

# SHABBOS STORIES FOR PARSHAS SHOFTIM 5785

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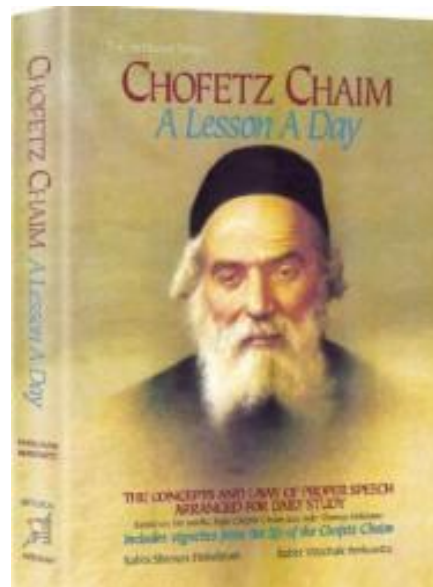
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## The Thirteen Sets of Mishnah Berurah

Rabbi Reuven Semah



Rav Elya Brudny explains that the Torah wants a child to learn even before becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah that words count. If we make a promise, we have to keep our word. If we say something, we should mean it.

The Hafess Hayim writes that if we teach our children when they are young not to speak lashon hara, it will not be difficult for them to avoid such talk when they grow up.

Rabbi Shlomo Finklestein brings us a beautiful story to illustrate the importance of what you say. Rebbetzin Faiga Zaks, youngest child of the Hafess

Hayim, related, “One day when I was a girl, I was about to go outside and play with my friends when my father stopped me.”

“Faiga, a man is coming to pick up a set of Mishnah Berurah (a set of six volumes). You know that I never sell a sefer without first checking each page to make sure there are no mistakes (no blurry pages, no missing pages, no pages out of order). Please check the sefarim so that I can give them to him when he comes.”

I told my father that I would be happy to check the sefarim later, but right now I wanted to play with my friends.

My father insisted that the sefarim needed to be checked now, to which I responded, “Tatte, if you let me go out and play now, I’ll check even thirteen sets later.”

My father did not respond, which I took as a “yes.” I went out and played.

When I returned, there were thirteen sets of Mishnah Berurah stacked on the table. “Uh, tatte, why so many sets?” I asked.

My father replied calmly and matter-of-factly, “These are the sets that you said you would check.”

“But tatte, I didn’t really mean it! I said it because I wanted so much to go out and play.”

“Mein kind,” my father replied lovingly, “You must learn from when you are young that a Jew must always honor his word.” Rabbi Reuven Semah

*Reprinted from the Parashat Matot-Masei 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyperbspace.*

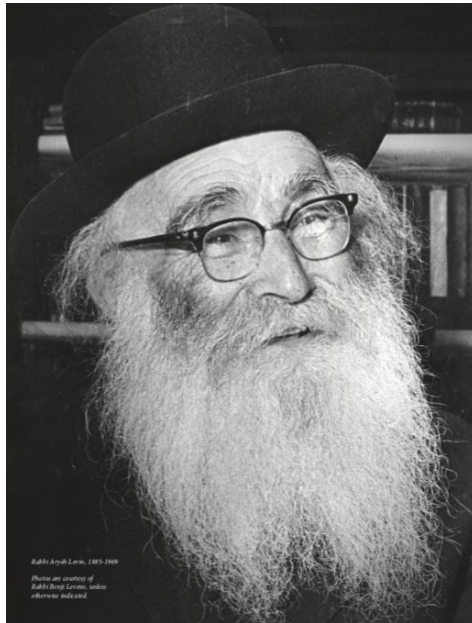
# The Reprimand of the Future Rebbe of Lublin

When the holy Rebbe of Lublin zt”l was a young child, he was once playing outside with his friends. His parents came by and asked him: “Every day we hope that Moshiach will arrive imminently. How would it look if you were in the middle playing when Moshiach comes?”

When the young Rebbe of Lublin heard this statement, he resolved not to play anymore and went inside the Beis Medrash to learn Torah and serve Hashem. From then on, he continued to grow, attaining great heights of holiness and a profound connection to Hashem.

*Reprinted from the Motos-Masei 5785 email of World of Belz.*

# Did You Hear That?



Eliyahu Zlotnick, an orphan, walked aimlessly around the playground as the others ran around playfully. It was a cold, rainy day and those who were not running around were warming themselves with a glass of hot tea which they had purchased from the shamash for a few pennies.

