**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas beha’aloscha 5775**

Volume 6, Issue 39 19 Sivan 5775/ June 6, 2015

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

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**Heavy Rains Flood Houston and Cause**

**Major Damage to Jewish Communities**



**Morgan Arney, left, and Donniel Ogorek, center, came to the aid of Rabbi Joseph Radinsky, rabbi emeritus of United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston.**

In less than 12 hours, more than eight inches of rain fell, according to news reports. The situation was exacerbated because of already saturated ground from prior rains, coupled with smaller bodies of water in the Houston, Texas area that overflowed. And the temperatures were warm, at about 80 degrees midday.

The west side of the city was among the hardest hit, where the Meyerland neighborhood—home to a large Orthodox population—is located.

“People are still trying to get their bearings,” says Lazaroff, co-director of Chabad of Uptown with his wife, Chanie. “Many of our community members’ houses are under water—not in our immediate area, but in neighboring Meyerland.”

*Reprinted from Chabad.Org*

**The Sensitivity of Respecting a Jew Who Has Gratitude to a Dog**

**By Rabbi Simon Jacobson**

Quite a few years ago, maybe nine, I was giving a class on the topic of unconditional love. Conditional love is driven by ulterior motives, and is therefore subject to change: If the motive is no longer fulfilled, the love wanes in direct proportion. Unconditional love, by contrast, is unwavering because it is not determined by mercurial factors.

As I was speaking, a gentleman sitting to my right began to mutter. “Absolutely right,” he said. “The only unconditional love is the love you get from your pet dog.” His voice got louder and more aggressive. “Human love can never be trusted. People will always disappoint you, but your dog will always love you, unconditionally. When you come home after a hard day, your dog will greet you at the door, lick you and always accept you. Human love is unpredictable, always changing, always with strings attached.”

The man became increasingly passionate, to the point that he was almost frothing at the mouth. ‘Yes,” he raved on, “humans can never be trusted. The only love that is unconditional is the one from your pet.” Clearly, the issue touched a deep chord in this gentleman.

The rest of the class, however, was quite annoyed. People tried to silence him. Some snickered, others laughed, while others got angry. One woman spoke out at him, with a dismissive voice, “We didn’t come to hear you talk about your dog. We came to hear the Rabbi. Why don’t you just shut up with this dog nonsense. Stop raving like a lunatic.”

I’ll never forget the look in his eyes, as he glared at her and hissed with an anguished, trembling voice: “You… You are so shallow…”

The entire class looked at me waiting, watching how I would respond. I could have easily dismissed the individual. It would even have been possible to get a good laugh at his expense. But I instantly remembered something that took place many years ago, when I wore a younger (and slimmer) man’s clothes.

A man came to see me and told me his life story, which included the horrible abuse that his alcoholic father would subject him to. To avoid the blows of a baseball bat, the young boy would run outside and sleep near the doghouse, where he would be comforted by the love of his pet dog…

The man told me, “I learned love from… a dog. That was the first true love I ever experienced.”

I was utterly stunned. It was the first time I had ever heard about real abuse. I just couldn’t believe it. But I never forgot the story. So now, when this gentleman was carrying on about the unconditional love of a dog, I said to myself, “you never know where people find love. Never, ever judge anyone especially when it come to the emotional realm.”

So I calmly said to the man at the class: “Listen, this week we’re talking about human love. We’ll designate another time to discuss canine love.” Everyone was surprised that the man responded with respect, “Thank you. I understand.”

After the class, another attendee, slipped me a handwritten note, which I read after I returned home. “I have been coming to your class for two years,” she wrote. “I have learned many things and been very inspired. But tonight I learned the most important lesson of all: The respect one must show to other people, no matter how strange they may behave. You have healed me tonight from my greatest wound: The lack of trust in human dignity.”

A few months later, the gentleman called me as well, and said that he wants to thank me for not dismissing him. “Your validation of me has given me strength to deal with some very difficult challenges I am facing. Over the years, I have always been dismissed as weird when I would strongly react, in my own bizarre way, to issues around love. That night something changed. The fact that you did not invalidate me, that you actually allowed me to be strange, opened some significant doors. I now believe in some new possibilities.”

