

# SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS MATTOS-MASEI 5785

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## Drama on the Roof of a Tel Aviv Skyscraper

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles



About fifteen years ago, Jerry (not his real name), an Israeli multi-millionaire businessman, was on the top of the world. He toured the globe enjoying the best hotels, restaurants, cars and anything that money could buy. He was a self-made-man who loved his creator (i.e. himself). Saying; "My talents and strength gave me all these riches." (Deut. 8:17) and the sky was the limit almost.

One of the most grandiose building projects ever in Israel, the Azrieli business complex in Tel Aviv, [1] was nearing its completion and Jerry was given an opportunity to purchase the entire top (49th) floor!

It would cost him several tens of millions of dollars but he had the money, or could easily borrow what was lacking and it looked like a promising investment. He examined all sides of the deal with his lawyers, took a lot of advice and was just about to say yes until one of his best friends came up with a better investment.

"What?" His friend exclaimed. "For price of one floor of the Azrieli Towers you can buy ten whole offices buildings in Hungary! And the economy there is on the rise! In just two-three years you'll have your entire investment back, and after that pure profits! Get in on it now before it's too late and it's all sold. It's a sure thing!!"

Jerry took his friend's advice, dropped the Azrieli idea, took loans and invested all he had in Hungary and within less than a year lost it all.

Suddenly every penny he had saved and slaved for was gone and he was in tremendous debt. Even after he liquidated all his assets, including selling his house to pay his debts, he still owed 17,000 shekels to the Israeli Revenue Service.

Things happened so fast that he almost didn't have time to digest it all. At first he even tried to deny it saying. "After all, that's business; right? ups and downs! Right? It will pass! The main thing is to smile, keep my eye open for opportunities, think positively; soon I'll be on the top again. Even more than before! Etc. etc."

But reality began creeping up on him when he tried to get the 17,000 shekels. He soon discovered that his old friends weren't as friendly as before. Doors that used to open for him were now locked and people weren't returning his phone calls.

With no collateral, the banks refused to loan him money on any terms. He was getting desperate, things were looking very bad. But then an old friend returned one of his calls.

"Jerry, how are you? I hear you're looking for a loan. Come up and see me, I think I owe you a few favors from the good old days. Whatever you want I'll try to help."

[BTW, as irony would have it, this friend's office was nowhere other than the 49th floor of the Azrieli center!]

Jerry, still full of confidence, took the elevator to his friend's office, signed for the loan, shook his hand, put the bills in his inside coat pocket and exited the office to the plush corridor.

The door closed behind him and he was alone, it was quiet with only soft recorded music coming through the ceiling. Jerry began to realize the irony of it; this whole floor could have been his! With nothing better to do he decided to walk around and have a look.

After a few minutes of strolling he noticed a set of stairs leading up to a large metal door, which he ascended and opened the door. A cold autumn wind blew into his face. It was the door leading to the roof, 'why not', he thought to himself as he went out.

Ah, it was beautiful! From here he could see far into the distance; the Judean hills in one direction, the wide, vast Mediterranean sea on the other. He just stood there, thinking and trying to enjoy the weather when suddenly a loud thud behind him startled him. A quick glance revealed that the wind had slammed the door shut.

That broke his train of thought, and anyway it was getting late. He decided it was time to go back. Jerry went to the door and tried to open it, but, to his shock, it was locked!

He tried peering from all sorts of angles to figure out the latch but he couldn't. So he began to pound on the door and when that didn't work, to kick at it. For sure someone would hear.

But no one did. The wind was getting stronger and colder now and he wasn't really dressed for this. He looked around for some object to hit the door with, to attract attention and get out but there was none. He still had a good hour before dark; people were probably still in their offices so he pounded, kicked and yelled but there was no response.

'Hey, what a fool I am!' He slapped his forehead and said to himself, "My cellular phone! I can just call someone with my cellular phone!"

But when he took it out he discovered that the battery was dead. Totally dead! Of all times for this to happen!

But he didn't lose his composure. He had to work fast. He went to the edge of the building, peered over the small protective fence and began waving his arms and yelling to the people far below which, after just five minutes, he realized was totally futile. There was no way that anyone would hear him over the wind 49 floors below.

Jerry knew he had to remain calm. It was his only chance. Soon it would be dark and really cold. And there was nowhere to get protection from the wind, which was getting colder by the minute.

Suddenly he had an idea. The money! He had 17,000 shekels in his pocket. For sure if he threw a 200 shekel note down people would look up to see where it was coming from, and then they would see him.