Noticing that Eliyahu was not drinking any tea, Rabbi Aryeh Levine approached him and inquired why he was not warming himself with tea like the other boys. Eliyahu seemed shy and distant, avoided eye contact, and mumbled something about not liking the taste.

All of a sudden, R' Aryeh realized that Eliyahu did not even have the few cents needed for the glass of tea. Turning to the shamash, R' Aryeh instructed him to give Eliyahu tea, and quietly told the shamash that he himself would pay for it. The boy looked at R' Aryeh and smiled in gratitude. But the shamash was confused. "Didn't the boy just say that he doesn't like tea?"

"Is that what you heard him say?" R' Aryeh gave Eliyahu a knowing glance. "I heard him say something totally different. I know that young boy. He's been an orphan since he was a little baby, when he lost both his parents. He lives in the Diskin Orphanage and goes to school with these boys. The reason he says he doesn't like the tea is because he doesn't have even the pittance needed to buy it." R' Aryeh looked once more at the shamash. "You have to learn to listen with your heart."

*Reprinted from the Parashat Matot-Masei 5785 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberbspace.*

# Don't Judge Whom You Are Giving Tzedaka to

By Yehuda Z Klitnick



Harav Chaim Halberstam, the Tzanzer Rov, author of the Divrei Chayim, supported Talmidei Chachamim -known as Yoshvim- entirely. They sat all day in the Bais Hamedrash and studied. One night, during the seudah, a homeless begger came in and sat himself at the table and began to eat without restraint. The Yoshvim had respect for the Tzanzer Rov, who was standing nearby, and they didn't dare stop the man from eating so much. Eventually the Tzanzer Rov finally stepped in and said to the man, rather sternly, "That's not how a Yid eats!"

The homeless man got insulted, and he said to the Tzanzer Rov, "How am I worse than the Yoshvim here? They eat here all year and no one says a thing. This is my first time eating here and already you're giving me mussar?"

The homeless man angrily ran away from the table, and the Bais Hamedrash. The Tzanzer Rov immediately told the Gabbay to run after the homeless man, and bring him back to him. The man returned, and the Tzanzer Rov began to beg him to forgive him.

"I didn't mean to insult you. Nor did I want you to eat less. All I asked was to eat like a yid eats."

The Tzanzer Rov saw that the yid wasn't consoled yet. He took out 30 gulden, which was a lot of money in those days, and gave it to the homeless man so that he would be moichel him. The homeless man was astounded as he had never in his life seen that much money, realized that the Divrei Chaim honestly felt bad, and said he forgives the Rebbe full hearted, and left joyfully.

The Tzanzer Rov returned to his house with a soothed heart. The son of the Divrei Chayim, Harav Boruch of Gorlitz, said to his father, amazed, "Wouldn't it have been enough to get the homeless man's forgiveness with one or two gulden? Why did you need to give him so much money?"

Let me tell you a story that happened to the Rebbe Reb Zusha of Annipoli which will help you understand why I did what I did. "The Rebbe Reb Zusha, was detached from this world almost entirely. As a result, he was poor, and there was never any bread in his house. He had a neighbor who ran an inn. The neighbor's wife saw the poverty of the Reb Zusha, and told her husband about the bare condition of his house. They both decided to bring the Reb Zusha's rebbetzin some money each week so that they could live.

From that week they saw a blessing in their lives. They immediately understood that this was in the merit of supporting Reb Zusha and his family. They built a house for Reb Zusha and his family next to the inn, and settled them there. Reb Zusha now had the ease of mind to focus on serving Hashem without anything disturbing him. The inn kept growing in success, and the innkeeper and his family kept growing in riches.

However, the Satan didn't like it. He received permission to test the innkeeper. He disguised himself as a tzaddik, dressed entirely in white, and came to the inn. The innkeeper received the 'tzaddik' very warmly, and was very happy to take such a guest into the inn. As the guest entered, he heard someone in a side room davening very loudly.

He asked the innkeeper, 'What's the the noise?' "The innkeeper answered, I support a poor yid who davens and learns the whole day so he has no worries to disturb him from serving Hashem. That's his voice you're hearing."

The Satan exclaimed: "Supporting a poor, lazy man who's looking for a way out of work and out of earning parnassah for his wife and children, is a poor excuse for a mitzvah, I can assure you!"

These words began to sink in the innkeeper. He thought about it all night. He decided his guest, the 'tzaddik' was right, and he resolved to follow his advice. The next day, immediately in the morning, he told Reb Zusha that he needs to look for someone else to support him. He had given him enough already.

