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## The Young Rav's “Rash” Promise

By Yoni Schwartz



**Rav Ovadiah Yosef, zt”l**

Years ago, at a gathering in Northern Israel, Years ago, at a gathering in Northern Israel, Rav Ovadiah Yosef, ZT”L, was sitting next to a young Rabbi named Rav Dovid. At some point, a man ran to Rav Dovid, hysterically crying. “My wife just came back from the doctor, and she was told that she only has a few months left to live,” he exclaimed. “What about our family?! What about our children?! Rav, you have to promise me that she’ll be okay!”

Rav Dovid empathetically responded, “I can give you a blessing, just like any other Jew can, but I cannot make such a promise.” The man would not accept no for

an answer. “Please! You must promise us. What about ‘*Tzaddik gozer v’HaKadosh Baruch Hu mekayem*’ (a well-known statement that when a tzaddik makes a decree, Hashem fulfills it)?”

“I’m sorry,” Rav Dovid responded, “I’m not capable of making such a promise.” Still, the man would not relent. After four minutes of begging Rav Dovid, he got up and said, “I promise that your wife will have a complete recovery.” The man ran away as happy as could be, but at that moment, Rav Ovadiah Yosef looked on in utter shock.

“What did you just do?!” Rav Ovadiah exclaimed. “Did you just make a promise to this young man? I don’t even promise anybody. What about the biblical prohibitions against making false promises or giving somebody false hope? What if his wife doesn’t recover? Did you even speak to the doctor? How could you say such a thing?”

Rav Dovid responded, “I saw that young man’s pain. I knew he wasn’t leaving without a promise. If he goes home now without that promise, he and his family will sink into terrible despair from which they may never recover. I looked into my heart and said, ‘Hashem, I’m willing to suffer the consequences of violating a biblical prohibition, but at least I’ll know that for the next few months this young man and his family will live in a happy home because of this promise.’”



**Rav Dovid Abuchatzaira**

Rav Ovadiah was stunned. He turned to the crowd and said, “This man - Rav Dovid - is destined to be a Gadol. Someone who is willing to give up of his own Olam Haba, who is willing to suffer for his people, that is a true leader.” Indeed, his words came true. He is now the world-renowned Rav Dovid Abuchatzaira, one of the gedolim of our generation

*Reprinted from the Parshas Shemos 5786 email of Torah Sweets.*

# The Kerosine “Afflicted” Aravah Tree

By Rabbi Reuven Semah

*“But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase” (Shemot 1:12)*

Harav Avraham Horowitz zt”l once related that he planted an aravah tree in his backyard, and each year the Steipler Gaon zt”l would come and cut down aravot from the tree for his lulab.

## **The Malicious Not Observant Neighbor**

One of his neighbors was a person who was not observant of Torah and misvot. The sight of the aravah tree bothered him, and he decided to destroy it. He proceeded to dig a pit from his property all the way to the roots of the tree. Then he poured kerosene into the pit, intending to kill the tree.

When the Steipler Gaon arrived to take aravot that year, Harav Horowitz told him what had happened. The Steipler Gaon went to inspect the tree and sensed the strong odor of kerosene emanating from it. He turned to Harav Horowitz and said, “This tree bears misvot, and as much as they try to afflict it, so it will burst forth. It will grow in the kerosene even better than it would grow in water.”

## **The Damaged Tree Flourished**

Indeed, the tree grew abundantly. It sprouted numerous branches, and each branch grew many aravot. The neighbor became infuriated and poured more and more kerosene into the ground. The more kerosene he poured, the larger the tree grew.

Soon its branches shaded the street, and its height surpassed that of the house, to the point that it became necessary to go up to the roof to cut down the aravot. The sheer quantity of aravot was amazing. Many Jews from various locations flocked to get aravot from this wondrous tree.

As so with the Jews in Egypt, the more the Egyptians afflicted us, the more we grew. And so it will be in our time, Amen.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemot 5786 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

# It Pays to Pay

By Dvora Keil

Tuvia had signed a contract with a construction company to build a staircase in a multistory building. He was supervising several projects at the time and was running behind schedule, so he employed a worker to finish the stairs. The worker assured Tuvia that he was experienced and capable of completing the job by himself.

As it turned out, the worker was not capable of doing the work himself. Tuvia had to stand over him and instruct him every step of the way, costing him a great deal in time and money. It would have been easier for Tuvia to complete the job himself.

As they were finishing the job, Tuvia asked the worker for his honest opinion. “Do you really think I should pay you for your work?” The worker shrugged and kept silent. Tuvia said he would think about it. When the man arrived at work the next day, Tuvia still had not decided, and he let the whole matter slide.