*Reprinted from the website of the Meaningful Life Center. The article was originally published under the title of “Vaetchanan: The Power of Human Touch.”*

**Sephardic Rabbis**

**Rabbi Tam ibn Yehia (1475-1542)**

**By Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

Rabbi Tam ibn Yehia was one of the most important rabbis of his generation. He was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1475. In 1496, when the Portuguese Jews had to choose between converting to Christianity or leave the country, Rabbi Tam escaped to the city of Constantinople, today's Istanbul, Turkey. There, he acted for some time as a member of the rabbinical court of the famous Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi. After the death of Rabbi Mizrahi, Rabbi Tam inherited his position and was assigned as the spiritual leader of the Jewish community in Turkey.

Rabbi Tam's relations with the government of Turkey were excellent. Firstly, because Rabbi Tam was also a renowned physician and became one of the most trusted doctors of the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566). Second, because Rabbi Tam mastered the Turkish and Arabic languages, and he was an expert in Islamic law [sic]. His son Gedalia ben Tam (Rabbi of Thessaloniki, Greece) wrote in his book of Jewish history Shalshelet haQabbal "my father's knowledge of Islamic Law was so great that Muslim judges [Imams] often consulted with him regarding their decisions. "

At that time, all countries in the Middle East, including Syria, Egypt and Israel, were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Being the chief rabbi of Turkey conferred Rabbi Tam the rabbinical authority over all the rabbis of the Middle East. Thus, Rabbi Tam, was permanently consulted not only by individuals but also by his colleagues from across the Middle East, who sought his verdict when there was some debate or discussion among them.

The importance of the prestige of Rab Tam in the court of Suleiman the Magnificent should not be underestimated, also from the political standpoint. Thanks to the excellent relations of Rabbi Tam with the Sultan, all Jewish communities in the Middle East enjoyed the favor of the Sultan and the Ottoman Empire, which often meant the difference between life and death of a Jew, or the destruction or survival of entire Jewish communities.

Rabbi Tam was also a prolific writer. One of his students, Rabbi Binyamin Motal, wrote that Rabbi Tam composed: "The book Ma'ase Nisim, a commentary on the Rif. Al Hanisim, a commentary on the Ran. And he also wrote a very extensive book with the records of all his halakhic rulings. A collection of thousands of Halakhic questions, sent to him from all over the world, and his responses, including his analysis and verdicts. He also wrote tens of thousands of explanations of the Gemara, commentaries on the Tora and the Midrashim, sermons, books on science, etc. "

The reader may wonder, how is it possible that a Rabbi of the stature of rabbi Tam, who was so famous and prolific in his time (in my opinion he was a "Maimonides 16th century") is so little known in our time?

I think that there are two possible answers to this question: First, that unfortunately most Sephardic rabbis are ignored and unknown. This historical injustice is being reversed and although much remains to be done, gradually the Hakhamim Sephardim are more and better known.

The second answer is that, in the particular case of Rabbi Tam ibn Yehia, there was a tragic factor which contributed to pushing his name into oblivion. In 1541 there was a terrible fire in the city of Constantinople. This fire claimed many lives, and consumed virtually all the books of Rabbi Tam ibn Yehia. Such was the pain Rabbi Tam suffered seeing the work of his life consumed by fire, that, according to his students testimony, his death in 1542 was partly due to the sadness and grief he suffered by the loss of his manuscripts.

All what is left to us from the work of Rabbi Tam is a small compilation of some of his comments on the Rif (Derekh Tamim), and a collection of just 213 rabbinical responses (Ahole Tam ) in a book published by his grandson, Don Tam ben Gedalia, in Venice, Italy, 1620.

*Reprinted from the May 27, 2015 email of the Shehebar Sephardic Center.*

[**A Railway Sign In Yiddish? – Only in Siberia**](http://www.jewishpress.com/sections/features/feautures-on-jewish-world/a-railway-sign-in-yiddish-only-in-siberia/2015/05/27/) **(Birobidzhan)**

**By** [**Ben G. Frank**](http://www.jewishpress.com/author/bengfrank/)


Road sign in Russian and Yiddish greeting visitors on the road just outside Birobidzhan. (photo by Ben G. Frank)

*“A Jewish commissar tells a group of Jewish leaders about the founding of Birobdzhan: ‘This is the most important moment in the history of the Jewish people in two thousand years.’”* *Ken Kalfus, “Pu239 and Other Russian Fantasies”*

Chances are the city of Birobidzhan, in the Russian Far East, is not on your “bucket list,” but if you do go there, you’ll be shocked. It’s the only city in the world where the railway station has a sign in Yiddish characters spelling out the town’s name, alongside its Russian-language counterpart.

