**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Matos 5774**

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**Story#868**

**A Timely Gift for the Sultan**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

If he had his way, the wicked vizier thought to himself countless number of times, there would be no Jews in Morocco. He hated the Jews, but, although he was very powerful, he could do nothing. For the sultan showed favor towards his Jewish subjects and would not let the vizier harm them.

The cruel viceroy bided his time, until finally a fitting opportunity arose. The sultan had decided to travel to the distant provinces of his land, leaving his viceroy in charge of affairs. The vizier prepared a trumped-up charge against the Jews of the capital and incited the Moslem populace to attack the Jewish quarter. The bloodthirsty Arabs did not need much of an excuse.

The sultan had, meanwhile, reached the city of Meknes where Rabbi Chaim ibn-Atar, the *Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh* (the holy one), lived. The Ohr HaChaim had become aware from Heaven of the danger threatening his brethren and wished to avert it. He went to the palace where the sultan was staying and asked for an audience. He was refused.

"Tell the king that I have brought him a gift for his birthday, but that I insist on giving it to him personally."

The sultan, his curiosity aroused, gave instructions for the Jew to be brought before him.

R' Chaim bowed deferentially and took out a small mirror from his case. "This is my gift to Your Majesty. It is a mirror with special powers. Just look into it, and tell me what you see."

The sultan gazed into the small looking glass and his eyes grew round with wonder. There was the capital, his palace, his throne -- and the vizier was sitting on it as if he were sultan! A heavy scowl suffused his features as he ordered his servants to prepare for his immediate return home.

The sultan arrived just in time to prevent a massacre. In a fit of fury, he slew his rebellious vizier. And the Jews of Morocco breathed freely once more, thanking G-d for the great miracle.

[**Source**: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from *"Tales of Tzaddikim"* (ArtScroll) by G. MaTov]

**Biographical note**: Rabbi Chaim ben Moses ibn Attar (1696-15 Tammuz 1743) was one of the most prominent rabbis in Morocco. In 1733 he decided to leave his native country and settle in Palestine. En route he was detained in Livorno by the rich members of the Jewish community who established a *yeshiva* for him. He resting place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is the occasion for a large annual pilgrimage on his *yahrzeit*.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed www.ascentofsafed.com*

**Tales of the Gaonim**

**G-d’s Helper**

**By Rabbi Sholom Klass**

(*Last week, by mistake, we cut out the last few paragraphs of this story. We are therefore reprinting it in its entirety.)*

In a little town in the Ukraine there lived a widow and her only daughter, who was of marriageable age. The two earned the few kopeks needed for their survival by sewing tachrichim and candles. All week they ate only a piece of black bread with salt and with the addition of salted herring on Shabbos and Yomim Tovim. But they never complained. Only one thing bothered the widow: her daughter was single.

“When, O G-d, will I have the good fortune to see my daughter married and have the merit of seeing grandchildren?” she would ask the heavens every day, as if expecting a reply. But as the days rolled on and no husband appeared on the scene, the woman grew more and more despondent.

One winter morning a terrible blizzard raged, the weather dropped to below zero, and the woman became desperately ill. There was no wood in the house to make a fire and the water in their buckets became solid ice. Even the windows were covered with a solid sheet of ice. The young daughter, suffering from malnutrition, didn’t have the strength to chop wood to heat the fire. The dying woman pleaded for a drop of water, but all of it was frozen and the girl quietly began crying, “Father in heaven, Father of orphans and widows, please help!”

At that moment the door opened and in came a tall man, dressed in tattered clothing. He carried a bag on his back and a walking stick in his hands. His beard and hair were caked with snow and ice. Dropping his bag, he clapped his hands and feet trying to get the numbing coldness out of them.

“Anybody home?” he announced, not seeing the woman and the girl lying in their beds.

“There is a blizzard raging and I am happy to find shelter in this weather.”

When his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he noticed the sick woman and her daughter and immediately surmised the situation. Without saying another word, he walked outside and began chopping wood. He reentered the house and soon built a raging fire. Taking off his coat, he placed it over the shivering girl who was lying on the bed.

The mother was already covered with a heavy quilt. Peacefulness and serenity had descended upon the world. He took bread and food out of his pack, he prepared a meal. After carrying in snow in a pail, he heated it and soon had water to offer the woman and her daughter. Then he uttered a short prayer: “G-d in Heaven Who heals all the sick in Israel – heal her!”

The sick woman opened her eyes and seeing him, begged for water, which he immediately gave her.

