**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Emor 5773**

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**Dear Siddur, It’s Time**

**To Say Goodbye**

**By** [**Sam Stern**](http://www.aish.com/authors/203342891.html)

**Dear Siddur,**

After 17 years together, it pains me to write this letter.

You were with me during times of joy and pain. After 17 years, it’s time to say goodbye.

I remember the day we met. You came to me through the assistance of a Jewish outreach organization when I was in Israel at the age of 19 – my first [siddur](http://www.aish.com/sp/pr/).

At first, your words were foreign, but over the years they became familiar, almost second nature.

**You Were There for Me**

**For So Many Situations**

We’ve been through a lot together, you and I. You were there with me in those early years, when I was in yeshiva in Israel when everything was so new, when I was trying to figure Judaism out, trying to figure life out. You were there for me in college and then when I graduated. You were there with me when I was looking for my *bashert*, during a frustrating period of years that seemed like it would go on without end.

But you were also there with me when I found my *bashert*. Do you remember, siddur, the day of my [wedding](http://www.aish.com/sp/pr/90070712.html) when I held you, [praying](http://www.aish.com/sp/pr/48965861.html), overwhelmed as I thought about the life that lay ahead of me? The tear marks on your pages still commemorate that day.

You were there for me during those days of triumph, and you were there for me during days of struggle as well. You were there with me as I sat at the bedside for each of my grandparents before they departed to their Eternal Home. You were with me when I was fired from my job, and unemployed for almost a year. And for the years when my wife and I wanted so badly to have children but were not yet blessed, you were there, siddur.

I won’t lie – it wasn’t easy opening you up during those times. But in those days you taught me discipline. You reinforced the lesson that prayer is not a magic incantation. It is a process by which we strengthen our relationship with the Master of the Universe, because only during difficult times is growth really possible.

**There Are Tears on Your Pages**

And you were there for me, siddur, when my wife and I found out that we were going to be blessed with not one child but two – twins. There are tears on your pages which commemorate that as well. You were there when our beautiful children were born, you were there at the [bris](http://www.aish.com/jl/l/b/Bris_Milah_Beautiful_or_Barbaric.html) when family and friends joined us in this new chapter in our lives and as we formed another link in the eternal chain of the Jewish people.

You were there when I finally got the job that was meant for me and me for it.

With so many years together, you always seemed to know which page I wanted to turn to, almost instinctively. You even had all of the notes that I made in the margins during those first few years when I delved into the meaning behind your prayers.

**All that Wear and Tear**

**Has Taken its Toll on You**

But all of the wear and tear has taken its toll on you. I’ve tried to patch you up over the years, God knows, I’ve tried. Pages have fallen out, and I have taped them back in place over and over again, stubbornly fighting the inevitable.

I finally bought a new siddur. It doesn’t open to the right page or stay open obediently like you did. It doesn’t have the notes from my youth, or the tears. It feels so clean, so sharp, so foreign.

If you could talk, I have a feeling you’d say it’s time for me to move on. I hear that – another chapter in life. But it isn’t easy. So if it’s alright with you, I am not going to get rid of you entirely. I am going to tuck you away on a corner of the bookcase, and just open you up from time to time and visit you, my old friend.

Seventeen years. Thanks for the memories, siddur.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Aish.com*

**The Legacy of**

**Shimon Zeitlin**

**By Rabbi Reuven Semah**



“*When I observe the Shabbat Hashem watches over me.*” (*Zemirot* of Shabbat)

Our *perashah* discusses all of the holidays, but it starts first with Shabbat. Let’s hear a true story about a hero and about Shabbat, as told by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman.

Sam (Shimon) Zeitlin was born in Brooklyn in about 1945 into a non-religious home. His father passed away when he was five and his mother was often ill. Faced with these difficulties, young Sam always pushed himself to succeed.