Reb Zusha didn't say a word. He once again resumed his old way of wandering from place to place and relying on Yidden to give him bread to eat. Lo and behold, from that day the bracha in the inn grew weaker. In a short while, he had

lost everything. Not only did he not have enough to support anyone, he didn't even have enough for him and his family to live.

The time passed, and Reb Zusha became revealed to the world. Yidden from the entire area came to spend time in Annipoli by Reb Zusha, and were helped by the tzaddik. Among them the innkeeper also came to ask for a yeshuah.

"As soon as he recognized Reb Zusha as the poor neighbor he had supported, he began to cry bitterly, and he told him everything. Reb Zusha gave a krechtz, a groan, and said to the innkeeper, 'You have to understand, when you took Zusha and his family in, you did it without checking if he was worth supporting. You opened your gave him without checking his level. So, Hashem paid you measure for measure. They poured on you an abundance of good without checking whether you were worth it. That brought you and brachah and wealth.

"But from the moment that you didn't withstand the test, when you failed the test that the Satan set for you, and you let him convince you to start looking only for well-known tzaddikim, they began to check you too in heaven, to see if you were worth it. They checked your entire life, and based on how you looked, they decided to take away from you the wealth they had given you and they also gave it to someone else."

The Tzanzer Rov finished the story, and said to the Gorlitzer Rov, "If I were to behave as you want me to, if I were to give my money only to people who are talmidei chachomim, they will make such judgments about me also. Now, since I'm not careful about that, and I give tzedakah to homeless people like that with a generous hand, Hashem will treat me with a generous hand as well.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Masei 5785 email of Pardes Yehuda.*

## Inspiring Stories of Rav Chaim Ozer

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski would often spend his summers in Druskenik, a resort town near Vilna. He would take long health walks in the forest. Each time he would be accompanied by a group of students and a Rabbi seeking his counsel. They were once walking when a young man with a speech difficulty came over to ask directions to a certain place.

One of those who accompanied Rav Chaim Ozer was about to give the directions, when Rav Chaim Ozer suggested that they walk with the young man instead. It was not such a short walk, but furthermore it was completely out of their

way. The other Rabbi asked Rav Chaim Ozer why simply giving the directions would not have sufficed.

Rav Chaim Ozer replied, "That young man has great difficulty speaking. The directions are far from easy to follow. He would therefore have to stop a few more times to ask people for directions. I am sure that as a result of his speech impediment he finds it difficult to ask something of others which would surely cause him further embarrassment. By accompanying him to his destination, we made certain that he would not have to ask anybody else for directions."



A young man came to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky to receive a bracha that he should not be drafted into the Russian army. Besides the dangers of war, the term of conscription would usually last twenty to twenty-five years, especially if the authorities knew the inductee was Jewish.

During the course of their conversation, Rav Chaim Ozer asked him, "Do you wear Tzitzis?" The boy could not lie, and mumbled, "no." They continued speaking and then Rav Chaim Ozer asked, "Do you put on Tefillin every day?" The boy hesitated for a brief moment, and then uttered an almost silent "no." After a few more moments of talking, Rav Chaim Ozer asked, "What about Shabbos? Are you Shomer Shabbos?" The boy could no longer look Rav Chaim Ozer in the face, and while staring at the ground said, "I am not religious at all."

The boy was expecting to be rebuked about his lack of religious commitment and possibly even sent away. He wasn't ready when he heard, "I give you a bracha that the Soviet authorities should be as disappointed in you as I am."

A few weeks later, the boy returned to Rav Chaim Ozer, his face beaming, and exclaimed, "Rebbi, I wanted to tell you that your bracha helped! The army rejected me!" Then, glowing with pride, he lifted up his shirt and showed Rav Chaim Ozer the Tzitzis he started wearing. The man continued to wear Tzitzis, put on Tefillin and keep Shabbos for the rest of his life. All because of the well thought out response of Rav Chaim Ozer. Rather than take an opportunity to yell at the young man, Rav Chaim Ozer took the opportunity to build him, and give him a dose of warmth instead.

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Rav Chaim Ozer once visited Cracow. When he arrived, Rav Chaim Ozer sought a tailor who could sew his suit which had torn on the way. He eventually found one, and requested that he fix his suit. The tailor answered, "Forgive me, Rav, but I have not yet lit the Chanukah candles. If you wish, you can wait until I light, and after a half an hour, I'll sew your suit."