He pulled out a stack of bills, removed one, looked over the fence and threw it. He watched as it floated crazily in the wind and finally, after several minutes, landed on the other side of the street. He watched helplessly as someone stopped, bent down, picked it up and continued walking.

This time he took out five bills, 1,000 altogether and let them drop, but it was the same thing. No one noticed them until they hit the ground, then they picked them up, looked around for more and kept going.

He knew what he had to do! It was his only chance! He took all the money from his pocket, tore the band that held them neatly in a pack and with a yell, threw below as hard as he could the rest of the sixty-five 200-shekel bills. With his last optimism he gazed as it scattered far below him. He removed his shirt and began waving it frantically for someone to notice.

Jerry couldn't believe his eyes; not only did no one look up or hear his cries for help; they were all arguing down there about who saw which bill first!

He looked around on the roof, the sun was setting, it was still light enough to see, but he saw nothing that might help him.

He looked up at the dimming sky and his eyes filled with tears. Suddenly he felt small and weak. He needed help..... he was sure that there was hope. The sky said so. It was obvious he wasn't alone.

He yelled out, " Oh G-d! G-d Al-Mighty! Help! Help me!" A second earlier he didn't even believe in a Supreme Being, but now it was clear.

Suddenly his eye caught a medium sized sack of sand and small pebbles. Why didn't he see it before? But there it was! He dragged it to the fence, took a handful of pebbles, said a prayer, threw it over the side and began waving his arms and looking down again.

Sure enough, this time it worked! People looked up and pointed and began screaming and cursing at him. It must have been that many of them called the police because in just moments the door burst open, police with guns drawn stormed through, put handcuffs on him and took him to the station. He was saved!

It took some serious explaining. He was lucky that no one was really hurt from his pebbles and, of course, he lost the 17,000 shekel and still owed the taxes. But after a few days they accepted his story and let him out.

Surprising all his friends, Jerry proclaimed that it was well worth it. Not only he got saved, but he got adjusted as well! He got a good look at how foolish he had been; the people on the street had just taught him!

They were just like him; all the time money was raining down they never looked up--only down for more money. But as soon as they started feeling the pebbles hurting them, they looked up to see where they were coming from. Now Jerry realized he too never looked up when he had money. At those times he felt like a god incarnate. When he began to suffer, however, he realized he needed help to change.

Jerry began taking classes in Judaism and started doing the commandments also. In time, he became a totally observant Jew.

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an emailing of **Rabbi Tuvia Bolton** of *Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim* in 5776 (2016), who states that he heard the story

years before from a good friend, who says that unfortunately he lost all touch with Jerry.

1 The Azrieli Center is a complex of three skyscrapers--one square, one triangular, and one round--that define Tel Aviv's skyline. At the base of the complex lies a large shopping mall. It is (as of the original writing of this story in 2016) Israel's leading real estate property

*Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat 5785 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed in Israel.*

## It's Mindy's Vort!



Mrs. Chana Juravel shared a story that took place a few years ago (the names have been changed). Mindy and Judy Nussbaum were identical twins. When the time came for them to start Shidduchim, their parents wondered what to do. The girls were so much alike! How could they figure out who should date Mindy and who should date Judy?

They decided that Mindy, who was 15 minutes older than her sister, would begin dating first. Baruch Hashem, it didn't take long before Mindy became a Kallah, and nobody could have been happier for her than her sister.

On the night of the Vort, the whole family was in the van, about to go to the Simchah. But where was Judy? What was taking her so long? It was getting late! Mr. Nussbaum honked the horn and everyone sat impatiently waiting for the front door to open, and for Judy to come outside. Mr. and Mrs. Nussbaum began to wonder whether Judy had been putting on a brave show of happiness for her sister, when really, she was feeling left behind. Maybe the reality was a little hard for her to face.

Finally, at the last possible moment, Judy came running out to the car. But she surprised the family with what she was she wearing. It wasn't the elaborate dress that her mother thought she would wear. It was just a nice outfit, with light makeup, and her hair was done very simply.

Mrs. Nussbaum asked her what this was all about. She said that after all, it couldn't hurt for the next sister in line to become a Kallah to make a nice impression on the guests.

With a twinkle in her eye, Judy said, "I waited until it was too late for you to send me back in to change. I want my sister to really shine tonight. I don't want anyone to say to me, 'Who's the Kallah? Are you the Kallah?' This is what I'm wearing so there'll be no confusion, and all the attention will go to Mindy."