Suddenly Tuvia’s work orders stopped coming in. Tuvia had to start calling people who had previously given him building projects to see if they had any new business for him, something he had never been required to do before. Since no work turned up, Tuvia retired to the *Bet Midrash* and started to learn rather than to waste his time.

In the course of his learning, he came across the incident with Rav Huna in *Berachot* (5b) which tells about Rav Huna’s large store of wine that turned into vinegar. When Rav Huna asked the Rabbanim what might have caused all his wine to have gone sour, the Rabbanim asked him if he had paid all his workers.

Rav Huna replied that he had not paid all his workers in full because he knew they had been stealing from him. He therefore felt justified in withholding part of their wages. The Sages ruled that he must pay his workers in full even though they had been stealing from him.

Rav Huna immediately went and paid the workers the wages he owed them and, the *Gemara* says, there was suddenly a huge demand for vinegar; Rav Huna was able to sell all the wine-turned-vinegar for a handsome profit. (Some say the vinegar turned back to wine.) In any case, Tuvia remembered instantly that he had not paid that worker any wages. He decided on the spot that he would seek out that worker and pay him, even though his bank account was practically empty.

Tuvia tracked down the man and paid him. That very day, when Tuvia returned home, he found three faxes with orders for major construction jobs awaiting him. The contracts he signed subsequently were so lucrative that Tuvia’s earnings compensated him for all the money he had lost during the previous six weeks when

he had no income. (Excerpted from the Judaica World book – “When the Time is Right”)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Shemot 5786 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

## The Arizal and the Seemingly “Simple” Shamash



*The Minchas Elazar of Munkacs, zt”l*

The Minchas Elazar of Munkacs, zt”l, related the following story in the name of the Shinover Rav, the Divrei Yechezkel: Lag BaOmer marks the Yartzeit of the great Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. As per Rabbi Shimon’s request, it is a day of great rejoicing, especially at his Kever in Meron. A huge bonfire is lit there on the night of Lag BaOmer, and singing and dancing go on throughout the night and the following day.

One Lag BaOmer, hundreds of years ago, the Arizal traveled from his home in Tzefas to Meron with his Talmidim, and the group began dancing joyously. Suddenly, another group of dancers appeared. Among them was an older man who was regal-looking in appearance, dressed all in white, whose face had a special radiance.

The Arizal's Talmidim saw this man take the hand of a simple Jew named Elazar, who they knew as the Shamash of the Shul in Tzefas, and he began dancing with him alone in the center of the circle. The pair's feet seemed to barely touch the ground as they danced in joyous delight.

The Arizal's Talmidim looked on in wonder. Who was this older man and where had he come from? Why had he singled out the simple Shamash to dance with?

Suddenly, the Arizal himself broke away from his Talmidim and approached the old man and the Shamash, joining in their dance. The Arizal's Talmidim were even more astonished than before.

Later, one of the Talmidim worked up the courage to approach the Arizal. He requested, "Please, Rebbe, can you explain to us what has happened here? Why did you leave the Talmidim to dance with the Shamash?"

The holy Arizal smiled at them and said, "If Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai saw fit to dance personally with our Shamash, isn't it an honor for me to do the same?"

It was then that the group of Talmidim learned that the "simple" Shamash, Rav Elazar Azkari, zt"l, was, in fact, a tremendous Talmid Chacham who had kept his greatness and knowledge of Torah hidden from the world. Rav Elazar Azkari later became known as the author of the Sefer Chareidim!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Vaeira 5786 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefillah.*

## Reb Zusha of Anipoli, zt"l

It was the custom of Reb Zusha, to recite his morning prayers at length. After he concluded, he would retire to his room next to the Shul. Once there, he would open the window and, lifting his eyes to the heavens, call out, "Ribbono shel Olam - Master of the World, Zusha (he always referred to himself in the third person) is very hungry and desires to eat something!"

Every morning, his attendant would wait until he heard Reb Zusha's appeal, then he would bring in the Rebbe's morning meal of cake with a little schnapps. One morning the attendant thought to himself, "Why doesn't the Rebbe ask me directly for his meal. In fact, who does he think he is fooling by calling out to Hashem like that? He knows full well that I bring him his food every day."

So, on the spot he decided that the next morning he would not bring the Rebbe his meal when he called out. He would just wait to see what would happen and where he would look for his meal.