“Who are you, stranger?” she asked.

“I am a Jew, traveling through here and I noticed your house and came in to warm myself,” he replied.

The woman began to cry. “Who will take care of my poor orphan after I am gone? Who will arrange a shidduch, a match for her?”

“Fear not,” replied the man, “I will take care of her and I will see her wed.”

Promise me you will take care of her,” she pleaded, and the man did. A little while afterwards she breathed her last and the man, Rebbe Yisroel Hopsztajn, the Maggid of Koznitz, made arrangements for her funeral and took the girl into his home.

The following week, Reb Yisrael had occasion to travel to a small village and was invited to stay at the house of one of the well-to-do members of the community. The man was a widower; his wife had died two years before, and he was very lonely.

“Rebbe,” he sighed, “I make a good living, I have plenty of food and vegetables in the house and I have cows that provide me with plenty of milk. But I have no woman in the house, and I am very lonely. Had I been living in a big city I would have been able to marry a widow or a divorcee, but out here in this small town there is nobody. I even have all the beautiful clothing left over from my wife.”

Reb Yisrael heard this and he saw the hand of G-d here. It was only through His miracle that he was guided to this town and had stopped off at this man’s house. Turning to the man, he said, “I have just the woman for you.”

“Is she a widow or divorcee?” he asked.

“Neither,” he replied. “She is a single girl.”

“Where does she come from?” he asked.

Reb Yisrael told him the name of the town.

“What is the name of her father?”

“G-d in heaven,” replied the rabbi, “she is an orphan.”

The following morning they set out for the town. The sun shone beautifully, the trees were beginning to bloom and the birds were singing. After midday, Reb Yisrael asked the man to halt his carriage as the descended to pray Mincha. Reb Yisrael prayed with such fervor that the very heavens appeared to ring with his pleas. He thanked G-d for the good fortune He was showing him.

The man was impressed with Reb Yisrael and he realized that he was traveling with a saint. He had made up his mind to follow the instructions of this holy rav for which he assuredly would be blessed.

He entered the town and was introduced to the girl and he liked her. A large wedding was held, to which the entire town was invited, and everyone gave the poor girl gifts.

Silently, Reb Yisrael lifted his eyes toward the heavens and whispered: “Thank you, O Father of orphans!”

*Reprinted from the July 4, 2014 edition of The Jewish Press*

**It Once Happened**

**It is Not Just the Bird**

In Europe it was the custom to fatten up geese in the months preceding Passover, since many families refrained from using any oil other than goose fat. For six to eight weeks the geese would be fed a full bucket of corn twice a day, so that by the time the holiday arrived they would be so huge they could barely waddle.

**A Dispute Between the Chasam**

**Sofer and the Yismach Moshe**

Two religious giants of the day, the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer) and the Yismach Moshe (Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum) differed in their rulings as to whether the practice of force-feeding rendered the geese treife (not kosher). The question revolved around whether or not the sharp corn grains which were fed to the birds in such quantities would damage the esophagus, thus making the birds treife (i.e., unable to live another year).

The Chasam Sofer held that the esophagus would not necessarily be damaged, and so he ruled the practice permissible. (Of course, the geese had to be carefully checked before being consumed to prove that they were kosher by the process described later.)

His contemporary, the Yismach Moshe felt that since the corn kernels were sharp, the likelihood was that the birds would be rendered treife by the force feedings. He ruled that geese fed in this manner would not be permissible.

The two corresponded back and forth, each presenting learned arguments to prove his point, their dispute purely "for the sake of heaven." Finally, the Chasam Sofer suggested that instead of theorizing, they should put their rulings to a practical test. Each was to take ten geese and fatten them up. Then, they would slaughter them, fill the esophagi with air and float them in a full tub of water. If the esophagus was damaged, air bubbles would escape into the water, thus proving that the bird was treife. If no bubbles were seen, the bird would be kosher.

When the birds were duly fattened and slaughtered, an amazing thing took place. All the birds from the household of the Chasam Sofer proved to be kosher, whereas all the birds of the Yismach Moshe tested treife.

So it was seen that the legal rulings of these two great giants dominated the physical reality, proving the axiom that the rulings of true halachic authorities determine the actual reality of a physical situation.

Another story is told which illustrates the same point. There lived in Europe in the last century a well-known Chasidic rabbi who was rebbe to tens of thousands of Chasidim. He was known as the Zidochover Maggid.