In 1965 he joined the N.Y. State cycling team and became an instant sensation. Within a short period of time he won championships in the United States, Canada, Europe and Central America. As a cycling star, he became a target of anti-Semitism, some open and some hidden. Though Sam was not religious at the time, he was proud of his Jewishness and the hatred he was being subjected to was difficult to tolerate. It had been expected that he would join the U.S. cycling team in the forthcoming Olympic Games. However, Sam now decided that if he was going to participate in the Olympics he would do so as a member of the Jewish team.

Sam flew to Israel and joined the Israeli cycling team. He participated in the Maccabiah Games and it was predicted that he would win a gold medal at the Olympics.

One evening after a hard day of training, Sam decided to visit the *Kotel* for the first time in his life. At the *Kotel* he met some Rabbis who introduced him to Rabbi Noah Weinberg, who would later found *Yeshivah Aish Hatorah* in the Old City. Before long Sam was keeping all the *misvot* and experiencing a joy of life that he never felt before. He was still cycling and looked forward to participating in the Olympic Games that were fast approaching.

The Israeli Sports Federation announced that the cyclists’ Olympic trials would be held on Shabbat. Sam informed the committee that he would participate on any day but Shabbat. They were wholly unsympathetic, saying the date was fixed and would not be changed, knowing full well that he was the only Israeli cyclist who had a possibility of winning an Olympic medal.

Sam was devastated. He had spent hundreds of lonely hours training and now was being denied the opportunity to compete in the Olympics.

He did not have to think the matter over. He was grateful that Hashem had led him to people who made him realize that keeping Shabbat was far more important than his cycling career. He did not participate in the Olympic trials and as a result Israel did not send a cycling team to the Olympics.

The year was 1972. At the Olympic Games in Munich Germany, Arab terrorists abducted the Israeli Olympic team from their lodgings in the Olympic village and murdered all of them, *Hashem yikom damam*.

Sam would often say, “I gave up my Olympic dream for Shabbat and Shabbat saved my life.” As we sing every Friday night at our Shabbat table, “Ki Eshmerah Shabbat Kel Yishmereni - When I observe the Shabbat Hashem watches over me.”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin*

**Only Jewish MP in**

**The Muslim World**

**By Hezki Ezra and Gil Ronen**

Yehuda "Yavda" Abramov, who is accompanying Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Almar Mamadiarov on his visit to Israel, is apparently the only Jewish Member of Parliament in the entire Muslim world.

Abramov, who is also the chairman of the Israel-Azerbaijan Inter-Parliamentary Committee, told Arutz Sheva he does not see anything extraordinary about his status.

"I do not see anything special in the fact that a Jew serves as a member of parliament in a Muslim country," he explained. "In our country, there is a complete equality of rights between citizens, and anyone can be elected. I am a member of the ruling party, which is headed by the president, whose father was one of the founders of the state."

Abramov, 65, hails from what he says is the last Jewish village in the world outside Israel – Krasnya Sloboda, near the city of Kuba. He was a history teacher there, and was elected to the post of councilor before becoming an MP.

"I was not elected by Jewish citizens," he stressed. "I also do not feel like a representative of the state of Israel, but as a bridge between Azerbaijan and Israel. Azeri-Israeli relations are good, both diplomatically and politically. There is a very good friendship between the countries. I have no doubt that the currently visiting delegation will bring about a fundamental change in the relations between the countries."

Abramov said that he always excited to be in Israel. "My children live in Israel, and I try to come to the Land of Israel at every opportunity."

The delegation was also joined by the head of the Ashkenazi community in Azerbaijan, Kandi Zalmanovich, and the head of the World Federation of Caucasus Jews, Medvi Ylazarov, who told Arutz Sheva when he was still on the flight to Israel, "The dream of all the Azeri Jews in Israel is that an embassy will be opened in Israel. This matter will be on the agenda in the visit, and I expect it to happen soon."

*Reprinted from the April 22, 2013 email of Arutz Sheva*

**Hasidic Sect Hopes to Buy Huge Armory in Brooklyn**

**By Joseph Berger**

The late-19th-century National Guard armory in Williamsburg, a 165,000-square-foot brick fortress with crenelated towers at the corners, has been empty for two years, and is now used mostly for film shoots.

