**Shabbos Stories for**

**Parshas Acharei Mos-kedoshim 5781**

Volume 13, Issue 34 12 Iyar/April 24, 2021

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

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**Milk Demons**

**By**[**Menachem Posner**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/12145/jewish/Posner-Menachem.htm)



 It happened all too often. Poor Jewish tenants were unable to pay their rent and would end up in the dank dungeons of the local *poritz* (landowner) until they could scrape together what they owed. But how were the poor wretches supposed toHow were the poor wretches supposed to raise money from their prison cells? raise money from the confinement of their prison cells?

 Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov—a consummate lover of the Jewish people—would spend many long weeks on the road, finding incarcerated tenants and raising funds for their release.

 It happened that the Baal Shem Tov encountered one such family, and after immense efforts, managed to secure their freedom just before Shabbat.

 “Please spend Shabbat with me as my guests,” offered the Baal Shem Tov. “It is too late for you to return home before the sun sets, and you surely have nothing prepared for the holy day.”

 The family gratefully accepted his offer, and thirstily drank in the dazzling spiritual delights of Shabbat with the Baal Shem Tov and his close circle of students, the Chevraya Kadisha (the Holy Brotherhood).

 As the Friday night meal progressed, the Baal Shem Tov turned to the poor man he had just rescued. “Please tell us,” he began, “what news from today do you have to share?”

 “Rebbe,” replied his guest, “surely you know that I have been in jail for many weeks now. What sort of news can I possibly have heard?”

**Asked if Anything Interesting Happened**

 “In that case,” replied the Baal Shem Tov, “please tell us something interesting that happened to you.”

 “I do not recall ever doing anything of particular interest,” said the man, “but we experienced something very peculiar while we were in prison.

 “There was a group of vile men who were imprisoned near us. Every day, they would weep and wail. They made such a ruckus that we just kept to ourselves, frightened and miserable.

 “Then, every Friday afternoon, just before Shabbat, they would begin to laugh and dance. This too would frighten us, but we had nowhere to hide and nowhere to run.

 “Today, they cried and shouted louder than ever before. Then, as the afternoon progressed, they began to laugh and dance as usual. But this time, they were so horribly gleeful it was like nothing we had seen on previous weeks. I had always been afraid to approach the men lest they harm me, but knowing that you would be coming shortly to redeem us, I summoned up the nerve to ask the men the meaning behind their outlandish behavior.

**The Connection to the Righteous Tzaddik**

 “They explained to me that ‘there is a righteous man, an otherworldly *tzaddik*, who spends the entire week immersed in Torah study, prayer and spiritual pursuits. We are not men, but spirits who live off of this man’s sins. Since he lives such a holy life, we have very little to live off of, and this is why we cry.

 “‘It is only on Friday that he finally decides to break his weeklong fast with a dish of milk, which he carefully prepares so that it will be ready when he returns from prayers. Every week, after he prepares his dish, one of us goes to his house and arranges to shove a member of the household into the cabinet where the milk is stored. The holy man becomes irked by this, and this anger gives us enough vitality to survive the next week.

 “‘Recently, the holy man caught onto our game and decided to one-up us. He carefully prepared his milk and locked it into his safe, confident that no-one would disturb it there. He then contentedly prepared himself for prayers. When we got wind of this, we cried like never before, fearing for our very survival.

**Peasant with a Cart Full of Firewood**

 “‘Then we had an idea. One of us went to his house disguised as a peasant with a cart full of firewood. Standing outside the man’s humble home, the peasant offered the firewood at such a cheap price that the man’s wife asked her husband if she could go to the safe and withdraw a few coins to purchase the wood. In her excitement, she knocked over the bowl of milk, and her husband lost his cool. That’s why we laughed with such joy now.’”

 As the man concluded his strange tale, one of the students of the Baal Shem Tov fell from his seat in a faint. He was the holy man in question.

