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The Magical Ring

By Rabbi David Bibi



Rabbi Asher Abittan z'sl, would often tell us the story of a king, a jeweler and a special ring. The Ben Ish Chai brings the parable as well, as does Abraham Lincoln. I was curious if there was a source to this story which has grown more elaborate over the years undoubtedly by jewelers hoping to sell rings. The latest versions make Solomon the king in the story and the great sage, sadik and warrior, Benayahu Ben Yehoyada as his advisor. I will retell as posted, but keep in mind, this story is completely one of fiction, though it still offers a wonderful lesson.

Long ago there lived a man named Benaiah, the captain of King Solomon's palace guards, and also the king's good friend. Benaiah was a noble man, with a handsome face and a beautiful soul. Some say he was among the 36 men of his generation chosen to exist so that the world might continue.

Benaiah served his king well, but one day King Solomon was passing through a courtyard and happened to overhear his soldiers gossiping. His heart sank when he heard Benaiah boast, "No task is too difficult for someone like me. I can accomplish anything."

The king went to his chambers and there he thought about pride. "Pride can harm a man," he thought. "I must give my captain a task that is impossible. Only in this way will he understand that he is but a man."



Burial place of Benayahu ben Yehoyada in Biriya, Galilee (Israel)

That evening he called Benaiah to appear before him. "I have a job for you, my friend," said the king.

"Whatever you ask," Benaiah said. "Your wish is my command."

"I want to own a magical ring," said the king.

"As you wish," Benaiah said. "Describe the ring for me so that I may find it."

King Solomon smiled. "All I can tell you is this: If a person is happy and puts this ring on his finger, he will become instantly sad. But a sad man who places this ring upon his finger will become happy." Of course, the king understood that there

was no such ring, but he knew his friend would never rest until he found it. "I shall find it for you," Benaiah said.

"And you will surely succeed," said the king, "for I know you can accomplish anything." Benaiah set out for the marketplace, where one by one he visited the jewelers of Jerusalem. "I am looking for a magical ring that makes a happy person sad and a sad person happy," he told each merchant.

Each one shook his head. "Never heard of such a ring," each said, and by sunset, Benaiah realized he would have to travel far to fulfill his king's desire.

That evening he prepared a caravan, and at dawn he set out to find the trader who possessed the magical ring. Benaiah and his men traveled for days and met many traders along their way, but each time he asked where he might find the magical ring that altered moods, he heard the same response: "I've never heard of such a treasure."

Visited all of the Seaports And Met with Ship Captains

Benaiah visited the seaports, and there he met captains from every foreign land. Once again he asked where he might find this ring of wonders.

"Never heard of such a ring," each captain said.

Benaiah traveled on, but after many weeks his heart began to feel heavy. Perhaps he would fail to fulfill his king's desire. He could not bear the thought.

Still, he had no more ideas about where to look for the treasure, and so he returned to Jerusalem. He decided he would look one last time in the local marketplace, and as he was visiting the jewelers, he happened past a young man he had never before seen. The young man wore ragged clothes and sat upon the ground, and before him was a threadbare carpet laden with simple bracelets and rings.

"Surely this lad won't have the magical ring," Benaiah thought, but he decided he must at least look. He bent down and said, "I am looking for a ring that makes a sad person happy and a happy person sad. Have you ever heard of such a treasure?"

Reached into His Pocket...

The boy's eyes lighted up, and he reached into his pocket and handed a single gold band to Benaiah. "This is a ring my grandfather gave me long ago," said the boy. "He inscribed it. Read what he has written."

Benaiah shrugged. Such a plain ring could not be magical. Still, he reached out and held the ring in his palm. He turned it over, and when he read the words inscribed, his heavy heart lifted. "This is it!" he cried.

Benaiah fulfilled one lad's dream as he handed over all the silver and gold coins he carried in exchange for the ring. "Your grandfather was a wise man,

indeed," he told the young man. And then, the ring in hand, he returned to the palace. When Benaiah appeared before King Solomon, he bowed low, and at the sight of his good friend, the king felt suddenly sad. He did not wish to humiliate such a friend.