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**If the Satmar Hasidim can buy the vacant National Guard armory on Marcy Avenue in Williamsburg, they could relieve school crowding, accommodate social functions and perhaps bridge a schism in the ultra-Orthodox sect. Credit Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times**

But in a Brooklyn neighborhood where a real estate rush is fueled by both gentrification and a fast-growing Hasidic community, the Satmar sect is eyeing the building as a possible solution not only to the perennial space crunch in its schools and synagogues, but also to [a bitter schism](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/06/nyregion/satmar-rift-complicates-politics-of-brooklyn-hasidim.html) that has divided the community in two.



**First graders in a crowded classroom at Bais Rochel d'Satmar, a girls' yeshiva in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in the building that once was Eastern District High School. Credit Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times**

The Satmar Hasidim, the dominant sect in Williamsburg, consider the 3.2-acre, square-block site an ideal location for a large school, along with housing and a community hall. And the building is now for sale: The Empire State Development Corporation, a state authority, plans soon to put out a request for proposals for the site, which is known both as the 47th Regiment Armory and as the Marcy Avenue Armory.

While the state authority has said it hopes to spur a “a competitive process” and capture “the best value for New York State taxpayers,” it also plans to require in its request for proposals that the site be used to benefit “the needs and priorities of the local community,” potentially giving an edge to the Satmar Hasidim — an important voting bloc increasingly courted by politicians.

“We’re looking forward to getting the R.F.P. and trying to come up with the best price we can afford,” said Rabbi Chaim Mandel, the business administrator for United Talmudical Academy, a large, ultra-Orthodox day school whose operations now are spread across 15 buildings.

The Satmar community is so fast-growing that it is desperate for space — for classrooms, worship services, wedding halls and other social functions.

The armory closed in 2011, after the federal government called for a consolidation of military installations, and since then the Satmars have occasionally used the building for teeming celebrations on the anniversary of the day in 1944 that the founder of the sect in America, [Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/teitelbaum.html), escaped Nazi-occupied Hungary.

The two factions of the community, unable to work together because of rival dynastic claims, have alternated use of the building: In 2011, a group called the Zaloynim celebrated there, with 10,000 people filling the cavernous 60,000-square-foot drill hall, and last December it was the turn of the other group, called the Aroynem.

According to articles in news outlets for the ultra-Orthodox, Satmar leaders have been discussing their desire to buy the building with an Orthodox businessman, Abraham Eisner, who in the past has served as a campaign liaison to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo.

Some in the community hope that the availability of the armory, with its huge halls, at a price that is low given skyrocketing local real estate costs, will be an incentive for the Satmar sects to bridge their divisions, because the state is unlikely to side with one group over the other.

“There is a deliberate serious effort under way to bridge the historical divide between the largest Satmar factions,” said [Michael Tobman,](http://hudsontg.com/our-team/michael-tobman/) a consultant to the Aroynem.

An ultra-Orthodox Web site called Vos Iz Neias? (What Is New?) has suggested that Mr. Eisner is close “to sealing a deal that would result in a joint purchase of the armory by Satmar’s warring factions.” And the Hasidic blog Let’s Talk Dugri [has sketched the outlines of a possible deal](http://www.jacobkornbluh.com/2013/03/satmar-faction-inching-towards-historic.html), while pointing out that uniting the two Satmar factions would create a powerful political bloc of votes, since the community tends to vote according to the guidance of its leaders.

But Matthew Wing, a spokesman for Mr. Cuomo, said the governor would not play a role in brokering differences within a religious community.

“No one from the governor’s office is involved in any kind of ‘deal,’ and rumors to the contrary are just that: rumors,” Mr. Wing said in an e-mail.

All sides agree that the Satmars, who tend to have a high birthrate and large families, need more space. Rabbi Benzion Feuerwerger, the Hebrew principal of Bais Rochel d’Satmar, a girls’ yeshiva in Williamsburg, describes a dilemma as architectural and mathematical as it is Talmudic. In June, Bais Rochel will graduate eight classes of eighth graders, but in September it will enroll 16 classes of first graders. How will he accommodate the newcomers?

