**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Bamidbar 5774**

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**Asher Yatzar:**

**Take Just 20 Seconds to Say Thanks to Hashem**

**By Kenneth M. Prager, M.D.**

**Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, New York**



***Dr. Kenneth M. Prager***

When I was an elementary school student in yeshiva - a Jewish parochial school with both religious and secular studies - my classmates and I used to find amusing a sign that was posted just outside the bathroom. It was an ancient Jewish blessing, commonly referred to as the asher yatzar benediction, that was supposed to be recited after one relieved oneself.

**Nothing More Strange or Ridiculous**

For grade school children, there could be nothing more strange or ridiculous than to link to acts of micturition and defecation with holy words that mentioned G-d's name. Blessings were reserved for prayers, for holy days, or for thanking G-d for food or for some act of deliverance, but surely not for a bodily function that evoked smirks and giggles.

It took me several decades to realize the wisdom that lay behind this blessing that was composed by Abayei, a fourth-century Babylonian rabbi.

Abayei's blessing is contained in the Talmud, an encyclopedic work of Jewish law and lore that was written over the first five centuries of the common era. The Jewish religion is chock-full of these blessings, or brachot, as they are called in Hebrew. In fact, an entire tractate of Talmud, 128 pages in length, is devoted to brachot.

On page 120 (Brachot 60b) of the ancient text it is written: "Abayei said, when one comes out of a privy he should say: Blessed is He who has formed man in wisdom and created in him many orifices and many cavities. It is obvious and known before Your throne of glory that if one of them were to be ruptured or one of them blocked, it would be impossible for a man to survive and stand before You. Blessed are You that heals all flesh and does wonders."

**An obligation for Observant Jews**

An observant Jew is supposed to recite this blessing in Hebrew after each visit to the bathroom. We young yeshiva students were reminded of our obligation to recite this prayer by the signs that contained its text that were posted just outside the restroom doors.

It is one thing, however, to post these signs and it is quite another to realistically expect preadolescents to have the maturity to realize the wisdom of and need for reciting a 1600-year-old blessing related to bodily functions.

It was not until my second year of medical school that I first began to understand the appropriateness of this short prayer. Pathophysiology brought home to me the terrible consequences of even minor aberrations in the structure and function of the human body, At the very least, I began to no longer take for granted the normalcy of my trips to the bathroom. Instead, I started to realize how many things had to operate just right for these minor interruptions of my daily routine to run smoothly.

**Realizing Just How Wise**

**The Rabbi Had Been**

I thought of Abayei and his blessing. I recalled my days at yeshiva and remembered how silly that sign outside the bathroom had seemed. But after seeing patients whose lives revolved around their dialysis machines, and others with colostomies and urinary catheters, I realized how wise the rabbi had been.

And then it happened: I began to recite Abayei's bracha. At first I had to go back to my siddur, the Jewish prayer book, to get the text right. With repetition - and there were many opportunities for a novice to get to know this blessing well - I could recite it fluently and with sincerity and understanding.

Over the years, reciting the asher yatzar has become for me and opportunity to offer thanks not just for the proper functioning of my excretory organs, but for my overall good health. The text, after all, refers to catastrophic consequences of the rupture or obstruction of any bodily structure, not only those of the urinary or gastrointestinal tract. Could Abayei, for example, have foreseen that "blockage" of the "cavity," or lumen, of the coronary artery would lead to the commonest cause of death in industrialized countries some 16 centuries later?

I have often wondered if other people also yearn for some way to express gratitude for their good health. Physicians especially, who are exposed daily to the ravages that illness can wreak, must sometimes feel the need to express thanks for being well and thus well-being. Perhaps a generic, nondenominational asher yatzar could be composed for those who want to verbalize their gratitude for being blessed with good health.

**One Unforgettable Patient**

There was one unforgettable patient whose story reinforced the truth and beauty of the asher yatzar for me forever. Josh was a 20-year-old student who sustained an unstable fracture of his third and fourth cervical vertebrae in a motor vehicle crash. He nearly died from his injury and required emergency intubation and ventilatory support. He was initially totally quadriplegic but for weak flexion of his right biceps.