"Ah, poor man," Solomon said softly, "the task I gave you was impossible, but you have tried your best ..."

But before he could finish his sentence, Benaiah held out the ring. "I have found it!" he exclaimed.

King Solomon could not believe his ears, but he reached out and took the ring. The moment he read the inscription, his smile vanished, and when he looked out at the grand things surrounding him, he felt so sad that tears welled in his eyes.

The Guards were Curious

"What has happened?" the king's guards whispered.

King Solomon passed them the ring. "Read the inscription," he said, and soon the whole court understood.

"Gam zeh ya'avov -- this too shall pass," were the words the boy's grandfather had written inside the ring. King Solomon now realized that all his treasures would one day turn to dust, and those who felt sad realized that one day their sadness would leave them and they might feel happiness again.

The King Asks for Forgiveness

The king reached for Benaiah's hand. "Forgive me, friend," he said. "From this day on you shall wear my jewels, and I will wear the magical ring."

For King Solomon was wise, and he understood those words would keep him forever balanced.

Reprinted from the Parashat Vayigash 5783 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

Story #1308

Tipping the Scales of Justice

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

editor@ascentofsafed.com

The phone rang in Ben Meed's office; Ben picked up the receiver. A restrained, sorrowful voice asked to speak to the president of WAGRO (Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization). "Speaking," responded Mr. Meed.

The gentleman's voice continued: "My father, Mr. Abraham Bachner, asked me to call you. The name won't mean anything to you; you didn't know him. My father just passed away. During one of my last visits to the hospital, he requested of me that when his time came you would attend his funeral.

"You see, Mr. Meed, my father attended all the annual Warsaw ghetto memorial services, the ones that your organization sponsors. It was his wish that you attend his memorial service. My father was a Holocaust survivor." He gave Meed the place and time of the funeral.

How Do You Know the Deceased

Just as Ben Meed entered the funeral chapel, he met Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld of Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills, who addressed him, "I didn't know you knew the deceased,"

"I didn't," answered Meed, and told Rabbi Schonfeld about the telephone conversation with Bachner's son. The rabbi responded, "Ben, I am really grateful that you came. You don't know how meaningful it is to all of us who knew Abraham."

The casket was brought in, covered in black with a Hebrew inscription saying "He makes death to vanish in life eternal." Rabbi Schonfeld began to officiate.

"As you know, it is prohibited, according to *Halacha* (law), to deliver a eulogy on a holiday and we are in the midst of Hanukah. Instead, I will share with you a conversation I had with Abraham Bachner during one of my visits to the hospital.

Wants to be Buried in His Concentration Camp Uniform

"Rabbi,' he said to me, 'I have been a member of your congregation for the past thirty years. I tried to be an honest, observant Jew. I attended services regularly on Shabbat and weekdays, no matter what the weather. I know that my time is up and I will soon be summoned before the heavenly court. I want to be buried not in *tachrichim* (white burial garment), as required by Jewish law, but rather in my concentration-camp uniform, the one I wore in Auschwitz, the one in which I was liberated.'

"I could not understand his strange request and asked for an explanation. Abe said to me, 'You see, Rabbi, when I reach the seat of justice on high, the heavenly prosecutors probably will have a list of grievances against me upon which they will base my guilty verdict.

"But, when they place my transgressions on one side of the scales of the heavenly court, I will place on the other side my concentration-camp uniform. The hunger, the fear, the humiliation I suffered each minute for years while I was

a *katzernik* (inmate) will surely tip the scales of justice in my favor. I hope, Rabbi, that you understand. I must be buried in my uniform. It is my defense case, my *melitz yosher* (righteous intercessor).”

At the conclusion of the services, as the casket was being taken out of the chapel, Ben Meed walked over to Rabbi Schonfeld and asked him, “And what was your decision, Rabbi?” “The concentration-camp uniform is there with him, in the coffin,” responded Rabbi Schonfeld.