The next morning, Reb Zusha awoke as usual, well before the light of day. As he did every morning, he first went to the town Mikveh to immerse himself in preparation for the day's holy work. The night had been a rainy one in Anipoli, and the streets of the town had already turned to rivers of mud. In order to get from one side of the street to another, one had to cross on narrow planks that were laid across the flowing mud. As he was crossing in the direction of the Mikveh, a man whom he didn't recognize, a guest in town, was coming towards him from the other side.



**Art by Raizel Shurpin**

When he saw Reb Zusha, dressed in rags without a tooth in his mouth, the stranger yelled out, "Tramp!", and with a hearty laugh jumped up and down on the plank causing Reb Zusha to tumble into the mud. Reb Zusha didn't say a word. He calmly picked himself out of the mud and continued on his way to the Mikveh, while

the stranger walked off into the distance, chuckling merrily the whole way as he copied his clever maneuver over and over in his mind.

When he arrived back at the inn where he was staying, he couldn't help but brag to the innkeeper about his amusing prank. The innkeeper didn't laugh so quickly he asked the guest to describe the tramp that he had catapulted into the mud. Upon hearing, he clapped his hands to his head and cried out in anguish, "Oy ! Oy vey! Do you know what you did? That was not just some simple person that was the Rebbe Reb Zusha!"

Now it was the turn of the guest to cry out "Oy vey," for Reb Zusha was known to all as a holy Tzaddik. Trembling, the guest struck his breast, "Oy vey, Oy Vey! What am I going to do now? What am I going to do?"

"Don't worry," exclaimed the innkeeper, regaining his composure. "Listen to me. I know what you should do. Reb Zusha spends many hours every morning in prayer. When he is finished he goes into his private room next to the Shul. There he opens the window, and anybody can see how he thrusts his head out, and calls toward the heavens, 'Master of the World, Zusha is very hungry and desires to eat something!'

"So, I'll prepare some cakes and some schnapps for you to take to him. When you hear him call out to Hashem, you go in immediately with this gift, and offer it to him and beg his forgiveness. I'm certain that he will forgive you whole-heartedly."

That morning, like every morning, after the prayers, Reb Zusha went into his room, opened the window and called out, "Master of the World, Zusha is very hungry and desires to eat something!"

The attendant, upon hearing his Rebbe, held his ground and clasped his folded arms together even tighter, waiting to see what the outcome would be. "Let Master of the World bring him his cake this morning", he huffed to himself.

Suddenly the door to the Shul opened and a man, holding a large plate of cakes and a bottle of schnapps came in and made his way to the Rebbe's room. He went straight in, put the cakes on the table, and then fell to the floor in grief, begging the Tzaddik for his forgiveness (which he was certainly granted). Then the attendant came to understand that it really was the Master of the World who brought Reb Zusha his breakfast every morning.

The two saintly brothers, Rebbe Zusha and his brother Rebbe Elimelech, wandered for years disguised as beggars, seeking to refine their characters and encourage their deprived brethren. In one city, the two brothers, who later became mentors to many thousands of Jews, earned the wrath of a "real" beggar who informed the local police and had them cast into prison for the night.

As they awoke in their prison cell, Reb Zusha noticed his brother weeping silently. "Why are you crying," he asked? Reb Elimelech pointed to the pail situated in the corner of the room which the inmates used for a toilet. "Jewish law forbids



one to pray in a room that has such a repulsive odor," he told his brother. "This will be the first day in my life in which I will not have the opportunity to pray."

"And why are you upset about this?" asked Reb Zusha.

"What do you mean?" responded his brother.

"How can I begin my day without connecting to Hashem?"

"But you are connecting to Hashem," insisted Reb Zusha. "The same Hashem who commanded you to pray each morning, also commanded you to abstain from prayer under such circumstances. In a location such as this, you connect to Hashem by the absence of prayer."

His brother's viewpoint, allowing him to view his problem as part and parcel of his relationship with Hashem, elated Reb Elimelech's heart. The awareness that the waste-filled pail in the corner of the room allowed him the opportunity to enjoy an intimate, though different, type of relationship with Hashem inspired him so deeply that he began to dance. The two brothers were now holding hands and dancing in celebration of their newly discovered relationship with their Father in Heaven.

The non-Jewish inmates imprisoned in the same cell were so moved by the sight, that they soon joined the dancing. It did not take long before the entire room was swept away by an electrifying energy of joy, as dozens of prisoners were dancing and jumping around ecstatically.

When the prison warden heard the commotion coming from the cell, he burst open the gate, only to be stunned by the inmates enjoying such a lively dance. In his fury, he attempted to stop the dancing, but to no avail. The prisoners were by now totally consumed by an awesome happiness, stemming from a very deep place within their souls.