A long and difficult period of stabilization and rehabilitation followed. There were promising signs of neurological recovery over the first few months that came suddenly and unexpectedly: movement of a finger here, flexion of a toe there, return of sensation here, adduction of a muscle group there. With incredible courage, hard work, and an excellent physical therapist, Josh improved day by day. In time, and after what seemed like a miracle, he was able to walk slowly with a leg brace and a cane.

**The Urologists Were Very Pessimistic**

But Josh continued to require intermittent catheterization. I know only too well the problems and perils this young man would face for the rest of his life because of a neurogenic bladder. The urologists were very pessimistic about his chances for not requiring catheterization. They had not seen this occur after a spinal cord injury of this severity.

Then the impossible happened. I was there the day Josh no longer required a urinary catheter. I thought of Abayei's asher yatzar prayer. Pointing out that I could not imagine a more meaningful scenario for its recitation, I suggested to Josh, who was also a yeshiva graduate, that he say the prayer. He agreed. As he recited the ancient bracha, tears welled in my eyes.

Josh is my son.

*Reprinted from the website of asheryatzar.com*

**At Wrigley Field, Orthodox Vendors Going the Way of Cubs Wins**

**By** [**Uriel Heilman**](http://www.jta.org/author/uriel-heilman/)

[](http://www.jta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/wrigley-web.jpg)

A cotton candy vendor roaming the Wrigley Field stands in 1994. (Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images)

(JTA) — Longtime fans of the Chicago Cubs know there are a few mainstays they can expect when they visit Wrigley Field: ivy on the outfield walls, a strict no-wave policy rigorously enforced by fans and, most days, disappointing play by the hometown team.

But there’s one little-known quirk at Wrigley that appears to be fading away as the ballpark, which celebrated its 100th anniversary last week, enters its second century: the numerous Orthodox Jewish vendors who sell food and drinks in the stands.

A few subtle signs could give them away: a stray tzitzit strand flapping out of a jersey, a name tag reading Simcha, the mincha prayer minyan that used to take place in the outfield stands before or after games.

No one seems to know quite how it began, but for decades Wrigley Field vending was a redoubt of Orthodox Jews, most of them teenagers or early 20-somethings, and almost all of them men.

**A Rite of Passage for Guys**

“I went to high school at Ida Crown Jewish Academy, and it was just like a rite of passage there,” said Jon Blumberg, 41, an investment fund manager who vended for five or six summers beginning in 1989. “Once you were at the age where you no longer were going to camp or didn’t want to be a counselor, it was just what guys did.”

The tradition long predates Blumberg. The late Rabbi Moshe Kushner, the Chicago Rabbinical Council leader and Camp Moshava-Wisconsin director who died last October at age 68, vended in his youth.

Twenty years ago, it wasn’t unusual to have upward of 25 Orthodox Jewish vendors working the stands at Wrigley, selling everything from beer to peanuts.

It was seen as an ideal summer job for observant teenagers. The ballpark is a short ride from Chicago’s Orthodox neighborhoods, it wasn’t too onerous to join the union required to vend, you could make a decent amount of money in just four hours’ work, and vendors could choose when they wanted to work and when they didn’t — perfect both for Sabbath observers and teens uninterested in committing to a regular job.

Plus, there was the baseball.

**“This was a Dream Come True”**

“This was a dream come true,” said David Porush, 40, a lawyer who vended for a couple of years starting at age 16. “I’m a huge Cubs fan. I love baseball. I love Wrigley Field. If you were a very big fan like me, I’d make $30 or $40 and then sit down to watch the game. But if you were a very aggressive vendor, you could make a lot of money.”

Danny Altschul, now a partner at the accounting firm McGladrey, credits his five years of vending with helping pay for his wedding and the down payment on his house in the Chicago neighborhood of West Rogers Park.

“For those few hours you were out there it wasn’t the time to be lazy,” said Altschul, who could make up to $300 on a good day. “You work hard, try to work swiftly and take advantage of an opportunity when you’re in a commission-based business. It helped me pay for college.”

Like many of the vendors, Altschul also hawked wares at Chicago’s other sports arenas. He remembers fondly the day he managed to sell 31 loads of pop (Midwest parlance for soda) at a Cubs-Astros day game and then headed downtown to Comiskey Park to work a White Sox night game.

