sublime.

Days later, a leper knocked on the door of Eliezer and Mirush. Not registering even the slightest amount of shock, Mirush smiled at the leper and invited him in.

"But everyone else just gives me food or money at the door and waits for me to leave," the leper informed Mirush. "It is not necessary for me to come inside. I know what I look like." And the leper proceeded to point to his many open, oozing sores, his clothes hanging onto his scabs like a second skin, his matted hair and beard.

"I have not bathed for months. No one can stand to help me and I cannot do it alone," he said quietly, ashamed of the horrific odor he carried with him everywhere.

**Invites the Leper into the House**

"Please do come inside," Mirush offered as she opened the door wide for him. The leper warily entered. Mirush led him to the kitchen where she prepared warm, nourishing food. Then she informed the leper that she insisted he stay in their home until he was healed.

From then on, every morning and evening, Mirush applied special creams to the leper's sores. Days passed and the leper's open sores began to heal. As his skin improved, Mirush carefully and skillfully peeled off the ragged clothing which had been sticking to his body. As soon as possible, Mirush arranged for the leper to bathe and presented him with a new set of clothing.

**The Leper’s Health Continues to Improve**

Over the next few weeks, the leper continued to improve. When he was fully recovered, Mirush and Eliezer encouraged him to stay a little longer until he had totally regained his strength. When he was finally ready to leave they gave him some money, and Reb Eliezer accompanied him part of the way.

When they were about to part, the guest said to Reb Eliezer, "In the merit of the kindness and hospitality you show toward every person, including a leprous beggar like myself, you and your wife will raise children who will be righteous tzadikim." And with that, he walked away.

Until that time, Eliezer and Mirush's three sons were not known to be exceptional scholars. In fact, they had not even been able to keep up with the studies of their peers. But from that time forth, their children began to excel in Torah learning, performance of mitzvot and in the refinement of their personality.

**Among the Greatest Disciples**

**Of the Maggid of Mezritch**

Two of their sons, R. Zusya of Anapoli and R. Elimelech of Lyzhansk were amongst the greatest disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov, and subsequently became great Rebbes in their own right.

Source: Supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the renditionon of lchaimweekly.org (#819), with permission.

Biographical notes: Rabbi Zusya of Anapoli (?- 2 Shvat 1800), was a major disciple of the Magid of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov. The seemingly unsophisticated but clearly inspired Reb Zusha is one of the best known and most beloved Chassidic personalities. He and his famous brother, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk, spent many years wandering in exile, for esoteric reasons.

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhinsk (1717 - 21 Adar 1787), was a major disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov, and the leading Rebbe of the subsequent generation in Poland-Galitzia. Many if not most of the great Chassidic dynasties stem from his disciples. His book, Noam Elimelech, is one of the most popular of all Chassidic works.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed*

[www.ascentofsafed.com](http://www.ascentofsafed.com) [ascent@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000nHW0:001D%5eAP500002Tea&count=1301349486&randid=888593548&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=888593548##)

**It Once Happened**

**The Baal Shem Tov’s Shidduch For the Farmer’s Daughter**

Although the farmer, Yankel, was as wise as could be in the ways of farming, in the vast sea of Torah, he could not swim a stroke. For his sons, however, he wanted better. He sent them to a nearby town which had a good cheder and yeshiva and the two boys learned assiduously until they became known as the brightest students of the school.

One day they happened to hear the Baal Shem Tov speak and from that time they became great adherents of his and went to Mezibuzh whenever they could steal away. Their father couldn't understand what they found so interesting there. "We want to hear the words of the famous Baal Shem Tov," they would reply.

Once Yankel's curiosity was so great that he decided to visit Mezibuzh himself. When he arrived, he quizzed the Baal Shem Tov on his knowledge of farming, and when he seemed to know all the correct answers, the farmer was satisfied that the Baal Shem Tov was, indeed, a wise man. Over the course of time, Yankel also became a great admirer of the Baal Shem Tov and he traveled to Mezibuzh to seek advice.

