**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas kedoshim 5774**

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**It Once Happened**

**If a Man is Bound on High**

*The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, told the following story:*

During the winter of 1903, when I accompanied my father for the couple of months he spent consulting medical specialists in Vienna, he would sometimes go out in the evening to visit the shtiblach (small informal "houses" of study and prayer) of the local Polish Jews - to be among Chasidim, to hear a story from their mouths, to listen to a Chasidic saying, and to observe fine conduct and refined character.

**Telling Stories of the Saintly**

**Rabbi Meir of Premishlan**

One Wednesday night, on the eve of the 15th of Shevat, my father visited one of these shtiblach, where several hoary Chasidim were sitting around together and talking. As my father and I drew nearer, we heard that they were telling stories of the saintly Rabbi Meir of Premishlan.

Among other things, they related that the mikveh (ritual bath) in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood stood at the foot of a steep mountain. When the slippery weather came, everyone had to walk all the way around for fear of slipping on the mountain path and breaking their bones - everyone, that is, apart from Rabbi Meir, who walked down that path whatever the weather, and never slipped.

One icy day, Rabbi Meir set out as usual to take the direct route to the mikveh. Two guests were staying in the area, sons of the rich who had come somewhat under the influence of the "Enlightenment" movement. These two young men did not believe in supernatural achievements, and when they saw Rabbi Meir striding downhill with sure steps as if he were on a solidly paved highway, they wanted to demonstrate that they too could negotiate the hazardous path. As soon as Rabbi Meir entered the mikveh building, therefore, they took to the road. After only a few steps they stumbled and slipped, and needed medical treatment for their injuries.

**Mustering the Courage to**

**Ask the Rebbe a Question**

Now one of them was the son of one of Rabbi Meir's close Chasidim, and when he was fully healed he mustered the courage to approach the tzadik (righteous person) with his question: why was it that no man could cope with that treacherous path, yet the Rebbe never stumbled?

Replied Rabbi Meir: "If a man is bound up on high, he doesn't fall down below. Meir'l is bound up on high, and that is why he can go up and down, even on a slippery hill."

My father was under doctor's orders to walk about outdoors for a certain period every day. So from the shtibl we stepped out into the clear and balmy night, and strolled along the garden path that ran down the middle of one of the local avenues, where the moon lit up every detail for several paces ahead.

**So Deep in Meditation**

My father was so deep in meditation that he drew the attention of many passersby. Whenever I observed him in this state I yearned to know what he was thinking about. I watched intently for any facial expression or movement that might disclose a hint of what thoughts were engaging his mind, and what world his mind was now surveying.

Chasidic teaching discusses the differences between speech and thought, one of which is that speech reveals something to another, whereas thought obscures: one person can think all day long, and the next person will not know what he is thinking about. It is further pointed out, however, that it is the details of his thought that remain hidden. A general perception of his thinking - whether it concerns an intellectual concept, or an emotional matter - can be gleaned from his facial features.

We walked on together for such a long time that I began to feel uncomfortable. Continuing our stroll in this way made me feel morose and downhearted. Every minute lasted an hour, until at length a deep sigh inadvertently passed my lips.

At this my father stopped short and looked me through - all the way through - and said: "Why do you sigh? If a man is bound up on high, he doesn't fall down below."

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**The Death of Rabbi**

**Yaakov Emden**

**By Rabbi Nissan Mindel**

Rabbi Yaakov Emden was born in Altona (near Hamburg) in the summer of 1697. His father Rabbi Tzevi Ashkenazi (known as the Chacham Tzevi) was then chief rabbi of the three sister communities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck (known in Jewish history as the 'Kehiloth AHU,' after the Hebrew initials of the communities).

Rabbi Jacob Emden's real name, as you see, was Ashkenazi, but he was called Emden after the city where he had served as rabbi. He is also known as YaBeTz, being the initials of the words Yaakov Ben Tzevi. The young Jacob's first teacher was his own illustrious father, who was a famous Talmudist and rabbi in his time. From his father, Jacob inherited a fiery nature and violent opposition to the movement of the false 'Messiah' Sabbatai Tzevi.