**The Vendors were Former**

**Students of His Father**

Porush says he wanted to vend ever since he was a little kid, when he’d watch Orthodox vendors at Wrigley slip free beer, ice cream and peanuts to his father, a teacher at the Hillel Torah North Suburban Day School. The vendors were former students.

David Landsman, an accountant who now lives in New Jersey, used to cut school to vend on Opening Day and used a similar tactic to avoid trouble when spotting a school official in the stands.

“In Chicago, everyone would play hooky on Opening Day,” Landsman recalled. “As long as I gave the assistant principal something from what I was selling, it was fine.”

In recent years, the stream of young Orthodox Jewish vendors has slowed to a trickle. Seniors at the two Orthodox high schools that served as the main feeders — Ida Crown and Skokie Yeshiva — told JTA through an administrator that students aren’t becoming vendors anymore. Vending isn’t as lucrative as it once was, the rising number of night games makes the job less suitable for teens and the setting isn’t that compelling to young people.

“My kids, they don’t get it,” Blumberg said. “They don’t understand why you’d ever go to a Cubs game because they’re so pathetic. The ones who want to go say they want to go to the Sox.”

**Last Won a World Series in 1908**

The Cubs last won a World Series title in 1908 and haven’t had a winning record since 2009.

The number of young Orthodox Jewish vendors at Wrigley has shrunk to just four or five, plus about an equal number of older full-timers, according to Joe Bulgatz, an Orthodox Jew in his 50s who has been vending at Wrigley and other sports venues in Chicago since 2004.

“Between the Cubs’ performance and the economy, a lot of people are just saying, ‘Hey, it’s not worth it,’ ” he said.

Bulgatz juggles his hours working in the credit department of a cable distributor so he can supplement his income by vending at Wrigley and venues such as U.S. Cellular Field, the United Center and Soldier Field. His modus operandi, he says, is to “provide the best quality service possible and make a connection with the fans, and make a kiddush Hashem at the same time.”

If he sees fellow Orthodox Jews, Bulgatz often drops a hint to let them know he’s a member of the tribe — informing them, for example, that the hot chocolate is kosher-certified.

**Cut Out of Almost a**

**Quarter of the Games**

Orthodox Jews have a few unique restrictions when it comes to vending. They can’t work on Shabbat or Jewish holy days, which cuts out about a quarter of the games. On Passover, they may not handle beer — often the most lucrative product — because it’s hametz, or leavened. And many won’t sell hot dogs for fear of unwittingly selling non-kosher meat to a Jew.

Years back, when the hot dog buns apparently carried dairy ingredients, Orthodox vendors often debated whether selling franks violated the Jewish law prohibiting profiting from the sale of food that mixes meat and dairy, even if the meat isn’t kosher.

**Selling Traif Hots Dogs are O.K.**

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, kashrut administrator at the Chicago Rabbinical Council, says he fielded this question from a vendor’s mother not long ago. The prohibition, he says, applies only to foods in which the dairy and meat have been cooked together, so ballpark franks are OK (as long as you’re not selling them to a Jew).

As the kosher certification agency for the kosher food stands at the United Center, the rabbinical council maintains an onsite mashgiach, or kosher supervisor, at Bulls (NBA) and Black Hawks (NHL) home games. Wrigley has no exclusively kosher concessions — a subject of some consternation among Orthodox fans. A call to United Center’s kosher concessionaire, Kosher Sports Inc., was not returned.

With so many G-d-fearing Jews vending — and sometimes praying — at Wrigley, the Cubs’ dismal performance might seem like a challenge of faith.

Porush says he doesn’t see it that way.

“I’d like to think we’re getting our reward in the next world,” he said. “I’ve seen lots of heartache as a Cubs fan, and I think it is parallel to being a G-d-fearing Jew. We live through difficult times and all we can say is, ‘Next year in Jerusalem.’ A Cubs fan is always saying, ‘Wait till next year.’ That’s who we are.”

So what will happen first — the coming of the Messiah or a Cubs World Series title?

“I really hope Moshiach comes first,” Porush said, “because the Cubs aren’t going to be a contender for at least another two years.”

