

SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS VA'ETCHANAN 5782

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The Stamp of Honesty

By Moshe Lieber



A famous incident involving Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky — and one that he felt was a mitzvah to publicize — serves as a classic instance of our responsibility for the public image of Jews and Judaism.

Shortly after Rav Yaakov assumed the position as rav of Tzitevian, Lithuania, a Jew came to him and reported that the postmaster had mistakenly given him change for a hundred-lit note instead of for the ten-lit note with which he had paid.

Rav Yaakov advised the man to return the money. Several weeks later, Rav Yaakov was in the post office, and this same postmaster gave him more stamps than he had paid for, and Rav Yaakov returned the excess stamps.

The sly smile on the postmaster's face convinced Rav Yaakov that the postmaster was deliberately testing him to see whether the new rabbi was honest.

Rav Yaakov was delighted that he had been presented with such an opportunity for kiddush Hashem.

Years later, he learned from survivors of Tzitevian that the postmaster had been one of the few locals who had been willing to hide Jews from the Nazis. Rav Yaakov was convinced that such displays of honesty by Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky been a major factor in that decision.

Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5782 email of the At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll published "The Pirkei Avos Treasury."

Story #1285

The Second Slap

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles
editor@ascentofsafed.com

The sound of a slap was heard in the *shul* (synagogue). Everyone present turned around and were astonished to see that the person administering the slap was no other than Rabbi Lipa, the Rav of Shargorod, in Ukraine. For a moment silence reigned but soon people returned to their prayers.

Rabbi Lipa's studiousness was exceptional. He hardly took time to sleep. While studying Torah he disengaged himself entirely from his surroundings to the extent that he was completely unaware of the passing of time. One of the duties of his elderly *shammesh* (attendant) was to remind Rabbi Lipa when it was time for prayers.

A Young Man is Chosen as the New Shammesh

Time passed and the old attendant passed away. The leaders of the community looked for a suitable candidate to take his place. Eventually they chose a young man who had decided not to continue his intensive studies. They hoped that being in close contact with the Rav would influence him spiritually for the better.

The rather irresponsible young man wasn't impressed with his new duties. He even used his situation negatively and often caused the Rav distress. All this time the Rav kept this to himself; he said nothing to the people who had appointed him.

One night the young man sat with his friends till early morning. Concerned that if he would go to bed he would not get up in time to remind the Rav that it was time for morning prayers, he decided to lie down on a bench in the shul, hoping that the arrival of the first worshippers would wake him.

He slept so deeply, however, that the entrance of the early comers didn't wake him, not even when the prayers began. The community had waited for a long time

for the Rav to join them but when he didn't come they started the prayers without him.

Only in the middle of the prayers did the *gabbai* (manager of the synagogue) notice the sleeping young man. He immediately realized the reason for the absence of R. Lipa. He quickly awakened the young man and sent him to call the Rav.

The Rav Slaps the Young Man in Great Anger

The young man came to the Rav as usual and said nothing about the delay. The Rav leisurely made his way to shul, but on his entrance realized that the community was about to finish praying. This angered him greatly and he slapped the young man on the cheek in front of all the worshippers.

The young man accepted the slap with understanding and the people present also felt that it was deserved. But the Rav was terribly upset. His conscience troubled him how could he have hurt another Jew! His prayer that morning was like the concluding prayer of *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur, his tears flowed from his eyes like water.

Immediately after the prayers, the Rav ascended the *bimah* (platform in the synagogue for the Torah Reading) and announced emotionally: "I deeply and sincerely regret the slap I gave the young man, and I beg him for pardon and forgiveness."

Right away the young man stood up and exclaimed: "Honorable Rabbi, I deserved that slap, already for a long time I had it coming due to all the distress I caused you."

Only His Family Knew the Reason for the Rav's Disappearance

Several days went by when suddenly it became known in town that the Rav left on a long journey, without stating when he would return. The *Rosh Yeshiva* (head of the yeshiva) was appointed as his substitute. Only to the members of his family the Rav revealed that he decided to take upon himself a period of exile [not so rare in those days] as penance for slapping the young man in public. He would continue until he received a sign from Heaven that his repentance was accepted.