When years had passed and the Yankel's daughter reached marriageable age, he decided to consult the Baal Shem Tov about finding an appropriate mate. "Send your sons to me and I will send them home with the proper husband for your daughter," the Baal Shem Tov advised the him.

The two sons arrived and traveled with the Baal Shem Tov to a distant town where the tzadik made inquiries about a certain young man named Shmerel. They remained in the town for several weeks, but the youth, Shmerel, was nowhere to be found.

On the eve of the new month, when the townspeople had gathered at a festive banquet in honor of their distinguished guest, a wild-looking young man entered the hall. His manners were most uncouth, and he ran in and out just as quickly.

This very youth was the one whom the Baal Shem Tov had been seeking, and although the two sons of the farmer Yankel couldn't understand what he could have possibly wanted with such a character, they duly informed him that they had found the boy.

The Baal Shem Tov was delighted and gave instruction that the boy be cleaned up and dressed properly and then brought before him. Shmerel was given the place of honor next to the Baal Shem Tov, and during the meal the Baal Shem Tov passed his handkerchief over the boy's face and commanded, "Give us a Torah discourse!" To the shock of all present, Shmerel began speaking and he expounded gems of Torah for the next few hours. The two brothers were very pleased with what they saw and heard and they set off for home with the yokel in tow.

The wedding was held immediately and throughout the entire week of celebration, the groom delivered marvelously impressive Torah discourses to the assembled guests. The brothers couldn't wait until the days of rejoicing were over and they could sit together with him and learn from his seemingly inexhaustible fountain of wisdom. However, they were to be profoundly disappointed.

The first week, when he failed to show up in the study hall, their sister replied only, "My husband is sleeping," or "My husband is very tired." The brothers then began to observe him closely and found that he didn't observe even the most basic Jewish laws and customs.

They left for Mezibuzh and told the Baal Shem Tov what had transpired that week. "Let me explain," he said. "You see, there are celestial matchmakers as well as their earthly counterparts. It was determined in Heaven that Shmerel was to be your sisters husband, but it was a difficult match to arrange. How would a girl from a wealthy family with such scholarly brothers agree to marry a man like Shmerel? “At first it was thought to make her deranged, but with her family fortune, she would still be able to make a good match in spite of the illness. Then it was suggested that the girl be deranged and her father die. It was then that I made my suggestion. I would take it upon myself to assure that the match be made. The only way to achieve my goal was to open the young man's mind to Torah wisdom, and in that way, endear him to you.

"If only Shmerel had been worthy of the knowledge, it would have remained with him forever, but alas, he was not. The Torah I put into him lasted only the seven days of blessing the marriage, then it was lost. But there is nothing to be done about it, for Shmerel is the mate who was destined for her from Above. Tell your sister to remain married to him and I will guarantee her fine children. As for you, continue to teach him and he will slowly improve and learn."

This story was often related by the Apta Rav, who would then add, that the descendants of this match are among his closest disciples.

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

**Yoav Fogel: A Once**

**In a Lifetime Boy**

**By Michal Peretz**



**Yoav Fogel (Israel News photo)**

(*Editor’s note: Last month, the Jewish nation was stunned by the barbaric attack on Shabbos night in the Israeli community of Itamar by Arab terrorists who brutally killed five member of the Fogel family. The article below is a tribute to one of three slain children – Yoav Fogel. May Hashem avenge the blood of the Fogel kadoshim*.)

I first met Yoav Fogel when he was just four months old on the day in which the truck began to unload all our furniture in our new home in Karmei Tzur.

Ruth, Yoav’s mother, and I embraced and were excited by the occasion. After all, it is not every day that friends from childhood and high school become next-door neighbors.

After unpacking some suitcases and after the new trailer began to take the shape of a house, I went next door to the Fogel family for some coffee and cake. In my arms I was holding my eldest son Avia, aged 3 months.