One Friday as he sat and learned Torah with a group of his disciples, a woman entered his study carrying a chicken that she wished to prepare for the Shabbat meal. However, there was a question on the kashrut of the bird, so she had brought it to the Rabbi to ask if it was permissible. Now, on the face of it, the chicken had lesions on its lung that would normally indicate that it was treife, but to the astonishment of his students, the Rebbe spent hours studying many texts in an attempt to find an opinion that would permit the chicken.

**They Couldn’t Understand**

**The Lengthy Rebbe’s Actions**

It was incomprehensible to them just why the Rebbe would go to such lengths when he could just as easily give the woman a ruble to buy another chicken. After hours of study the Rebbe stood up and pronounced the chicken kosher! The Rebbe's disciples couldn't believe their ears, but he had labored and succeeded in finding a way to rule the chicken permissible. The happy woman went home to prepare her Shabbat meal, and the scholars resumed their study.

Soon after she left another woman entered the hall in a state of hysteria. "Rebbe, Rebbe!" she screamed, as she fainted to the floor. When she was revived she resumed her wailing, crying, "Rebbe, you must help my husband, the doctors have given up hope!" Again the poor woman fainted and had to be revived. The Rebbe stood by her side and said, "Tell me please, what is the exact nature of your husband's ailment?"

She replied that he had serious lesions on his lungs. When he heard that, the Rebbe comforted her saying, "I just ruled that this type of malady is kosher. Go home and don't worry; your husband will live for many years." And this, in fact, is what happened.

Only then did the students understand that through his ruach hakodesh (Divine inspiration) the Rebbe had known that he would need that halachic ruling to help a fellow Jew. Through his pronouncement which allowed the chicken to be used he also, so to speak, negated the fatal effects of the same illness on a fellow Jew.

*Reprinted from the recent Parshas Balak edition of “L’Chaim,” a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**In Brooklyn, a Trove of Hebrew Books From Centuries Past**

**By Allan Kozinn**



A page from Maimonides’s Mishneh Torah

from 1574.Credit The Chabad-Lubavitch Library

The [Chabad-Lubavitch](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/c/chabad-lubavitch_movement/index.html?inline=nyt-org) movement, a Hasidic group known for its outreach to Jewish communities around the world, has amassed one of the largest collections of rare Jewish manuscripts and books anywhere – on the order of 250,000 items, including some that go back to the 11th century or earlier.

The items are usually available only to researchers who need to consult specific antique sources for their work. But Chabad has been showing parts of its holdings in annual exhibitions since the mid-1990s, and [this year’s show](http://chabadlibrary.org/exhibit/exhibition2.pdf), which just opened in the Chabad-Lubavitch Library’s exhibition hall, is its most expansive yet, and includes some of its rarest pieces. The exhibition is open Sundays through Thursdays, noon through 5 p.m., and Fridays, noon through 2 p.m. at Chabad’s headquarters, 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. It will run through at least February.

Its theme is early Jewish publishing, and most of the items are Hebrew books published between 1475 and 1574. Included is a page from the earliest known printed Hebrew book, a commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Sholomo Yitzchaki, an 11th-century French rabbi who is now known universally as [Rashi](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/rashi.html), and whose Biblical and Talmudic commentaries remain revered today. Hebrew Bibles often have the main text printed in a conventional Hebrew font, with Rashi’s commentary printed in a special typeface called [“Rashi script.”](http://www.dictionary.co.il/rashi_script.php)

“Rashi script actually has nothing to do with Rashi,” Rabbi Shalom Dovber Levine, the curator of the exhibition, said in an interview on Thursday. “But since this book was published using that script, it was adopted and became known as Rashi script.” Rabbi Levine added that there is only one known copy of the 1475 publication, and its pages are scattered. Chabad owns two pages; the Jewish Theological Seminary owns another.

**Items from the House of Soncino**

Among the other 90 items in the exhibition are early printings of the Bible and its individual books, including several from the house of Soncino, one of the earliest Jewish publishers (founded in Soncino, Italy, in 1483). Early printings of books from the Talmud are also included, as are commentaries, books about Jewish law, volumes on philosophy and mysticism, prayer books, grammatical texts, and even a 1535 edition of “Mahbarot Immanuel,” a collection of writings by [Immanuel ben Solomon ben Jekutiel of Rome](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283519/Immanuel-Ben-Solomon), a 13th- and 14th-century satirical poet whose works were frowned upon by rabbis of his time.

The exhibition also includes manuscripts that predate printing by as much as 400 years, including a section of the Talmud and pages of a prayer book, both written on parchment.

