**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Lech Lecha 5771**

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**Weekly Chasidic Story #672**

**The Glory of Israel**

**From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

Rabbi Yisrael of Rhizin was faithful to the spirit of the Baal Shem Tov, who explained the Biblical verse *"To these the Land shall be divided "*(Num. 26:52), as "The Holy Land can bring a separation between a woman and her husband when he wants to go to Israel and she wants to remain in exile" (see story #520 in this series).

On the last day of Pesach, 5607 (1847), the Rebbe's wife, Sarah, passed away. On the day of the funeral, he wept profusely the whole day long. When the chasidim asked him about this, he replied,

**Heavenly Signs in the Port of Constantinople**

"The Baal Shem Tov, after the passing of his wife, decided to immigrate to Israel, but on the way a great storm arose and he was detained by Heaven. When he finally reached the port of Constantinople, he saw other heavenly signs indicating that he should return, at which point he said, 'All my life I yearned to come to Israel, and now I am being prevented. “Since half of me is remaining in the Diaspora, it is decreed that I, too, shall remain.' And I, too," concluded the Rebbe, "yearned and hoped for the day that I would go to Israel, and now that half of me remains here, I am afraid that I will have to remain here, and for this I weep."

**Grants Permission to His Chassidim to Immigrate to Israel**

After a few years passed, the situation in Russia improved somewhat and the Rizhiner gave his consent to those of his Chasidim who requested permission to immigrate to Israel. He involved himself with them and cared for them, never losing interest in their welfare and in the most mundane details of happenings in Israel.

Although the Rebbe longed to go and settle in Israel, he was unable to forsake his chasidim. He used to say that if he came to Israel he would be asked why he had come without his Jews. On one occasion the Rebbe spoke about the final redemption and said that it would begin with the emigration of Jews to Israel. Just as in the times of Ezra there was no miraculous redemption as in Egypt, similarly in our times if the generation will not be worthy, the redemption will also take place in a natural way. The countries of the world will decide to give the Jews Israel back and rebuild the land. There will be great miracles but they will be hidden in the circle of nature, and after this we will see the final redemption.

**“Let It Start Already”**

As the Rebbe finished these words he sighed and said, "Of course it bothers us that the redemption should start in such a way, but we have no more strength to wait. However it will be, let it start already."

One of his major accomplishments in the Holy Land was the building of a synagogue in Jerusalem. It eventually was named after him, *Tiferes Yisroel*, "the Glory of Israel."

It began when in the year 1843, Nissan Beck of Jerusalem came to visit the Rebbe in Sadagora. Along with the news he brought from the Holy Land was that he had heard from officers of the Turkish government that Nicholas, the Czar of Russia, was planning to buy a plot of land next to the Western Wall, in order to build a large church and a monastery.

When he heard this, the Rebbe became very agitated and said, "*Ponye* (used here as a euphemism for Russia) wants to block the way to the Western Wall with his impurity. He shall not be able to do it; we shall not allow him!"

**Beats the Czar in Buying the Land**

Beck hurried to comply with the Rebbe's command. As soon as he returned to Jerusalem he spoke to the Arab owners of the land. With great difficulty, after interminable debates and arguments, he was able to buy the land for a huge sum. A few days after the purchase had been completed, an order came from Czar Nicholas to the Russian consul in Jerusalem urging him to conclude the purchase. But it was too late.

It is told that after the Czar was informed that the plot of land had been "snatched away," by his enemy, the *tzadik* of Rizhin, he became extremely angry and cried out, "He always stands in my way!" By then, nothing could be done, for the Rebbe had already received Turkish citizenship papers and had been registered as a citizen of Jerusalem, so that the Czar had no alternative but to buy a different plot of land outside the walls of Jerusalem for a church. The area is known today as the "Russian Quarter."

According to the directions of the Rebbe, Nissan Beck immediately hired workers to clear the property he had purchased for the building. Beck himself was the architect and the contractor.

**Many Obstacles Presented Themselves**

Even at the outset, however, many obstacles presented themselves. It transpired, for example, that the burial place of a sheik was beneath the plot of land; it was therefore necessary to move the grave elsewhere. Permission was obtained from the Moslem *kadi* (religious judge), but it was necessary to do it quietly, so as not to arouse the attention of the Moslem masses. Unfortunately, a too curious Arab saw what was happening and demanded a bribe not to reveal the secret.