 *(When telling this story, Chassidim would say: See how G‑d orchestrates things. He arranged for this man to be placed in prison and to be released right before Shabbat, just so that this other man could learn to mend his errant ways.)* (From Reshimot Devarim, vol. 1, pp. 12-13.)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tazria-Metzora 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Story #1217**

**Three Spiders**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

**editor@ascentofsafed.com**

 One year, Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn (referred to as the *Rabash*) attended the *brit mila* of a grandson in the village of Slavat. After, at the celebratory meal, a careen of meat stew was brought to the table and placed in front of him.

 Before he was able to dip in the ladle, a spider descended into the careen. He ordered that the large bowl should be removed from the table and the spider extracted, and then a fresh bowl be brought in its place. But a spider also descended into the second serving bowl, and again he ordered that it be removed and another fresh bowl be brought out. But this third bowl was also 'invaded' by a spider.

 Eye-witnesses to the event insist forcefully that it was clearly three *different* spiders.

 The Rabash asked the ones who had provided the food where they had obtained the meat. They replied that they had slaughtered a lamb for the sake of the circumcision Mitzvah Meal. When he next asked from where they purchased the lamb, they said from a certain non-Jew in a certain nearby village.

 The Rabash requested that they please ask the man to come to speak with him. They did so, and when the man arrived the Rabash asked him if there was anything unusual about this lamb, and make sure to tell him the truth.

 "I shall tell you the truth," declared the gentile. "This lamb was 'orphaned' from its mother, so I took him to a sow (a female pig) to suckle. And indeed, he stayed with her and she fed him until he was grown."

 Upon hearing this, the Rabash commanded that all the vessels in which the lamb meat was cooked should be broken.[1]

 The *shamesh* (attendant/shul manager), Avraham-Eliyahu, from whom we know this story, was a simple, sincere, pious Jew, whom no one ever suspected of being untruthful. He would tell what he personally saw that day with great enthusiasm, including all the details.

 Once again was proven the Talmudic dictum,[2] "The Holy One, blessed be He, never brings tzadikim (the perfectly righteous) to stumbling blocks." *Tosfos* (a primary commentary) states [3]that this principle manifests particularly in matters of eating and drinking.

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 A Jewish merchant once came to Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn (referred to as the *Rabash*) and complained that his buying and selling were dependent on a lot of snow falling very soon, so that the winter paths would be densely packed enough to allow transporting merchandise by sleigh.

 The Rabash replied, "If you leave a charitable donation with me of 25 rubles I'll pray for the snow that you need."

 The man agreed.

 That night there was a very heavy snowstorm.

 Source: Translated from a Hebrew booklet by a great-grandson of the Rabash, which was distributed at the wedding of a Schneersohn descendant of his. Unfortunately, I no longer recall the names of the *chatan* and *kallah*.

 Biographical note: Rabbi Baruch-Shalom Schneersohn [22 MarCheshvan 5566 - 16 Shvat 5629 (Oct. 1805 - Feb. 1869] was the firstborn of the 3rd Rebbe of Chabad, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, and the great-great-grandfather of the 7th Rebbe (1902-1994). Unlike his younger brothers became the, he remained inflexible in his determination not to accept any position as head of a Chassidic community, even though he was eminently qualified. He was exceptionally humble. It was only after his passing that numerous manuscripts he had authored came to light, which provided evidence of his profound intelligence and wisdom.

**Footnotes:**
[1]This was not 100% necessary. See Shulchan Aruch Yorah Deah 60:1 and the learned commentaries there. See also Tzemech Tzedek Responsa #15 (end).
[2]Yibamos 99B
[3]Gittin 7A

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemini 5781 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent or Safed.*

**Rav of Komemiyus: Part Two**

 During his 17 years as Rav of Kfar Attah, R’ Binyomin Mendelson raised the level of Torah learning and observance, extending himself valiantly to bring Torah into the lives of his beloved people.

 Once, R’ Binyomin ruled that certain funds be withheld from the school in Kfar Attah until they paid one of their workers all the salary that was due him. The directors of the school asked R’ Binyomin to release the funds as, they claimed, the salary payments were not due the worker for various reasons.

 R’ Binyomin told them: “Is it for this reason that I am Rav of Kfar Attah, and is it for this that I denied my eyes sleep for numerous nights to immerse myself in Shas and Poskim – so that laymen should come and tell me how to conduct my affairs as Rav?!”