While Rav Chaim Ozer waited, he noticed how this simple tailor prepared himself for the Mitzvah. He removed his weekday clothing, and donned Shabbos clothing. He washed his hands and joyously prepared to light the candles. Rav Chaim Ozer was astounded by the sincerity of the man and he said, "Now I understand how the city Cracow produces such Gedolai Torah and giants in good middos, if this is what the tailors are like.

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Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski was most distraught when his trusted doctors ordered him to go to the health springs in Karlsbad and to remain there over the Yamim Nora'im (the Days of Awe). He would be missing the intense spirit and awe in his beloved Vilna, and was most unsettled to have to remain in an alien setting. But having no choice he followed his doctor's orders. During his stay at the spring, he chanced upon an American Jew who did not know his identity.

In the course of their conversation, the foreigner remarked that he was intending to marry his brother's wife who had been left a widow with small children (even though the Torah explicitly forbids such a marriage). The man insisted on carrying out his wishes, and had no intention of changing his plans. Indeed, he announced that he would only be persuaded to listen to none less a personality than the chief Rabbi of Vilna.

At that point Rabbi Chaim Ozer smiled and introduced himself as the chief Rabbi of Vilna. The American Jew was taken aback by surprise. Gently, the outstanding scholar proceeded to dissuade his newfound friend against transgressing what would have amounted to a serious sin. Only then did he understand why it had



been imperative for him to spend the Days of Judgment in a foreign environment for this encounter. In relating this story, Rav Shach memorably remarked. "Note the incredible sequence of events. Hashem thought it worthwhile for the greatest Torah authority of the generation to be afflicted with bad health so that he would have to spend time in the health springs away from the Torah center of Vilna, all so that a Jew would not violate a Torah prohibition!"

*Reprinted from the Parshas Mattos-Massei 5785 email of Inspired by a Story By Rabbi Dovid Caro.*

## The Chofetz Chaim and The Girl with Severe Mental Illness

During the last year of his life, a few weeks before the Yomim Noraim, the Chofetz Chaim left his hometown of Radin to rest up in a vacation town for a short while. He used his time there building up his strength in preparation for the Yomim Noraim, spending his days learning and serving Hashem with no disturbances.

While he was away, a family arrived in Radin, having traveled a long distance to see the Chofetz Chaim. They brought along their daughter, who was suffering from a severe mental illness. Her emotional malady had grown so severe that they had to tie her hands and feet so that she should break everything in her path. They made the long journey to Radin to get a bracha from the Chofetz Chaim for her to have a refuah, and they were dismayed to discover that he was not there and would not return for a while.

They begged the Chofetz Chaim's family to have mercy on them and to take them to where he was staying. Filled with compassion for the unfortunate girl, they took them to the place where he was resting. As they approached the Chofetz Chaim, they removed the ropes from around the girl's arms and legs and took her to ask for a bracha. As soon as she got within range, she grabbed his hat off his head and threw it to the ground, and she began to scream unintelligibly at him.

When the Chofetz Chaim saw this, he cried out, "Ribono Shel Olam, this is a Jewish girl! Please have mercy on her!" He then told the family, "You can return home. She will be all right." One of those present asked the family for their address. After the Yomim Noraim, he made the trip to visit them and saw that the tzadik's words had been fulfilled and the girl had returned to her full mental health.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Matos-Massei 5785 email of The Way of Emunah based on the Torah Thoughts of Rabbi Meir Isamar Rosenbaum.*

# Now, It's Time

By Rabbi Moshe Hirschberg



Engraving of Akiva Eiger (1830s)

Late one night, as Reb Akiva Eiger was learning in his house in Pozna, there was a loud bang on his front door. A mother and daughter stood at the doorstep, very shaken up. The Rav sat them down at his small table, and after they calmed down somewhat, they explained the reason for their visit. Their father/husband managed an inn, and most of the income from their business went to cover their rent to the poritz.

But that winter had been very harsh, and few had passed through the city. They couldn't cover the rent. Their father had gone to the poritz to plea for an extension, hoping to accumulate the sum at some later time. He had been granted a three-month leeway, but that period came and went with their wallet no better off than before. They had nothing to present to the poritz.

"Yesterday," continued the visitors, "the poritz sent a group to throw him into dungeon, and his life is hanging by a thread. If we come up with all the money by tomorrow, we can spare him, but if not...who knows..." There was no way the Rav would leave this mitzvah unattended. He told his son that he's going out, much to the son's amazement as to where his father would be going at such an hour.