R' Nissan refused to pay the bribe. On Friday, when the Moslems gathered in the Mosque of Omar to pray, the Arab revealed to them that the sheik had appeared to him in a dream, complaining that his pious brothers had allowed his grave to be desecrated and removed. He succeeded in inflaming all present, and they decided to visit the kadi, to ask him to halt further construction. The *kadi*, intimidated by the mob, promised that he would, and work on the building came to a halt.

**Understanding the Psychology of the Arabs**

R' Nissan, however, understood the psychology of his Arab neighbors. He waited until the community's anger dissipated. Then he went to the Grand Sheik of the Mosque of Omar and the *kadi* and persuaded them to rescind their prohibition, as well as to pacify the masses sufficiently to ensure that they not interfere with the construction of the synagogue.

On the following Friday, when the worshipers came to pray at the Mosque, the Grand Sheik told them in his discourse that the dead sheik appeared to him in a dream, saying, "What do you have against me? For preventing the Jews from building their house of prayer I was called to our Patriarch, Ibrahim (beloved of All-ah), in the Garden of Eden, and he berated me, saying,

"Why do the children of your nation prevent the children of my nation from building a house of prayer in Jerusalem, the Holy City? Watch yourself, lest you be punished! Now, instead of deterring them, you will assist the sons of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to build their house of prayer at my former place of burial. This will give me in my grave great satisfaction and peace.'

"The Grand Sheik concluded, "So harshly did he speak to me that I have promised him that I will command you to do his will. Now I command you to do my bidding!"

**Many Arabs Came to Help**

**In Laying the Foundation**

At once, all the gathered worshipers became excited and went to the *kadi* to ask him to rescind his prohibition. Many of them came to help in the laying of the foundation. This was also difficult, as there was no rock on the site with which to build the foundation. Further delays ensued.

It is told that during the laying of the foundation, the Rizhiner saw in a dream the Biblical verse addressed to King David, when he wanted to build the Temple. *"You, however, shall not build the Temple. Rather your son shall build the Temple for My Name"* (I Kings 8:19).

The Rebbe then sent a letter to his followers in Jerusalem, directing them to stop the construction. It stopped until his demise in 1850, was renewed by his son, R' Avrohon Yaakov of Sadagora, and continued, with sporadic interruptions.

**Yehuda HaChassid Segal of Szydlowiec**

In 1699, Yehuda HaChassid Segal (1660-1700), the fiery *maggid* ("preacher") of Szydlowiec, left Grodno for Israel with 120 people , known as the "Holy Society of Yehuda HaChassid." They traveled through Altona, Frankfurt, and Vienna, and their number grew to 1,300. But many died en route, and no more than a few hundred of them eventually reached the Holy Land on 14 October 1700.

Unhappily, Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid died five days after arrival. His followers purchased a site in Jerusalem on which they planned to erect a synagogue and forty homes. The new settlers borrowed heavily from the Arabs, who, in November 1701, attacked them and destroyed the synagogue.

After that, it was known as the Hurva Yehuda HaChassid. The synagogue remained a ruin from 1701 until a new foundation stone was laid on 7 Nissan 1857. The synagogue took nearly eight years to build. It was dedicated on 24 Elul 1864 and became the chief synagogue of the Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem.

The rebuilding of the 'Hurva' inspired Beck to persevere in his efforts to erect a Chassidic synagogue. In a public proclamation he pleaded that "it is already twelve years since we acquired a site to erect a magnificent structure." He was financially backed by the Sadagora Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Friedman, son of the deceased Rhizinner, who sent one of his Chasidim to Jerusalem to help, and by the family of Ezekiel Reuben Sassoon.

**Kaiser Franz Joseph Visits the Holy City**

On 14 November 1869, when Kaiser Franz Joseph visited Jerusalem on his way to inaugurate the Suez Canal, he noticed the beautiful building of the synagogue was lacking a roof. He asked the reason for this. Nissan Beck, who was accompanying the Kaiser's touring party in the walled city, replied: "Even the synagogue wishes to welcome you and took off its hat in honor of Your Majesty."

The Kaiser smiled and added, "I hope that the roof will be built soon." He left the Austrian consul one hundred franks (a huge sum in those days) towards the completion of the synagogue, the roof of which was called from then on, "Franz Josef's cap."