**The Religious Man Who Cut His Hair Just Before Shabbos**

 Once, a religious man representing an organization asked to speak in the shul in Kfar Attah on Shabbos. R’ Binyomin noticed that this man had had his hair cut just before Shabbos, and it was during the days of sefirah when haircuts are forbidden.

 R’ Binyomin told him he could not make a public address because he had transgressed a law in the Shulchan Aruch. Some of the people in the community tried to vouch for the speaker. But R’ Binyomin could not be swayed. The man did not speak.

 When he left Kfar Attah to become Rav of Komemiyus, R’ Binyomin allowed his community in Kfar Attah to keep the back salary they owed him in order to pay a Rav to rule halachic matters for them, until they could secure a permanent Rav. He claimed that since he was already being paid by Komemiyus, there was no need for him to receive a double salary!

**Hand-Picked the Teachers for the Talmud Torah**

 R’ Binyomin personally oversaw the running of the Talmud Torah in Kfar Attah. He hand-picked the teachers, most of whom he brought in from Yerushalayim. His first job requirement was that the teacher be G-d-fearing. Of course he required that the teachers be skilled and able to teach, but fear of G-d was the foremost requirement. The Talmud Torah was highly successful, with the “fruits” of its efforts planted all over Eretz Yisroel.

 The Talmud Torah building served multiple purposes, under R’ Binyomin’s direction. At night it served as a dormitory for refugee students who had survived the Holocaust. Early each morning it hosted a minyan for Sefardim. One Shabbos morning it was the place for the Poalei Agudath Israel Shacharis minyan and in the afternoon the Tzeirei Agudath Israel gathered there.

**Walls Lined from Ceiling to Floor with Well-Worn Seforim**

 R’ Binyomin lived in a house attached to the Talmud Torah and was thus able to direct all the goings-on there. One of the rooms in R’ Binyomin’s dwelling was set aside as the “Beis Din Room.” Its walls were lined from ceiling to floor with well-worn seforim, many of which were on the long table framed by wooden benches. Around this table the Dinei Torah were held, the shiurim were delivered, and the Shabbos and Yom Tov meals were conducted, and the Melava Malkas were enjoyed.

 The room and its table hosted groups of communal leaders, “lent an ear” to individuals who came to R’ Binyomin for advice and personal problems, to Russian immigrants whom R’ Binyomin helped and strengthened. The table and walls of this room could certainly bear witness to the love, warmth, caring, Torah brilliance and greatness of spirit of R’ Binyomin.

 R’ Binyomin would remain wrapped in his tallis and tefillin after the minyan had already left the Beis Medrash. He would sing praises to Hashem, completely immersed and enraptured in his exalted state. On Shabbos he would hold a Seudah Shlishis in the Beis Medrash, singing with great emotion until nightfall, stirring the souls of all those assembled.

 In the Beis Medrash R’ Binyomin would deliver his Shabbos HaGadol and Shabbos Shuva drashos, which lasted a few hours. He poured out a wealth of mussar and chizuk from his heart. It was a sight to behold! R’ Binyomin never tainted his hands with unclean money. His stringency in distancing himself from even the slightest hint of financial dishonesty gained him the respect of a wide range of Jews.

**Stood Up to a Secularly-Run Government**

 When the State of Israel was established in 1948, R’ Binyomin stood at the helm of protecting the observance of Torah and mitzvos in the face of the secularly-run government. He was very close with the Chazon Ish, who deeply loved and valued R’ Binyomin. R’ Binyomin would discuss with the Chazon Ish issues relating to the State of Israel and how to protect Torah observance. R’ Binyomin spoke about these issues at the 4th Knessiah Gedolah of Agudath Israel in 1954.

 R’ Binyomin left Kfar Attah in 1952 to become Rav of a religious Moshav in the south of Eretz Yisroel – Moshav Komemiyus. He was appointed to this position by the leading Torah giants of the generation, who saw R’ Binyomin as a leader capable of further developing, expanding and strengthening this observant settlement. From 1952 until his final day, 27 years later, R’ Binyomin led Moshav Komemiyus, setting a sterling example of how an entire community could wholly devote their lives to worshipping Hashem while settling the holy land of Eretz Yisroel.