**Still Secret Followers of the**

**False and Misleading Movement**

Although this movement 'had already long been proven as false and misleading, there were still secret followers of it. Like his father, he was determined to ferret them out and expose them at all costs. Until the age of eighteen, Rabbi Jacob followed his father everywhere, when the latter took up position in Amsterdam and later in Lemberg.

Then he left him to marry the daughter of a famous Talmudist Rabbi Mordecai ben Naftali Hakohen, who was the head of a great Yeshivah at Ungarish-Brod in Moravia. There he greatly enriched his knowledge of Torah by devoting most of his time to dilligent study. In his spare moments he also studied languages, grammar and philosophy.

After three years of intensive study, he left his father-in-law's house and Yeshivah at Brod and became a travelling salesman in jewelry. He did not want to become a paid rabbi if he could help it. Nevertheless, he never neglected to continue his studies even during his travels, and wherever he came he preached and reprimanded Jewish communities or leaders when he was not satisfied with their religious conduct.

**Unable to Stay in Emden**

In 1728 he accepted the call of the Jewish community at Emden to fill the vacant rabbinical post in that city. He held the post for four years, during which he was in continuous strife with all those who did not live up to his expectations. Finally he gave up the position, and returned to his native Altona in 1733. Here he spent the rest of his life, more than forty years of relentless fighting for his convictions, which brought him in conflict with the leading rabbis of his time.

On arrival in Altona. he was permitted to establish a synagogue of his own. He also started a printing shop, for which he had received the king's approval. In addition he conducted a thriving business in gems. Soon Rabbi Jacob Emden printed a prayer book with commentaries which aroused a great deal of opposition because it contained radical changes.

Rabbi Emden did not live at peace with the two leading rabbis of his community, Rabbi Moshe Chagis, head of the rich Portuguesecommunity, and Rabbi Jezekiel Katzenelnbogen, chief rabbi of the triple communities, the position previously held by Rabbi Emden's father. He often criticised the latter's law decisions, disregarding his age and position, for when Rabbi Jacob Emden consideredhimself in the right he would respect no one who differed from him.

**A Bitter Opponent of the Chief Rabbi**

For sixteen years he was a bitter opponent of the chief rabbi, until the latter's death in 1749, when Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz of Metz succeeded him. Rabbi Jacob Emden suspected the new \chief rabbi of being a secret follower of the Sabbatai Tzevi movement. He denounced him in public, and demanded that he be excommunicated.

The leaders of the community defended their Rabbi, who was well known as an unusually pious man and outstanding scholar. They declared that Rabbi Emden was a trouble maker and demanded that he leave the community. He refused to do so, until he was threatened with violence; then he fled to Hamburg and appealed to King Frederick of Denmark, to whom the province belonged. In June 1752 judgment was passed in favor of "Jacob Herschel" (Jacob the son of Hersch-Tzevi) as Rabbi Emden was called in the official documents.

The Jewish community council was blamed for high-handed action in driving Rabbi Emden out, and the leaders were fined. Rabbi Emden was permitted to return to Altona, where he continued his attacks against Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz.

**Ordered by the King to Stop His Attack**

Finally the king was convinced that Rabbi Emden was in the wrong and ordered him to stop his attack. The heated conflict was ended, but not before it had spread far and wide and kept Jewry in a state of excitement for a long time. It was generally agreed that although Rabbi Jacob Emden was prompted by good motives to defend Judaism against what he believed to be a grave danger, he was blinded by his zeal, and his fiery nature had the better of him.

There was, however, no difference of opinion as to Rabbi Jacob Emden's great scholarship. He 'was recognized as an authority on Jewish law and had great influence among government circles. Thus in 1772 he was called upon to help the Jewish community- of Mecklenburg Schwerin in its fight for the right to bury the dead soon after death, in accordance with the requirements of Jewish law, which regards a delay in burial as degrading to the dead.

**Wrote Numerous Pamphlets**

In addition to his Siddur, which despite some opposition became an important reference book in connection with Jewish prayer, Rabbi Jacob Emden is the author of several other works. He wrote a diary "Megillath Sefer" which is of great historical interest, since it gives a clear picture of Jewish life in those days. He also wrote various pamphlets in connection with the many controversies in which he was involved. Such was his "Eiduth

B'Yaakov" in which he presents his case against Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz.

