**Shabbos Stories**

**For Purim 5781**

Volume 12, Issue 26 14 Adar/February 26, 2021

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

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**The Rejected**

**Mishloach Manos**

**By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**



Teshuvah is difficult when it means changing one’s middos. One year, a devoted chassid of the great R’ Dovid Tzvi Shlomo, the Lelover Rebbe, brought mishloach manos to his Rebbe on Purim. The chassid was known to be hot-tempered, and when the Rebbe saw his mishloach manos, he refused to accept it. He told the chassid he would only take it if the chassid promised to control his temper.

The chassid was hesitant and replied that he could not promise to vanquish his rage, but he would certainly make every effort to do so. The Rebbe refused to accept this compromise and explained to the chassid that he would only accept the mishloach manos if he explicitly promised not to get angry anymore.

The chassid left deeply pained because he couldn’t make the promise the Rebbe demanded. All day he was acutely distressed and, finally before sunset on Purim, he returned to the home of the Lelover Rebbe. He angrily placed his mishloach manos on the table and loudly proclaimed, “May it be the will of Hashem that this rage that I have right now will be the last I ever have.”

Indeed, from that day on, he never again lost his temper and was soft as a reed, amicable and pleasant to everyone.

The elders of Yerushalayim, who were supported by this individual, testified that one would never have believed that he had been such an ill-tempered person. He was always forbearing and agreeable. Indeed, his transformation teaches us the power of teshuvah. It can even cause a person to change his nature.

*Reprinted from the January 21, 2021 website of The Jewish Press.*

**When the Purim Jester Was Sad**

**By [Asharon Baltazar](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/22307/jewish/Baltazar-Asharon.htm" \o "Browse more articles by Baltazar, Asharon)**



Everyone in Aleksander, Poland, knew and loved Reb Yerachmiel, the learned *shochet* of Kinov who always had a smile on his face. A devoted chassid, he often came to Aleksander to bask in the sanctity of his rebbe, Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Dancyger (1853–1910). Reb Yerachmiel held a special position in the Rebbe’s court, serving as a jester of sorts, tasked with bringing joy and levity to communal gatherings.

Purim saw Reb Yerachmiel in his element—joking, singing, and entertaining.

One year, just before Purim, two calamities befell Reb Yerachmiel: His wife passed away and his daughter disappeared. Grief enveloped the poor man, and he seemed to drag his feet wherever he went. Fellow chassidim observed him with pity and concern. Despite their best efforts to lift his spirits, he remained melancholy and despondent. They wondered whether he’d attend the Purim celebration that year. What would Purim in Aleksander be without Reb Yerachmiel’s joyful antics?

**No Sign of Reb Yerachmiel**

Megillah reading on Purim night revealed no sign of Reb Yerachmiel. The next morning, shortly before the reading, he appeared in shul, face marred by a frown. Old friends attempted to make conversation, but Reb Yerachmiel ignored them as though deaf.

The Rebbe’s shul swelled with an enormous crowd for the Purim feast. Chassidim gathered around a beautifully set table bedecked with wine, pastries, and fruit. With craned necks, they anticipated the moment the Rebbe would enter the room. When the Rebbe took his seat at the head of the table, the room erupted into festivity. Platters of food, helped by eager hands, made their way through the crowd, and the wizened beadles took turns bellowing invitations to respected guests to sip some of the Rebbe’s wine.

Suddenly, the beadle announced, “Yerachmiel Kinover!”

Usually, this was the cue for Reb Yerachmiel to come forth and amuse the crowd. But the call went unanswered. Yerachmiel continued to stand listlessly against the wall, unbothered by the attention.

**The Rebbe Notice the Extra Visitor**

When the feast had reached its end, the Rebbe made his way to his room, escorted by close students. Reb Yerachmiel followed from behind and managed to squeeze in before the door was shut. The Rebbe, noticing the extra visitor, immediately addressed him.

“Oh, Yerachmiel, this is what you call Chassidus and its lessons? Is this what I taught you? Where’s the joy?”

Silence blanketed the room as Reb Yerachmiel paused before responding.

“There is a story,” he began, “of two Jews, who were neighbors in a village. One was a chassid and one was a *mitnaged*, an opponent of Chassidism. For the longest of times, the chassid tried mightily to influence his neighbor to taste the depth and joy of Chassidism.