Finally, the warden pulled aside one of the inmates, demanding from him an explanation for what was going on. The frightened prisoner related that the outburst was not his fault, nor was it the fault of the other inmates. It was rather the two Jews dancing in the center of the circle who triggered the trouble.

"And what inspired the two Jews to go into such a dance?" thundered the warden. The prisoner pointed to the pail in the corner of the room. "It is the pail, they claim, that brought about the joy in their heart; they discovered some new type of relationship through the pail."

"If that's the case, I will teach them a lesson that they will remember for a very long time," shouted the furious warden. He took the pail and threw it out of the cell. Reb Zusha turned to his brother and said: "And now, my dear brother, you can begin your prayers."

*Reprinted from the Parshas Va'eira email of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.*

# Lights On!

By Rabbi Avrohom Stulberger



**Rabbi Avrohom Stulberger**

Late one evening, two young men in Israel decided to drive from Ashdod to the Kosel. It was a spontaneous idea, perhaps even an impractical one. Yet they davened, spent some time there, and then returned to Ashdod around two o'clock in the morning. Exhausted, they began walking home through the quiet streets.

As they passed a local shul, they noticed something unusual: the lights were on. Pause for a moment and consider the scene. Two o'clock in the morning. The streets are empty. The simplest response would have been to shrug and walk on.

But one of the men said to the other, "Why would the lights be on? If no one is inside, they're just wasting electricity. Let me check."

It was a small decision. A minor inconvenience. A step out of his way. He opened the door—and discovered that the shul was not empty. Inside were two people. One was a teenager studying intensely for an upcoming exam. The other was a kollel fellow, whose name he came to learn was Moshe, a man in his early thirties. Moshe was crying.

The visitor approached him gently and asked what was wrong. Moshe did not speak in abstractions. He spoke plainly.

"My wife threw me out of the house tonight," he said. "She told me that I may be learning Torah, but I'm not taking care of my family. There's no food in the house and the children went to bed hungry. We don't even have soap or shampoo. She locked herself in the bedroom, crying. I didn't know where else to go, so I came here. I turned to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and asked, 'What do I do now?'"

At two o'clock in the morning, Moshe sat alone in a shul, broken and desperate. The visitor responded instinctively. "I have some shampoo at home," he said. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

But as he stepped outside, he stopped. Shampoo alone would not solve this problem. He told his friend what was happening. Between them, they had four hundred shekels. Without hesitation, they decided to find a market and buy Moshe everything he would need for Shabbos—food and the other basics.

At two o'clock in the morning in Ashdod, there was only one place open: a brightly lit convenience store called "24/7." They were uncomfortable shopping there as it was open even on Shabbos—literally 24/7—but they knew Moshe could not go home empty-handed. They bought challah, meat, fish, groceries, soap, shampoo. Everything. Every shekel they had was spent.

As they loaded the bags into their car, they realized something else. Moshe would be uneasy if he knew the food came from a store that operated on Shabbos. So, they began transferring everything into plain bags.

Unbeknownst to them, the store owner had been watching. He approached and asked, "What are you doing?" Nervously, but honestly, they explained the situation. They expected anger, maybe mockery.

Instead, the man broke down crying. "I'm not fully religious," he said, "but I've been growing. I was learning regularly with a chavrusa two hours a week and it changed my life. When he moved away, I lost that connection. Tonight, I prayed to G-d and said, 'I want to come closer. I want this Elul to mean something. Please help me reconnect.'"

Then he looked at them and said, "And now, at two o'clock in the morning, you walk into my store to help a kollel fellow who has nothing." He made them an offer. "I want one of you to learn with me for two hours a week. In return, I will give my maaser—not to you, but to Moshe. He will have steady support."

And that was not the end of the story.

Moshe was able to continue learning and his home stabilized. The store owner as well regained his chavrusa and furthered his spiritual journey. And months later, the store changed its name and its sign. No longer "24/7." It became "24/6."

All of this... from one small moment. One person saying, "Let me check the shul lights." One step. One decision. Never underestimate the impact of a single act of responsibility or one gesture of kindness. We often have no idea whose life we are touching or how far the consequences of our choices will reach. They stretch beyond the imagination.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Va'eira 5786 edition of TheTorahAnyTimes as compiled and edited by Elan Perchik.*

# **Holy Murderers And a Crazy Jew**

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



**Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, zt"l**

Some 250 years ago in Russia, near the area where the first Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, lived, there was a crazy man. He had been a normal, sensible religious Jew with a wife and family until one day he suddenly lost his mind and began screaming and thrashing about for no apparent reason. His family was shocked, his friends tried to help, his neighbors shook their heads in pity and the Rabbis prayed, but it didn't help.

