**Shabbos Stories for**

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**Two Nights, Two People,**

**Four Solo Seders**

**By Steve Lipman**



“Steve, my dear,” my mother, calling my office in Manhattan from her home in Buffalo several years ago, began an uncomfortable conversation, “we love you dearly, but . . . .”

The “but” had me worried. That conjunction usually leads to the crucial part of a sentence.

“But please don’t come to us for Passover anymore.”

“Us” were Mom and Dad, who was still alive.

Dad, who had grown up in an extremely secular home in Berlin, knew nothing about attending a Seder, let alone leading one. Mom, from an Orthodox home, is from the generation where a wife would not upstage her husband; she would not feel comfortable leading the Seder. So from the time I was in elementary school (attending a few times a week after-school Hebrew program), I led our family *Sedarim*—sometimes for just us, sometimes for a smattering of guests.

My proficiency in this improved as an adult, after I joined the ranks of *ba’alei teshuvah*. It was a responsibility I truly enjoyed, engaging in months of research beforehand. I tried to make the Seders interesting, “relevant.”

But it was to be no more, Mom told me.

**Jewish Law and Tradition**

**Made Mom Nervous**

After I had studied the various *halachot*of preparing one’s home for a kosher Pesach, and married a strictly religious young woman, the mounting demands of Jewish law and tradition made Mom nervous. While she did her best to accommodate me and make me feel at home on the Festival of Freedom—*shlepping*cartons of *yom tov* dishes from the attic, *kashering*pots in the weeks before the holiday began, looking for *kosher l’Pesach* items at the local supermarket, trying to accept my way of making Pesach—finally it was to no avail. I was disinvited.

I would miss Pesach with my *mishpachah*but was free to spend the holiday with friends who invited me, by then divorced and single, to be their guest. And, later, to start the tradition that became my standard practice for nearly two decades—leading Seders in far-flung places, for small Jewish communities largely unfamiliar with the richness and beauty of a true Seder.

Then Covid came. No traveling. Just a solo Seder in my Queens apartment.

Then last year, my sister, who lives a mile away from Mom in the Houston area, asked me to come down and help take care of Mom. For social distancing reasons, Mom could not attend my sister’s Seder, as she had done since she moved to Texas fifteen years ago, following Dad’s death.

**An Early Seder Because of Her Age**

I would be with Mom for the Seders. Four of them. Because of her age (she turned 100 a month before this past Pesach) and her health (she tired easily, by early evening), Mom decided that she would do her own Seder—while it was still light outside, before the *chag* actually started.

But *no* Seder (even if only a scaled-down version) was no option; Mom would do her best. “I didn’t think I’d make it to this Passover,” she told me gratefully during *chol hamoed*.

In her small apartment, I set the living room table with a dark blue plastic tablecloth, laid out Mom’s ceramic Seder plate and a plastic cup for her grape juice (at her age, no wine), and a new, large-print Haggadah I had found online.

Finally, I set out three pieces of matzah on an acrylic serving tray that one of Mom’s granddaughters had made (Mom saved it for Pesach), put on my Shabbos uniform of a well-ironed white shirt and black pants, and sat at the other end of the table, answering Mom’s basic questions about the Seder traditions, pouring her cups of grape juice, serving her meals and making sure she did not feel alone.

Mom wore a long green print dress, and read from an old, juice-stained Maxwell House Haggadah she found preferable to the large-print one I had procured; she had used a Maxwell House version as long as she could remember. Besides, the large-print Haggadah contained paragraphs of commentary and explanations she found distracting from the plain text.

She read slowly, haltingly, some blessings in Hebrew, the rest in English; she recited every word, straining to see in the fading late-afternoon light. We were serenaded by the quacking of ducks on the man-made lake outside the window.

**Feasted on Cold Chicken and**

**Kugel from a Local Shul**

Three hours later, at the proper time, I sat down at my place at the table, a Lubavitch Haggadah with the expected learned commentaries at plate-side. My kind of Haggadah. Mom was in bed by then. My meal was some cold chicken and kugel from a local shul.

No one hid or found the afikomen. I was the sole participant. *L’Shanah Haba’ah* in a world without Covid.