**A Fine Example of Ottoman Architecture**

The building was fully completed in the month of Av 1872, and inaugurated on the fifteenth of that month, at which time the Kollel Vohlin distributed four hundred meals to needy Jews of the community. The festivity was great as the masses, including gentiles, came to witness the bringing of the Torah Scrolls into the synagogue. All the chasidim of Rizhin-Sadagora journeyed from throughout the country to participate in the dedication. The beautiful synagogue was a fine example of Ottoman architecture, with its thirty windows facing the Temple Mount and the twelve windowed dome.

It had superb decoration, and silver objects which were donated by various chasidim. The synagogue also had a ritual bath in its basement. It was considered one of the richest and most beautiful synagogues of Jerusalem. The descendants of the Rebbe bought themselves seats in this great synagogue, and most Chasidim of Rizhin would walk on Shabbos to pray there, at this unifying "small Temple" of their great Rebbes.

 It was destroyed by the Jordanians on 19 Iyar 1948, together with fifty-seven other historic synagogues (only the Tsemach Tsedek Shul remained intact, miraculously -editor). The Jordanians also vandalized the Scrolls of the Torah and the synagogue's very valuable library.

*Editor's note:* In 2010, the restoration and rededication of the Yehuda HaChassid synagogue was spectacularly completed, after nearly a decade of construction work. May it be G-d's will that we will soon see also the complete restoration of the *Tiferet Yisrael* Synagogue.

**Sources:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "The House of Rizhin" by Rabbi Menachem Brayer (Mesorah), "Hasidism in Israel" by Tzvi Rabinowcz, (Jason Aronson), and "The Golden Dynasty" by Yisroel Friedman (Kest-Lebovits).

Connection: Seasonal - 160th yahrzeit

**Rabbi Yisrael Friedmann of Rizhin**

Biographic notes: Rabbi Yisrael Friedmann of Rizhin [1797 - 3 Cheshvan 1850] was a great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezritch. At a young age was already a charismatic leader with a large following of chasidim. Greatly respected by the other rebbes and Jewish leaders of his generation, he was-and still is-referred to as "The Holy Rizhinner." Six of his sons established Chassidic dynasties, several of which-Sadigora, Chortkov, etc-are still thriving today.

Nissan Bak's father, Yisrael Bak (1797-1874), became a pioneer in Hebrew printing in the Holy Land. After printing twenty-six books in Berditchev, he settled in Safed in 1831. The first book he printed one year later was Siddur Sefat Emet, a prayer book that was endorsed by the Safed rabbinate. Two years later, he was joined by his wife, five daughters, and his son Nisan and other families from Berditchev and Odessa. His printing press grew, and he soon had a staff of thirty.

**A Legacy of Hebrew Book Printing**

During the Peasant's Revolt against Muhammed Ali on 8 Sivan 1834, his printing press was damaged. He himself was attacked and physically injured, and he remained lame for the rest of his life. Three years later, his son-in-law perished in the earthquake that rent Safed on 24 Tevet 1837. He moved to Jerusalem in 1844, where, for twenty-two years, he enjoyed the monopoly in printing Hebrew books. By 1883, nearly 130 Hebrew books had been printed by the Bak family.

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**The Human Side of the Story**

**Never Give Up Hope**

**By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

When a lady in New York lost a ring in the ocean she gave up hope of ever getting it back.

Thirty years later a woman in Puerto Rico flushed the ring out of the ocean, thousands of miles from where it was first lost. She noticed that the name of the owner was etched onto the ring and set about locating her.

To those involved in outreach to alienated Jews, this serves as a reminder never to give up hope on a Jew lost to his people.

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**A Slice of Life**

**How a Gown**

**Becomes a Curtain**

**By Miri Yeshurun**

It was the end of summer 2003, at the height of the bloody terrorist attacks against the Jews of Israel. One of Jerusalem's heroes was Dr. David Applebaum, head of the emergency department at Shaarei Tzedek Hospital. Originally from the U.S. Dr. Applebaum was always among the first, whenever a terrorist attack hit, to give the injured his devoted care, thereby saving scores of lives.

Dr. Applebaum had just returned from New York, where he had been invited to lecture at a major Manhattan hospital on emergency treatment of terror victims. He hurried back home for the wedding of his eldest daughter, Nava, on Wednesday, September 10. That Tuesday evening, the doctor took Nava out to the popular Cafe Hillel.