 One of his first actions as Rav of Komemiyus was to establish a yeshiva. He also established a kollel, where he regularly delivered shiurim in halacha, revealing but a fraction of his Torah genius. R’ Binyomin ran the kollel both spiritually and financially, raising funds to support it. With his indefatigable energy, he also established a cheder for young boys and a girl’s school, all of which continue to function and blossom until today.

**Defended the Mitvah of Shmittah Observance**

 Even before he came to Komemiyus, R’ Binyomin valiantly took up the cause of the special mitzvos of the holy land of Eretz Yisroel. When he was still Rav in Kfar Attah, 25 farmers from the nearby Kfar Gidon turned to R’ Binyomin asking him to help them to keep the laws of shmittah, and thereby publicly demonstrate that it is possible to be a successful farmer who keeps the laws of shmittah.

 R’ Binyomin so effectively instilled the importance of observing shmittah in the simple, devout farmers of Komemiyus, that he convinced them to unwaveringly adhere to the laws of shmittah, no matter what the hardship. R’ Binyomin would draw from the timeless sources of Shas and Poskim as to the importance of keeping shmittah and other mitzvos which apply to Eretz Yisroel.

 R’ Binyomin would sit with the Chazon Ish and clarify the details of these mitzvos, as well as the mitzvah of settling the land of Eretz Yisroel. (Marbitzei Torah Me’Olam HaChassidus, Vol. 8) The yahrzeit of R’ Binyomin ben R’ Menachem Mendel Mendelson zt”l is on 24 Iyar (1979). May his merit protect us.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Tazria-Metzora 5781 email of The Weekly Vort.*

**The Power of Pushkas**

**By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**



 Our sages teach us that the mitzvos of tzedakah and gemilas chassadim are important elements of the teshuvah process. Similar to a korban, tzedakah has the capability to atone for one’s aveiros and has the potential to bring the ge’ulah.

 It was customary for the gabbaim in Mezhbizh to place pushkas throughout the shul on Erev Yom Kippur to collect tzedakah before and after Minchah. They would shake the coin-filled pushkas to inspire community members to give tzedakah.

 One year, the leaders of Mezhbizh sought to discontinue this minhag. They said it disturbed the congregants, and most people were in a rush to head home to eat the seudah hamafsekes and prepare for Yom Kippur.

 However, the Baal Shem Tov rejected the resolution and said there was no way he could agree to annul this holy custom. He explained that one year Heavenly prosecutors erected a wall in Heaven that disrupted the Jewish people’s flow of prayers and prevented them from reaching the Heavenly Throne. The prosecutors could not be removed until the gabbaim began to shake the tzedakah boxes.

 There was such a clamor and din that the prosecution became disoriented and dispersed. Only then did the wall come down and were the people’s heartfelt tefillos able to ascend straight up to Heaven.

 How great is the power of the mitzvah of tzedakah!

*Reprinted from the March 18, 2021 website of The Jewish Press.*

**What to Look for**

**In a Good Wife**



 A Yeshivah Bochur once came to Rav Elazar Shach, zt”l, because he was very confused about a possible Shidduch that had been brought to his attention. The girl seemed perfect in every way and was seeking someone who wanted to remain in learning.

 The only negative thing he had heard about her was that it seemed to be that she was not very intelligent. This worried him, because he feared that if he married a woman who lacked a sharp mind, they would be less likely to have intelligent children.

 Rav Shach explained that raising successful children depends on one thing, and one thing only, and that was how much Yiras Shamayim the parents of the child have.

 He said, “How can you know how much Yiras Shamayim a person has? If their every move is calculated to bring pleasure to Hashem and if they are very careful about other people’s money, you can know that they fear Hashem. Another way you can see Yiras Shamayim in the home is when the parents are always willing to give in to one another, and when there is always an atmosphere of joy in the house surrounding Mitzvos. Also, one should be able to see how a person is upset if he falls in Ruchniyus.