When the thirty-seventh commemoration of the uprising of the Ghetto Warsaw took place on May 3, 1981, Ben Meed told the story of about Abraham Bachner’s last request.

“In this gathering, here on earth, there was no doubt that the scales tipped in favor of Abraham Bachner when he stood before the heavenly court. For there is nothing more holy in this world than a broken Jewish heart in a concentration-camp uniform.”

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*Source* : Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from “*Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*” by Yaffa Eliach, Based on the story Ben Meed told her on April 3, 1981, and also on a letter by Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld in “Martyrdom and Resistance,” March-April 1981, p. 8.

*Connection*: The *Fast of the Tenth of Tevet* (this year: Jan. 3), in addition to commemorating the start of the siege of Jerusalem which culminated in the destruction of the Temples on *Tisha b’Av*, has also become the day on which *Kaddish* is recited for all those whose death day is unknown.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email KabbalaOnline.Org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

# The Power of the Yeshiva

By Rabbi Reuven Semah

Rabbi Yaakov Bender explains, there is something about a yeshivah. The ideal yeshivah situation is when a young man lives in the yeshivah and visits his family on occasion. A certain spirit and life that emanates from within the *Bet Midrash* has the capacity to warm a person for life. There are those that are privileged never to leave, fortunate enough to live near the wellspring itself, able to draw from its source.

There is something about children who grow up breathing yeshivah air, those whose parents live near and pray in the yeshivah. A yeshivah is holy and brushes all those exposed to it with holiness.

There was an elderly *Talmid Hacham* who sat in the library at the *Yeshivah Gedolah* in Montreal, and learned Torah. Rav Yaakov Moshe Magid was an elderly student of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe. He was a retired *shochet* and continued to say classes to a group of devoted students, within the walls of the yeshivah until his final years.



Someone once asked him why he doesn't move to another *Bet Midrash*, which might be more spacious. He explained that in 1939 he was learning in the Mirrer Yeshivah and he traveled home to his family. The students were allowed to go home and be with their families as war was breaking out. His parents were overjoyed to see him. "But no," said his father, "Your place is with the yeshivah. Whatever fate will meet the yeshivah will be yours as well."

### **Knowing it Might be a Final Goodbye**

With tears in their eyes, his parents encouraged him to leave them and return to his place – the yeshivah, knowing that they might be saying a final goodbye.

That courageous decision would save his life, because that yeshivah – Mirrer Yeshivah – was miraculously spared, carried on an extraordinary journey to

safety. He eventually landed in Montreal, a living testimony to the power to his father's advice. "Your place is with the yeshivah." Of course, he never left.

There was a young man who learned in *Ner Yisrael* in Baltimore, who was moving to Israel. He went to Rabbi Ruderman, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, for a *berachah*. The *Rosh Yeashivah* wished him well and made a suggestion. "Whatever you do, wherever you live, make sure to be connected to a yeshivah.

### **The Commanding Officer Mocked the Idea of G-d**

**Years later this young man was called to do military reserve duty. The commanding officer delivered a speech to his men. In his address he mocked the idea of G-d, speaking of the power of man and the might of the Israeli Army. The reservist was deeply hurt by his words. Bursting with rage, he could not find the courage to protest.**

**As he stood there seething with rage, a voice came from the other side of the room.**

"*Kefirah!*" came the pained cry. "How dare you speak with such arrogance? There is a reality that there is a Master of the Universe. He is in charge, and not you!"

### **What was the Power of the Seemingly Simple Sephardic Jew**

The protester, a Sephardic gentleman, kept shouting and was thrown into a military jail for several days. When he was allowed to rejoin the unit, the yeshivah graduate hurried to welcome him back and asked, "How is it that I, who learned in yeshivah and still learn seriously, could not bring myself to speak up, and you, who do not appear to be a *Kollel* man, did not even hesitate? What do you do for a living?"