Not only that, but to this day, street signs, municipal stationary, town posters, stamps, and government documents are prepared in Yiddish and Russian in the city and the surrounding area, which is still called “The Jewish Autonomous Region (JAR).”

Birobidzhan, a stop on the Trans-Siberian railway, boasts two synagogues and a Jewish community center and just last year celebrated its 80th anniversary in this vast, wintry Siberian land where about 2,000 Jews reside.

Yelena Sarashevskaya, editor of the weekly *Shtern* newspaper, has described Birobidzhan “as a quiet, tranquil and cozy place, good for married couples, elderly people and children… a Jewish place”



The Yiddish and Russian sign at the The Jewish Community Center in

Railway station at Birobidzan, Siberia. Birobidzhan (photo by Ben G. Frank)

(photo credit by Samuel Millstein)

Birobidzhan possesses deep significance in Russian Jewish history because, in the early 1930s, Stalin had the bright idea of moving Jews to this swampy, 13,895 sq. mile area near Russia’s vulnerable border with China. Ideologically, it was to be Communist Russia’s answer to Zionism: a new “Soviet Zion.” Jewish farmers would till the soil in a socialist republic, except that much of that soil rested on a frozen wasteland. An “agrarian, socialist-Jewish utopia,” it never became, even though Russian Jews and Jewish pioneers from all over the world, including the U.S., Canada, Argentina and France – good Communists that they were – drained the swamps, cultivated the barren land, established agricultural cooperatives, started a Yiddish newspaper, and opened a theater, schools and various institutions.

The Jewish population never topped 38,000, less than one-fourth of the JAR’s overall population. But in the late 1930s and early 1940s, many Jews fled Birobidzhan to escape the misery of the region as well as to hide from Stalin’s mad purges. Estimates vary, but at least 2,000 Jews were murdered during those terrible times. Despite all that, it has been said that at least the Jews who came in the late 1930s and 1940s survived the Holocaust, though during the Cold War few Westerners visited there.

Eight decades later, Jews still reside in Birobidzhan, population about 76,000; 175,000 in the JAR where Yiddish is still spoken, though increasingly fewer and fewer can carry on decent discourse. Kosher meat arrives by train from Moscow, 5,000 miles away every few weeks; a Sunday school functions, and most definitely a *minyan*on Friday night and Shabbat, according to Rabbi Eli Riss, who was born in Birobidzhan, and studied in Moscow and Brooklyn.

The last time I traveled to Birobidzhan, it was the summer and the weather was in the mid-70s (Fahrenheit). (During the winter the temperature can go down to -13F.) Heading west from Khabarovsk, on a tree-lined, well-paved road, our car sped along the 120-mile route. Three hours later, we reached our destination: the Jewish Autonomous Region, which is the size of Connecticut and Massachusetts and located on the main trunk of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Surprise! Just on the outskirts of the region’s main city, Birobidzhan, we stopped to gaze at a huge road sign that read: “Birodbidzhan” in Yiddish and Russian.

Making our way around the city, we viewed the new Sholom Aleichem monument at 2 Sholom-Aleykhem Street. Then we stopped in at the state kindergarten at 19 Pionerskaya Street, where the youngsters in the *Menora*program offered their own version of the Birobidzhan story in Yiddish and Hebrew. We walked under tree-lined streets named after such Jewish personalities as Emmanuel Kazakevich and Boris Miller. And with Zionism no longer taboo as it was in Communist days, we discovered Hebrew language study is gaining ground. The *alef-bet* is taught in the state kindergarten.