I placed him carefully on the carpet next to Yoav, who was mesmerized by a shiny toy. “As of today, you are friends,” I said. For a whole year the two babies happily grew together as they began to crawl and take their first steps. When Yoav’s parents, Udi and Ruth, decided at the end of that year to move to Netzarim in Gush Katif, the two children parted with great sorrow (and their mothers as well…) and each time our group of children (which expanded at every meeting) met, the excitement was great.

“Tamar and Yoav are coming to visit!” were the words I used to inform my family that the Fogel family is on their way.

**Addicted to Reading Books**

Each time they would visit our home, the moment came when Yoav would draw several thick books from the library in the living room and curl up on the couch, engrossed in a book. “What? He already knows how to read?” I asked. I will never forget the first time I saw five-year-old Yoav sitting next to Avia and reading to him a children’s story.

“Oh, it's been a long time already, what are you so excited about?” his mother said dismissively.

Over the years Yoav went through several apartments and finally settled with his family in Itamar in Samaria, where he met new friends and quickly integrated into the local school and branch of Bnei Akiva.

**Everyone was Shocked By that Terrible Attack**

Nothing prepared any of his classmates, his teacher, counselor, and all his acquaintances, [**for that terrible attack**](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/142840) on that Friday night in which Yoav Fogel, the beloved grandson, friend, student, and neighbor, was taken away.

“Tell me a little about Yoav,” I asked two of his best friends, Eitam Ronsky and Yagel Meidani, when I visited Itamar.

“Yoav would always ride his bike,” said Yagel. “We would take bicycle trips together around our community. He loved to take hikes.”

“He was an outstanding student in all subjects,” added Eitam. “He finished his English booklet before everyone else, and this booklet was also meant to be studied in seventh grade! He was also prominent in mathematics.”

“He participated in the school choir and had a really beautiful voice but he was always a bit shy so he sat in the back row,” recalled Yagel. “He also learned how to play the electronic organ.”

“Apart from singing, he was also a star soccer player,” said Yagel and Eitam enthusiastically. “Yoav almost participated in a soccer tournament of all the communities in Samaria and missed the game only because of a sprained leg.”

“He was an active member in the youth group,” smiles his counselor, Golan. “He never missed any get-together, and when his family once traveled outside the community, he made sure to stay with a friend so that he could participate.”

**The Class Genius**

“He was everybody's friend,” continued Eitam. "The class genius. He helped others in school but was really annoyed if we told him: ‘you are a genius!’ He had an excellent memory. Last year he won first place in a Purim contest and when the applause echoed throughout the hall, Yoav just blushed, smiled and looked down.”

“This year he urged me to apply to take part in the contest,” smiled Eitam sadly. “He told me that I must take first place.”

“One time I divided the boys into groups composed of boys who did not play much with one another,” recalled Golan. “It was important for me to formulate some team spirit. The other guys were angry but Yoav took it well without complaining.”

**A Once in a Lifetime Student**

“Yoav was a once in a lifetime student,” said Rabbi Avia Azoulay, who was Yoav’s teacher last year in fourth grade. “He excelled in all the subjects. He would advance on his own in Hebrew and Math and was always one level above the rest, but he did not keep his wisdom only to himself and always liked to help students who had difficulties.

“He would never tell them the answers, but rather with great patience and humility, he explained to them the process by which to get to the answer. Whenever we had a class get-together he made sure that someone gave a D’var Torah. At the end of the year, as a representative of the students, he made a speech and even bought me a gift on behalf of all the students.

**Gave Up His Recess to Help His Mother**

“When his mother replaced the secretary, as she herself was near the end of her pregnancy, Yoav was giving up his recess so that he could help his mother with her work as a secretary.”

“'Go play with your friends,'” I would call out to him and he just replied happily, ‘I want to help my mother!’

“He had an average of 100 in all the subjects and after winning first place twice in a row in the school contest he decided not to participate anymore, saying that other children should have the opportunity to participate and win.”