*Reprinted from a recent email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals) Update. The article was originally published by the JTA (Jewish Telegr*

**Midrash and Talmud**

**Answering the Doubters**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

“Know clearly what to answer the scoffer.” This axiom from *Pirkei Avot* is important for every Jew to bear in mind. One who observes the commandments and is a living symbol of Judaism stands every day as a representatives of our faith who may be called upon to defend a cardinal point of belief or to explain the reason for certain traditions or customs. If he fails to do so properly or if he fumbles and hesitates, he not only fails to satisfy his questioner but he convinces him that the observant Jew follows his traditions blindly and illogically.

Certainly, the Jewish leader, even more than the layman, must have his answers and explanations ready at all times. One of the most famous of all Jewish leaders who was consistently called upon to explain a point, both to friendly and unfriendly critics, was Rabban Gamliel.

As head of the *Sanhedrin*, people expected him to have ready explanations and the Talmud records many such questions and debates in which he participated.

**Why Not the Idols?**

Once a pagan philosopher encountered Rabban Gamliel and engaged him in a discussion concerning religion. The philosopher asked:

“In the Bible it states that the Lord is a consuming fire who takes revenges upon those who worship idols. Why does your G-d grow angry at the idolators? Is it not more logical for Him to pour out His wrath upon the idols themselves? Certainly if there were no idols in existence, the people would have nothing to worship beside Him?”

Rabban Gamliel looked at the philosopher and answered: “You ask a very intelligent question and I will attempt to answer it by means of a parable.

“Once there lived a king who had a very dear son. The boy had a dog that he loved very much. He raised it from a puppy, fed it from the food that he ate, gave it to drink from his water and slept with it in his bed.

“Not content with this, however, he also began to call the dog by his father’s name, saying: ‘I swear by the name of my dog whose name is the same as my father that I shall do this and this…’

“When the father heard of this, he naturally grew quite angry and he determined to put a stop to it.

“Now I ask you, my friend,” concluded Rabban Gamliel, “at whom should the king have been angry? Should he have been angry at the poor, dumb animal who was called a king or at his son who gave him the name?”

**The Philosopher Continues**

The philosopher responded:

“Let us assume that what you say is correct and that the idols are powerless and helpless. Still, would it not be better to have them erased and done away with so that they cease being an obstacle to people?”

Rabban Gamliel shook his head and replied:

“No, my friend. Were the Almighty to do as you say, He would have to destroy the sun and the moon and the stars; He would have to wipe out the mountains and the animals and the trees, for these too are considered to be gods by many people.

“The fact is that people create idols out of many things and it is literally impossible to destroy them without destroying the whole world. The world will continue as it is; man has free will to worship or not to worship foolishness and the fools will pay for their sins in the World to Come.”

**The Creation of Woman**

One day a scoffer was engaged in discussion with Rabban Gamliel and a group of intellectuals and noblemen. He began to choose parts of the Torah and question them.

“Tell me, Rabi,” he began, “in the Torah it relates how the Almighty created the first woman. It says that He cast a deep sleep upon Adam and while he slept, He removed Adam’s rib and created from it the first woman.

“What I would like to know is why your G-d felt it necessary to cast a deep sleep on Adam. Why did He not perform this operation while he was awake?”

**The Noblewoman Answers**

Rabban Gamliel began to answer the scoffer when a noblewoman who was sitting nearby suddenly interrupted him.

“Allow me to answer this man if you will.”

She ordered her servant to bring her some raw meat from the kitchen and proceeded to go through the entire cooking process right before the eyes of the entire assemblage.

When she had finished the process, she took the meat and the ashes that still covered it and put it before the scoffer, saying:

“I have prepared for you a wonderful repast. Please eat.”

When the scoffer saw the plate he made a face and said:

“Forgive me, madam, but I must respectfully decline.”

“Why, sir,” asked the royal lady, “is not the meat of the highest quality and does not its fragrance water your mouth?”

“Indeed it is as you say, madam,” said the scoffer, “but to be quite blunt, the process of cooking it together with the ashes has repelled me.”

“Why, that is no problem,” said the noblewoman, “I will simply clean the ashes from the meat and you then can eat to your heart’s content.”