We reached the old Hut Synagogue on Mayakovskaya Street, a modest structure dating to the dark Communist years of the 1960s. During much of the Stalin’s days, no synagogue existed in Birobidzhan as religion was perceived to be counterrevolutionary. This first synagogue opened at the end of World War II, but closed in the mid-1960s after it was severely damaged in a fire. In 1968, the “Hut Synagogue” (so named because it resembled a wooden*shtiebel*), was established. The modest structure with a tin roof houses is described as a 19th century Jewish village congregation, held together by a small membership, a number of whom may not even be Jewish – or so we were told.

The community’s heart is the JCC at 14a Sholom Aleykhem Street. It has been renovated a number of times and at one point housed the second and main synagogue which opened in 2000. The congregation soon discovered that it was difficult to hold services in a crowded JCC, so in 2004, it moved to a newly-constructed building next door to the JCC, affiliated with Chabad – the cost of construction benefited from a donation by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee which financially assists organizations involved in education and welfare needs throughout Russia and Ukraine.

This synagogue features a prayer hall that seats over 100, a beautifully-designed *Aron Kodesh*crafted from wood imported from China, meeting rooms, a kitchen and canteen, a children’s center and a room designed for celebrating *Shabbat* and Jewish culture. “*Cafe Simkha*” on Sholom Aleykhem Street features *klezmer*music.

According to Samuel Millstein, an American, who describes himself as an “observant Jew,” the restaurant was *kashered* specifically for the Israeli diplomatic mission and guests during the Jubilee festival last year. He noted that there is a Yiddish supermarket chain called “*Brider Penshina*” with a growing selection of kosher products, including kosher meat.

Born and raised in the U.S. and a recent graduate of Emerson College in Boston, Millstein, who now lives in Odessa, believes in Yiddish as a living language. He went to Birobidzhan to live, but had difficulties obtaining the necessary immigration papers. Now he works at the Tikva Children’s home in Odessa as an English-language videographer where he plans to improve his Russian and return to Birobidzhan.

The weekly Jewish newspaper, *The Shtern*, circulates throughout the city, but most of the articles are in Russian, though there are four Yiddish articles each week with a glossary of Yiddish words printed alongside them.

Rabbi Riss told me that there are a large number of residents with Russian names who have shared with him that they are Jewish. This phenomenon of Jews “coming out of the woodwork,” is not new to Eastern Europe and Russia. Once they discover they are Jews, “they now come to the synagogue,” added the rabbi.

After years of decline, Birobidzhan Jews face the future with optimism, even though the Jewish population has decreased. In the past, predictions abounded of JAR’s demise. But Jewish life in Birobidzhan continues and it could last a long time. Otherwise, why is the community building a new Jewish kindergarten, with a youth synagogue and *mikveh*in Birobidzhan?

Having traveled to Jewish communities in 89 countries, this writer would advise: “Never say a Jewish community is dead.”

*Reprinted from the May 27, 2015 email of The Jewish Press.*

**Short Story of the Week**

**The Rewards for Marrying**

**A Non-Jewish Lady**

When Hitler, may his name be erased, annexed Austria to Germany, he imprisoned all sorts of important people, among them the Kapishnitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, of blessed memory. While in his cell, the hated Nazis threw in another person, all beaten and bruised.

The man stood near the wall banging his head on it and crying, “It’s my fault! It’s all my fault!”

The Rebbe calmed the man down and asked him why he was blaming himself for his troubles. The man told the Rebbe that he married a non-Jewish lady. “Life was good,” he recalled. “I got along with her and we raised a family together. Then, the Nazis took over. Without batting an eyelash, my wife gave me over to the Gestapos and told them I was rich. Rebbe, my parents sat Shivah for me when I married her. Now I see how right they were.