Rabbi Amos Cohen, Yoav’s teacher this year in the fifth grade, said: “Yoav loved to study Torah, prayed with devotion, avoided defamatory speech, and almost never had a quarrel with anyone in the class. He could absorb things rapidly and he only wanted to learn more and more. He loved to study Mishnah, Tanach, and especially Talmud . He had a thirst to know more and more and remembered in detail all the materials studied. On the other hand he was loyal to his great love, soccer.

“’Perhaps when we finish learning the tractate you’ll let us play soccer?’ he asked me not long ago and I told him, ‘Yoav, for you, anything.’ We celebrated finishing the tractate that day by scoring goals on the soccer field.

“It’s hard for all of us,” he sighed. “This loss is hard but we must continue forward and not break. The faith in G-d is what gives strength.”

**Accompanied His Grandmother**

**On Shabbat Afternoon Walks**

“Yoav would play basketball with his cousins whenever they visited us,” said his grandmother Tzilla of Neve Tzuf. “On Shabbat in the afternoon he would join me for a walk in the woods adjacent to our community.”

“His usual spot was at the library, usually with a thick book in his hand,” added his grandfather Chaim. “A sensitive child with big eyes, always curious and thirsty to know more.”

“He really took care to not speak libel. When he heard his friends gossiping he would quickly put two hands over his ears,” said Yoav’s aunt Neta.

“Yoav knew that I love receiving kisses from the grandchildren,” his grandmother Tali said, “And every time he would come to visit with his family he would run to me and give me a kiss. Whenever they visited us on Friday night, he and Roi would sit next to Grandpa Yehuda and request that he ask them questions, and he asked them questions that even the older cousins were in awe that Yoav could answer.

**A Very Sensitive Child**

“Once I saw him reading and when I asked him what he was reading, he replied: ‘Chronicles.’ He also read a book about Begin, Rabbi Lau’s book, and knew all the laws of the Chofetz Chaim regarding libel. He was a very sensitive child. One time he inadvertently hit one of his uncles and did not know what to do with himself.”

“Immediately after the terror attack, with Yoav’s request still echoing in my head, I applied to take part in the Purim quiz and just as he predicted, I won first place,” said Eitam. “I did it for him. The win was thanks to him.”

“He was a once in a lifetime student,” said Rabbi Avia, “and he will remain as such in all of our hearts.”

Reprinted from the April 5th email of Arutz Sheva. This article originally appeared in Hebrew in the magazine “Otiyot LiYeladim” (Children’s Letters), was reprinted on Arutz Sheva’s Hebrew website, and translated into English by Elad Benari.

**More on Korean Talmud Studies – Not Quite**

**As It Was Reported**

(Editor’s Note: Last week, Shabbos Stories for the Parsha published an item about how millions of South Koreans were because of their fascination with the success of Jews, avidly studying a Korean translation of the Jewish Babylonian Talmud.)

As a follow-up to [this post,](http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2011/03/koreans-love-studying-talmud.html) I just spent a bit of time puzzling out Korean auto-translations from Google, and I have discovered that in no way are Koreans "studying" the Talmud.

When they say they are studying it, they mean that they have taken a small number of proverbs and Rabbinic stories that have been translated and they are reading and discussing just those stories. .

The Korean Talmud webpages I have seen treat the Talmud the same way one treats Aesop's Fables, as a shorthand way to gain insights into morality and how to live as well as plain entertainment. The bulk of the Talmud - as a basis for an all-encompassing legal system - is not mentioned.

I cannot find any indication of any real Talmud study. I can't find any translations of Talmud into Korean, nor any indication of scholarly study of the Aramaic/Hebrew original by Korean students. And in no way are the Koreans taking advantage of the parts of the Talmud that **have** sharpened the minds of Jews for centuries - the intricate pilpul, the careful reading of texts for legal ramifications, the hours it takes to reconcile two seemingly opposing source-texts.  
 As far as I can tell, the Koreans think that the brief snippets of translation they have access to **is** the Talmud. They do not seem to understand what the Talmud really is, hence the confusion about so many Korean people think they own copies of the Talmud.