The Rav exchanged his clothes for the clothes of a simple wayfarer and wandered from town to town. There were times that he would have no food for a long time and times that he found no place to lie down and rest. Often he was jeered at, but he accepted it all with love.

Years passed and he felt his strength weaken, he realized that he would not be able to continue his wanderings but he still awaited a sign from Heaven. One Shabbat eve he came to a town close to Shargorod. He decided to approach the person in charge of the Guest House for help in finding a house where to eat his Shabbat meals.

When he stood in front of the man responsible for the Guest House he was dumbfounded to realize that this was the same young man who was his servant all those years ago. He had married, raised a family and moved to this town. The man didn't recognize the Rav and the latter didn't say anything. He was sent to eat in the house of the head of the community.

From the conversation during the Shabbat evening meal the host discovered that his guest was an outstanding Torah scholar. The community leader was extremely pleased and invited the Rav to stay and sleep in his house. At the end of Shabbat after *havdala* (ceremony at the termination of Shabbat) the Rav took leave of the household members and got ready to continue his journey.

Suspicion Falls on the Unique Guest

In the meantime, a tumult broke out in the shul: the valuable silver candle sticks had disappeared. Suspicion fell immediately on the guest, who had hurried to leave the house of his host. The community leader ran to the Guest House supervisor and furiously asked him, "How did you sent me a guest who is nothing but a thief!?"

The supervisor decided to discover the whereabouts of the thief. He took his carriage and set out to find the guest, who hadn't managed to cover much distance. By the time he overtook him he was so incensed that he slapped the Rav on his cheek then ordered him to return the stolen candles.

To his surprise, he saw a big smile appear on the face of the guest. This angered the supervisor even more and he raised his hand in order to slap the guest again.

The Rav raised his hand and said "Enough! I deserved one slap but not more than that."

This remark sounded very strange to the supervisor. Looking searchingly at the man in front of him he suddenly yelled "Oy! Rebbe!" realizing that this was none other than the Rav of Shargorod, Rabbi Lipa!

He threw himself down before the Rav, begging him for forgiveness. Again, a big smile spread over the Rav's face. He said "You do not have to feel bad. Finally, I have received a sign from Heaven that my repentance has been accepted."

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation by C. R. Benami, long-time editorial assistant for [www.AscentOfSafed.com](http://www.AscentOfSafed.com), of an article in *Sichat Hashavua* (#1327)

*Connection :* In the Three Weeks leading to Tisha b'Av, we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temples and the exile of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence).

*Reprinted from the Mattos-Masei 5782 email of KabbalaOnline.Org, a project of AscentofSafed.com*

# The Friday Night Barber



Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein said that when he once visited Rav Eliyahu Broide, the Rav of the Ramat HaChayal neighborhood in Tel Aviv, Rav Broide introduced him to a Torah observant Jew with an interesting story.

“This man,” Rav Broide said, “was a barber by profession, who kept his shop open on Friday nights. When I asked him why he desecrates Shabbos so blatantly, he explained that many pilots from the air force live in his neighborhood, and since they are busy all week with their flights, the only time they can get a haircut is on Friday night. Therefore, there was no way he can close his shop during these hours.”

Rav Broide added that he tried to persuade the man to close the barber shop on Shabbos for one month, and then calculate whether or not it caused him a loss. Rav Broide said emphatically, “I promise you that you will earn thirty percent more than you earned up until now!”

The barber decided to give it a try. After closing his shop on Friday nights for an entire month, he realized that his profits had grown, not only thirty percent as the Rav said, but by fifty percent! Since then, he and his family have become Frum!

Rav Zilberstein said, “I was very impressed by this story, and I wondered if it is permissible to test Hashem in such a way? After all, it says in Devarim (16:16) not to test Hashem. However, it seems that when it comes to sanctifying the Name of Hashem, and together with Tefilah, it is permissible to do so, as Eliyahu HaNavi did on Har HaKarmel.

