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Sons of Fatima

From the Desk of Yerachmiel Tilles



Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu

Although the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are entombed in Marat HaMachpela (the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron), for 700 hundred years [1267-1967], the Muslims did not permit entry to the Jews, claiming that Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov belonged exclusively to them. They gave permission for Jews to ascend only until the seventh step of the outside Eastern stairway leading up to the tomb markers, and no further.

When Israeli forces liberated Hebron, Jerusalem, and other important Jewish sites in the Six-Day War, Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim sent Rabbi Mordechai

Eliyahu, then aged 38, to visit and inspect the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Rachel's Tomb in Beit Lechem (Bethlehem), and the Kotel HaMa'aravi (Western Wall) in Jerusalem.

When they were at the cave, a large group of soldiers entered. This was the first time anyone had been inside after the battles.



The outside of the Cave of the Patriarchs

There were many high-ranking army commanders and numerous soldiers there, among them Yitzhak Rabin, [1] Haim Bar-Lev, [2] and Uzi Narkiss. [3] A number of prominent rabbis were also present.

Some of the soldiers were injured, some were hungry, and most of them were exhausted after days of fighting. They saw the rugs in the cave and lay down, soon falling asleep. Suddenly, the sheik in charge of the cave, a man named Jibri, came out and started shouting at the commanders and soldiers.

"Get out of this cave!" he yelled. "You have no respect for it! We Muslims wash our hands five times when we come here. We take off our shoes and honor this place. But you show no respect whatsoever! Your soldiers are eating here, sleeping here, walking on the rugs with their dirty boots. You have no respect for this place - leave!"

Apparently, he was right. What he said made sense. Everyone was silent! except one.

Rabbi Eliyahu, who understood Arabic, as did most of the senior commanders, responded, "Listen to me, Sheik. You know that if a servant comes before the king in soiled clothes, or serves him food on a filthy tray in front of all the king's ministers and servants, he will surely be put to death.

"But if the king's son were absent from his mother and father's home for many years, and his father spent many nights worrying about him and his mother crying for him, if that son was to return home after many years, how do you think the king would receive him? What if he simply wandered in without making an appointment? What if he showed up with torn, dusty clothes, and interrupted the king's conference with his ministers, crying, 'Father, I came home?'

He is Still Their Son

"What if he approached his mother, the queen, calling, 'Mother, I'm here'? His mother and father would surely hug him, loving him, and thanking G-d with all their heart for his homecoming, even with his ripped, dirty clothes "because he is their son."

Rabbi Eliyahu looked the sheik in the eyes and said, "Avraham is our father, Sarah is our mother. We behave here as though in our own home. You, however, are the 'sons of Fatima,' the children of the maidservant Hagar. You behave as is appropriate for a servant to behave, and we behave as is appropriate for children to behave!"

The sheik turned red with shame. Not only did he have no rejoinder for the rabbi, he had been called a "son of Fatima," son of the maidservant. He was insulted. He turned on the spot and stormed back into his room in a great rage.

“That’s the Only Thing They Understand”

The senior commanders there immediately turned to Rabbi Eliyahu, asking in horrified dismay, "Why did you do that? We want to live in peaceful coexistence with the Arabs. Why did you have to upset him? You may have ruined everything!" Rabbi Eliyahu replied firmly, "You have to tell them the truth. That's the only thing they understand."

The argument continued for a few minutes, until the door of the sheik's room suddenly opened. The sheik exited his room with his head down, approaching Rabbi Eliyahu in deference. "Oh, Wise One, oh Master; please forgive me!" he cried out. Rabbi Eliyahu didn't turn to him or even respond. He simply looked at the commanders and said, "You see what language they understand? I grew up among the Arabs from when I was a young child in the Old City of Jerusalem. Tell the truth and they will understand!"

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Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the book, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu: A Legend of Humility and Leadership.

Connection: The Torah Reading, Chaye Sara, 1) opens with [Sarah's death and] Avraham's registered purchase of the field in which Machpela Cave is situated, and 2) continues with the saga of arranging the match between Yitzchak and Rivka (Isaac & Rebecca).

### **The Legacy of the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel**

Biographic note: HaRav Mordechai-Tzemach Eliyahu [of blessed memory: 5689 - 25 Sivan 5770 (1929-2010)], son of Rabbi Salman Eliyahu, a leader of the Sephardic kabbalists in Jerusalem, served as the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel from 1983 to 1993. Rabbi Mordechai was a noted sage in all areas of Torah study, as well as a significant kabbalist, and was considered to be one of the leading authorities on Jewish law in Israel. His son, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, who is currently the popular Chief Rabbi of Tsfat, was also the main force in compiling the 5-volume Hebrew set from which the English book cited above was taken.