“Even so,” persisted the scoffer, “I still have no stomach for it. You see, having seen the entire process of the cooking with all the unsavory things that are part of it I cannot eat it even after it has been cleansed and looks good to eat. The very seeing and remembering it is too much for me.”

“Indeed, sir,” laughed the clever woman. “Is it not your very tongue that has now answered your own question to Rabban Gamliel?

“Consider how wise is the Almighty. If He had allowed Adam to see the process of His making of Eve, Adam would surely have been so repelled that he would have not wanted Eve even though she looked beautiful afterwards.

“Great indeed are the ways of the G-d of the Jews!”

*Reprinted from May 2, 2014 edition of The Jewish Press.*

**The Old Man on the Island**

**By Yanki Tauber**

For many years Rabbi Ze’ev Kitzes, one of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov’s senior disciples, yearned to travel to the Holy Land. Finally the long-awaited opportunity arrived, and Rabbi Ze’ev stood in the Baal Shem Tov’s room to receive his rebbe’s blessing for a safe journey.

“Remember, Reb Ze’ev,” were the Baal Shem Tov’s parting words to him, “one must know how to properly answer a question. Weigh your words carefully before you speak.” Rabbi Ze’ev had no idea what his rebbe meant with these words, but he kept them near to his heart, certain that their relevance would be revealed to him before long.

**A Mishap Occurred at a Port of Call**

He reached the sea without incident, and boarded the ship that was to take him to the Holy Land. But at one of the ports of call along the way, a mishap occurred. The ship stopped to take on supplies, and the passengers disembarked to spend a few hours on solid ground. Rabbi Ze’ev, who was deeply immersed in his thoughts, did not hear the call to reboard the ship, and was left behind. In growing distress, Rabbi Ze’ev wandered about this strange place. He had no idea where he was—he seemed to be on some sort of island—nor how long he would have to wait for another ship.

“Reb Yid! Why are you so crestfallen?” he heard a kindly voice ask. Lifting his eyes, he found himself looking into a saintly face with luminous features and a snow-white beard. His joy and relief knew no bounds. Yes, there was a Jewish community on the island, fully equipped with a synagogue and *mikvah* (ritual immersion pool); there would be another ship in a few days, and in the meantime, the old man would be deeply honored to have their esteemed visitor—a disciple of the holy Baal Shem Tov, no less!—as his guest for Shabbat.

**His Host was a Veritable Torah Scholar**

Rabbi Ze’ev’s host turned out to be a veritable Torah scholar, and the two spent Shabbat in prayer and study; Rabbi Ze’ev felt as if he was back in Mezhibuzh at his rebbe’s table. On Sunday morning Rabbi Ze’ev, accompanied by his attentive host, returned to the harbor to meet a ship that had stopped at the island.

In parting, the old man asked: “Tell me, Reb Ze’ev, how is it with the Jews of your country? How are they faring in our exile?”

“Thank G‑d, all is well,” answered Rabbi Ze’ev, hurrying up the gangplank. “The Almighty does not forsake His people.”

The ship was well on its way out of the harbor when Rabbi Ze’ev suddenly remembered what the Baal Shem Tov said to him on the eve of his journey. “Woe is me!” he cried. “What have I done! Did not the Rebbe warn me to consider my words carefully before I answer? Why did I not say the truth? Why did I not tell this man of the poverty and the persecutions, of our daily struggle to persevere in face of those who seek to destroy us body and soul?”

**Traveled Back to See the Baal Shem Tov**

Rabbi Ze’ev was so devastated by his failure to carry out the Baal Shem Tov’s instructions—for he now had no doubt that it was his encounter with the old man on the island that his rebbe had in mind—that at the next port he got off the ship and traveled back to Mezhibuzh to tell him what happened.

“Reb Ze’ev,” said the Baal Shem Tov sadly, “every day our father Abraham confronts the Almighty. ‘Master of the Universe!’, he cries. ‘What will become of my children? Why are they still languishing in exile?’ And the Almighty replies: ‘I do not forsake them.’ But Abraham is not appeased. So, G‑d says to him: ‘Why don’t you ask them yourself? Look, there goes Reb Ze’ev Kitzes, an honest and upright Jew, on his way to the Holy Land. Why don’t you ask him?’”