So, with his kapotah and his son, the Rav headed to the door. Reb Akiva Eiger went through the town, and the only place still occupied with people at that hour was where all the forlorn hung out. But what wouldn't one Yid do for another? He went in and gave it a shot. They may be the right people to ransom this person.

When he entered, the participants were struck by their visitor. Never in their wildest dreams did they anticipate such a guest. Reb Akiva Eiger wasted no time and began addressing the listeners with the need at hand. As they heard the Rav's cause,

these people who had very minimal — if any — connection to Yiddishkeit began shelving out generous sums of money. When these gangsters and robbers were approached by the gadol ha'dor, their hearts took a shift, and in just a few minutes, the entire sum was covered.

A sense of satisfaction filled the air. Reb Akiva Eiger and his son were glad that the sum was covered, and the ruffians were glad to cover it. They were sure that Reb Akiva Eiger would turn around and return to his house, but he remained there and asked for everyone's attention.

From the depth of his heart, the Rav pleaded with them to repent and turn a new page in their lives. He shared how it pained him so to see this group violating the will of Hashem. As Reb Akiva Eiger was rebuking them, their satisfied smiles made a little — or a big — spin. They were not expecting such words from the Pozna Rav, to say the least.

From among the crowd, Reb Akiva Eiger overheard someone grumbling, “First he asked us for money, and only after milking us dry does he reprove us. He should have reproached us first and then launched his pitch. Then we would see how much he would walk away with — nothing!”

“I knew all along that you would have claims against me,” rejoined Reb Akiva Eiger. “But let me tell you something. For the longest time, I’ve been davening for your return, but no matter how much I davened, I saw no improvement. Nothing at all. I therefore refrained from voicing my opinion per Chazal’s teaching that ‘just as there is a mitzvah to say something that’ll be heard, so is there a mitzvah to withhold something that will not be heard.’ Up until today, that was the case.

“But moving forward, I see that it can be heard. Once you did that mitzvah, and you did it willingly, there’s room for you to move in the right direction. That kind deed left enough of an impression that there is some chance of improvement, and that’s why I only now saw it fit to speak such reproof.”

A wave of tears began to stream down the cheeks of Reb Akiva Eiger, but he was not the only one. The hearts of the listeners loosened up as well, and many burst into tears. Once he saw the impression he made on them, that at least the first step was taken, he collected the pile of money and headed home.

He was content returning home with a heartfelt tefillah that Hashem would leave this impression permanent. The Rav happily handed the money over to the mother and daughter, wishing them well on concluding their mission. The words of Reb Akiva Eiger did leave a permanent imprint on the hearts of many there in that room that night, and they started a new page in life. It brought them to unimaginable heights — all from the power of one mitzvah. One mitzvah leads to another. And can ultimately be life changing.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Devorim 5785 email of Zichru Toras Moshe.*

# **The Desperate Sister of the Holy Ari**

## **From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the “Holy Ari” of Tsfat, had a sister who did not have children for many years. She would beg her brother to bless her but he didn't respond to her. So, more years went by, childless. One day she decided she would go to her brother and not let up until he would promise her a child. She said, “Why is it that you can help everyone else but not your own sister?”

The Arizal answered her that he tries as much as possible, but he sees that the gates of Heaven are closed. “Perhaps you can increase to davven [prayer] to Him directly,” he suggested gently.

This made her feel even more bitter. Another few years passed by, and still no child. She went again to her brother and insisted that she would stay in his home until he helped her. After a time, he said to her, “You can return home, for you will be blessed with a son. But,” he continued:

“One thing I warn you. Never say ‘this is my child!’ ‘This is the fruits of my pregnancy!’ I am warning you that if you or your husband boast about the child, I then will release myself of all responsibility for any possible tragedy that may befall him.”

He was an exceptional child and extremely gifted. Once, the father was sitting together with other parents and each one was boasting about the talents of their child. So, the father spoke up, “True, your child is wonderful, but not even close to the specialness of mine.”

Immediately as he completed these words, the child became blind. His mother was devastated. She brought the child to the Arizal and asked him to raise him. The child was miserable. His blindness caused him to feel that the entire world was blackened.

One day, the Arizal came to him in the middle of the night and put an amulet around his neck, saying to him, “This is food for the journey. Go to the place where your steps will be directed.” The boy knew that it is for his benefit, so he agreed. He felt his way through the dark city walking blindly, not really sure of where his goal is.

When he felt a lot of trees in his path, he realized he had reached a forest and entered into it. Suddenly he heard voices and realized that people were approaching

him. When they came close to him they asked him if he would join them until the time will come for him to return home.