“We know one thing: We are out of space,” Rabbi Feuerwerger said. “We only have eight empty classrooms for 16 classes. We’re looking to rent.”

Rabbi Hertz Frankel, the longtime English studies administrator of Bais Rochel, estimated that together the two Satmar factions had 30,000 students crowded into more than 20 buildings in Williamsburg, Borough Park and upstate in Monsey and Kiryas Joel.

His girls school has 2,400 students in its century-old building, which was once the public Eastern District High School. Some classes are held in bathrooms and closets, and preschool classes are in trailers. As a result, the only outdoor space available for recess is a yard the size of a basketball court.

To emphasize how rapid the Satmar growth has been, Rabbi Frankel pointed out that when he started out as a principal in 1959, the entire Satmar school system had just 800 students. With 30,000 students now and 4,500 expected in another five years, the Satmar desperately need the armory, he said.

“Any space that would be provided would be important; otherwise we can’t survive here,” Rabbi Frankel said.

*Reprinted from the April 11, 2013 edition of The New York Times.*

**Story #804**

**The Six Stolen Tzefat**

**Torah Scrolls**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000sSk0:001HT_m600001H0G&count=1366723153&randid=285794026&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=285794026##)



***Rabbi Marzel and a Tzefat police officer***

Shortly before Lag baOmer, on early Shabbat morning, 13 Iyar 5772 (May 5, 2012), Rabbi Gavriel Marzel, director of the Tzemach Tzedek Synagogue in the Old City of **Tzefat**, was shocked to discover that all six of the synagogue’s Torah scrolls were missing.

When he arrived onto the scene, the doors were open, the window bars had been cut and the ark was empty. The 160 year old shul, founded by followers of the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Rebbe of Chabad, was in the process of restoration around the time the Torah scrolls disappeared.

The theft occurred on Shabbat, and services were held at another location; a Torah scroll was lent by another congregation.

The community urged additional psalms be read for the recovery of the scrolls, one of which was written in the memory of Chabad emissary to Tzefat since 1973 and founder of the present-day Chabad-Tzefat community, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Kaplan, of blessed memory, who passed away in 1998.

Another of the scrolls was commissioned by the Rapaport family in Canada, whose foundation paid for a renovation of the synagogue three years ago. A third was written in honor of the Jewish People and a fourth was written to honor the memory of Rabbi Marzel’s father-in-law. The other two were on loan to the shul.

The thieves also broke into the private lockers of the shul's congregants. They took out pairs of tefilin and put them into a pile, but then for some unknown reason decided to leave them inside the shul. Before they left, the thieves wrapped the Torahs in the shul’s Shabbos tablecloths.

Every Shabbos, more than 100 Chabad Chassidim and other local residents daven at the shul.

"When we saw that the Ark of Holiness had been broken into, we all burst into tears," said Rabbi Gavriel Marzel, the Shul's director since 1979. "We were so shocked that we couldn’t believe what had happened. Then we calmed down, especially after a police officer promised that they would do everything in their power to catch the thieves."

The police sent a non-Jewish officer to the shul immediately to write up the first report. Sunday, a team arrived to conduct a full investigation, and Tzefat detectives launched a nationwide investigation concerning the whereabouts of the scrolls.

"Temporarily, we have borrowed a Torah scroll from a nearby shul but of course we hope and pray that they will soon find ours," said Rabbi Marzel.

Prayers and efforts were answered one week later (Sunday, May 13) when three young religious Tzefat boys, who were playing close to a cave-like abandoned stone house spotted inside a pile covered with white linen tablecloths, and by peeking underneath one of the cloths realized they had found the missing six Torah scrolls.