The second night, Mom’s blood pressure was high; she felt ill and tired. A few minutes of a Seder sufficed.

I missed my accustomed style of Seder—the table full of adults and children, the creative explanations of readings and rituals, the theatrics to engage the kids’ interest, the prizes and awards and photocopied sheets to be handed out.

On one hand, last year was very frustrating.

On the other hand, it was very fulfilling.

Despite Mom’s earlier Seder disinvitation, I got to spend another Pesach with her. This time, she did not object.

*Reprinted from the Spring 2021 edition of Jewish Action. Steve Lipman is a frequent contributor to Jewish Action.*

**The Power of the Rebbe’s Shabbos Hagadol Sermon**

A Jew in a village near Kolbisov, Poland, made his living as an innkeeper, renting the inn and the privilege to run it from the local Poritz who owned all the land of the village and the surrounding area. At first, everything went as he had hoped. The local peasants drank and paid for the large amounts of hard liquor they consumed, so he was always able to pay the rent on time to his landlord and still make a reasonable profit.

Time passed and business at the tavern took a downturn. Many of the regular customers stopped coming. The innkeeper began to be late in his seasonal payments. The first few times the village landlord was somewhat tolerant of the delay. But when it started to become a regular pattern he lost all patience, and finally told his tenant in a rage, "I won't listen to any more excuses. The next time you are late to pay me, I'll send some of my men down; they know very well how to deal with the likes of you."

**A Group of Drunken Peasants Wrecked the House**

Unfortunately, it did not take long for his threat to come to fruition. The next due date fell on a Shabbos. That morning, most of the family was still in bed as the innkeeper prepared to go to Shul. Suddenly, a group of drunken peasants burst through the front door. With a glint of hatred in their eyes, they began to wreck the house. They broke, they shattered, they smashed whatever they could put their hands on, they destroyed. Not even the hot cholent on the Shabbos stove was spared, that was dumped all over the floor in the midst of the rest of the wreckage.

The unfortunate family looked on helplessly in shock as their home was destroyed in front of their eyes. It was clear that these thugs had been sent by their landlord. As the peasants slammed the door in satisfaction upon their departure, the innkeeper's wife and children finally broke down in bitter tears. He himself tried to restore a little order from the mess, did his best to comfort the others, and then hurried off to Shul.

It was very difficult for the innkeeper to maintain any spirit of Shabbos. During the whole davening he was deeply worried about what would be. He knew this was just the beginning; he still didn't have the money, so he could expect an even worse follow.

But then it was time for the Rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel to give the special Shabbos Hagsdol sermon. He didn't get to hear too much, nor did he understand what he heard. But he managed to follow the last part of the sermon. Two different blessings mention the redemption of Israel.

One, Ga'al Yisrael, is in past tense "Blessed are You...who redeemed Klal Yisrael." This we say every morning just before starting Shmone Esrei and on Seder night at the end of Magid before the second cup of wine. It refers to the redemption from Egypt, a past event.

**The Powerful Go’el Yisrael Blessing**

There is also a blessing, Go'el Yisrael, in the present tense "Blessed are You...who redeems Klal Yisrael ." We say it three times every day in the Shmone Esrei. It begins, "Please behold our affliction and wage our battle."

At this point the Tzaddik gave a small sigh, raised his eyes towards the entrance of the Shul where the anguished tenant had just come in, and then returned to his talk. "This blessing is expressed in the present tense because it refers to the Divine redemption that takes place at every moment. Therefore, even if there is a Jew in a village who is unable to pay his rent on time and the landlord sends Cossack bullies to wreck havoc in his house, the Master of the Universe will arrange redemption and salvation for this Jew too."

The innkeeper, an unlearned Jew, did not understand all that the Rebbe said, but these final words penetrated his heart. He knew well that it was he who the Rebbe was referring to. When he arrived home, he was full of joy. He tried to encourage and cheer up his still-grieving family, even though he couldn't remember the Rebbe's exact words.

"The Rebbe said 'Go'el Yisroel'! The Rebbe said 'He redeems Klal Yisrael!'" he kept happily repeating to his bewildered family. They just couldn't understand his remarkable reversal of mood.