 The main things to look for in a wife is that she jumps away from Aveirah like from fire. She should love her fellow Jews, perform Chesed, and have good Middos. Most important is that she not be materialistic. This is how you will merit to have children who grow up to be great Talmidei Chachamim and Tzadikim who have profound Yiras Shamayim. The intellectual abilities of the parents are actually irrelevant to the development of the children’s potential. The only thing of real significance is Yiras Shamayim!”

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemini 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Power of the**

**Shehakol Blessing**

 Rav Elimelech Biderman, Shlit”a, writes that during World War II, Baranovitz was on the border of Russia and Germany. Once, German soldiers ordered all the Yidden of Baranovitz to line up facing a wall.

 The Yidden understood what the Nazis were planning. They prepared to leave this world with Teshuvah and holy thoughts. The previous Slonimer Rebbe, the Nesivos Shalom, zt”l, reminisced that his father who was among those standing by the wall, and he asked him for a cup of water, because it is written in Sefarim that it’s ideal to say the Brachah of Shehakol before one’s demise.

 His father took the cup of water and said, “Baruch Ata… Shehakol Nihiyeh Bidvaro.” Everyone present heard the Brachah and answered Amein.

 Immediately afterwards, gunshots were heard. Russian soldiers had arrived and were shooting at the Nazis. The Nazis ran to fight off the Russians, and in the meantime the Yidden escaped!

 People went over to the Nesivos Shalom’s father and said, “You saved our lives! It was a miracle!”

 The Nesivos Shalom replied, “It's not a miracle. I said Shehakol and increased my Emunah Peshutah, the simple faith that Hashem does everything. It is Emunah that saved us!”

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemini 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Framed Pictures of Tzadikim**



 There was once a man who was involved in a serious accident and sustained a trauma which caused him to become severely handicapped, R”L. His only choice was to undergo a special regiment of rehabilitation in a center designated specifically for such situations.

 Before he left for the center, he decided to travel to Bnei Brak and receive a Brachah from the Ponovezher Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Elazar Shach, zt”l. After hearing about the man’s handicap, Rav Shach asked him which rehab center he would be going to and when his rehabilitation was scheduled to begin. The man was surprised that the Rosh Yeshivah took such an interest in the minor details, and told him all the information.

 Then, Rav Shach gave him a warm Brachah, and the man went on his way. After the man left, Rav Shach turned to one of his attendants and said, “Hurry, buy some framed pictures of the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Chaim Ozer, and the Chortkover Rebbe. Then take them to that rehabilitation center, find out which room this man will be assigned to, and hang up those pictures all over the walls.”

 The attendant was puzzled. He asked, “Is all this really necessary?”

 Rav Shach simply answered, “When you get there, you will understand.”

**Shocked by What He Saw**

 The young attendant did as he was instructed, bought the pictures of those great Gedolim, went to the rehabilitation center, and was given the man’s room number. As he walked into the room, he was shocked by what he saw— the walls were covered with indecent pictures!

 Quickly, he took down the inappropriate photos and replaced them with pictures of Gedolei Yisroel. When he returned to Rav Shach, the Rosh Yeshivah asked him what he found. He told him what he saw and commented with awe and reverence, “The Rosh Yeshivah surely has Ruach HaKodesh, and knows the future!”

 Rav Shach smiled and shook his head and said, “This was not Ruach HaKodesh. I just used common sense. Hospitals are filled with sick people who cannot get out of their beds, and all they think about is the pain and suffering that they must endure.

**The Danger of Inactivity**

 “In rehabilitation centers, however, people are generally not bedridden, nor are they in constant agonizing pain. They undergo treatment for a certain number of hours a day while the rest of the time they are bored, and this inactivity makes them even more bored.

 “Furthermore, since they are not home in their normal religious surroundings, barriers tend to come down and people are generally more lax in their Mitzvah observance.”

 The attendant asked, “If that is so, why didn’t the Rosh Yeshivah just send me to clean up the room before he came?”

 Rav Shach answered, “No, no! When barriers fall and Torah becomes weakened, one must rebuild and recreate a spirit of Kedushah and sanctity. Just staying away from evil is not enough. One must actively pursue righteousness by fulfilling the words in Yeshaya (30:20), ‘Your eyes will behold your teacher!’”