A Tzefat detective said the scrolls had been placed there by the perpetrators in an attempt to evade arrest. He said he had spoken with one suspect by phone earlier in the day who told police to stop their pursuit and the scrolls would be returned, although he did not reveal where. He also said that investigators believe the Torahs were stolen by criminals of Jewish descent with access to markets where scrolls are sold.

"Three young boys ran into the shul and told us they found the scrolls," a member of the shul's kollel reported. "We followed them and right away identified one of the Torahs which was not fully covered."

The three pre-teen heroes belong to three families of American olim (immigrants to Israel), Ravitch, Kopp and Erdstein, who were living in Tzefat at the time.

Police were immediately called to begin an investigation and take fingerprints.

The Torahs were in decent condition and unharmed. A special ceremony took place the next day to celebrate the recovery and the joyous news that the scrolls would be back in place in time for Shavuot, the Jewish holiday commemorating the original giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. During it, Rabbi Marzel, the mayor of Tzefat and other religious and community leaders addressed a crowd of 800 who danced with the Torah scrolls and celebrated their safe return.



One yeshiva student Ari Lesser, who attends the Temimei Derech yeshiva on the first floor of the synagogue, said he believed the significance of the scrolls being stolen was so we could have this great celebration. Sarah Marzel, the rabbi’s wife, said, “We are humbled and we are blessed, and G-d should spread the blessings and kindness he gave us to the farthest reaches.”

Sources: Compiled by Yerachmiel Tilles from articles by Miriam Metzinger (Living Jewish weekly), and the staff of //collive.com; and from oral Tzefat sources including Rabbi Marzel.

Connection: The first anniversary of the theft, 13 Iyar, occurs this week, on Tuesday .

**Safed Police Open Synagogue**

**With Recovered Torah Scroll**

**By Yehuda Sugar\***

(originally for //Chabad.org - July 12, 2012)

The police who were involved in the hunt for the Torah scrolls and their rescue and restoration to the Tzemach Tzedek Synagogue were so inspired by the story that they decided to open a small shul in the police station! Two months later (July 12), they requested the privilege of using one of the formerly missing Tzemech Tzedek scrolls.

Rabbi Gavriel Marzel, director of the Chabad-Lubavitch institution, says he was happy to loan the Torah to the police on a trial basis for a few months, especially considering the time of year. The development comes during the three-week period preceding the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av and the anniversary of the destruction of both of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem.

“We know that from darkness comes the greatest light,”said Marzel, “and that the anniversary of the Temple’s destruction will one day become the most joyous day on the calendar. Similarly, our Torah scrolls theft and recovery brought about the birth of another synagogue.’

The Torahs had been discovered missing on May 5, sparking a nationwide recovery effort. They were found several days later in an abandoned house.

A ceremony celebrating the arrival of the police station’s Torah scroll took place on Monday. The dancing entourage included Safed Police Chief Ofer Kotrovich and about 20 other officers.

Another synagogue donated an ark and prayer books for the stationâ€™s use.

Marzel credited a young volunteer officer working with the force as part of his tour of duty in the Israeli National Service with the idea for the new synagogue.

*Both of the above articles on the Safad Torah Scrolls are reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline,org, a program of Ascent of Safad.*

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**Lag BaOmer**

**66 Years Later**

**By Rabbi Meir Kaplan**



**Rabbi Meir Kaplan**

A young woman walked into our community Purim party with her delightful children. As we chatted, I mentioned I’d be visiting Israel in a couple of months for my father’s *yahrtzeit*, and she asked a favor. “My great-aunt lives in Israel. Would you visit her on my behalf? She’d be thrilled to see you.”

I agreed, although upon closer consideration my agreement made little sense. Perhaps it was the result of the *l’chaim* I’d said; I had no doubt that on any other day I wouldn’t have agreed. Not because I didn’t want to visit this woman’s great-aunt, but because I was going to be in Israel for less than three days, and I wouldn’t even be visiting my own grandmother or my many aunts and uncles who live there, simply due to lack of time. So, how could I visit this woman I’d never met, who is the great-aunt of someone I had met only a handful of times?