Without any more time to spare, and their hearts full of admiration for their daughter, the Nussbaums drove off to Mindy's Vort!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukas 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

## Rashi's Unpleasant Prediction for the Crusader Leader



Godfrey of Bouillon

There is a story that took place with Rashi, and Godfrey of Bouillon, the leader of the terrible First Crusade in the year 1096, which wiped out many Jewish communities, R"L.

Though the nearby cities of Speyer, Mainz, and Worms were devastated by the Crusaders, the Jews of Rashi's city of Troyes were spared from destruction.

When Godfrey was looking to conquer Palestine, he sent messengers asking for an appointment to meet with Rashi, in order to hear the great Tzadik's thoughts regarding his plan. The fact that Godfrey, who was a

vicious enemy of the Jews, would seek such a meeting, was itself remarkable, but Rashi denied him the meeting.

Furious, Godfrey assembled soldiers and burst into Rashi's Beis Medrash, calling out, "Solomon!" Although he did not see anyone in the Bais Medrash, and even though he saw the books were open, he heard Rashi reply, "What does his Highness want?"

Terrified, Godfrey ran outside. Insisting on hearing Rashi's advice, he called to a student of Rashi and swore that no harm would come to Rashi if he came to meet with him.

When Rashi agreed and met with Godfrey, Godfrey informed him of his plans, including the fact that he had 100,000 horsemen ready to invade Palestine. He told Rashi to give him his honest opinion.

Rashi replied that Godfrey would conquer Yerushalayim and that he would rule for three days, and after that, he will be driven out by the

Moslems, and return to Troyes with only three horses.

Angered to hear this, Godfrey swore that if this did not happen, he would cut Rashi to pieces and feed him to the dogs!

However, Rashi's prophetic comments came true. Coming back four years later to Troyes, Godfrey remembered the words Rashi said to him. He decided that he would indeed punish Rashi, as he currently had four horsemen with him, not the three that Rashi had predicted.

But when they entered the gates of Troyes, a large stone fell from the top and killed a horse and its rider. There were now three horses entering Troyes with Godfrey. Every aspect of Rashi's words had now come true!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukas 5785 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

# A Lesson in True Empathy

By Yoni Schwartz

Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, ZT"L, a renowned dayan for the Badatz, had to have a pacemaker installed late in his life. However, the doctors were worried that he might not wake up after the anesthesia due to his old age and frailty. Rav Fisher told them he could undergo the procedure without anesthesia.

The doctors thought he was crazy, not understanding how anyone could endure the pain of having the heart cut open while awake. Nevertheless, he reassured them and went ahead with the procedure, learning Torah in his mind to distract himself from the pain. Throughout the entire procedure, he didn't move a muscle or make a single sound.

Many years later, Rav Fisher had grown even frailer. Simply speaking and answering questions was an enormous challenge for him. Attendants were appointed to ensure that only people with very serious issues would be allowed to speak with him, and even then, they would speak first to his grandson, who would relay the message to Rav Fisher.



**Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, zt"l**

One time, a man whom Rav Fisher had known for years came with a very urgent life-or-death halachic dilemma. His grandson relayed the problem to the Rav and then told the man his answer. The man needed clarification on something, so the grandson went back. This conversation continued back-and-forth for a while, about 20 minutes.

Towards the end, his grandson asked, “Zeidi, since this is clearly something very important to you, why didn’t you have him brought in so you could speak face-to-face? The conversation would’ve been finished in a quarter of the time.”

Rav Fisher responded, “This man is suffering! If I see him and witness his pain, I don’t know if I’ll have the heart to withstand his agony.”

Rav Fisher was strong enough to withstand having his heart physically cut open, yet soft enough to feel so much for fellow Jews that their pain becomes unbearable. That is true empathy. That is greatness.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukos 5785 email of Torah Sweets*

# The Wrong Rich Man and the Wrong Address

By Yehuda Z Klitnick



**The Tzemach Tzedek**

A Yid rented an inn from the Poritz of the village, and made a nice living from it. One day, the Poritz notified the Yid, that he was ending the contract with him for the inn, and would have to leave. The Poritz was going to give the lease to another Yid who would pay more rent and give him better terms. The Yid pleaded with the Poritz and told him he would pay more rent, and he would offer the same terms that the other Yid, had offered.

But the Poritz would not give in, and dismissed the Yid from his office. It was

devastating for the Yid, and he had to begin thinking what to do now. His friend told him about a very rich man who had influence on the Poritz. He advised him to go to this man and ask him to intervene with the Poritz for him.