So while it is still a fascinating topic, YNet seems to have overblown it a bit.

*Reprinted from the Elder of Ziyon website as reported in this week’s email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Programs) Update.*

**Is It Immoral to**

**Be Overweight?**

**By Rabbi Aron Moss**

***Question:***

As a fitness trainer, I wonder: do health and fitness have a place in Judaism? It seems that the secular world encourages a healthy life far more than the Jewish world does. I hear rabbis talk about spiritual matters, but find it hard to listen to them if they themselves are overweight. Is physical wellbeing not important?

***Answer:***

In our modern world, we are seeing health as the new morality. Good and bad are now measured in calories. My cereal box invites me to “taste the goodness”—not a moral value, but rather a nutritional one. The scales of merit are not found in heaven anymore, but are right there on the bathroom floor, and the daily judgment is pronounced in kilos and pounds.

This all makes sense if you see the human being as just a body without a soul. If the flesh is all there is, health becomes the highest ideal. But from the Jewish perspective, the soul is our true self, and the body its vehicle. The body and its health are important only because through them we express our higher self. More so, while our body houses our soul, it is a gift from our Creator to use while we are in this world. As it is on loan to us and therefore does not truly belong to us, we must always treat it with respect.

**One of the Ways of Serving G-d**

The great Jewish thinker, Maimonides, wrote in the 12th century:

“Caring for the health and wellbeing of the body is one of the ways of serving G‑d.”

And he immediately explains why:

“One is unable to think clearly and comprehend truth if he is unwell.”

If your mind is cloudy, you may lack moral clarity to know what’s right. While battling with illness, we may not find the stamina to battle the ills of the world. That’s why we need to look after our bodies. A healthy body is not in itself our life’s purpose; it helps us fulfill our purpose. It is a vehicle that transports us towards goodness, but it is not the destination.

Jewish tradition provides no excuse for being unhealthy. On the contrary, it gives the best reason possible to live healthy: life has meaning and purpose, and each day is precious. Only if life has meaning is it worth taking care of. The risks of high cholesterol, heavy smoking and drug use are a concern only to one who values life. The threat of a shorter lifespan means nothing to someone who sees life as pointless.

We are the healthiest generation in recent history, and our life expectancy is reaching biblical proportions. This means we have more time and energy to fulfill our purpose—to elevate our corner of the world, and tip the scales towards true goodness.

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

**Why Rabbi Meir of Premishlan Didn’t Slip on the Ice**

During the winter of 5663 (1903), when I accompanied my father for the couple of months he spent consulting medical specialists in Vienna, he would sometimes go out in the evening to visit the *shtiblach* (small informal “houses” of study and prayer) of the local Polish Jews—to be among chassidim, to hear a story from their mouths, to listen to a chassidic saying, and to observe fine conduct and refined character.

One Wednesday night, on the eve of the Fifteenth of Shevat, my father visited one of these *shtiblach*, where several hoary chassidim were sitting around together and talking. As my father and I drew nearer, we heard that they were telling stories of the saintly Rabbi Meir of Premishlan.

Among other things, they related that the *mikveh* (ritual bath) in Rabbi Meir’s neighborhood stood at the foot of a steep mountain. When the slippery weather came, everyone had to walk all the way around for fear of slipping on the mountain path and breaking their bones—everyone, that is, apart from Rabbi Meir, who walked down that path whatever the weather, and never slipped.

One icy day, Rabbi Meir set out as usual to take the direct route to the *mikveh*. Two guests were staying in the area, sons of the rich who had come somewhat under the influence of the “Enlightenment” movement. These two young men did not believe in supernatural achievements, and when they saw Rabbi Meir striding downhill with sure steps as if he were on a solidly paved highway, they wanted to demonstrate that they too could negotiate the hazardous path. As soon as Rabbi Meir entered the *mikveh* building, therefore, they took to the road. After only a few steps they stumbled and slipped, and needed medical treatment for their injuries.