But a commitment is a commitment, so before getting on the plane I took down the contact information for Mrs. Esther of Ramat Gan.

My second day in Israel was the eve of Lag BaOmer. My mother and I travelled to Meron, the resting place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, to celebrate the holiday with thousands of other Jews.

My return flight to Canada was to depart the following day at 1:10 PM. I left early in the morning, planning to stop and visit Esther to give her regards from her niece and other family members.

Unfortunately, as I neared the center of Israel, traffic became heavier and slower, and it quickly became clear that detouring to visit Esther would mean risking my flight. Traffic wasn’t moving, so I pulled out my cell phone and dialed Esther’s number.

“Hi, it’s Rabbi Meir Kaplan from Victoria, B.C. I have warm regards for you from your family in Canada who are doing well. I was on my way to visit you, but I’m so sorry—traffic is hardly moving, and I won’t be able to make it in time.”

“I’m expecting you, and looking forward to meeting you,” she responded, kindly but firmly. “Where are you now?” I realized I wasn’t really being given a choice . . .

“Okay, I’ll try my best,” I said. “I have your address, but I’m not quite sure how to get to you…”

“Don’t worry,” she instructed. “When you get to Ramat Gan, just park your car and take a taxi. I’ll pay for it when you get here.” I looked at my watch; it was 10:10 AM. Just three hours until my flight, and I was about to head in the opposite direction from the airport . . .

I knew how much this visit would mean to Esther, so I took the exit to Ramat Gan and began looking for an available taxi. “My friend,” I called through the window, “Can you show me the way to Tirtza Street? I’ll pay you when we get there.”

“Follow me,” the driver said, as he began weaving through the narrow city streets. In case I wasn’t already short on time, as we approached the next traffic light a driver making an illegal U-turn hit my car. After an initial bout of rage and yelling, the driver calmed down enough to take pictures and exchange information. Now I had an accident to deal with, but more importantly, I’d lost another 15 minutes of precious time!

Seven minutes later, I was knocking at Esther’s door. After a few minutes of silence, an elderly woman stepped out of the elevator looking concerned. “I’ve been waiting outside for you. What happened?”

“I’m so sorry,” I explained, “but I’m thrilled to be here now. I wish I could stay for longer, but I have only about “Do you know what today is?”10 minutes; my flight from Ben Gurion Airport leaves in just two hours . Esther led me to the kitchen and began talking. “I’m so excited. I don’t know where to begin,” she said. “Although I am not a religious woman today, this is not the real me. I suffered a lot, like many of the Jews of my generation, so I’ve walked away from my roots somewhat . . . But let me show you who I really am.”

She gestured to a pile of documents and photographs she had prepared for our meeting, pulling out an old newspaper. “Look, that’s me in the front row, soon after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen,” she said in a shaky voice. “I grew up in a chassidic family, and attended a Beit Yaakov school.”

I looked carefully at the picture—Esther was part of a parade with other young women, holding a sign which read, *Tziyon b’mishpat tipadeh v’shaveha bitzedakah*—“Zion will be redeemed with justice, and its captives with righteousness.” Then I read the Yiddish headline, “Big Lag BaOmer Celebration in Bergen-Belsen Camp.”

“Do you know what today is?” I asked Esther. “Today is Lag BaOmer! This picture was taken of you celebrating today’s holiday exactly 66 years ago!”

Esther’s face turned white, and tears streamed down her cheeks. She hadn’t realized the significance of the picture and our meeting on this day—Lag BaOmer. I, too, was overcome with emotion as I thought of the divine providence that led me to meet with Esther that morning, despite the many obstacles.

I spent most of my trip back to Canada lost in thought. The image of these young girls, who had lost their entire families and childhoods to the Nazis, marching with Jewish pride on Lag BaOmer on the blood-soaked soil of a death camp, stayed with me. Sixty-six years later, Esther is a true testament to the strength of our nation.