However, the rich man refused to do it. He went back to the friend and told him what the rich man had said. The friend advised him to travel to the Tzemach Tzedek (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1789-1866), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and ask him to write a letter to the rich man asking him to beg the Poritz for mercy.

The Yid, traveled to Lubavitch. When he arrived, Reb Chaim Ber Chaiymson, who told this story, was standing at the door, and he let the Yid in to see the Rebbe. The Yid, told the Rebbe his story. "I want to ask the Rebbe," he said, "There is a rich man, who the Rebbe knows, and is a friend of the Poritz. Maybe the Rebbe could write a letter asking him to convince the Poritz to change his mind about the inn, and let me continue to operate it."

The Rebbe immediately took a pen and paper and wrote a letter. He took an envelope, and wrote a name and address on it, and gave it to the Yid. The Yid left the Rebbe's home happily. However, he glanced at the envelope, and to his surprise, the name on the envelope was not the name of the rich man that the Yid had named to the Rebbe. It was a different Yid who lived in some far-away town!

The Yid assumed that the Rebbe had made an error and decided to return to the Rebbe and call attention to his mistake, and ask the Rebbe to correct it. When he reached the door to the Rebbe's room, Reb Chayim Ber, standing there, told him, "The Rebbe already saw you and said goodbye to you!"

The Yid reacted, "The Rebbe made a mistake. He wrote someone else's name and someone else's address. I simply want to correct him and ask him to write the correct name and the correct address."

"The Rebbe makes no mistakes," said Reb Chayim Ber. "If he wrote a name and an address then you need to go to that person at that address. There is no question that you will get the help you need there."

The Yid had Emunas Tzaddikim, and traveled to that town. It was during the worst of the winter, and the weather was bad. The roads were full of mud and snow, and only with great difficulty did the Yid reach the house of the man whose name the Rebbe wrote on the envelope.

He handed the letter to the man. The man opened the letter the Rebbe wrote to him and read it. The Rebbe was asking him to influence the Poritz of the Yid's village to let the Yid stay at his inn and not rent it to anyone else.

The man was surprised, and wondered Why would the tzaddik write this to me? I don't know the Poritz. How can I influence this Poritz when I have no connection with him at all?"

The Yid said “I have the same question.” He told the rich man how he had come to the Tzemach Tzedek and asked him to write a letter, but the Rebbe addressed it to you, not the person he had in mind.

“Okay, then stay here with me. Let’s see what happens.”

In the middle of the night, they heard a loud knocking at the door. When the rich man, went to the door he found a Poritz dripping wet from head to toe, begging to be let in before he dies. The rich man took him in immediately.

The Poritz began to tell how he was on the road in his wagon and got stuck in a swamp. In the process, he got totally soaked and the winter weather froze him.

The Yid was awakened by the noise of the knocking, and recognized the voice of the Poritz of his village. He immediately called the rich man to him and whispered to him that it was his Poritz who had come to the door, and now he had the chance to help him!

The rich man warmed up some hot soup for the Poritz, and gave him dry clothes. The Poritz was full of thanks and praise for the rich man who had labored so much for him. The Poritz slept overnight at the house, with the plan to leave in the morning to the swamp to retrieve his horse and wagon from the swamp.

In the morning, after the Poritz ate breakfast, he asked the rich man how he could pay him back for all the good he had done him the nightbefore.

“I don’t want any payment from the Poritz,” said the homeowner. “I have one thing to ask of the Poritz: I have a friend that has been the innkeeper in your town. He happens to be here, and is at a loss to understand why the Poritz decided to throw him out and rent the inn to someone else. “I ask that the good Poritz should change his mind and allow the Yid to return to his inn.”

“I’ll tell you,” said the Poritz. “As far as I’m concerned, I have nothing against the good innkeeper. But I have a good friend, a rich Jew, -and the Poritz named the rich man that the Yid had asked the Tzemach Tzedek to write the letter to-. He asked me to give the inn to his relative. Since he’s a good friend of mine, I decided to give in and do it for him.

“But you have treated me so well,” continued the Poritz, “and you saved my life. If you hadn’t opened the door to me in the middle of the night, I probably would have died from the cold. I must thank you and show you good will. So, I agree with your request, and I guarantee you that the Yid can stay where he is, and at the old price. He will not have to pay more rent.”

Now the Yid understood that the Tzemach Tzedek had not made any mistake. The mistake would have been had they sent the letter to the rich man that had started the whole trouble, as he had now found out from the Poritz.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukas 5785 email of Pardes Yehuda.*

# The Less-Than- Acceptable Grade in Gemorah

Savta Elka was an institution in [19<sup>th</sup> Century] Yerushalayim. Her love for Torah was boundless. On the first day of Selichos, Horav Eliezer Don Ralbag, zl (Rosh Yeshivas Eitz Chaim, niftar 1895), was walking to shul. When he passed by Savta Elka's window, he heard her weeping copiously.