Rav Zilberstein added that he approached his brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt”l, with this question.



**Rav Chaim Kanievsky**

Rav Chaim quoted a different source from Sefer Daniel (Ch. 1), when the king said to feed Daniel bread, Daniel asked one of the ministers to feed him only seeds, suggesting a ten-day trial to examine whether the seeds will sustain his body. Rav Zilberstein said, “We see that when it comes to sanctifying Hashem’s Name, it is permissible to test Hashem. Especially when relating to Shabbos, which is the source of all Brachah!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.*

# A Used Pair of Tefillin



Last week, someone called Mitzvah Man and said, “My friend is in his 40s, and he never put on *tefillin* before. Can you get him a pair of *tefillin*?” Michael Cohen, Mitzvah Man, said, “Sure. Please fill out these forms, and we can get your friend a beautiful brand-new pair of *tefillin* and a *koracha*.”

The man said, “My friend does not want to take a new, donated pair, he just wants a used pair of *tefillin*, and he wants you to bring it to him to put it on for the very first time.” In his head, Michael thought, *I know how to get a new pair, but where could I possibly find a used set of tefillin?*

## Another Call Came in at that Second

That second, a call came in on his other line. He told the man, “Hold on a few seconds, I have another call.” He jumped on the other line, and it was another call for Mitzvah Man. “Hi, my grandfather passed away a few months ago. We are cleaning out his apartment and we came across his *tefillin*. Do you know anybody that could benefit from a set of used *tefillin*?” The next day, a man was able to put on *tefillin* for the first time in 40 years.

This story is absolutely incredible. When a person has it in his mind to do good, and to do *chessed leshem shamayim*, Hashem gives him the tools to perform the *mitzvah* he set out to do. Michael Cohen is a *shaliach*—messenger from Hashem, serving the community for years and years, and Hashem is holding his hand every step of the way.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Mattot-Masei 5782 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

# Transferred for Generations

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

The Reichmann family of Toronto is known throughout the world for its integrity, philanthropy, and absolute faith in Hashem and His Torah. Despite the great wealth they had enjoyed, their priorities have remained steadfast, with religious commitment and family values always uppermost in their minds. This conviction stemmed from the patriarch of the family, who set standards for his future generations.



The patriarch was Shmayahu (Samuel) Reichmann. As Mr. Reichmann grew older, he wanted to have a Sefer Torah written on his behalf to fulfill the misvah that few Jews have the opportunity to fulfill, because of its great cost. In 1969 Mr. Reichmann commissioned a noted sofer in Bnei Brak to write a Sefer Torah, but the man was overworked

and overburdened, and could not find the time to fully concentrate on the Reichmann project.

When Mr. Reichmann would have family members in Israel go to the sofer and urge him to complete the project, he would work on a few more sheets of parchment, but then would get diverted with other things that he felt were more pressing. It was extremely frustrating, but the Reichmanns stayed with this sofer because of his reputation for beautiful handiwork.

## Completed in Time For Shabuot 1975

Finally, in 1975, the Torah was completed and sent to Toronto in time for Shabuot. There could be no more appropriate time, for Shabuot commemorates Hashem's giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Plans were made for the Torah to be brought with pomp and ceremony on the first day of Shabuot to the Yeshivah Yesodei Hatorah. There would be a procession where the Torah would be carried, as



family, friends and community members joined with song and dance.

The day before Shabuot, Mr. Reichmann, with the help of a local sofer, completed the Sefer Torah by filling in the final letters. Ordinarily a calm and level person, Mr. Reichmann was visibly excited at the opportunity to present a Sefer Torah on Shabuot. On the first day of Shabuot the police closed off the blocks of Dalemount Ave., where Mr. Reichmann lived. A meeting place was set up at the intersection of Dalemount and Fairholme Aves.

### **A Crowd of 100 Laymen and Children Participated in the Sefer Torah Celebration**

At about 9:50 a.m., about a hundred laymen and children left Yesodei Hatorah and walked behind five men, each of whom was carrying a Sefer Torah and marching down Fairholme Ave. toward the Reichmann home. They sang as they walked, regaling in the delight of the moment. At 9:55 a.m. R' Shmayahu Reichmann, accompanied by his children and grandchildren, carried the new Sefer Torah from his home and walked majestically down Dalemount Ave. toward the designated corner.