He wrote pamphlets in his fight against the Sabbatai Tzevi movement. Of greater importance are his commentaries on the Mishnah, called "Seder Olam," and the Siddur mentioned above, which are important contributions to Rabbinical literature, which gave him an important place among the leading Talmudists of his time.

*Reprinted from the email of the Chol Hamoed Pesach edition of the Young Israel of Flatbush Bulletin. Published with permission of Kehot Publication Society.*

**A Miracle in Baghdad**

**By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton**

Some three hundred years ago a lone old, white-bearded wanderer entered the Jewish section of Baghdad. He was weary from the road and didn't notice that the streets were unusually empty for the middle of the afternoon. He looked down the street and headed for the highest building, the Synagogue.

**A Hot, Hungry and**

**Thirsty Traveler**

It was hot, and he was hungry and thirsty as well as tired. He entered the gate of the Synagogue courtyard, found a seat by a table under the shade of a tree, took a small package out of his pack, put it on the table and went to the outdoor sink. He washed his face, had a drink of water, then washed his hands for bread, sat down, took a sandwich out of the bag and began to eat. But as he was chewing he noticed the muffled sound of perhaps hundreds of voices plaintively reading Psalms in the Synagogue.

He finished the sandwich, said the blessing after eating, walked to the Synagogue door and pushed it open to a surprising sight. The Synagogue was packed; hundreds of people were reading Psalms aloud, swaying back and forth and weeping. He walked in and to the first person that glanced up at him, bent over and asked "What happened? Was there some sort of disaster?"

"We're fasting."

**Shocked by the News of the Fast**

"Fasting!?" he exclaimed aloud so several people turned to face him. "But I just finished eating! Did I make a mistake? Is it a fast day today?"

"No, don't feel bad." The man replied and motioned for him to follow him outside. "The Sultan has decreed that he's going to evict us, the entire Jewish population of Baghdad, tens of thousands of people, tomorrow morning!! It's insane! He wants us to find a Jew that can do miracles like Moses What can we do but fast and pray to G-d for help?!"

The visitor asked a few more questions until he got the entire sad story. It seems that the Sultan's chief advisor, an evil Jew-hater called Mustafa, tried to convince the Sultan that the Jews, besides being infidels who denied the 'prophet' Muhammad, were thieves and traitors in disguise that must suffer for their crimes; all their riches must be confiscated and evicted from Iraq.

But the Sultan was reluctant to make the decree. He was afraid that perhaps the Jews had a leader like Moses who could bring all sorts of plagues on him like happened to the Egyptians.

So his evil advisor invented this new decree; the Jews had to either produce a 'Moses' or leave Iraq immediately.

**Talking to the Rabbis**

The man returned to say Psalms leaving the old traveler immersed in thought. After a minute or so he entered the Synagogue hall, went up to the front where the Rabbis sat and began whispering something to one of them. Eventually he had all the Rabbis on their feet around him, a lively conversation ensued in low tones, they all shook their heads in agreement and finally one of the Rabbis went to the high podium in the middle of the room, clapped his hands for attention and announced.

"Our visitor claims he has a plan to save us. He has volunteered to go to the Sultan. If he succeeds, with G-d's help, we will be saved. But if, G-d forbid, he does not succeed, then we can say that he was just some old fool that acted alone. We must pray for his success.

The old man set off for the palace and in a half hour he was knocking on the huge palace door and demanding admission. "I am the Jew that has the power of Moses!!" he announced "I demand to see the Sultan immediately!"

**Ushered into the**

**Presence of the Sultan**

In moments he was ushered royally into the palace by several guards and stood bravely before the Sultan who was seated on his magnificent throne. The Jew's long white beard, walking staff and fiery eyes made a striking impression.

"So" said the Sultan, "You claim that you can do miracles like your Prophet Moses! What are these miracles?

"Ha!" The old man answered as he scanned the audience around him. Hundreds of courtiers, and other important- looking people were all staring at him with a mixture of awe, skepticism, curiosity, and fear in their eyes.