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It turned out these people were the patriarchs and other tzadikim who had come to take him along with them. As soon as he agreed and joined them, his sight returned! He learned Torah from them, the revealed parts [Scripture, Mishna, Talmud] as well as the secrets of Torah [Kabbalah]. After a period of time, he became a young Torah genius. He stayed with them until his 13th birthday. Then they told him:

“The time has now come for you to go on your way. We have taught you all the Torah that we can. We will give you one set of clothes, but we warn you not to change these for any others until the day you see us again.

“When you will leave us, you will go to a certain place that we will tell you and there you will meet a man grinding wheat. You shall work for him but to all the questions he will ask you, answer 'I don't know.' All your actions of piety should be done in absolute secrecy so that everyone will think that you are a simpleton.

“After a while, a man will approach you and ask if you are willing to become his son-in-law. Agree. He will ask you if you will live on his property. Agree. But again, beware: never change your clothing until you see us again, even if people will beg you to do so.”

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He met the wheat grinder and began working for him. The man noticed that the boy does not davven (pray) -- just responds when asked, “I don't know how.” Interestingly, from when the boy arrived at the windmill, the owner was blessed with an abundance of blessings. He, however, did not attribute it to the boy; rather, he simply dismissed it as coincidence.

In a city, not too far from the boy, lived a big Rav, who was quite famous for his greatness in Torah knowledge. He had an only daughter for whom he had not yet been able to find a suitable match. One night his deceased father came to him in a dream and told him that his daughter's soulmate is in such and such village where he works for the owner of the windmill. His wife had the same dream and his daughter, too!

But to the daughter, the old man added: “Beware. If you won't take this man for a husband, you will die. His outer appearance might not be appealing at first, but don't pay attention to it. This person is the perfect match for you!”

In the morning, each one told the dream they dreamed to each other. When the three realized that they all had the same dream, they immediately agreed it was meant to be. The Rav traveled to the village with his daughter. The owner of the factory prepared a luscious meal in their honor. The Rav was shocked when he saw the young man and tried his best to dissuade his wife and daughter from going ahead, especially considering his old ragged clothing. They, however, still trusted the dream, so they refused to listen and nothing he said could change their minds.

The Rav was not pleased at all with the circumstances, but realized there was nothing they could do to change the situation, given that they knew their daughter's life was at stake. They tried at various opportunities to talk to the young man about changing his clothes, but to no avail. He insisted that these clothes were dear to him and he will not change them.

The daughter said, "If this is what is destined for me, then so be it." They decided on a date for the wedding and began the preparations, hoping that at least for the wedding he would wear other clothing. The Shabbat before the wedding the Rav and the kallah too begged him to wear more presentable clothing, but he remained steadfast.

During the afternoon of the day of wedding, a shepherd walked into the home of the Rav and asked to speak with the chatan. They embraced each other warmly, which lifted the spirits of the kallah's family. May be this stranger will be able to have some influence on him. He agreed to speak with the chatan, as they are old time friends. He reassured them that he will come to the wedding with other clothing, befitting for the occasion. In fact, right now he will change his under garments and shoes.

The day of the wedding came and the hour, but the chatan insisted that they wait until some more of his distinguished family members arrive. The guests waited and waited and still no one showed up. Night fell, and no one came. One by one, the guest got discouraged and left.

At midnight, the sounds of a chariot were heard. The Arizal and his sister were seated in it, along with other guests. The shepherd greeted each one – "Baruch haba" ("Welcome,"—lit. "blessed is the one who has come."), Father Avraham; Welcome, Father Yitzchak; Welcome, Father Yaakov; then continuing to welcome, Moshe, our Teacher, King David and Eliyahu ('Elijah') the Prophet.

The shepherd honored each one to dress the chatan with new clothes, and King David to sing beautiful melodies while the chatan and kallah were being escorted to the chupah (wedding canopy). At the meal, the chatan delivered an impressive and well-received speech that included deep insights in the revealed and hidden parts of Torah. The dancing continued till dawn, whereupon the heavenly guests disappeared. The Arizal stayed until after Shabbat. The mother of the chatan, the Arizal's sister, stayed to live with the blessed couple until the end of her life. She lived to enjoy much nachas (pleasure) from them and their children.

**Source:** Revised and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "The Life of the Arizal: True Stories from Tzefas's Golden Age" [translations from the Hebrew sefer, Shivchei HaAri] by Rabbi Boruch Twersky, as posted by Zlata Ehrenstein, long-time resident of Tsfat, on LinkedIn (July 26, 2017).

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