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

**G-d’sWaiting Room**

**By Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

*“When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as forbidden; for three years it will be forbidden to you” (19:23)*

With macabre humor, Miami Beach is called “G-d’s waiting room” because it abounds with retirement homes and hotels for the elderly.

Retirement is a western concept, and one that has come under criticism from doctors in recent years.

Studies have found that people who don’t retire but stay involved in their work (albeit at a level that befits their age) have longer life expectancies than those who retire and relax into their “golden years”.

My father, who passed away well into his ninety-third year, was a person who worked hard throughout his life and never retired. Every morning he would still go into the office and do his work. He went in later and came back earlier, but he still kept his life’s routine.

Our Sages teach that G-d conceals our time of death from us so that we should remain active to the last.

The Roman Emperor Hadrian was once passing through the city of Tiberias in Eretz Yisrael. He noticed an elderly man exerting himself, tilling the soil around his fig trees.

“Saba! (Grandfather) Saba!” called out Hadrian, “Why are you working so hard? When you were young you had to toil to make a living, but now it’s time to relax. Anyway, you will never live to enjoy the fruits of your labors.”

The old man replied, “My task is to try and accomplish whatever my age allows. The Almighty will do as He sees fit.”

“Tell me, please, Saba, how old are you?”

“I am a hundred years old.”

“A hundred years old! And you actually expect to reap what you sow?”

“If I merit to eat the fruit of my labors, well and good. If not, my efforts will benefit my children just as I have benefited from the toil of my forbears.”

Hadrian said,”Hear me, Saba! If you ever eat these figs that you are planting you must surely come and let me know.”

In due course, the figs ripened and abounded with fruits. The old man thought to himself, “I must go and tell the emperor.”

He filled a basket with figs and traveled to the palace.

“The Emperor wishes to see me,” he announced to the guards and they led him before the Hadrian’s throne.

“Who are you?” asked Hadrian.

“Does the emperor remember years ago in Tiberias passing by an old man tending his figs? G-d has granted me to eat of those figs that I planted. I have brought the emperor a basketful as a gift.”

Hadrian turned to his servants. “Take the figs from this elderly man and refill his basket with gold coins.”

His courtiers questioned the emperor’s generosity,

“Why such a lavish gift for an old Jew?” Hadrian replied to them, “His Creator honored him with longevity. Is it not proper that I too should accord him honor?”

The Creator does not want us to sit and read the newspapers in G-d’s waiting room.

*• Source: Vayikra Rabba 25:5*

*Reprinted from last week’s email of OHRNET, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine of the Internet.*

**A Plot of the Maskillim**

**In 19th Century Russia**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

While other countries of Europe Jewry enjoyed occasional periods of respite from anti-Semitism, in Russia it was never so.

The Russian Jews never knew a day that was free from some sort of oppression, evil government decree, expulsion or cruelty. Jews were forbidden to hold various jobs, live in certain areas, visit certain towns, make ‘too much’ money or even practice their own religion. And just as they began to adjust to one decree another would be added or a pogrom would 'spontaneously' break loose.

Near the turn of the 19th century a new enemy joined the ranks; the 'Maskilim' (enlightened). These assimilated, intellectualist Jews began by setting their sights on convincing Jewish youth to leave the ‘confines’ of Torah observance and become 'free' 'normal' people.

But eventually they declared outright war on G-d. And that is where our story begins.

It was in the beginning of the nineteen hundreds in Russia. A large group of several hundred leading 'maskilim' planned a scheme to convince the Czar's minister of education to close all Jewish schools and forbid the learning of Kabala in all synagogues.

These were clever, devoted people with many powerful friends and connections and it wasn't long before the Minster agreed to make a special hearing to consider their proposition.

Orthodox Judaism was caught off guard. They had virtually no lobbying power or political representatives. So the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Ber (nicknamed the ReShaB), took things into his own hands and sent his only son, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, to Petersburg, where all the high officials were, see what could be done.

But upon arriving there he realized that it was far worse than he could have imagined. After almost a week of trying he found himself up against a brick wall; he had accomplished nothing. Every one of the officials he managed to see and even their secretaries openly expressed their hatred for the religious Jews.