At exactly 10 o'clock, just as planned, the two groups fused. Mr. Reichmann stood for a moment holding the Torah scroll - and suddenly turned to his son, Moshe, saying, "I don't feel well." He handed the Torah to his son, collapsed on the spot and died!

### **Transmitting a Most Important Message with a Last Misvah**

The patriarch had delivered his message as he fulfilled the last misvah. He had transmitted the Torah to Moshe - and he and his siblings have bequeathed the message that resonates in the family to this day.

On that very spot, where R' Shmayahu completed his mesorah, a yeshivah and bet midrash were built. It is appropriately called "Zichron Shmayahu."

*Reprinted from the Parshat Matot-Masei 5782 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Excerpted from the Artscroll book – "Reflections of the Maggid."*

# The Optimist

By Rabbi Daniel Staum



American President Ronald Reagan was known to be an optimist. In one of his speeches prior to his presidency, he related the following. An experiment was once conducted wherein two boys were placed under scrutiny, one of them being described as joyful, playful and positive and the other negative and down.

A variety of toys were placed in one room, for the boy who generally had a dispirited attitude to look at and play with. But he saw only problems with each of the toys.

“This one is too blue, this one is too big.” Each toy was more problematic and faultier than the previous.

The one who kept to a positive and optimistic attitude was placed in a room which smelled of a donkey’s live-in stall. Reeking of manure, no one anticipated that the boy, despite his jovial attitude, would be able to tolerate the discomfort. And yet, there he was, joyful and playful, enjoying the moment.

The observers were shocked. Inquiring of the boys how he could remain so upbeat, the boy told them why. “I knew that if I was placed in this stall with donkey manure, there must be a donkey awaiting me to play with!”

Our attitude is a choice. It’s not something that chooses us, but something we choose. If you want to have a happy life, go create it. You’ll find that happiness surrounds you wherever you go.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Matot-Masei 5782 email of TheTorahAnyTimes. Newsletter as compiled and edited by Elan Perchik.*

# A Scammer Robbed Me of Everything I Thought I Had

By Simmy More



Some things just stick in your memory, like a broken record; they repeat and regurgitate, rearing their ugly head, debilitating, like a choking feeling you can't escape.

The day I got the phone call was one of those days. I had allowed myself a couple of hours off work, which was uncharacteristic for me, a through and through workaholic.

Looking back, it's as clear as day that it was an escape mechanism from the storms in my life, but at the time, I saw it as me being ambitious, able, serious-minded and professional. I was secretly proud of my achievements.

I designed tiles for the stars. Even Elton John's architect wanted me to design his bathroom and flew me out to Atlanta. Of course, there were plenty of others—actors, singers and football players—they all loved my sense of piquancy and designs.

I tried to focus and paint my future with the success I worked so hard to attain. My showroom was beautiful. It had everything in it; it was quirky, it had high-class displays, and it had something for the “man on the street.” It was utterly original, and wherever you looked, it told a story and reflected the world and its inhabitants;

the displays were put together eclectically. No one in the world had a showroom like mine!

I invented and developed countless design methods not used previously in my industry. I combined brass, wood, granite and sparkling quartz stone to create floor medallions that would not shame any hotel lobby, and splendid mosaic designs so intricate and palatial that people would stare in awe. The front of the showroom boasted a large framed panel that depicted the star's constellation on jet-black porcelain tiles. I had sand-blasted sections of it to make it matte, with a rough and charcoal-like appearance, creating a contrast from the shiny black "world." I had an astronomer draw me a map of the main stars, then I had drilled holes there following their design. Then I put tiny fiber-optic bulbs inside each hole that shimmered and reflected like the universe around us. It always drew comments from visitors to the showroom.