Now one of them was the son of one of Rabbi Meir’s close chassidim, and when he was fully healed he mustered the courage to approach the *tzaddik* with his question: why was it that no man could cope with that treacherous path, yet the Rebbe never stumbled?

Replied Rabbi Meir: “If a man is bound up on high, he doesn’t fall down below. Meir’l is bound up on high, and that is why he can go up and down, even on a slippery hill.”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine and based on the writings and talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch.*

**The Special Seder**

**In Braditchev**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Boloton**

It was well after midnight on the night of Passover and the great Tzaddik (Holy Man) Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Braditchev had just finished his Passover Seder according to all the mystical and esoteric principles found in the awesome mystical works of Judaism.

His pupils had never seen such a Seder. They felt transported into a different world, as though they had gone out of all their limitations and into a world of pure G-dliness.

Suddenly the room filled with the sound of a deep rumbling like massive thunder, and then from within the thunder an awesome voice announced, :"Levi Yitzchak's Seder was pleasing to G-d, but there is a Jew in Braditchev called Shmerl-the-tailor who's Seder was better!!!!"

**Only the Rebbe Had Heard**

**The Thunderous Announcement**

The Rebbe looked around him and his pupils did not seem in the least moved; it was obvious that only he had heard the thunderous announcement.

"Have any of you heard of a Jew called Shmerl the tailor?" He asked.

After several minutes of silence one of the elderly Chassidim piped up and said, "There's no tailor here by that name. I know all the tailors here. But, if I remember correctly there used to be a tailor by that name about thirty years ago, but he only lasted for a month or so. He was terrible! All his garments fell apart. I think he's still alive though. If I'm not mistaken he's the one they call Shmerl-the-Shikkur (drunkard) and he lives with his wife in a few old large shipping crates near the docks."

**One of the Hidden Tzadikim?**

But Rav Levi Yitchak was thinking to himself, 'Aha, this must be one of the hidden Tzadikim living here in my town and I knew nothing about it!'

In fifteen minutes, at two in the morning, The Rav was standing in front of Shmerl's door and when he heard what sounded like someone moving around inside, he knocked.

The door opened and an old Jewish lady poked her head out of the door. "Good Yom Tov!" said Rav Levi quietly," Please excuse me for the late hour but is your husband Shmerl awake?" "Good! You want Shmerl? Good!! Just wait one minute please, Rebbe, wait right here."

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Berditchever_tzion.JPG)

**Mausoleum of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak in**

**the old cemetery in Berdychiv, May 2003.**

**Awakened with a Bucket of Water**

She disappeared back into the house and the unmistakable sound of a bucket being filled with water was heard from inside followed by a minute or two of silence and suddenly… SPLASH! She threw the bucket of water on her sleeping husband!!

"Aaahh!!! Oyyy!!! Where am I?? OOIY VAI!!! The ship is sinking! We're all drowning!" He screamed, and then his wife chimed in shouting.

"Get up you drunk!!! The Rabbi has come to punish you!!! Wake up you good for nothing!!!!"

**Please Don’t Punish Me!**

Poor Shmerl staggered, sopping wet, to the door and when he saw that it really was the Rabbi he fell at his feet and began weeping, "Please Rabbi don't punish me I didn't know better Please have mercy!!!"

The Rav of Braditchev was completely astounded at this bizarre scene. Could it be that this man's Seder was better than his own?

The Rabbi bent down, lifted poor Shmerl to his feet and said, "Listen, Shmerl, I didn't come to punish you, in fact I don't even know what you are talking about. Please let me in, let's sit down and talk, I only want to ask you something. Go put on a dry shirt and we'll talk."

Minutes later they sat facing each other over Shmerl's small table. The Rav looked at him kindly and softly said: "Shmerl, listen, I want you to tell me what you did in your Seder last night. Don't worry, I promise that I'm not going to punish you, I promise"

"Oooy!" moaned Shmerl and began weeping again, "I didn't mean it, I don't know any better, oooy!" It was obvious that Shmerl was still pretty drunk.