**A Suicide Bomber Attack**

The Applebaum's were ready to leave, when someone called from home. Suddenly, a loud explosion was heard over the phone. A suicide bomber had walked into the cafe and blown himself up. David and Nava's family members tried calling them. But no one picked up their calls.

The older children in the family immediately ran over to the cafe. The scene there was chaotic so the family took a taxi to the hospital. The hospital's director saw them: "Where's David?" he asked. "We need him here!"

"I'm looking for him, too," Mrs. Devora Applebaum told him. The hospital's emergency staff quickly realized that this time their beloved head would not be among those giving aid.

Eventually Dr. Applebaum's son, head of the TRM emergency first aid clinic that his father had established, approached his mother.

"Which one?" Devora asked frantically.

**Both Father and Daughter are Killed**

Between sobs, he managed to burst out: "Both, Ima, both of them!"

The double tragedy, of a bride on the eve of her wedding day, and her father, the beloved doctor who had saved so many lives, shocked the whole country. Even the international media covered the story in depth. Thousands attended the funeral, many of them total strangers. During the shiva week, multitudes visited the family to console them, while many more came just to stand outside their home and weep with them. No one could look at Nava's beautiful wedding gown.

**An Idea of Memorializing the Wedding Gown**

Aviva is a close friend and relative of Devora. Her daughter was Nava's best friend, who had grown up with her and been in the same class as her all the way through school.

During the shiva, a memory floated before Aviva's eyes. Years ago, in a museum in Safed, Israel, she had seen a paroches - a curtain for a holy ark that holds sacred Torah scrolls - sewn by a woman from the bridal gown of her daughter who had been murdered in a pogrom before her wedding. Aviva recalled how she had gazed at that paroches, shocked by the very thought of a bride murdered on the eve of her wedding.

Suddenly it struck her: Why not perpetuate Nava's holy memory by converting her bridal gown into a paroches? When Aviva shared this with Devora, she embraced the idea. This, she felt, would be an appropriate symbol of Jerusalem's repeated devastation and its inhabitants' suffering over its millennia-long history.

**The Uniqueness of Rachel’s Tomb (Kever Rachel)**

Aviva is among the coordinators of a women's organization for preserving Rachel's Tomb (Kever Rachel). The Torah relates that Jacob buried his beloved wife Rachel outside Beit Lechem after she passed away in childbirth. Tradition tells us that Rachel was providentially buried along the way so that she could arouse Divine compassion upon the Jews when their captors brought them on that path on their way to exile in Babylon. This is recorded by Jeremiah (31:14-15): "...Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be consoled... Thus says G-d: 'Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your accomplishment... and they shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future... and your children will return to their border."

**Archetype of Every Jewish Mother**

Rachel became the archetype for every Jewish mother whose compassion for her children prompts her to arouse Divine mercy on them. Jewish women have always felt close to Rachel and have flocked to her tomb to pour their hearts out to G-d, confident that Mother Rachel's merit will bring Divine compassion upon us all.

Aviva and her friends agreed that the ideal place for a paroches made out of Nava's wedding gown was at Rachel's tomb!

**An Expert Seamstress Donates Her Services**

Needed now was a seamstress who could put her heart and soul into the craftsmanship. Aviva found Tal Levi, an expert seamstress who supports her family so that her husband can study Torah full time. Although Tal would need to put hundreds of hours into creating the paroches, she and her husband decided that she should donate her services.

Aviva approached the woman who owned the rental company to explain what they hoped to do with the bridal gown. The owner generously agreed to donate it without charge.

The graceful bridal gown became a magnificent paroches, a work of art. The paroches was finally completed and it was to be dedicated on Nava's 21st birthday, the 11th day of Adar (Thursday, March 4, 2004).

The dedication ceremony would take place at Rachel's Tomb. When the Israeli media heard about the event, they clamored to cover it. Rachel's tomb was packed for the deeply moving ceremony. The resplendent paroches, clearly transformed from a bridal gown, was hung in the approach corridor before the tomb's synagogue for all to admire. Later, Nava's brothers hung it in front of the synagogue's holy ark, and a prayer service was held. It was decided to hang it permanently in the women's section where many women pray next to it each day.

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**It Once Happened**

**The Mother of**

**Rabbi Yehoshua**

The young woman rose early. She hurriedly dressed in the half-light, making her way down the hill. Her attention was taken up by thoughts of the future. Following the sound of melodious voices, she arrived at the House of Prayer, and took up her usual position outside. It was here she came every morning, to sit upon the large rock and allow the sounds to enter her and fill her soul.