**Sent by the Duke to Keep**

**Up the Pressure on the Jew**

Late that Motzaei Shabbos, the Duke sent his henchmen again, to keep up the pressure on the Jew and see if he had learned his lesson properly. They were astonished to see their victim singing and dancing in vigorous joy. "He is acting like someone who found a hidden treasure," they reported back to their disbelieving master.

"Bring him to me immediately," he ordered. The tenant bounded in to the castle with a beaming face. The Duke gave him a fierce look and demanded his money, but the empty-handed Jew, confident in the Rebbe's blessing, just grinned even wider and friendlier.

The Duke, startled, began to wonder. Could it be that from all the suffering and pressure his tenant's mind had snapped? It certainly seemed like it. How could he act so carefree and happy when his situation was so desperate? But it had never been his intention to do any permanent damage to the Jew. He just wanted his money As, he stared at the grinning Jew and pondered the situation, he began to feel sorry for the poor bemused innkeeper. "Listen to me, Moshke," he addressed his tenant in a more gentle voice, "Why are you such a failure at the inn? Look at you, you are impoverished, you can't pay your debts, you can't even afford to replenish your stock of liquor so that maybe you could turn a little profit."

"So what should I do?" asked the innkeeper, shrugging cheerfully.

**The Duke Offers a Solution**

"I'll tell you" replied the Duke. "Go to the wholesaler. I'll give you a note telling him to sell you several crates of bottles on credit. You can make good business with them at the tavern. Just be careful to put money aside to pay off the purchase and of course to pay me what you owe me!"

What a deal! The innkeeper took his landlord's offer cheerfully. In a relatively short period he was able to pay all his debts. After that he made large profits. The whole while he was clear in his mind that his sudden turn of fortune and everything connected with it was in the merit of the Rebbe's blessing.

After some time, when he was able to return to Kolbisov to see the Rebbe, he brought with him a pouch filled with silver. He presented it to the Tzaddik, saying, "Rebbe, here is 'Go'el Yisrael' money."

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayikra 5782 edition of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.*

**The Passover Story in Short**

**The Exodus**

On [**Passover**](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/871715/jewish/What-Is-Passover-Pesach.htm), we celebrate how G‑d took the [**Jewish People**](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3852163/jewish/Who-Are-the-Jews.htm) (Israelites) out of **Egypt**, where they had been enslaved by **Pharaoh**. With [**Moses**](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/73398/jewish/Moses.htm) as His representative, [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm) brought [**10 plagues**](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1653/jewish/The-Ten-Plagues.htm) upon the Egyptians until they agreed to send the Jews from their land.

When we read the [**Haggadah**](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1735/jewish/Haggadah.htm) at the [**Seder meal**](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1751/jewish/What-Is-a-Seder-Passover-Meal.htm), we retell this story to our children, who will one day retell it to their children. Also known as the story of Exodus, it is recorded [**in the Bible**](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/3970297/jewish/Passover-in-the-Bible.htm) and is important to the Jewish people because it tells us how G‑d chose us to be His special people, which helps us understand our purpose and meaning in life.

**Arrival in Egypt**



Jacob and his children had arrived in Egypt to be close to Joseph; he was second in command to King Pharaoh, and with his ingenuity had saved the people of Egypt, and by extension those from neighboring countries, from death by famine. Jacob and his children were settled in the city of Goshen and prospered wonderfully—their numbers grew and grew.

As long as Jacob's son's are alive, the Children of Israel are accorded honor and respect, but after the passing of Joseph, "There arose a new king in Egypt who knew not Joseph"--some commentaries say, chose not to know Joseph--"And he said to his people. 'Behold the Children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply...'"([Exodus 1:8](https://www.chabad.org/9862#v8)-10).

**Enslavement**



The Egyptians' way of dealing with their "Jewish Problem" is to enslave the Jews. They are all forced into backbreaking labor, compelled to build cities of treasure houses for Pharaoh. But still, the Jews continue to multiply, to Pharaoh's eyes, at an ever frightening pace.