"If your majesty will allow me, I can do a miracle that even Moses could not do! Yes, your highness, even greater than Moses himself!!"

"And what is this miracle?" asked the Sultan incredulously.

"I can CUT a man's head off with a sword and then REVIVE him by RETURNING his HEAD TO HIS BODY." He used sweeping hand motions with each of the key words to impress the crowd.

**Does the Old Man Really Have Special Powers?**

The Sultan smiled and looked around shrugging his shoulders not knowing what to think. Was the man mad? If so he would have him killed on the spot! But on the other hand he seemed very sure of himself. If this old fellow really had such powers then maybe it was best to not to take any chances.

"But," the Jew continued, the crowd was abuzz from his previous announcement and took a few seconds to quiet down. "There is a condition!" He looked around at the crowd again and resumed speaking to the Sultan. "The man whose head I remove must be truly wise, if not, the head will not return properly."

The Sultan swallowed the bait. He was worried and the only thing that would assuage his doubts was to see for himself.

**Looking for a Candidate**

He began looking around at his advisors; staring deeply at them one after another. Each one lowered his eyes to the ground and prayed that he would pick someone else, until his eyes fell on …. Mustafa!

"Mustafa! The wisest of the wise!! My chief advisor!!"

"No! Your majesty!" Mustafa cried out in a squeaky voice. He cleared his throat and resumed in a normal tone. "That is…. Not me, your majesty, I'm not ….. that is I can't …. Err, he's faking your majesty! The old Jew is an imposter, he wants to kill me!"

"Could be… but I'm not taking any chances" answered the Sultan calmly. "If he IS genuine…. Well….. you want to endanger our entire nation? And… what about me?? The Sultan shuddered as he said the last three words, clapped his hands loudly three times and announced "Bring the sword!!"

"NO!!" Yelled out Mustafa. "I admit it! I confess! I am a fool, I'm not at all intelligent! I was the lowest in my class! I hardly know how to read. Forget my idea about the Jews it was a foolish idea!! I'm not fit to be your advisor. Take someone else… anyone else!!" And saying this he ran from the palace never to be seen again.

Of course when the old man returned to the Synagogue with the good news the happiness, singing and jubilation was boundless. Somehow in the festivities that followed he slipped out of town also never to be seen again.

Some say that he was Elijah the prophet but others just say that it was a Jew that couldn't bear to 'Stand on his fellow man's blood'.

*Reprinted from this week’s email from Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.*

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**The Terrible Decree**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

The Jewish people are hardly strangers to persecution and tyranny. When we hear of the complaints of other peoples, we smile bitterly and wonder: What do they know of persecution? What do they know of tragedy and bitterness? We are a people who have experienced oppression for centuries and have drunk deeply of the bitter cup of woe.

Among the bitter memories of the past, few are more painful than that of the days of Russian Jewry under the heel of the wicked Czar Nicholas I. In his hatred and frustration, the evil man devised a cruel scheme that he saw as the answer to his “Jewish problem.” His “solution” was to draft Jewish youngsters as young as eight and nine into his army for a period of 25 years.

**Every Town Had its Quota**

Every town was given its quota and commanded to fill it under penalty of severe punishment. The wailing and tears that accompanied this announcement can only be imagined. But it was to no avail. The leaders of the communities were told that it was their responsibility to furnish the children, and they in turn hired people to enforce the decree. These men, known as “kidnappers,” zealously tracked down the children, chasing them into forests and caves. They would drag them back and throw them into the communal jail until the inspectors would arrive and choose.

The children were cruelly torn from their parents and homes, dragged away to the far reaches of Siberia and forced to endure not only terrible physical pain – but also attempts to convert them. Who can count the number who died; the number of those who succumbed to the tortures and embraced Christianity in order to escape the pain and suffering?

**The ‘Drunkard’**

The story is told of the great Rav Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, who visited a small Lithuanian town. When he heard the wailing of children who were in the town jail awaiting transportation to the army, he feigned drunkenness and was thrown into jail with them.

“My children,” he cried out, “listen to me. I speak to you through tears but what I have to say you must hear carefully.