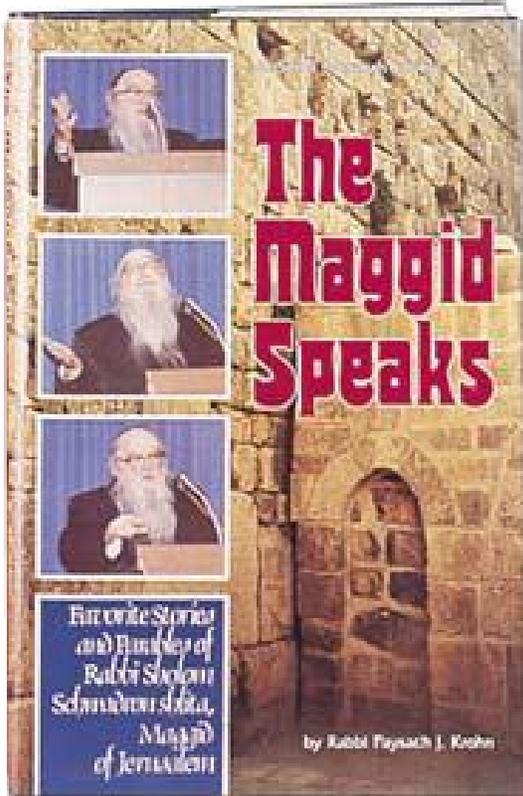
The Sephardic man nodded, "I am the cook in the Ponevezh Yeshivah," he said simply.

In a flash, Rav Ruderman's advice of years earlier came back. "Remain connected to a yeshivah." There, one is able to be connected to life itself.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Vayigash 5783 email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin,*

# The Tzadik and the Tailor

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



**Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**

R' Shmuel Strashun of Vilna (the Rashash) was known as a Torah giant and a wealthy person. He also administered a gemach (free loan fund). R' Zalman the tailor once came to borrow money as he was in desperate need of 300 rubles. The Rashash granted him the loan, to be repaid in one year. The transaction was recorded in the Rashash's ledger.

One year later, to the day, R' Zalman appeared at the home of the Rashash with the money. Deeply involved in a sugya, the Rashash did not wish to be disturbed.

R' Zalman, who knew the loan was due that day, quietly handed him the money. The Rashash, wishing to minimize the interruption, tucked the money into the back-cover flap of the sefer he was using, with the intention of removing it later on. But when he finished learning, many hours later, he replaced the sefer into the shelf, forgetting to remove the money.

A few weeks later, the Rashash reviewed his ledger and saw that the loan to R' Zalman had not been crossed out, and was apparently overdue. He asked R' Zalman about it, and naturally, R' Zalman claimed that he had repaid the loan on the very day it had been due. Yet there were no witnesses, no receipt, and no notation in the ledger. The Rashash had no recollection of the matter. It was decided that both parties would go to a din Torah to settle the matter.

### **News of the Din Torah Upset the Whole Town**

News spread like wildfire that the simple tailor, R' Zalman, was involved in a din Torah with the revered Rashash. People were outraged that anyone would have the audacity to contradict the great Torah giant. The tarnishing of R' Zalman's character and reputation had begun. The Beis Din ruled that since there had once been a debt and it was now the word of one man against the other. R' Zalman would have to swear that he had indeed repaid the loan, and thus be absolved of the debt.

The Rashash did not want to take a chance of a fellow Jew possibly swearing falsely, so he relented and dropped the case. Anger and bitterness were cast upon the tailor. People stopped patronizing him, and R' Zalman and his family became the objects of mockery and degradation. R' Zalman gave up his business and moved to a hamlet out of town, a broken and sorrowful man.

A year later, the Rashash once again learned from that sefer and noticed the money tucked into it. Suddenly it struck him – this was the money R' Zalman had repaid! He immediately traveled to R' Zalman to make amends. R' Zalman was living in a dilapidated shanty in a desolate area.