To put a stop to this, Pharaoh summons the Jewish midwives, Shifra and Puah, and commands them to kill all Jewish newborn males. This, he is certain, will put an end to the propagation of this race. When the midwives defy his order, he commands that they cast all the newborn males into the Nile—his stargazers had predicted that the savior of the Jews would die through water—and Pharaoh hopes his plan will ensure an early death for any potential Jewish leader.

**Moses' Birth**



Jocheved, the wife of the Levite Amram, gives birth to a son. Because he is born three months early, she is able to conceal him for that amount of time. When she can no longer hide him, she builds a small water-proof cradle and puts her child on the brink of the Nile. The child's sister, Miriam, hides among the brush to watch the child.

Pharaoh's daughter comes to bathe in the river when she sees the floating cradle. When she opens it and sees the weeping baby, she realizes that this is a Jewish child, but her compassion is aroused and she resolves to take the baby home. She names him Moses "he who was drawn from the water."

Miriam approaches the princess and offers to find a wet-nurse for the baby. When Pharaoh's daughter accepts, Miriam brings her Jocheved, whom Pharaoh's daughter hires to nurse and care for the child. When Moses grows older, he is returned to the palace, where Pharaoh's daughter raises him like a son.

**Moses Is Appointed Leader**



As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the hardship of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them—Zipporah—and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

In the meantime, the plight of the Children of Israel in Egypt worsens, "and their cry rose up to G‑d."

As Moses is shepherding his flock, he comes upon a burning bush, in which G‑d appears to him and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses objects, citing a speech defect he acquired while in the palace, and so Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman.

In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go and even intensifies the suffering of Israel. He increases the burden of labor on his Hebrew slaves, commanding their taskmasters to cease bringing the Israelites straw to make the bricks. Now, they must go to the fields to collect the straw themselves, but maintain the same quota of brick production.

Moses can no longer bear the pain of his brethren; he turns to G‑d saying, "Why have You done evil to this people?" G‑d promises that the redemption is close at hand, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land."

G‑d then reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the "four expressions of redemption," He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the Land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

**The 10 Plagues**



Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G‑d, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron's staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers.

Pharaoh still refuses to let the Jews go. Moses warns him that G‑d will smite Egypt. Pharaoh remains impervious. G‑d begins to send a series of plagues upon the Egyptians. In the throes of each plague, Pharaoh promises to let the Children of Israel go; but he reneges the moment the affliction is removed.

1) Aaron strikes the Nile, the waters turn to blood;

2) Swarms of frogs overrun the land;

3) Lice infest all men and beasts. Still, Pharaoh remains stubborn;  
 4) Hordes of wild animals invade the cities,

5) a pestilence kills the domestic animals,

6) painful boils afflict the Egyptians.

7) Fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go; as G‑d had said to Moses."

**The Egyptians Begin to Beg**

**Pharoah to Let the Jews Go**

The people of Egypt have suffered too much. They beg Pharaoh to let the Jews go. When Moses comes to warn Pharaoh of the eighth plague, Pharaoh says: You say that you want to go serve your G‑d? I'll let the men go, as long as the women and children stay behind. No, says Moses, we must all go, men women and children, cattle and herds. Pharaoh once again refuses.

The next plagues descends upon Egypt.

8) a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery;

9) a thick, palpable darkness envelops the land.

The Israelites are instructed to bring a "Passover offering" to G‑d: a lamb or kid is to be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that G‑d should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs.

Then G‑d brings the tenth plague upon Egypt,  
 10) all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nissan.

**The Exodus**



The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance and he literally begs the Children of Israel to leave his land. Following G‑d's command, they hastily depart; so hastily that there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments, emerging from Egypt a wealthy nation.

The Children of Israel are commanded to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating [matzah](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1747/jewish/The-Matzo.htm), and telling the story of their redemption to their children.

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G‑d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the Children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G‑d.

*Reprinted from the website of Chabad.Ortg*

**Kol Dichfin – Everyone**

**Is Welcomed**

**By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon**

*I am posting the following story, I recently heard from Rabbi Chaim Mentz, shliach of the Rebbe in Bel-Air California.*

It was one erev Pesach in the late 1960’s, and our neighbor Rabbi Kasriel Kastel of Lubavitch Youth in Brooklyn, called our house. “Rabbi Mentz,” he said to my father, someone just called if we can put him up for the two sedorim, can he stay by you?”