With no other choice he returned to Lubavitch to tell his father that he had failed. The only thing that could help now was prayer. They needed a miracle.

But when he entered his father’s room and gave him the bad news his father didn't reply. He was preparing for the Morning Prayer checking the strands (Tzitzis) on his Prayer Shawl (Talit) that hung folded over his shoulder and just looked up at his son without saying a word.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak related in great detail exactly where he went in Petersburg, what he did, with whom he had met, how they rejected him, how he continued trying and how he met with disappointment after disappointment until he had exhausted all his plans and had no choice but to return home.

When he finished speaking his father quietly told him a story.

"Once, the Alter Rebbe (first leader of Chabad; Rabbi Shneur Zalman some hundred years earlier) sent his son the Mittler Rebbe (lit. the middle Rebbe) to the government offices in Petersburg to change a certain evil decree. He traveled there and did his best but despite his great talents and determination he failed. And with no alternative he returned to his father.

"When he entered the house his father was standing in the middle of the room with his Tallit on his shoulder checking the Tzitzit before he began the Morning Prayer and he answered:

"'Do you see? This is a Tallit. A Tallit represents the Makif and the Makif blinds the eyes of the Chitzonim'.

[This is Kabalistic terminology; the commandment of the Tallit represents and connects to a high, 'surrounding', aspect of G-d (Makif) against which no evil (Chitzonim) can succeed].

"When The Mittler Rebbe heard this he took several of the strings of his father's Tallit and kissed them, then returned to Petersburg and succeeded."

Needless to say when Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak heard this story he 'got the hint'; He too grabbed a few strands of his father's Talit, kissed them and ran out the door to the train station.

A few hours later he was on the next train to Petersburg and the next day he was again roaming the streets of that city.

Suddenly he got a wild idea. The head of the Maskilim was a devilishly clever man by the name of Karps who had even succeeded in getting himself appointed as the 'Rabbi' in the assimilated city of Oddessa. He was the one that had written all the papers that would be used to convince the officials and ministers and he happened be staying in a hotel in Petersburg until the hearing.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak had no plan but he had a feeling…. the hearing would be in two days, G-d would help!

He went to Karp’s hotel room, straightened his suit, and knocked at his door. Karps opened up, immediately recognized him as the son of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and graciously invited him in….

They sat and chatted for a few minutes until the conversation got around to the plans of the 'Maskilim'.

Karp did not deny a thing. Exactly the opposite; he was so sure of himself and his cause that he began to brag and boast of how he and his friends had an air-tight case. They were about to wipe out Judaism with super logic. They would free all the Jews from superstition and eventually even the religious Jews, even the Rabbis, would thank him etc. He then produced a neatly bound portfolio of some thirty finely handwritten pages, all the paperwork he had prepared specially for the hearing, and declared:

"This is the beginning of the end of archaic religion!!"

Rabbi Yosef Yizchak asked if he could see it for a moment and Karps, declaring brazenly that he would certainly agree with all that was written there; the fate of Judaism was sealed, all the officials were on his side etc. etc. agreed readily!

The Rabbi took the papers walked to a corner of the room as though he wanted to examine them closely, and proceeded to quickly and efficiently rip the whole business into shreds!

Karps let out a scream, but by the time he realized what was happening and ran over to stop him, all that remained of his evil masterpiece were hundreds of small pieces strewn on the floor like confetti.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!!! YOU IDIOT!!! IT TOOK ME MONTHS TO PREPARE THAT!!! I'll KILL YOU!!!"

He slapped the Rabbi in the face and would have done worse but the Rabbi made for the door and ran out of the hotel.

The plans of the maskilim had been destroyed. It had taken months of political maneuvering and bribery to arrange the hearing and months more to prepare the accusations and there was no copy. Now there was no way they could present their case. In fact, the accusations were never made; just months later Karps came down with a strange throat disease and was called to the 'big hearing in the sky'.

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