### **The Rashash Begg the Tailor for Forgiveness**

“Please forgive me,” pleaded the Rashash, “I just found the money in the sefer and I realized that it was you who was right, not I.”

“What good is forgiveness?” said R' Zalman bitterly. “My business is gone; my money is lost. I have nothing. I am the laughing stock of the community.”

The Rashash said, “Not only will I return your money, but I will go to every shul and announce from the bimah that it was my mistake and that people should restore their proper respect towards you.”

R' Zalman sadly replied, “People will only say that the Rashash is a tzaddik, and it is his compassion that compels him to act in this manner. They will never believe that I was really right.”

The Rashash was perplexed, for he understood human nature and knew that R' Zalman was right. People wouldn't believe him after such a long period of doubt and rebuke. The Rashash thought a moment about how to rectify the situation and then said, “I have a daughter... now if I take your son as a son-in-law, which means

that you would become my mechutan, then no one would doubt that you are indeed a respectable man.”

R' Zalman agreed to this proposal. The prospective kallah and chosson agreed as well, and a marriage was arranged between R' Zalman's son and the Rashash's daughter, and R' Zalman regained his former status in the community. (The Maggid Speaks)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# The Reward for Checking the Kashrut of Chewing Gum

By Sivan Rahav-Meir



**Rabbi and Mrs. Morgenstern**

I have a lot to say about the wonderful Shabbat we spent with Young Israel of Scarsdale, New York. This community is led by Rabbi Jonathan Morgenstern who, between various lectures and other gatherings during our stay, told me the following story:

“On my Bar Mitzvah I made a promise to myself: I would only eat food that was labeled kosher. Where I lived at that time, it was difficult to abide by such a promise, but I was strict in adhering to it for years.

“One day I went to a basketball game between two large Jewish high schools in New York. A girl sitting next to me offered me some chewing gum. I asked if I could see the package. I turned it over again and again looking for kosher certification but could not find any.

### **Aroused Her Curiosity**

“I gave her back the gum, she stopped watching the game, and asked in astonishment: ‘What’s your problem?’ I gently answered that I try not to eat anything without kosher certification. She did not exactly understand, but this aroused her curiosity, impressed her, and she began to ask me all kinds of questions.

“And then the rabbi introduced me to that girl, his wife Jordana. Today they are not only parents but young grandparents as well.

“I asked permission to tell this story and Rabbi Morgenstern agreed, adding: ‘This story is not about the gum, but about what it represents. We are now reading about the nation of Israel in Egypt and about the challenge of retaining their identity within a foreign culture. Ultimately, this is the challenge that all of us face. To what extent are we swept up by the values and practices of the world around us, and how do we stay true to the values and practices that make us distinct? Yes, I did lose the chance to chew gum that day, but I found my better half in the process.’”

### **Why Not Go First-Class?**

How do we want to live our lives? Now that Hanukkah is over, the routine of work, study, and winter begins. I found the following story upon opening *The Future Begins Now*, a new book by Rabbi Yoni Lavi.

“Once a farmer in a faraway village in Russia had to go to Moscow, the capital city, but the road he would have to travel by horse and cart would take two weeks. One of his neighbors advised him to take advantage of a new invention: a speedy train.

“The village farmer, who had never traveled by train, bought a ticket for the luxurious first-class compartment. He waited on the platform but, since he did not know how to behave on a train, he decided to do exactly what those standing in line in front of him would do.

“The train arrived and he followed the two people in front of him while they boarded the third-class compartment, not knowing that they did not have tickets. Each time the conductor approached, the two quickly hid themselves under some seats. The farmer, who thought that this was what you did when traveling by train, followed suit.

“At a certain point, the conductor noticed them hiding and demanded to see their tickets. The farmer pulled out his ticket and the conductor was in shock. ‘Why are you traveling third class and hiding under a seat with filth and spider webs when you have a premium first-class ticket?’

This parable is about us. When we were born, each of us received a ticket for a trip through this world. Shall we take that trip in a lowly, degrading, marginal compartment, or do we understand that we have a premium ticket to go first class, living a life full of joy and meaning?”