### **Doctors Couldn't Figure Out What to Do**

So, they collected money and went for professional help. But the doctors also were at a loss and couldn't figure out what to do. They just scratched their heads and shrugged their shoulders and said that perhaps it would just go away as suddenly as it came. Or perhaps they had to be patient and gradually he would improve. But the years passed and he didn't.

To have him committed to an asylum was out of the question. There he would be treated like an animal and would be thrown together with dangerous maniacs. Then someone suggested that they try the [founding] Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi

Shenur Zalman. So, they bound him, got him into a carriage, and after several hours were in the town of Liozhna entering the Rebbe's office.

In the presence of the Rebbe the madman was fairly still, once in a while giving a grunt or some other non-human sound and occasionally waving his hands, but surprisingly, when the Rebbe said he wanted to tell them a story and asked them to be seated, he sat and they untied him and he remained relatively still.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Noticed the Pool of Blood Bubbling on the First Temple Floor**

The Rebbe began. "It says in the Talmud (Gittin 57b) that when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel and his troops entered the First Temple to destroy it, they noticed there was a pool of blood bubbling on the floor of the Temple courtyard.

The commanding general then gathered the Kohanim ('priests') and asked for an explanation. They explained that it was the blood of a little-known Jewish Prophet called Zechariah [not the famous one who lived years later in the beginning of the Second Temple]."

When he saw they were all paying attention, the Rebbe continued. "Now, please listen closely. The accepted story is that the Jews stoned him to death because he stood in the Temple courtyard and told them things they didn't want to hear-- enumerating their sins and threatening them with death and exile if they didn't repent.

### **The Story is Quite Different**

"But, in fact, that is not what happened. The story is quite different. The motive in killing him was much more positive." The Rebbe looked at the crazy man and then at his family to make sure they were listening and continued. "The fact is that only a few men stoned Zechariah and they were 'tzadikim-- totally righteous Jews--perhaps the only Jews that had not sinned in those days. And they stoned him in order to save everyone else.

"The fact is, he did not anger anyone; he didn't even speak. As soon as he stood before the crowd, these holy men understood what he was about to say. "They knew that he was about to prophesize the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon. And they also knew that because his words were prophesy, as soon as they would be uttered the decree would be sealed unless the Jews repented. But they were aware that the Jews weren't ready to change their ways.

"So, they decided that they had to make the ultimate sacrifice even if it would cost them both this world and the next! They knew that by killing him they would die as sinners ... but so great was their brotherly love that they didn't care about themselves; only about stopping that prophesy and possibly averting the decree of death and destruction.

"But perhaps you will ask why didn't the prophet Zacharia himself refuse to make his prophesy? Certainly, he had no less love for his fellow Jews than those who killed him. Why didn't he just keep quiet?

"If you try to explain that if he did so he would be punishable by death [which is the law regarding a prophet that refuses to prophesize]. If so, then why didn't he give his life as those who killed him were willing to do?

### **The Mistake of Jonah the Prophet**

"The answer is that a true prophet is nothing more than a conduit for G-d's messages and he knows that G-d is good. In other words, his entire essence exists only to give over his prophesy with no worry of its repercussions [which was the mistake of Jonah the prophet].

"But those who killed him did worry and they felt they had no choice but to make a desperate attempt to save the Jewish people from tragedy and exile. So, they murdered him.

"Now, the tortured souls of those Tzadikim who 'executed' Zechariah have been in limbo for almost 2500 years; they couldn't enter heaven because of their sin of murder. And the gates of hell also would not admit them because of their pure intentions. So, they have been waiting to be rectified

### **The Rebbe's Tikun**

"That is why you came to me." The Rebbe concluded. "These souls entered your father's body and made him insane in the hope that someone could find some redeeming quality in their sin and free them. And that is what I did. "When I presented a zechut (merit) on their deed, I made a 'Tikun' (rectification) on their souls and now both they and your father are released."

Suddenly the insane man closed his eyes briefly, smiled with relief and began to breathe easily. He was cured!

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**Source:** Modified and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the free translation of R. Tuvia Bolton from Ma Sheseepere li HaRebbe (vol. 2 pg. 32), based on the telling by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Tishrei 5735 (Oct. 1976), as posted on lchaimweekly.org in 5770 (2010).

**Biographic note:** Rabbi Shneur-Zalman [18 Elul 1745-24 Tevet 1812], one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, is the founder of the Chabad-Chassidic movement. He is the author of Shulchan Aruch HaRav and Tanya as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

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