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemini 5781 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Baal Shem Tov’s**

**Unusual Marriage**

**Weekly Story by Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon**



 Rav Ephraim was the head of the *Beis Din* in the city of Brod. Once, he himself was involved in a dispute with another Jew in the city, and both parties had to appear before a *Beis din*to settle it. To prevent the slightest suspicion that the *Rabbonim* of the *Beis Din*were prejudiced toward him, Rav Ephraim agreed to travel with the other party to a distant city where no one knew who he was.

 One evening, on their way to that city, they stopped at an inn in a small village. The Baal Shem Tov (the Besht), who was then serving as a *melamed* for the innkeeper’s young children,[[1]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/%22%20%5Cl%20%22m_768047709377502394__ftn1%22%20%5Co%20%22) saw with his *ruach hakodesh* that Rav Ephraim’s daughter, Leah Rochel, was destined to become his wife.

 Knowing that the *Av Beis Din* (Chief Rabbi) of Brod would never agree to marry off his daughter to a simple *melamed,* the Besht decided to reveal part of his true greatness and began a learned discussion with the two travelers involving a deep concept in Torah.

 After witnessing his incredible brilliance and clarity of mind, the two litigants said to each other: “Why should we go through the trouble of traveling for another few days when we have a true scholar right here? Let us present our case to him!”

**The Besht Agreed to Hear the Case**

 The Besht agreed to hear the case and settled it to their mutual satisfaction. Rav Ephraim proceeded to have another learned discussion with the Besht, and he was overcome with admiration for ~~his~~/the depth of knowledge and scholarship of this *melamed,* who was so young yet so wise. After discovering that the *melamed*was not married, he asked him if he would agree to marry his daughter Leah Rochel, and the Besht answered in the affirmative.

 However, the Besht stipulated that when the *tna’im*outlining the agreement would be written, no title should accompany his name. “Instead,” he stated, “just write that you arranged a *shidduch* for your daughter with Yisroel ben Eliezer.” Rav Ephraim obliged and they wrote the *tna’im,* both of them receiving a copy.

 Rav Ephraim took leave of his future son-in-law and prepared to return home and inform his daughter of her wonderful fortune: she was engaged to a remarkable man, a tremendous *talmid chochom* and outstanding in all other virtues as well. However, since he was the Chief Rabbi not only of Brod but of all the surrounding towns as well, and since he wasn’t expected to return home for another few days anyway, he decided to utilize the extra time to visit some of the nearby villages and affirm that everything was in order.

**Rav Ephraim Suddenly Took Ill and Passed Away**

 As fate would have it, in one of these villages Rav Ephraim suddenly took ill and passed away, without having had the opportunity to inform his family about the wonderful match.

 Rav Ephraim’s son Rav Gershon Kitover assumed his father’s position as *Av Beis Din* of Brod. After getting up from *shiva,*he was surprised to find among his father’s belongings a copy of an agreement concerning his sister’s engagement. His surprise turned to bewilderment when he didn’t see any great titles written next to the *chosson’s* name.

 “Can it be that the *chosson*is an unlearned person?” he wondered. Nevertheless, he consoled himself, saying, “My father, of blessed memory, would never have arranged or agreed to such a match, unless the *chosson* is indeed a genuine *talmid chochom*. Probably the *chosson* is not only a true *gaon* but also extremely humble and did not wish to be identified with any titles.”

 Not knowing who the *chosson* was or where he lived, the only thing the family could do was to wait and see.

 Some weeks later, when the Besht concluded teaching his students, he informed their parents that they should hire a new teacher for the next term, as he was leaving town.

 Arriving in Brod, the Besht put on the clothing of a simple laborer and went to meet the family of the *kallah.* Since Rav Gershon had assumed all of his father’s responsibilities and spent most of his day in the *Beis Din,* that is where the Besht went to meet him.

**The “Poor” Laborer Didn’t Come for a Donation**

 Seeing a poor laborer standing at the door, Rav Gershon immediately instructed one of his attendants to give him some food and money. However, the attendant returned and said: “The person told me that he did not come for a donation, but rather to speak with the Rov about a private matter.”