*Reprinted from the January 6, 2023 of the Jewish Press website.*

## **In Just 90 Seconds!**

The well-known speaker, R' Shabsi Yigal, tells of a chance encounter with R' Yehoshua Hartman shlit'a in which the latter saw R' Chaim Kanievsky zt"l literally comb through all the works of Chazal in ninety seconds. He tells the story as follows:

I saw a familiar face one Friday morning. It was my old rebbe, R' Yehoshua Hartman, who had just recently edited a new edition of the Maharal's writings. He had been my rebbe in Maarava. I hadn't seen him for years. I had heard he had moved away to a different country. That's why I was so surprised to meet him, especially in Raanana, my hometown, on a short Friday, in the middle of the winter.

### **Asks His Old Rebbe to Speak in His Shul**

After a few friendly words, I asked my rebbe what he was doing in town. He said that his in-laws had made aliyah from Brazil and settled in Raanana, and he and his Rebbetzin were there to visit them. When I found out that R' Hartman was going to spend Shabbos in our city, I didn't waste a moment - I immediately asked him if he could come speak in the shul where I daven, both during davening and at a kiddush afterwards. I remembered the fascinating lectures he'd delivered during my yeshivah days, and was anxious to experience them again, to hear him expound on wonderful principles of the Maharal, and to share this treasure with my friends.

R' Hartman gave me his phone number so I could get his answer later in the day, and we said goodbye. When I phoned him later that day, shortly before Shabbos began, he told me he would be able to come and speak. Of course, I was more than thrilled. During the kiddush, R' Hartman said an exquisite dvar Torah and then told over one of the most amazing stories I'd ever heard about a talmid chacham of our generation and his incredible breadth of Torah knowledge.

While editing Gur Aryeh, R' Hartman came across a Maharal on Parshas Vayechi that states as follows: "During techiyas hameisim, all the dead will stand in Mearas Hamachpeilah, as is written in Chazal." However, the Maharal never cited his source. An editor's job is to find sources. There were no search engines in those days. Bar Ilan's program hadn't been created yet, there was no Otzar Hachochma or any other comprehensive collection of Torah writings. There were plenty of talmidei chachamim steeped in the writings of Chazal, though, so R' Hartman approached quite a few of them to see if they knew the source of this Maharal. He asked many people, but none of them had any idea. In the end, R' Hartman added a footnote on this piece of Maharal. "I don't know the source of this Chazal."



**Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt"l**

Shortly after R' Hartman's Gur Aryeh was published, he found himself in Bnei Brak, and as he was walking down a random street, he chanced upon R' Chaim Kanievsky walking by himself. That was still possible in those days. R' Hartman decided to grab the opportunity. He approached the tzaddik and asked if he could ask a question. Being given permission, he queried,

"The Maharal writes in Gur Aryeh, Parshas Vayechi, that during techiyas hameisim, all the dead will stand in Mearas Hamachpeilah."

"Is that what he says?" R' Chaim asked, in a tone that sounded surprised. Apparently, this was news to him, too.

"That's what he says," R' Hartman affirmed. "However, right afterwards, the Maharal writes that Chazal mention this fact, as well. Does the Rav perhaps know where this Chazal is?"

"Then the most amazing thing happened," said R' Hartman. "I watched as R' Chaim continued walking, but he was murmuring to himself. I walked behind him, trying to hear what he was murmuring. I heard him say, "Talmud Bavli? No. Yerushalmi? No. Midrashei Halachah? No. Midrashei Aggadah? No. Zohar? ...."

Then R' Chaim looked at me and mentioned a place in the Zohar that might be interpreted to mean that. "When I got home, I opened a Zohar to the place he'd mentioned, and bingo! It was right there!" R' Hartman said. "It was incredible. I saw R' Chaim Kanievsky scan the entire literature of Chazal in ninety seconds!"

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5783 email of Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's Torah Tavlin.*