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

**Chasidic Story #860**

**An Indispensable Requirement for a Blessing**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/21?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000pHG0:001Imxw800001qC8&count=1389104003&randid=1957232658&attachId=0&isUnDisplayableMail=yes&blockImages=0&randid=1957232658##)

**Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer Alfandari** was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1820\*, into a well-known rabbinical family. His father Rabbi Yaakov was a great G-d fearing scholar, but he did not live a long time. At his death, Rabbi Shlomo was still a small boy. He was first brought up by his mother, Chana, a learned woman who was well-versed in the Torah, the Talmud and the Laws.

His piety and wisdom was evident even as a youth, and while still a young man, he was appointed to the Spiritual Council of Istanbul. At that time he already was involved in correspondence with two of the greatest rabbinical authorities of the generation, Rabbi Akiva Eiger and Rabbi Moshe ("Chatam") Sofer.

Many of Istanbul's Jews pleaded with him to accept the position of *Chacham Bashi* (chief rabbi of the city), and to join its rabbinical court. Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer, however, refused to accept any rabbinical positions, preferring to devote himself to Torah study. He also refused to wear the customary dress of the Torah scholars of Istanbul, which consisted of a turban and a silk robe. When people referred to him as the city's chief rabbi, he would reply, "I am not a rabbi - just a simple layman."

Instead, he recommended his student, Rabbi Yitzchak Akarish, for the position of Istanbul's chief rabbi. Rabbi Yitzchak was one of Rav Shlomo Eliezer's most outstanding students. He tried to devote himself solely to Torah study, but when his family's financial situation became desperate, he sought Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer's advice.

Rav Shlomo Eliezer promised to find Rav Yitzchak a rabbinical post - on one condition: he had to accept any position offered to him. The latter agreed to his teacher's terms, but was startled when Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer secured him the position as *Chacham Bashi* of Istanbul. How could he serve as chief rabbi in the very same city in which his illustrious mentor lived? But he had already accepted Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer's condition, and couldn't renege on his word.

Istanbul's Jewish leaders were likewise reluctant to appoint Rav Yaakov, and for the very same reasons. However, they couldn't disregard Rav Shlomo-Eliezer's directive or his demand that Rabbi Yaakov receive a respectable salary.

From then on, whenever questions were addressed to Rabbi Shlomo- Eliezer, he would refer them to Rabbi Yitzchak, stressing that he was the city's chief rabbi.

Appreciating Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer Alfandari's greatness, Istanbul's Jews founded a *yeshiva* for him, and many outstanding scholars studied there. One of his most distinguished students was Rav Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini, author of the encyclopedic Sedei Chemed, who was to become the chief rabbi of Hebron.

Once, when Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer was seated at a celebratory meal at the home of one of the most prominent members of Istanbul's Jewish community, he heard two secular Jews discussing the "natural" causes of earthquakes. His face ablaze, Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer rose from his seat and vehemently countered their arguments.

"According to your scientific theories," he cried, "an earthquake can't occur here at this moment. But if the Al-mighty wills it, an earthquake will occur here this moment, in defiance of the laws of nature."

At that very moment, an earthquake shook the entire city. And that was when Istanbul's Jews came to regard Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer as a miracle worker, and he became even more precious in their eyes.

When he was nearly 80 years old, in 1897, he accepted an invitation to be *Chacham Bashi* (chief rabbi of the city) in Damascus. He held the position for seven years.

In 5664 (1904), Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer Alfandari resigned his position as chief rabbi of Damascus and moved to Israel. He settled in Haifa, where he studied undisturbed for the next several years. When the sages of Tzefat (Safed) learned that Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer had made *aliyah*, they invited him to serve as their city's chief rabbinical judge.

Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer accepted the position, even though he was already nearly 90 years old. It began a new period in his life. And he served in this position for close to twenty years! The aged sage surprised everyone who saw him by his vigor and sharp mind.

All the great scholars of Torah came to him in order to benefit from his knowledge and wisdom [including Baba Sali on a special trip from Morocco - see story [#118](http://ascentofsafed.com/cgi-bin/ascent.cgi?Name=118-18) in this series -YT], and all who came into contact with him sensed that they were dealing with a holy man. He was referred to fondly as *Sabba Kadisha*, the "holy grandfather," a title he has already acquired even before his decades in Tsfat.