From the moment she knew there was life within her, her plan was clear. She would go every day to the House of Prayer and then to all the Houses of Study. Her child, though yet to be born, would gradually come to know the sounds of the holy words of Torah.

When asked where she was going, she would reply, "I am going to the House of Prayer, so that my baby can hear the holy words." No one could fathom her design; but to her it was perfectly clear.

On this particular cold, winter day, she sat immersed in her own prayer to the One Above to bless her child with wisdom and the ability to toil in His Torah. She sat until the scholars emerged. Shyly, she approached the first: "Please, bless my child with wisdom." The old man smiled at the young woman whose presence no longer surprised him. "May your child shine with the light of Torah," he replied. She then continued on to the various Houses of Study where she would sit beneath the open windows, the words of Torah permeating her essence.

**Accompanied by Her New Son**

The months passed. The young woman still made her early morning rounds, but now she was accompanied by her new son, her precious treasure.

She still visited both the Houses of Prayer and the Houses of Study, but now she propped up the small baby in his cradle which she carried from home. And from the early morning until the heat of the day had passed, the tiny baby sat, dozed, ate, and dozed again while the sacred melodies of Torah learning filled the air, enveloping him and filtering into his consciousness. The young mother was joyful with her lot and confident in the future of her small child, Yehoshua.

**The Road to Rome is Long and Difficult**

Rabbi Yehoshua was tired. The road to Rome was long and difficult. But, thank G-d, his mission had met with success. His nerve-wracking debates with the vicious Hadrian had yielded the hoped for result-the severe decrees against the Jews had been rescinded. He could return to Yavne in peace, with good news for all his fellow Jews. Rabbi Yehoshua was enjoying his repose. Rabbi Yehoshua's thoughts turned to home. He longed to return to the Holy Land, to resume learning Torah with his beloved comrades, to enjoy the serenity of life's routines.

He was immersed in reverie when he was jolted by the appearance of a young Roman woman who stood before him with a saucy look on her face.

"So, you are Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania," she said with disdain.

"So, I am," answered Rabbi Yehoshua, for even in his humility he was aware that his fame extended to Rome. His wisdom, though, was equalled by his penetrating insight and deep-felt love for his fellowman.

"I have heard many tales recounting your wisdom," she replied. "But never would I have imagined that G-d would pick such an ugly vessel for his wisdom!"

Rabbi Yehoshua smiled at the girl's rude, but honest description of his appearance. He thought for only a moment and looked her in the eye, "Tell me, does your father have much old wine?"

**“We Have Extensive Cellars”**

"Yes, of course. We have quite extensive cellars," the girl answered.

"Well," he continued, "how does your father store the wine?"

"In clay jugs, of course."

"Can he not afford silver casks?" asked Rabbi Yehoshua, feigning surprise.

"Certainly he could, but everyone knows that wine will spoil if it is stored in silver. Clay is the proper material for preserving wine."

"Ah, now you have your answer! The Creator of the World knows the proper receptacle for his wisdom, and thus has He created me! So, if you have some complaint, you must take it to my Creator!"

**Both Embarrassed and Impressed**

The Roman woman was both embarrassed and impressed by Rabbi Yehoshua's discourse with her. She quickly took her leave, murmuring apologies, but as for Rabbi Yehoshua, he was unperturbed by the whole encounter.

Back in Yavne, Rabbi Yehoshua felt an immense relief. Now, life's rhythms could begin anew; and to him life was synonymous with Torah. And for his great learning and his loving nature, he was loved by all whom he touched. The years accumulated greatness and honor, but Rabbi Yehoshua's aim never changed.

**Exploring a Question in Jewish Law**

One day, already an old man, Rabbi Yehoshua sat with his students exploring a question in Jewish law. Was it incumbent upon the parents to bring their small children to hear the reading of the Torah during the Hakhel year? Rabbi Yehoshua listened to the discussion, and then related the story of how his mother would rise before dawn to sit beneath the open windows and allow her child to absorb the feel and essence of the holy words. All his life, Rabbi Yehoshua continued, he recalled his mother with blessing, for it was she who instilled in him the holiness to which his soul became attached.

Rabbi Yehoshua's comment sealed the Jewish legal conclusion with his own beautiful truth.

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