“You are going to be taken to far away places and you will be tempted and tortured in an attempt to make you leave your faith. Please, dear children, remember what I tell you today. “Remember the 10 martyrs who refused to bow their heads to the Roman oppressors who tried to stop them from teaching Torah. Remember how they chose death rather than give up the life of Torah. Remember Chana and her seven children, who clung steadfastly to G-d and willingly gave up their lives. Be as brave as they; choose life by welcoming – if necessary – death.”

All night he spoke to the children giving them strength and *chizuk*, and as morning came he said:

“Holy little sheep! Soon we will part. I do not know if I will still be alive when you return, but I do know that we will meet some day in the True World. I hope that when we do, I will be proud of all of you.”

**The Wicked Leaders**

The *rabbanim* did more than simply give the children courage. They actively condemned the leaders of the community who timidly acquiesced to the government demands and who helped in the collection of the children. They also urged the people to physically free the unfortunate children. One of those *rabbanim* was Rav Eliyahu Schick.

On a visit to a small town, Rav Schick was horrified to hear that a whole group of children were imprisoned in the community house, awaiting shipment to the army. Seizing a hatchet in his hand, he ran out to the main Jewish street and cried: “*Yidden*! Do you know the true meaning of the verse in *Yeshaya* (42:24) that says: ‘Who has given Yaakov over for plunder, Yisrael to robbers?’ ‘Yaakov” refers to the masses of *Bnei Yisrael* who are being plundered while ‘Yisrael’ refers to those communal leaders who are themselves the robbers and kidnappers.”

And, turning to the crowd gathered about, he called: “My brothers, why do you stand silently? Let us go and save Jewish souls!”

Inspired by the words of the rav, the crowd seized hatchets and crowbars and broke into the hall, freeing the happy children. Rav Schick then assembled all the Jews into the shul and addressed them concerning the meaning of the verse (*Shemos* 21:16): “And he who kidnaps a man and sells him shall surely die.” Finishing, he turned to the *Aron Kodesh*, and removing a Torah Scroll, he cried: “I call upon you to swear on this Torah scroll that never again will you permit such a horrible abomination to occur in this town.”

**Rav Yaakov Of Karlin**

Similarly, the Rav Yaakov (author of *Mishkenos Yaakov*) one of the leading students of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, heard that some of the communal heads of the town of Karlin where he served as rav had agreed to the kidnapping of the children. He immediately called in the leaders and pleaded with them to change their ways.

Nevertheless, one Shabbos morning, a woman suddenly burst into the synagogue and, interrupting the services, cried out:

“My brothers! My only son has been arrested – along with other boys – and is being held in the community house to be taken into the army. Save him, I beg of you!”

Greatly moved by the pitiful woman, the congregation crowded around the benches of the east wall, where the leaders of the community sat.

“Have mercy,” they cried. “Free the poor children!”

One of the leaders, however, arose in great wrath and exclaimed:

“Eject this woman immediately. She has disrupted the services and insulted the community leaders!”

The *shammas,* acting under orders, seized the poor woman and removed her from the shul. The congregation grew silent as Rav Yaakov rose, strode to the *Aron* and removed one of the scrolls. Rolling it until he reached *Parashas Ki Tetzei* he began to read the mitzvah concerning one who finds eggs in a nest and a bird sitting on them:

“You shall surely send away the mother, and the children you may take for yourself in order that it shall be good for you and you shall lengthen your days.”

**The Opposite**

Having finished, he then turned to the communal leader and exclaimed:

“You have done the exact opposite of this verse. You first took the son and afterward you gave orders to send away the mother.

“I am convinced that the Holy One, blessed be He, will also give you the opposite reward and you will not live many more days.”

The congregation heard his words and, without hesitation, ran to the communal hall where they broke in and freed the captive children.

Not all the children were, of course, as fortunate. One of these tragic, yet significant stories concerning these children tells of a special visit of the Czar to one of the camps. The commander had all the Jewish children lined up near the riverbank, and the Russian Orthodox priests prepared to have them undergo the rites of baptism. As the command was given for the children to immerse themselves they cried:

“We shall do and we shall hear!”

They then threw themselves into the river – and remained there. Before the startled soldiers could remove them, the martyred children had drowned to sanctify Hashem’s Name.

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