Early background notes for Machpela and Hebron (from the informational website "worth visiting!" HebronFund.org):

The Cave of Machpela has an ancient history dating back to the earliest man and woman in the Bible. Adam and Eve are said to be buried in the cave, the first of four couples to be buried there. The Cave of Machpela and the field around it were Abraham's first acquisition in the Land that God promised to him and his descendants.

### **Burial Place of the Jewish Patriarchs and Matriarchs**

Besides Adam and Eve, the three patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people "Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah and Isaac, and Jacob and Leah" are buried there as well. These three holy couples gave birth to the Jewish people and brought the awareness of G-d to the world.

Since Biblical times, the Cave of Machpela has been a place of prayer, meditation, and study. The cave is respected as a gateway to the Garden of Eden, where our prayers have a special potency. Hebron was the capital of the tribe of Judah. King David began his kingship here. From **Hebron**, he was crowned King of Judah seven years before he was crowned king of Israel in Jerusalem.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Chaya Sara 5784 email of KabbalahOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

# Wagonloads of Sins

By Miriam Zakon

In the time of the Chidah (R' Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai) there lived a talmid chochom who suffered from terrible illness and pain. In despair, he decided to visit the Chidah and ask for a blessing. When he entered the Chidah's Beis Medrash, he found the great man giving a shiur on a certain topic in the Gemara.

## Fell into a Deep Sleep

Not wanting to disturb, he sat quietly in the back waiting until the Chidah finished. His journey to the Chidah had been a long and tiring one, and in the warmth of the Beis Medrash, the talmid chochom fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly he felt like he was dead. He was surrounded by his family and friends who were escorting him to his final resting place. They eulogized him, they asked his forgiveness, and then they turned back to their homes, and he was left alone.

The quiet of the grave was soon broken as an angel came to escort him to the Heavenly Court for judgment. It's a long way from this world to the next, and the talmid chochom found it exhausting as he walked with the angel. When the angel said it would take two days of walking to reach, the talmid chochom was shocked, "Two days? I'm exhausted. I can't walk much farther."

## Asking for a Ride from the Carriage Driver

As they were speaking, he heard the sound of a carriage approaching. He looked up hopefully, but saw it was sagging beneath the weight of its heavy load – a huge trunk. The talmid chochom asked the driver, "Could I possibly get a ride with you?"

The driver laughed, "Do you have any idea what is in the trunk? It's filled with your sins. Tell me, do you really want to ride with the sins that will implicate you?"

The man stared in horrified disbelief. Could this really contain his sins? Impossible! He hadn't committed so many sins in his lifetime! Again, the driver laughed, "This? This is nothing! There wasn't enough room in my carriage for all your sins; there are dozens more coming after me!"

The talmid chochom saw that, indeed, more carriages were following on the road. As each of them passed he asked the driver what load he was carrying, and with a sinking heart, he heard the same answer – they were each carrying his sins.

Finally, the dismal convoy came to an end. Only one more coach drove up, a small one bearing an undersized trunk.

Almost in despair, the talmid chochom asked the driver what he was carrying. “Oh, this small trunk? It contains your mitzvos.” The verdict seemed to be a foregone conclusion. On one side, stacked so high you couldn’t even see the top, were the boxes of sins; on the other side the pitifully small box that held the mitzvos. A voice intoned, “He shall be brought to Gehinnom.” Two demons immediately appeared at the man’s side to bring him to where he would carry out his dreaded sentence.

### **The Angel Tries to Defend the Talmid Chochom**

Before they could move, an angel dressed in gleaming white appeared, “Where are you taking him?” he demanded. The demons replied, “To Gehinnom.” The angel turned to the judges of the Heavenly Tribunal. “Have you taken into consideration the terrible suffering this man went through in the physical world?”

The judges began to leaf through the book of the man’s life. Seeing the suffering he’d undergone, they ordered that half of the sin-filled crates be discarded.

“And what about the illnesses? Have you considered them?” Again, the judges looked through the book, and again they reduced the number of crates.

“And what about the problems with his family?” More crates disappeared.

“And his financial troubles?” By this time the scale was almost equal. But the sins still weighed heavy.

### **Asking for More Yissurim**

The angel looked at the scale and asked the judge. “Are there more yissurim, perhaps, a bit more suffering?” The man watched in disbelief. He could no longer control himself. “More suffering!” the man screamed, “More suffering! Can’t I have just a little more suffering?”

And then he awoke. He wasn’t dead. He wasn’t in the grave. He wasn’t facing the Heavenly Court. He was in the Beis Medrash of the Chidah, who was just finishing up his shiur.