He did not stand on ceremony, so immediately investigated the cause of the emotion. He discovered that one of her many grandsons had returned from cheder with a less-than-acceptable grade in Gemorah. This means that he did not receive his usual metzuyan, aleph plus.

“What happened to my precious grandchild?” she wailed. “He has always been an excellent student, diligent, loved learning, totally absorbed in Torah – and now this! Something must be wrong!”

The Rosh Yeshivah was unable to calm her down. Every year, he took upon himself a forty-day taanis dibbur. He did not speak from Rosh Chodesh Elul until after Yom Kippur. He wrote on a piece of paper that he would soon look into the matter. Immediately following Maariv on Motzoei Yom Kippur, he visited one of the bochanim, examiners, who had tested the students.

Seven scholars served in this capacity, and he visited each one until he located the bochein who tested Savta Elka's grandson. The bochein added that he, too, was surprised. This boy had been an excellent student throughout his years in the yeshivah. Something had happened after Pesach that created a change in his learning. While he was still able to rattle off the Gemorah by heart without missing a beat, something was lacking in his havanah, understanding of the material.

Rav Ralbag's next step was the boy's home where he met with the father of the eleven-year-old boy. After receiving permission to speak with his son, he asked the boy point blank, “Why has your grade gone down this last semester?”

The boy's response should give the reader an idea what type of child this was and the level of Torah studies in the end of the nineteenth century Yerushalayim. “In the past, I would pray hard and long that I do well in my learning. Hashem always listened, and I did well. This time, for some reason, my tefillos were not accepted.”

The Rosh Yeshivah asked about his daily schedule. Had anything changed that might have affected his learning? He replied that, when he came home, he would usually play with friends. Recently, a new boy had moved into the neighborhood. His father had offered him some grapes, which he ate. He discovered later that the

grapes had come from his uncle's vineyard in Petach Tikvah. Apparently, he had forgotten to tithe/take maaser from them."

"In other words," said the Rosh Yeshivah, "you ate tevel, untithed fruit." When he said this, the boy and his parents burst out in tears. It took the Rosh Yeshivah some time to calm them down.

He said, "Baruch Hashem, on Motzoei Yom Kippur I was able to investigate and find the source of your inability to learn as you once did. Your teshuvah, penance, will be that you accept upon yourself to go to all the produce merchants and remind/encourage them to tithe their products."

Rav Ralbag returned to Savta Elka's home and relayed the entire story to her. Her reaction is classic. "Oy vei, oy! A small cluster of grapes, a moment of pleasure, cost him a semester of learning!"

*Reprinted from the Parashas Chukas 5785 email of Peninim on the Torah compiled by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum, a publication of Hebrew Academy of Cleveland.*

## Even a Little Torah is Valuable to Hashem

The following story was told by Rav Efraim (son of Rav Yechezkel) of Kuzhmir zy"l:

Rav Efraim once was involved in a business deal that took up a lot of his time and energy. During that period, he was unable to learn as much as he usually did. This caused him a lot of anguish.

He went to discuss the matter with his brother, Rav Shmuel Eliyahu of Zalin zy"l, to ask his advice. His brother told him, "Right now, you should learn and daven as much as you can. Even if you are very busy and can't focus on what you're learning, you should still try to learn and daven as well as you can because even words of Torah and tefillah uttered without full comprehension and concentration are valuable to Hashem."

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukas 5785 of The Wau of Emunah: Collected Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Meir Isamar Rosenbaum.*

# Why He Looked So Sad

By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, zt”l



**Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

A look of sadness on the face of someone who always exuded happiness greeted the visitor to the home of a Torah scholar in Bnei Brak. When he met him the next morning in the synagogue he could not resist asking him why he looked so depressed the day before.

"My wife was in a very depressed mood that day," he explained, "and all my efforts to cheer her up met with failure. I finally hit on the idea that if she sees me looking depressed she will certainly try to cheer me up, and in order to do so she will herself have to become cheerful. I therefore put on an act of sadness that I could not drop when you came to the door because my wife was standing next to me and would have seen through my act.

"My strategy worked and she came out of her bad mood. It was worthwhile embarrassing myself in front of you, with an uncharacteristic show of sadness in order to make my wife happy."

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chukas 5785 email of Menucha Magazine.*