“Yes, it will be our pleasure,” my father replied. And a half hour before Pesach, a Jew with long hair got off his motorcycle and rang our bell. As he entered the house, we could smell that he was on the road for a few days and my father, gave him a clean towel and informed him where the shower was.

**Mother Was Standing on the Street Corner**

While he was in the shower, we went to shul, and to our shock as we were returning home there was my mother standing on the street corner.

“What happened,” my father inquired somewhat concerned?

“Our guest is a drug addict,” she replied, “and we can’t have him in the house. It is just too dangerous. You have to send him off.”

“But tonight, we say kol dichfin – whoever is hungry is invited,” my father replied, “I never heard that kol means everyone, besides the one I don’t want. We invite everyone, and our guest is included.”

“But Binyomin, he is dangerous,” my mother said. “However, if you insist to allow him to stay, it is your responsibility to remain up and be on guard the entire night.”

“Yes,” replied my father, “I will have to watch him.”

Entering the house, my father wished our guest a good Yom Tov, and made some small talk. Then pointing to the containers, he asked, “Is that your medications?”

No, replied our guest. “I sometimes take them to relax.”

**Asks the Guests to Remove His Drugs from the House**

In his gentle voice, my father said, “Tonight is Passover, and as you noticed some cabinets are covered or taped, as we worked very hard to take out all chometz – leavened items, from our house. It is possible that some of those items you have are also chometz, so if you don’t mind, especially as you said you don’t need them, can you please place them in the seat bucket of your motorcycle. This way in case they ae leavened they won’t be in our house.”

“Sure, no problem,” he replied and he took all of his pills and placed them in his motorcycle.

This individual was extremely inquisitive, and at the seder he peppered my father with questions about the Seder, Pesach and Judaism in general, with the conversation going on into the wee hours of the morning, way after the meal had concluded (after all my father promised he will stay awake). The following morning, when we went to shul and when we returned, our guest was in a deep sleep and he slept almost the entire day.

During the second Seder, he once again asked relevant and irrelevant questions until late in the morning and slept the entire day. When he awoke in the late afternoon, my father informed him that shortly he will be saying the Havdalah, and at that time the holiday comes to an end. He remained until after Havdalah and then thanked us and off he went on his motorcycle.

**Ten Years Later – A Greeting on Kingston Avenue**

Some eight to ten years later, I was walking with my father on Kingston Avenue, when a Jew with a kapota and long beard stops us and greets us in a friendly fashion, “Rabbi Mentz, Sholom Aleichem, how are you?”

“Boruch Hashem,” my father replied, “and who are you?” His facial expression showing he has no clue who this individual is, and was somewhat surprised that the person knows him and greeted him like an old acquaintance or friend.

“You don’t recognize me?” the person replied. “I was your guest almost ten years ago, for the first two nights of Pesach. Just then I arrived on a motorcycle.”

“Yes, yes, I recall that Pesach,” my father responded.

“Well now, thanks to you and some other wonderful individuals who I had the honor of meeting,” the person happily said, “I am religious and I am a sofer (scribe) in Eretz Yisroel.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

So, if you want to see the power of one encounter, here it is. Yes, you might not see the benefits of it for a while, or you may never realize what you accomplished. But a good deed produces positive fruit and results. However, you don’t have to wait for the Seder to make that connection and inspiration, one phone call, one compliment, one act of friendship, can make the difference.

Do yours today and every day!

*Reprinted from the Pesach 5781 Story of Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim and their Chassidim. He can be contacted at* [*avtzonbooks@gmail.com*](mailto:avtzonbooks@gmail.com)

**An Alternative Route**

**By [Yehudah Chitrik](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/10216/jewish/Chitrik-Yehudah.htm" \o "Browse more articles by Chitrik, Yehudah)**

A number of Jewish servicemen were based at a Russian army camp located near the city of Lubavitch. This location enabled them to maintain a reasonable level of Jewish practice, obtain kosher food, and pray with a quorum on Shabbat from time to time.