Â *Comment: We are still in the midst of a Holocaust, of the spiritual kind. Overall, the Jewish intermarriage rate is at 58 percent, up from 43 percent in 1990 and 17 percent in 1970. Among non-Orthodox Jews, the intermarriage rate is 71 percent (Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews). Seven out of ten Jews are being lost! The worst part is that these pour souls don’t even have a clue what they’re giving up.*

*It’s our responsibility to reach out to the 20- 30 years old demographic and attempt to inspire them to learn more about their Jewish roots. One should be on the lookout for people who appear Jewish and make positive lasting impressions. Outreach organizations such as Project Inspire and Torah Mates exist for those willing to take the next step to help save millions from spiritual suicide.*

*Reprinted from the recent Shavuos email from Reb Mendel Berlin.)*

**L’Maaseh… A Tale to Remember**

**How Rav Elyashiv Responded to**

**The Insults of a Chutzpadika Yid**

The pasuk says (Devarim 6:13), תירא אלקיך 'ה את, And you shall fear, es, Hashem your G-d. The Gemara (Pesachim 22b) teaches that Shimon Haamsoni would interpret every ES written in the Torah. However, once he reached this pasuk, ‘You shall fear ES Hashem’, he stopped expounding the word ES.

His students said to him, “Rebbe, what will become with all the interpretations of all the ESIN which you have interpreted until now?” He answered them, “Just as I received reward for interpreting them, so will I receive reward for withdrawing from them.”

Subsequently, Rabbi Akiva came and taught, “You shall fear ES Hashem, your G-d, the word ES comes to include Torah scholars.” Chazal teach us that the reverence demanded by the Torah for its scholars and those who guide and lead the Jewish people, is the same as the respect and reverence demanded for Hashem Himself.

One late afternoon in Meah Shearim in Yerushalayim, Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, zt”l, was heading to the Bais Medrash to deliver his daily Gemara shiur, and was being escorted by a student. They did not notice a stranger slowly approaching them. This man had gained a reputation for himself in the community as one whose yetzer hara (evil inclination) had gotten the upper hand, enticing him time and again to speak disparagingly about Torah scholars.

Many people avoided talking to such a person who blatantly disregarded the teaching of the Sages in Pirkei Avos (4:15), “The fear of your Rebbe should be as great upon you as your fear of Heaven”. As Rav Elyashiv and his talmid approached, the fellow looked around, making sure no one other than the great Rav and his escort were walking towards him.

He stood there waiting until Rav Elyashiv was only a few steps away, and then, with the utmost of chutzpah, began yelling at Rav Elyashiv, and screaming all types of insults and foul language at the Tzaddik. Amazingly, Rav Elyashiv wasn’t surprised or at all fazed by the ugly words.

It wasn’t the first time he had been insulted by people who, for various reasons, disapproved of his Halachic decisions. However, the Rav’s escort was very upset. It was the first time he had witnessed something of this nature, and he was shocked to the very core.

“Rebbe,” he trembled, turning to the Rav, “How is it possible to remain silent? Indeed, is it even permissible to remain silent? After all, Kavod HaTorah is being trampled on!”

Rav Elyashiv remained calm and replied, “Instead of feeling negative towards this man, let us give him a brachah!” Turning around, Rav Elyashiv faced the man and said, “Reb Yid, may Hashem bless you that you will have no time to spare for nonsense like this!”

Rav Elyashiv and his student then continued on their way. The man who had started up with Rav Elyashiv was dumbstruck. He was totally unprepared for this reaction and stared in confusion as Rav Elyashiv walked away.

“What did the Rav mean?” he wondered aloud, actually talking to himself, thinking he should ask the Rav to explain what he meant, but of course, he didn’t.

Exactly a year after that disturbing incident, almost to the day, the man and his wife became proud parents of quintuplets! Five tiny babies filled their home with healthy cries for attention. The streets of Yerushalayim were abuzz with the news, as Rav Elyashiv’s brachah had come true. Overnight, this man became so busy that he had absolutely no time for anything else!

What many people did not understand about the nature of this fellow, Rav Elyashiv, in his wisdom, immediately grasped. This man’s problem was that he had too much time on his hands and this led him to sin. After Rav Elyashiv’s blessing, he was never bored again and certainly had no time for nonsense like the one that brought about the amazing heartfelt brachah in the first place!

*Reprinted from last week’s Shavuos email from “Torah U’Tefilah: A Collectionof Inspiring Insights” compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**This Week in Chess History: Samuel Reshevsky**

**By Jonathan Zalman**

In 1920 the ‘infant prodigy,’ who never played on Shabbos, defeated twenty ‘graybeards’ in Paris



Samuel Reshevky, one of the best chess players in U.S. history, began playing at the age of 4. Born in 1911 in Ozorkow, Poland, Reshevky moved to the U.S. when he was 8. By that time he was so good that he had begun to play in simultaneous exhibitions during which he’d compete against a number of strong players at once.