### **Modern and Unusual Display Featured in Magazines**

I like Art Deco, always have ... I designed a bathroom with little stainless-steel mosaics in different widths and heights to give the appearance of skyscrapers, which I put against shiny dual-pigmented large white gloss tiles as the background. I took some of the mosaics out and replaced them with pieces of glass, giving the impression there were lights in the buildings. It was a modern and unusual display that was featured in magazines.

With all that, I think my favorite moments were when I was serving customers. They'd ask: "What is your name?" I'd answer, with a smile: "I'm Simmy, nice to meet you." So often, their response was: "What? *The* Simmy, as in Simmy Ceramics? This is your place?!"

I loved that, my ego was boosted, and my sense of pride heightened. I loved what I did. It was the only place I felt I received some recognition; it was the only location in which my self-worth was awakened.

That afternoon, I had just completed a very nice order for a couple of containers of granite and marble for a developer. I am now not only an importer but an exporter, too. I felt a sense of growth, moving forward in my business ... finally! I was getting orders on a scale that far outweighed the residential bathroom and kitchen tiles I provided to most of my clientele on a daily basis. I was going to break the barrier and "show them." I was going to make something of my life, my business and my passion.

I mentally ran through the various pallets of expensive marble and stone I had delivered a few days earlier. The client called himself James; funny, he didn't sound like a "James" to me.

“Oh, well,” I thought, “maybe he adopted that name; people do. Yeah, I need customers like him. I would try to focus my efforts more on high-value orders, even if the profit margins were compromised.”

And then my mind went back to “James.” Something about him had bothered me. I remembered our last conversation; I had confirmed the delivery details, thanked him for his order, and ended the conversation as I so often do with: “G-d bless!” There was a slight pause, like he was taken aback, and he barked into the phone, “Wass dat, you say?” I repeated: “I just said ‘G-d bless’.” He mumbled something that sounded like “Hummph,” and the line went dead.

I now played this conversation in my mind for no real reason, and once again, it bothered me.

### **Some Guy was Screaming on the Phone**

Then my mobile phone rang; it was from an unknown number. Some guy was screaming on the phone that I would go to prison because I stole his house, his living, his mortgage money, his life.

I really thought he was deranged, some lunatic, clearly, out of his mind. I couldn't make much sense of what he was saying, but when he said his name, sirens started going off in my head—the type of high-pitched silent screeching you experience just before you feel sick. He sounded nothing like “James.”

The truth surfaced bit by bit. This man was not the person to whom I sold the marble containers; instead, it was his money someone else stole to pay me. Not only was the cash taken and used straight away to compensate me, but his sim card was cloned and his telephone number compromised as well.

The credit card company was now taking back that (large) payment from my business, even though I had already paid for and delivered the goods to this scammer. When I later went to the address where the goods were delivered, there was no one there and no containers.

### **Felt like the World was Spinning into an Abyss**

It felt like the world was spinning, spiraling into an abyss, a deep ache that threatened my stability, my integrity, my future, my reputation, my business, my life—the blood drained from my face.

It was all too much to take in. I kept hoping against hope that this was somehow an error—that all would be solved, that it was just someone's administrative error. Errors happen all the time, don't they?

Then I got a call from the bank. They were saying they were on their way to my showroom to disconnect my PDQ machine and conduct a full investigation to see whether I was a willing participant in this scam. I couldn't take credit-card

payments anymore; my bank account would be disabled. Horror, absolute horror. How could I face my life?

I immediately called "James." I can't say I was too surprised when I realized that the phone was disconnected and a repeated message of "The number you have called has not been recognized, please hang up and try again." So, I did, again and again. If I kept busy, perhaps it would stop reality from setting in.

Almost everyone, apart from the few expressing the odd bit of empathy, took the stance of: "Simmy, how could you let something like this happen to you? You're an intelligent girl, what were you thinking?" "Tell me again, what did he say? How could he get away with it?"