 Although puzzled as to what this could be about, Rav Gershon agreed, and after everyone else had left the room, the visitor entered. Studying his visitor, Rav Gershon saw that as he entered he raised his hand to the *mezuzah* but did not touch it.

 Taking out his own copy of the *tna’im,* the Besht said, “I am Yisroel ben Eliezer who, according to your father’s agreement, is to marry your sister.”

 Rav Gershon was dumbstruck. He couldn’t believe his eyes and ears. “How could my father have agreed to arrange a match with such an ignoramus?!” he thought. “Surely this is a mistake!” However, being a true Rov, he knew he had to investigate the matter and uncover the truth.

 Rav Gershon took out his father’s copy and began comparing it to that of the Besht. After a thorough examination of both documents, he saw that they were indeed identical. No, it was not a mistake; his father had arranged an unthinkable match.

**Offered a Lot of Money to Annul the Agreement**

 Quickly composing himself, Rav Gershon offered Yisroel a substantial amount of money to annul the agreement.

 “I will not take any money from you,” the Besht replied, “nor would I allow you to go against your father’s wishes. The only one who has the right to make such a decision is your sister, the *kallah*. Call your sister and I will speak to her for a few moments. If she then decides that she does not want to go through with the marriage, I agree to cancel the *shidduch* without any payment whatsoever.”

 Rav Gershon immediately summoned his sister. When she arrived, he informed her that her *chosson* had appeared. “However,” he continued with great sadness and dismay, “he is a total ignoramus and seems to be a mere beggar. I can’t understand why Father agreed to such a *shidduch*. But *Boruch Hashem* there is some good news: he is willing to release you from this obligation after meeting with you for just a few minutes.”

**Revealed Himself to His Future Wife**

 Moving to a quiet corner out of earshot from Reb Gershon, the Besht revealed to Leah Rochel who he really was. He told her, though, that for the foreseeable future he would have to hide his greatness, even from the members of her own family. In addition, he warned her that during that time they would be forced to live in great deprivation. He then added:“Your brother is wondering why I didn’t kiss the *mezuzah.* However, he is unaware that the *mezuzah*is *possul*.”

 Leah Rochel approached her brother, but before she could say anything, he said: “Now that you have met him, you can see for yourself that he is a total ignoramus. Let’s go ahead and cancel the *shidduch*without further ado. You will surely marry someone much greater than him!”

 “Dear brother!” she replied, “Since Father arranged it, he must have seen some special quality in him we have yet to recognize. And if he himself possesses no special quality, perhaps we are destined to have a great son. I am going to marry him and fulfill our father’s wishes.”

 Rav Gershon was horrified at her answer, and he tried once more to convince her to change her mind. He then mentioned the fact that when the man had entered the room, he had just raised his hand but hadn’t touched the *mezuzah*. “You see, it’s not just that he isn’t a *talmid* *chochom,*” he bemoaned. “He doesn’t even know the basics of *Yiddishkeit!*”

 Knowing who he really was but not allowed to publicize it, she answered her brother in an off-handed manner: “Perhaps the *mezuzah* is not kosher.”

**Discovered the Truth about the Mezuzah**

 Hoping to prove her wrong, Rav Gershon immediately took down the *mezuzah* and checked it. To his horror it was indeed *possul,* just as his sister had stated, but that didn’t make him change his mind. After all, how could such a person sense something like that? He was still mortified by the match.

 Having no recourse, Rav Gershon arranged a modest wedding for them, much smaller than what he would have arranged had his sister married a remarkable *talmid chochom*. After the wedding, Rav Gershon supplied the couple with enough money to buy a horse and wagon so his brother-in-law could earn a livelihood. Knowing how painful their marriage was for Rav Gershon, they moved away a few months later.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemini 5781 email of Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon, a veteran mehanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim and their chassidim. He can be contacted* *atavtzonbooks@gmail.com* *Adapted from a story of the Rebbe Rayatz.*

[[1]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/%22%20%5Cl%20%22m_768047709377502394__ftnref1%22%20%5Co%20%22). Compiler’s note: It’s possible that he was the *melamed* of the other children in the area as well.