Finally, after numerous debates, the chassid succeeded, and the *mitnaged*agreed to learn more about Chassidism. Immediately, the chassid stood up and began preaching the foundations of Chassidism, lingering especially on the significance of joy. Happiness, he preached, meant sustaining unequivocal joy in the face of life’s challenges, without a stutter of despair.

**The Two Set Out on Foot**

The chassid asked his neighbor if he’d like to join him on his next visit to visit his Rebbe, and the two set out on foot. As the journey progressed and their provisions depleted, their stomachs began to moan with hunger. Though the chassid managed to ignore his hunger, his companion failed to overcome his pangs and bemoaned the lack of bread.

“‘Don’t worry, my friend,’ clucked the Chassid sympathetically, ‘we’ll make our way through a field, scrounge for some edible greens, and regain our strength.’

“The two scurried into a field and found some beans still hanging in their pods. They were so hungry they didn’t realize the field’s owner had appeared out of nowhere, looking none too pleased at the sight. Without warning, the owner of the field lunged at the *mitnaged*and started beating him. In pain, the erstwhile *mitnaged*cried out. The chassid, ever the teacher, rushed to admonish him.

“‘Didn’t I say that the foundation of Chassidic life is joy? What’s with all the crying?’

“‘It’s true,’ replied the *mitnaged*. ‘But not when you’re being beaten like this.’”

**Dressed as a Polish Woodchopper**

Reb Yerachmiel finished his story and exited the Rebbe’s room, only to return minutes later dressed as a Polish woodchopper. In one hand he held an axe, and in the other, a stout log.

“Will the Rebbe look at the wood on my shoulders?” asked Reb Yerachmiel, speaking in Polish. “I’m trying—with every fiber of my being—to split it. I swing again and again, but nothing splinters. I’m struggling to find a reason. Is the wood unbreakable? Is the axe too blunt? Or, perhaps, it’s just me, too lazy to exert myself any further?”

The Rebbe’s fierce gaze transitioned into one of fatherly concern. When the Rebbe replied, he too used Polish. “You continue to try again and again until it finally splits.”

Reb Yerachmiel found solace in the Rebbe’s words. Eventually, he recovered from his grief and learned to find joy in his life once again.

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad.Org Magazine. Adapted from Me’oran Shel Yisrael*

**As the Wheel Turns**

**A Purim story that could have been**



In a small town, there lived a young couple. The husband had learned in *yeshivah* before his marriage, and continued to learn for a few years afterwards. Eventually, it came time to think about earning a living. He went into business, using his wife’s dowry for his start-up costs. His efforts met with success, and within a few years he became very wealthy.

As the young man became richer, his commitment to his business became greater and greater, until it became the entire focus of his life. All that mattered to him was amassing more and more wealth.

**Many People Were Living in Great Poverty**

In the same village, there were many people living in great poverty. Some had to beg just to keep body and soul together. Others in the village collected money to keep communal charities afloat.

The young wife was very generous, and no one asking for help left the house empty-handed. The husband, on the other hand, became very stingy. The richer he got, the more his wife’s charity bothered him. Eventually, he commanded his wife not to give anything more to those needy people.

Of all the festivals throughout the year, Purim was the hardest for him. On Purim we are commanded to give gifts of food and charity to the poor (*mishloach manot* and *matanot la’evyonim).* Fulfilling these commandments didn’t interest him at all. No one sent anything to him—they all despised him and his stinginess—and he didn’t see why he should have to give them anything either. After suffering with these commandments for a year or two, he found an innovative solution. He sent a simple *mishloach Manot* consisting of a baked potato and a *hamantash* to his business manager, and he tossed a few pennies to some beggars sitting in the doorway of the synagogue when he came to hear the Megillah reading. And with this, he considered his obligation fulfilled.

**His Table was Overflowing with Food**

As he sat at a table that was overflowing with food, about to begin his eight-course Purim feast, he heard knocking at the door. He was extremely surprised. It had been a long time since anyone had approached him for money. He sent his wife to see who it was, and as soon as she opened the door he heard, “Happy Purim! Happy Purim! We’re looking for donations in honor of Purim.”