**Brought Up without Parents**

Gradually he calmed down and began speaking. "Well, it's like this. You see Rabbi, my father was killed by gentiles before I was born and my mother died a short time later. So I never learned much of anything not even a trade. So I make a living by begging. Well, early this morning, that is…yesterday morning, I'm walking in the street and suddenly I notice that people are rushing, rushing around. This one has a broom this one is carrying a box, this one something else, everyone is rushing except me.

So I stopped someone I knew and asked, 'What is everyone rushing for? Where are they all going?'

**“You Forgot Tonight is Pesach!”**

So he answers me, 'Oy Shmerl, are you so drunk that you forgot that tonight is Pesach?! Tonight is Pesach! Do you remember what Pesach is??'

I tried thinking but my mind wouldn't work, 'Pesach, Pesach, I…I can't remember. It sounds very important though; I remember something about Egypt. 'Listen' I asked him, 'please, do me a favor and tell me what it is again.'

The man looked at me in a strange way, and answered 'Listen, Shmerl, tonight you have to make a Seder, you know, eat three matzos, four cups of wine. You'll enjoy the wine Shmerl' he said with a sad smile, 'but you can't drink your foul vodka for eight days.' 'Eight days!!!' I said, 'Why?? Why can't I drink for eight days?' I was trembling and beginning to remember a little.

**Vodka is Chumatz**

'Because that's the law!' he answered, 'Eight days you can't eat Chumatz and Vodka is Chumatz (leavened bread). If you can't take eight days, maybe go to Israel,' he laughed, 'there it's only forbidden seven days! Here,' he said reaching into his pocket, 'Take this, buy your wife a present and buy some matzot and wine. Chag Smeach! (Happy Holiday)'.

I was stunned. But I knew I had to act fast, so I collected some more, and people gave very nicely. So I bought the things he said and with the money left I bought a big bottle of Vodka, big enough to keep me drunk for eight days, and drank the entire thing and went home.

That was just a few hours ago. Anyway, I was sleeping soundly in my bed when suddenly my wife throws a bucket of water on me, you see how she does it, and starts screaming: 'Shmerl, you bum! You drunk! You good for nothing! All the Jewish men in the whole world are making a Passover 'Seder' and YOU are lying like a drunken ox. Wake up and make a Seder!!!!'.

So I staggered to my feet, put on some dry clothes and stumbled over to the table and sat down.

**Saw that Everything was Different**

But then I opened my eyes and saw that everything was different. The candles were shining up the room and sparkling from the plates and silverware. Everything was new, clean, I felt… well, almost holy. I looked at the wine and the Matzot, the Haggada (prayer book for Passover night) was open in front of me, and my wife was sitting in her place opposite me like a queen, she was even smiling. Everything was so quiet. She nodded to me and said encouragingly; 'nu Shmerl, say the Hagadda.'

Then you know what I did?

I looked up and I started talking to G-d. Just like I'm talking to you now. I started talking to G-d and I said, 'G-d… listen…I don't know You, but You know me. You know that, well, I'm not so smart and I never had parents and well I never had time to learn, right? So I don't know how to read this book, in fact I can't read anything! And I don't know what I'm supposed to do tonight either; in fact I never really know what to do.

**But One Thing I Do Know**

But one thing I do know…I know that a long time ago You sent Moshe who took us out of Egypt, and I'm sure that You will send Moshiach to take us out of all our troubles now!!'

Then I drank the four cups, ate some Matzas and went back to sleep. That is what I did, please don't be mad Rabbi."

Rav Levi Yitzchak closed his eyes and began rocking from side to side.

"Now I know why your Seder was better than mine. I also wanted the Moshiach to come, but I had other things on my mind as well, all the Kabalistic unifications etc. But you thought only of Moshiach, and you did it with all your heart."

*Reprinted from this week’s email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Eretz Yisroel.*