Much to their dismay, they learned that their unit would be transferred. To add to their distress, the transfer would take place in direct proximity to the Passover holidays. According to their commanding officer’s plan, during [Passover](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/default_cdo/jewish/Passover.htm) they would be in the midst of a march deep in the Russian mainland, far away from any Jewish community.

Distraught, the soldiers decided to seek the advice of the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, and one of them was dispatched as a messenger to [Lubavitch](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/244369/jewish/About-Chabad-Lubavitch.htm). He explained their plight to the Rebbe, emphasizing in particular the difficulties they would have observing the Passover laws during their journey.

“I suggest you approach your captain with an alternative route for the journey,” said the rebbe. “Explain that the route he has planned has many disadvantages. Since the cities on his itinerary are more than a single day’s journey apart, the unit will be compelled to camp out at night in the wilderness.



“Suggest an alternative route—to pass through White Russia, stopping at Orsha, Shklov, Kopust, and Mohilev. The shorter distances between these towns will make the journey far more convenient for everyone. And you, of course, will gain access to the Jewish communities there.

**The Rebbe Asks a Personal Request of the Soldier**

“I also have a personal request. Most probably, you will be in Shklov on the first two days of the festival. When you go to synagogue on the eve of Passover, you will be invited home by one of the people. Accept his invitation for the Passover festive meals. However, if he invites you to sleep over, excuse yourself and spend the night in the synagogue known as the ‘Green Synagogue.’

“On the last days of Pesach you will be in Mohilev. There too, accept any invitation for the festival meals, but insist on sleeping in the communal guesthouse.”

The rebbe concluded his instructions and gave the soldier a parting blessing. Returning to his base, the soldier related the rebbe’s advice to his comrades.

One soldier’s response expressed the feelings of the entire group: “It is very sound advice, but how can we dare suggest it? The captain will be deeply offended if we so much as hint that his plan is less than perfect.”

The soldiers discussed the matter for days. They hesitated to approach their short-tempered captain until the imminence of their departure date finally compelled them to act. Hoping that the rebbe’s blessing would guard them, they presented the alternative plan to the captain.

Surprisingly, he was both impressed and willing. “Your suggestion is very good. How did simple soldiers like you come up with such an idea?” he asked in disbelief.

“To tell you the truth, sir, it was not our own idea, but rather the advice of a great scholar, Rabbi Menachem Mendel,” they answered.

Following the new plan, the troop indeed found itself in Shklov on the eve of Passover. The Jewish soldiers were given the next two days off, and hurried to the local synagogue to seek arrangements for the holiday. They were all graciously invited to different homes and went off with their hosts.

**Awakened by the Bitter Tears of an Old Jew**

After the Passover meal, the soldier who had been given instructions by Rabbi Menachem Mendel prepared to leave. Despite the protests of his generous host, he excused himself and made his way to the Green Synagogue where he settled himself in a cozy corner to sleep. As he dozed off, he was suddenly awakened by sighs and moans coming from the far end of the synagogue. Only then did he notice an elderly man hunched over the table in obvious distress. The soldier approached him and gently asked, “Why are you so upset? Can I help you?”

“How can you help me?” the man answered bitterly. “Go back to sleep and just ignore me.”

The soldier backed away, respecting the man’s desire for privacy. When, however, the older man’s anguished groaning continued and prevented the soldier from sleeping, he approached him again. “Please share your troubles with me,” he said sympathetically. “Perhaps I can ease your sorrow.”

**An Old Widower Betrayed**

**By His New Younger Wife**

The man was touched by the soldier’s sincerity and told his story: “I am a widower who married a woman much younger than myself. What I thought would be a peaceful marriage turned out to be a nightmare. We had been married only a few weeks when a traveling orchestra came to town. One of the musicians became friendly with my wife, and before I knew it, the two stole all my money and ran away.

“I have no income, no home, and am at a total loss as to what to do. This is why I sleep here in the synagogue,” the man concluded.

“One never knows,” the soldier said in an attempt to console him. “Maybe I can be of help to you. Our troop is on a long trek into the inland reaches of Russia, and we will be passing through many towns and villages. Describe your wife and the musician to me; perhaps I will come across them while we’re on the road. I promise to do my best to help you.”