At the door was a group of masked charity collectors. They were going from house to house collecting money for “Passover wheat,” the charitable fund that provides Passover supplies for the poor. (Making “Passover wheat” contributions is an ancient tradition that still takes place today.) There is only one short month from Purim to Pesach, and the needs of the poor at this time of year were great. And so, the town’s young Torah scholars would dress up in costumes and collect money for the poor. No one in the village refused them.

Well, almost no one. When this man’s wife returned to the table and asked her husband to give at least a small donation, he yelled at her and told her to send them away empty-handed. Bowing her head in humiliation, she was forced to turn them away and close the door.

**He Discovered a Large Loss from a Bad Investment**

The next day, when the rich man returned to work, he discovered that he had suffered a large loss from an investment that had gone bad. Within a few short weeks, this loss was followed by another sizeable loss, and his fortunes continued to plummet until he was forced to sell everything he had, even his wife’s jewelry. One day, he finally had to admit to his wife that he had no choice but to beg for charity. He gave her a stark choice: either don the beggar’s cloak and collect with him, or accept a divorce and relinquish his financial obligations to her.

His wife, who had suffered from his stinginess for years, decided to accept a divorce. In time, she married a young widower, a man with a pleasant personality who was well liked by his neighbors, and they lived a quiet, peaceful life together. They made their home in a nearby village and were known as decent, honest people. Her new husband didn’t stop her from inviting guests into their home and even encouraged her, inviting the poor of the village in himself after he saw that she didn’t mind. He was very generous and gave money to charity whenever he could.

Perhaps it was in her merit, or perhaps in his, but his business prospered, and they were also blessed with two beautiful children, a boy and a girl. It was a warm Jewish home, and they lived a happy life together.

The festival of Purim came around one year, and as the family was sitting down to their holiday meal they heard knocking at the door. The wife got up to see who it was and saw a poor stranger standing there. His clothing was tattered, and she could tell just by looking at him that he was starving. She invited him in, and her husband set an extra place at the table.



The beggar could barely keep himself from wolfing down the food. He ate from all the different dishes and delicacies until he couldn’t eat anymore. As he finally put down his fork, there were tears in his eyes. It is unclear whether these were tears of gratitude or tears of sadness at the contrast between this family’s happiness and his own dire condition. But his hosts did everything they could to cheer him up so that he could be joyful on the happy festival. They also gave him money so that he could buy new clothes for himself.

After Purim, when they had finished cleaning up and putting their children to bed, the husband and wife sat down and talked about the events of the day.

“I really feel for that poor man,” the husband told his wife. “I remember when I used to be poor like that. There was this one Purim when I was starving, and I was going to this rich man, not so far from here, in the hope of getting something to eat. He was supposed to be a real miser, but I figured that he might at least give me something to eat in honor of Purim, even if he wouldn’t give me any money. As I was approaching the house, I met a group of collectors who had been sent away. He didn’t even agree to talk to them. I lost hope of getting anything from him and didn’t bother knocking.

**Rejoicing in How Wonderful the World is**

“How wonderful the world is. Now, not only do I have plenty to eat and a happy life with you, but we’re actually able to invite guests and give food and charity to others. At the same time, we should never forget that everything we have comes from above, and is only ours for as long as He wants it to be. He gave it to us as a present so that we can use it to help others, but if He wants He could take it from us and leave us as destitute as that poor man. Who knows? Maybe that man once had money, maybe he was even rich. G‑d lowers the proud and raises the lowly. G‑d turns the wheel of wealth, bringing people high and low.”

“You’re right on target, my dear husband,” his wife said, wiping tears from her eyes. “That beggar was not only rich, he was the same miser you wanted to approach that Purim, the one who sent those charity collectors away in such disgrace.”

“How on earth can you know this?” her husband asked in surprise.

“I know because I was there,” she said softly. “As that man left our house today, it struck me. Our guest was none other than my first husband.”

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad.Org Magazine. Translated from Chagei Yisrael Umoadav (Kehot).*

**Purim on Hurva**

**Painting by Barbara Israel Bortniker**



**Reprinted from Joanne Palmer’s January 20, 2021 article on the art of Barbara Israel Bortniker, titled “From Law to Art to Israel” in the North Jersey – Rockland NY Jewish Standard.**