On May 17, 1920, Reshevky faced 20 players in a simul in Paris. The New York *Times* [covered it](http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F0DE7D9173AEE32A2575BC1A9639C946195D6CF) then, and [posted](https://instagram.com/p/2qf5spr27p/?taken-by=nytimes) a picture of the match, with a quote from the article, on its Instagram page yesterday. The article is both a treasured relic of chess history, and a reminder about the how beautifully journalists—and their allowing editors—once wrote.

Here’s the lead paragraph from the article, which includes a ***70-word*** second sentence:

Twenty graybeards sitting in a square played chess yesterday in Paris against a very small boy 8 years old, and he beat them all. Among the graybeards were some of the best players in France, and one at least, whose boast it is that he drew with Capablanca, the Pan-American chess champion, but all their reputation availed them nothing against a frail child with a pale, thoughtful face who moved quietly from one board to another, reducing their most skillful plans and wiles to nothingness and mating them and mating them when they least expected it.

Now *that’s*  how you get readers excited about chess.

Reshevksy, an Orthodox Jew, would become an International Grandmaster at the age of 39, and defeated seven world champions in his lifetime. His main profession, however, was that of an accountant.

*Reprinted from the May 15, 2015 edition of Table Magazine.*

**A Strange Solution for the Poor Father of Aging Daughters**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

In, in the 'enlightenment' days of Europe 200 years ago, when millions of Jews became wooed by German and French culture away from Judaism there were also many 'Tzadikim' (holy men) and one of them was the 'Chozeh' (Seer) of Lublin.

His erudition, wisdom and love for mankind was accompanied by an uncanny ability to 'see' into the unknown. Past, present and future lay before him like an open book, and to give blessings that worked.

Our story begins as one of his followers by the name of Avraham Mordechi of Pintshov; came to him with a problem; he needed money desperately to marry off his aging daughters but had absolutely nothing. He was a total pauper and he needed a blessing or advice, or simply ….. money.

The Rebbe thought for a moment, opened one of the drawers in his desk, took out a few coins and said, "Go to the town of Kreshnik and there you will be saved."

Avraham Mordechi took the coins, ran home, told his wife what the Rebbe said , packed a bag, and set off to the obscure town on the first carriage that left.

Three days later he arrived, checked in to the only Jewish hotel and only after he slept off his weariness from the journey did it hit him that he had no plan of action. The Rebbe only told him where to go but didn't tell him what to do! And he, in his enthusiasm, forgot to ask.

But there was no going back now. So every day he would awaken early and after morning prayers, would wander aimlessly around Kreshnik for an hour or two. Then he would return to the hotel to eat, rest up for a few minutes and resume wandering the streets till after nightfall.

Days passed and after the first week he was beginning to wonder what would be with him. Every day was just like the ones before it… nothing was happening except the money the Rebbe gave him was running out and his daughters were getting older.

Then, a few nights later as he was getting ready for bed there was a knock at his door. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Can I talk to you" was the answer in Yiddish. He opened the door and a well dressed, religious Jew about forty years old entered, closed the door behind him, sat down, motioned for Abraham to sit opposite him, leaned anxiously forward and spoke quietly as his eyes filled with tears.

"I won't tell you my name." He said, "Please don't ask. But I have something I want you to give to the owner of this hotel. Here."

He produced a large sealed envelope from his coat. "It belongs to the hotel owner. I want you give it to him. Will you do this? Please?

The whole thing was so strange that Avraham Mordechi completely forgot his own troubles.

The man began to explain.

"I am telling you this …. because….. because I want to confess my sin." He still spoke quietly but took out a handkerchief with which he blew his nose and wiped his eyes occasionally after each paragraph.

"Ten years ago I worked here in this hotel. The owner needed someone to teach his children Torah so I took the job.

"We were like family, best friends, he trusted me implicitly, gave me anything I wanted. Everything was perfect until the devil mixed in.

"I was teaching his youngest son in one room and noticed him standing in his office in the adjoining room; he had unintentionally left the door ajar.