In Nissan of 5674 (1914), Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer, accompanied by many of Tsfat's residents, went out to bless the new moon. After completing the prayer, he looked upward, clapped his hands and let out a piercing cry. Then he said: "I see that a large-scale war will soon break out."

Four months later, World War I began.

During the war, Tsfat's residents suffered from a lack of food and water. One time, the Turkish *pasha* (governor) visited the city. He was perched on a white steed, and was accompanied by an entourage of soldiers. He wore a flashy uniform, and a glossy medallion, which indicated his high rank, hung from his neck.

When Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer heard of his arrival, he went out to greet him. The pasha was awed by the Sabba Kadisha's majestic appearance, and asked him for a blessing.

Rav Shlomo-Eliezer replied, "Only the humble can receive blessings. I will bless you after you come down from your horse."

The pasha got off his horse and lowered his head to receive Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer's blessing. "May Almighty G-d help you in your efforts to see to the needs of the oppressed Jewish Nation," Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer said.

The pasha was very impressed by Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer and, as a result of that encounter, he made sure that Tsfat's residents had sufficient food and water.

In 1925, Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer contracted a serious illness. He was in Tiberias at the time, and he refused to undergo treatment in a hospital where *tznius*, the Jewish laws of modesty, were not meticulously observed. Instead, he was brought to Shaarei Tzedek Hospital in Jerusalem. When he recovered, the sages of Jerusalem pleaded with him to settle in the city. The elderly rabbi acceded to the sages' request, and rented an apartment in the Ruchama neighborhood, near Geula and Mekor Baruch. Today, the street on which he lived is named in his memory.

So Rabbi Alfandari spent his last few years in Jerusalem, surrounded by a multitude of admirers and disciples. He was already more than 100 years old at that time, yet his mind was lucid and his vision clear. He didn't even need glasses!

In 1930, the Rebbe of Munkacz, Rabbi Chaim-Elazar Shapira, made a special trip from Hungary to meet with Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer face to face. He even tried his best to speak with him using Sephardic Hebrew, in order to facilitate better communication. The Rebbe told him that he had learned from great *tzadikim* that the closeness of the Final Redemption depended primarily on the *tzadik* of the generation - if he would decree by the power of his Torah that Mashiach should arrive. Therefore the Rebbe was imploring him to make such a decree. Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer, in his humility, immediately replied: "I am not a *tzadik*," whereupon the Munkaczer burst into tears.

This conversation took place about eight days before his death. On Tuesday morning, the 22nd of Iyar 5690 (1930), he asked his disciples to envelope him with his *Tallit* and to put his two pairs of *Tefilin* upon him, on his arm and head (according to the custom of the Sephardic Chachamim). He immediately recited Shema, and when he came to the word *emet* [truth], he signaled his disciples to remove his *Tefilin*. He then said, "Enough, enough. The main thing is *emet* (truth). I can no longer continue.…"

Shortly afterward, at his suggestion, he was served a glass of warm milk. After he recited the appropriate blessing (*shehakol*) and had sipped some milk, his pure soul departed to the World of Truth. He was buried just before sunset on the Mount of Olives, at the age of 110! \*

[Source: Excerpted and adapted by Yrachmiel Tilles from // hevratpinto.org/index.html, //torahcenter.com, and //yadyosef.com]

Biographical note: **Rabbi Shlomo-Eliezer Alfandari** (1820\* - 22 Iyar 1930) was born in Istanbul, Turkey, where his reputation for piety and wisdom was established at a young age. He served as the chief rabbi in Istanbul (unofficially) and Damascus, and subsequently in Safed for 20 years toward the end of his life. He passed away at age 110 (!) in Jerusalem. Eight days before, the world-renowned Rebbe of Munkacz, Rabbi Chaim-Elazar Shapira, made a special trip from Hungary to meet with him, calling him the "the top *tzadik* of the generation." Many of his rabbinical correspondence on topics in Jewish law are included in his book, Sabba Kadisha. For more information on his life and writings, see our website.

\* Editor's note: There are conflicting opinions about his year of birth. The three main candidates are 1815, 1820 and 1826. I used the middle position. But it could be that he lived to at least 115!

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