The man readily described the two, and, calmed by the soldier's compassionate interest, he finally fell asleep.

The soldiers continued their journey during the next week, and, just as Rabbi Menachem Mendel had foreseen, they arrived in the town of Mohilev on the eve of the latter days of the holiday. Again, the Jewish soldiers were given leave and they accepted invitations to the local people’s homes.

**Again the Soldier was Awakened from His Sleep**

Once again, the soldier excused himself for the night and went to sleep in the communal guesthouse as instructed. During the night, a loud commotion roused him from his sleep. He got up and saw that a band of people had arrived to spend the night there. Much to his surprise, one of the men and a woman fit precisely the description he had been given by the old man in the town of Shklov.

Early the next morning, before the latecomers had arisen, the soldier hurried to the house of the local rabbi and pounded on the door. “I am so sorry to disturb you, Rabbi, but there is an urgent matter which I must discuss.”

He quickly related the sorry plight of the man from Shklov. “I believe that I have found his runaway wife and her friend,” he suggested.

The rabbi immediately contacted the authorities and the two were arrested. The stolen money and valuables were traced, and after the holiday, the Rabbi arranged for a divorce.

Adapted by Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles from *[From My Father’s Shabbos Table](https://www.chabad.org/2483833" \t "_blank")* by Rabbi Yehuda Chitrik, z”l, Eliyahu Touger’s excellent selection and translation from Rabbi Yehudah Chitrik’s *Reshimos Devarim*.

Art by [Sefira Lightstone](https://www.chabad.org/3159160).

*Reprinted from the Chabad.Org website for Pesach.*

[**Yehudah Chitrik**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/10216/jewish/Yehudah-Chitrik.htm)

**Rabbi Yehuda Chitrik** (August 28, 1899 – February 14, 2006) was an author and *[Mashpia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashpia" \o "Mashpia)* in the [Chabad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chabad-Lubavitch) [Hasidic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasidic_Judaism) community in [Brooklyn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooklyn), New York.

Yehuda Chitrik was born in 1899 in [Krasnaluk](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Krasnaluk&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Krasnaluk (page does not exist)), a small Jewish [shtetl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shtetl) in [Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia), to a prominent Lubavitch family that traces its roots to the foremost Chassidim of the [Alter Rebbe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alter_Rebbe). At the age of 14, he began studying in [Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yeshiva_Tomchei_Temimim) in the village of [Lyubavichi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyubavichi" \o "Lyubavichi), where he met the fifth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi [Sholom Dovber Schneersohn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholom_Dovber_Schneersohn). For the next 12 years, he traveled to many different communities together with the Yeshiva, for the difficulties caused by World War I, the [Bolshevik revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik_revolution), and the economic pressures to which the Jews were subjected compelled the Yeshiva to move frequently.

In 1926 Chitrik married Kayla Tomarkin, the daughter of Rabbi Aharon Tomarkin, a Rabbi in [Kharkiv](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kharkiv" \o "Kharkiv), [Ukraine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine), and began to serve as a [*Shochet*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shochet) until the Russian government forcefully shut down the ritual slaughterhouses. During this period he also met Rabbi [Menachem Mendel Schneerson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menachem_Mendel_Schneerson), who later became the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe.

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**Post-Holocaust**

In the turmoil that followed World War II and [the Holocaust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust), Rabbi Chitrik and his family moved to [Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium) with the intention of continuing to the United States. But the sixth Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi [Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yosef_Yitzchok_Schneersohn) recognized his skills and asked him to remain in Belgium to support the community and spread [Yiddishkeit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddishkeit) and Chassidic warmth among the many refugees who had settled in that country.

In 1949, he emigrated to [Montreal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreal), [Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada), where he was appointed *Mashpia* in the branch of the [Lubavitcher Yeshiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomchei_Temimim) established there. After the passing of his wife in 1983, he moved to Brooklyn.

Rabbi Chitrik was the eldest living Chabad Chassid for many years. He died 17 [Shevat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shevat) 5766. He has four children and eighteen grandchildren, and is survived by over 300 descendants in total.

1. Rabbi Caim Mentz told me in which city that person lives, but to protect his anonymity I decided not to post it. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)