“I found these when I was cataloging very old books, in around 1980,” Rabbi Levine said. “Because early publishers did not have cardboard, they would use pages from old books and manuscripts, glued together, to make covers. I found the pages of the Talmud parchment in the binding of a 16th-century book. You can see the glue marks, which I was advised not to remove, so you can see exactly how the pages were used for the binding.”

*Reprinted from the July 10, 2014 edition of The New York Times.*

**It Once Happened**

**The Miser Can Be the Third**

Years ago, the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel was entirely dependent on the generosity of its brethren in the Diaspora. To that end, special emissaries would travel throughout Europe collecting donations, visiting local Jews and soliciting funds.

One time an emissary arrived in a certain city and was given a warm welcome. All of the townspeople came to the synagogue to hear him deliver his appeal. At the end of the speech, a prominent member of the local community volunteered to accompany him on his rounds from house to house.

**Not One Family Refused to Contribute**

The two men walked through the Jewish section knocking on doors and asking for donations. Not one family refused to contribute. The contributions varied according to financial circumstance, but everyone was happy to give at least something. Then the emissary noticed that they had skipped a mansion, and asked his companion why. "It would be a waste of effort," he was told. "The man who lives there is miser. He has never given even a penny to charity."

"But we have to try," the emissary insisted. "Who knows? Maybe our words will penetrate his heart."

They knocked on the door, which was opened by the wealthy miser himself. "Good day!" the emissary said cheerfully. "May we speak with you for a minute?"

"You may certainly speak, but if you've come for a donation of money you're wasting your time," the miser said dryly.

**The Emissary Would Not Give Up**

But the emissary would not give up. "You're obviously a wealthy man. Don't you want to help support the poor Jews of the Holy Land? Everyone else is contributing generously."

"My money belongs to me," the miser declared sharply. "I worked very hard for it, and saved every penny. I refuse to give the fruit of my labors to someone who didn't expend the effort."

The emissary looked at him with pity in his eyes. "You're right, it's your money and your decision," he conceded. But before he left he added under his breath, "It looks as if you're going to be the third."

The miser closed the door with the emissary's words echoing in his ears. What did he mean? A whole day he couldn't get the comment out of his head, and that night he tossed and turned in bed. "It looks as if you're going to be the third." The third what? He had to find out.

**Pleads to Understand the**

**Meaning of Being the Third**

The next day the miser searched the city until he found the emissary from Israel. "I must know," he pleaded with him. "What did you mean when you said that I would be the third?"

The emissary smiled. "Yesterday I honored your principle of not giving away any of your hard-earned money. So how can you expect me to share my wisdom with you for nothing? I also worked very hard to acquire it."

The miser acknowledged that he was right, and agreed to pay for the answer. The emissary insisted on a sum three times what he usually asked of the rich, and the transaction was made.

"Now I will tell you a story," the emissary began. "Many years ago there lived a very wealthy man who was as stingy as he was rich. He was even miserly when it came to himself. He even refused to marry, lest a wife and children drain his finances.

**Even After Death He Refused**

**To Be Parted from His Riches**

"The man worked very hard his whole life and eventually amassed a fortune. Before he passed away, he instructed the Burial Society to bury him with all his money. Even after death he refused to part from his riches.

"His final wishes were carried out, and not one cent remained above ground. When the grave was filled, the angel in charge of the deceased came to accompany him to the Heavenly Court.

"'Did you study Torah?' the man was asked. 'No,' was his reply, 'I was a businessman.'

"'Then certainly you supported those who did with your charity. Tell us,' the judges urged him, 'which good deeds did you perform with all your money?'

"'Look, there's nothing to talk about,' the man answered. 'I brought all my money with me. Do whatever you want with it.'

"'You don't understand,' they explained. 'Here money has no value. The only currency is mitzvot (commandments).' The man's fate hung in the balance.

"After much discussion the judges realized that there was only one precedent in history, when the wealthy Korach had been swallowed up by the earth with all his riches. In the end it was decided that the miser, who had also been buried with all his money, should be sent to keep him company. The lonely Korach would no doubt be delighted.

"But it's very hard to spend such a long time with even two people," the emissary continued. "I'm sure that Korach and his friend are very bored by now, and would welcome a third conversationalist into their group. When I met you I thought to myself, 'Who knows? Maybe their boredom will soon be alleviated. But now that you've given me your donation, I think that Korach and his friend will have to wait a while longer."

From that day on the former miser was always the first to contribute to every charitable cause that came his way.

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