### **No Sympathy, No Empathy, Not a Single Hint of Compassion**

So now, not only was I busy kicking myself every waking hour, but I also had to justify myself to all, like I was the thief. I was sad, ashamed, distraught and pained. My boyfriend at the time looked at me with such disdain, such revulsion, that for the umpteenth time I felt mere inches tall. He didn't shout, he never shouted. He would bring his face right up close to mine, so I could almost feel his breath on my face, and say in a low, measured, controlled voice, "What does it feel like to always be wrong?" No sympathy, no empathy, not a single hint of compassion.

I think he reflected what I felt about myself.

Weeks passed, and the business was failing fast. We had no active bank account; how could I trade? What was I to tell my clients who wanted to pay for their orders by credit card or a check? How was I going to pay the staff their salaries? Questions, worries and pain greeted me each morning as I awoke.

I played that phone call in my mind countless times. Each time was followed by my going back in time and playing a different scenario, a different outcome. It was just a matter of time before my beloved XK8 Jaguar convertible was sold off to pay debts. Who knew whether I'd be able to keep my house? My son was all of 6 or 7 years old; how was I going to support him? My reality was a barrage of unanswered questions. I ate, drank, slept and breathed guilt.

### **Taken Out to a "Cheer You Up" Dinner**

Then, my sisters took me out to a "cheer you up" dinner—somewhere posh, somewhere lovely, the kind of place I reveled in. I started telling them with colorful descriptions and hand gesticulations about what I would do if I ever caught "James." Judy expressed so much understanding and empathy, it felt like she really shared my pain.

Rachel, whose wisdom has never ceased to inspire me, looked me straight in the eye: "Shhhhh," she said, "Don't do that. Bless him!"

I was indignant, angry and half thought she was joking “BLESS HIM??” I almost screamed, “Bless him?? What do you mean? Are you serious?? Why? He took everything from me, ev-ery-thing! He doesn’t deserve my blessing!”

When I finished my outburst, she was still looking at me intently, I saw endless love and compassion in her eyes. “He took everything, did he?”

“Yes, of course, he did!” I retorted

### **A Series of “No” Answers**

Again, softly, quietly, in a voice full of more love than I imagined possible, she asked: “Simmy, did he take your child?”

“No, don’t be silly, of course not!” I answered a little irritated.

“Simmy, did he take away your health?”

“Thank G-d, no. Well, apart from my anxiety ... ”

“Simmy, did he take your memories?”

“Nnnno-o, he didn’t take my memories.”

“Let’s see now, did he take away your talents?”

“Nooooo, he didn’t touch that.”

“Well, maybe, he somehow compromised or took away your soul?”

“No, no one can touch my soul!”

“Did he take away your future?”

“No, I admit, he couldn’t touch my future apart from the obvious financial impact.”

“Well, perhaps he took away your kind heart?”

“NO!”

“Ah, I know, did he take away your essence?”

“No.”

“Did he take away your love of art?”

“Never.”

“Did he take away your love of nature and the world?”

“No, how could he?”

“Did he take away your senses?”

“No.” I could see, hear, smell and touch.

“Did he take away your friends?”

“Nope.”

“Hmmm ... in that case, I don’t think he took everything away from you. Other than money, what did he take away? Nothing! And you believe that absolutely everything comes from G-d, so bless this James character for being party to your lesson, your learning, your journey. It’s not a punishment. It just had to happen, it was your destiny.”

She continued: “*A person's income is fixed from Rosh Hashanah to Rosh Hashanah.* (Beitza 16a) Understand Simmy, no one, absolutely *no one* can touch one penny of yours, and you cannot take away one penny of anyone else's, even though it may not seem so. Everything, is a decree from G-d.”

I thought long and hard about that conversation and narrated it many times since. I haven't got one tenth of the wealth I had then, and maybe I'm not supposed to. But I *do* harness the belief that *everything*, absolutely everything, happens for the good and G-d is looking after me.

*The steps of man are ordered by G-d, Who delights in his journey.* (Psalms 37:23)

Simmy More was born in London and raised in Israel. She is a single mother, currently living in London, whose encounter with Chabad has changed her life and enhanced her religious observance.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devorim 5782 website of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

## ***The Great Synagogue of Florence (Italy)***



Built in 1844 (reprinted from Wikipedia.)