"Anyway, I saw him take a large stack of money from his pocket, count it, put it in an envelope which he put in a drawer in his desk. He then locked the drawer and put the key behind a picture hanging on the wall.

"I thought it strange that he didn't put the money in the safe but the worst part was that he didn't notice me staring … not at all."

Avraham could barely keep his eyes open and really wanted to go to sleep. He had an urge to just tell this stranger to find someone else to talk to, but for some reason he kept listening."

"It planted an evil seed in my heart." The stranger continued, "At first I pushed it off as foolishness, but it didn't go away. Every time someone with fine clothes or expensive jewelry entered the hotel I thought 'why not me? Until I became insane, I wanted that money, I needed it!

"I was like a man possessed!. I began preparing. One night I went to the backyard, dug a hole, put a metal box inside and covered it with a stone.  And I waited.

"Finally, one night when everyone left for a wedding I went to the office door, turned the knob and when I found it unlocked I entered, took the key, opened the drawer, took the money buried it in the hole and … it was done.

"The next day I acted as though nothing had happened and in fact he didn't discover the robbery until a few weeks later.

"He opened the drawer and it was empty! He really took it hard. He held his head in his hands and actually began to cry. I was shaken and that night I even decided to 'find' the money and put an end to it. But in moments it was too late; he called the police and before I could think the house was crawling with them. .

"Of course no one suspected me. It never even arose in their minds! I was the last one in the world that would steal!! I told them that I must have been sleeping because I never saw nor heard anything.

"Anyway, after a month or so everything died down, he got over the loss and life returned to normal. I worked for another year or so, told them I found work elsewhere and we parted the best of friends.

"But my conscience bothered me. A hundred times, a thousand times I thought of returning the money but I didn't. I was afraid maybe someone would catch me digging it up. Or maybe the owner would get mad when I confessed and have me put in jail.

"Of course I considered giving it to him through someone else like I'm doing now but I had a problem; I couldn't trust anyone. I figured that if I could be a thief then maybe whoever I chose to return the money would also be dishonest and take it for themselves. Now, believe it or not… for ten years I have been going insane from regret. Until a week ago something told me the time had come.

"I came back here in the middle of the night, dug up the money and waited till the morning in front of the hotel wondering what to do next. Then, when I saw you come out I decided that you are the one. Now, please help me clear my conscience. Help me erase my sin…. Please, I beg you. Ask the owner not to ask any questions and give him the money back for me."

Avraham Mordechi stared in wide eyed disbelief. He had never been involved in such a thing and he was trying to digest it. Was the man lying? Should he do it? Maybe he would get into trouble himself! But something inside told him this man was genuinely repenting …. and he agreed.

"It's ten thousand rubles" The stranger added. "A real fortune."

The next morning Avraham Mordechi introduced himself to the hotel owner, asked if they could speak in private and when they were seated in his office said.

"Just tell me please, do you remember if ten years ago a large sum of money was stolen from you?"

At first he didn't recall but then his eyes opened wide. He raised his head and almost whispered… "You don't mean the ten thousand rubles?! Yes! About ten years ago about ten thousand rubles went missing… but …."

Avraham Mordechi pulled the wad of bills from his pocket and put it on the table. "Here it is." He said. "Someone gave it to me to give to you and requested that you ask no questions."

"But who?" the owner caught himself. "No questions? Are you sure? All right, all right! I can't believe this is happening!" He picked up the money, began to count it and when he was finished looked up and, still under the impression of this dreamlike experience, wiped his brow and said.

"But can I ask who are you? What are you doing here? I've seen you leave and enter and have heard that you just wander the streets. Why are you here?"

Suddenly Avraham Mordechi snapped back into his dismal reality and told him who he was and how the Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, had sent him for a solution for his three daughters.

The owner understood. He immediately counted out one thousand rubles and handed it to him. "Here is enough money to marry off your daughters and buy them houses as well. And I would like to see your Rebbe and thank him personally for the miracle and for the chance to give this charity."

When Avraham Mordechi returned to the Chozeh and told him what happened the Rebbe just replied. "I had to do it this way…the broken heart of that teacher didn't allow me to sleep nights!"

*Reprinted from a recent email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*