The Chidah saw the stranger and courteously asked him what he could do to help him. The talmid chochom told him fervently, “I don’t need any help. I have everything I need – and I accept it all with love.” [This story was relayed by R’ Ovadiah Hadayah, a mekubal and Chief Rav of Pesach Tikva] (Stories of Spirit and Faith)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5784 email of The Weekly Vort.*

# The Endangered “Modest” Wedding



There's a story in Living Emunah [by Rabbi David Ashear] about a man who occupies his time involved in chess and started an organization called the Mitzvah Man. He recently told a story in which Hashem's hashgacha is blatantly obvious.

One day, the Mitzvah Man received a tearful call from a woman. My daughter is getting married next week," she related. "We're making a very modest wedding. We cut all costs to the minimum, but we're still short \$5,000. The wedding hall owner and caterer are telling me that if I don't come up with the money before the wedding, we will have to cancel it. And we have no music. Can you help us?"

The Mitzvah Man told the woman he would do his best. He ended the call and turned to Hashem. "I have no idea where I will get the money or the music from, but I really want to help!"

Three hours later, Hashem answered him in a wondrous way. One of his friends called, saying he had just closed a business deal, and wanted to give a portion of his profits to a needy bride for her wedding. The sum that he had in mind was \$5,000. "Do you know of anyone who could use this help?"

The Mitzvah Man's jaw dropped. Hashem is amazing!! he thought.

"Yes, I know someone who needs the money right away," he told his friend. "Great, you can come over and pick up the check," he replied.

On his way there, another man called out to the Mitzvah Man from down the block. He caught up to him and said, "I know you help people. I am a DJ and I want

to offer my services, free of charge, to brides in need. Do you happen to know of any?"

The hashgacha pratit here is so clear. This family needed to make a small wedding and Hashem was right there, helping with the expenses, solidifying another shidduch.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Chayei Sara 5784 email of Jack E. Rahmey based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

## The Man Who Tried to Provoke Hillel

The Gemara in Shabbos (31a) relates a story. A Braisa taught that one should always be patient like Hillel, and not impatient like Shammai. There were two individuals who made a wager with each other and said that anyone who can aggravate Hillel to the point that he gets reprimanded, will win four hundred zuz. One of them said, "I will aggravate him."

### **Pestering the Great Sage on Erev Shabbos**

The day he chose to bother Hillel was Erev Shabbos, and Hillel was washing his hair L'Kavod Shabbos. This man went to the entrance of Hillel's house, and in a demeaning manner said, "Where is Hillel?! Where is Hillel?!" Hillel wrapped himself in a garment and went out to greet him.

Hillel said to him, "My son, how can I help you?" The man replied, "I have a question to ask." Hillel said to him, "Ask, my son." The man said, "Why do the people from Bavel have round heads?" With this question he intended to insult Hillel, since Hillel was from Bavel. Hillel responded pleasantly, "My son, you have asked a significant question. The reason for this is because they do not have clever midwives, and this happens when they are born."

### **Returns to the Home of Hillel with Another "Important" Question**

The man waited a short while and then returned to Hillel's house and said, "Where is Hillel?! Where is Hillel?!" Again, Hillel wrapped himself and went out to greet him. Hillel said, "My son, how can I help you?"



The man said, “I have a question to ask. Hillel said to him, “Ask, my son.” The man asked, “Why do the Tarmodian people have watery eyes?” Hillel again responded pleasantly and said, “My son, you have asked a significant question. The reason for this is because they live in a sandy area, and the sand gets into their eyes.”



**Hillel Street in Jerusalem**

Once again, the man waited a little while longer and returned, and said, “Where is Hillel?! Where is Hillel?!” Hillel wrapped himself again and went out to greet him and said, “My son, how can I help you?”

The man said, “I have a question to ask. Hillel said to him, “Ask, my son.” The man said, “Why do people from Africa have wide feet?” Hillel responded pleasantly again, and said, “My son, you have asked a significant question. The reason for this is because they live in marshlands, and their feet have widened to enable them to walk through the swampy areas.”

The man then said, “I have many more questions to ask, but I am afraid that you will get angry.” Hillel sat down before him and he said, “Ask any question that you have.” The man now got angry and said to him, “Are you Hillel, the one that they call the ‘Nasi of Yisroel’?” Hillel replied that he was. The man said, “May there not be any more like you in Klal Yisroel!”

Hillel said, “My son, why would you say this?” The man answered, “Because of you, I lost four hundred zuz!”

Hillel responded, “Be more careful and avoid these situations. It is better for you to lose four hundred zuz, and even another four hundred zuz more, but that Hillel will not get upset!” The Chazon Ish was once asked what he thought the reason was for him being such an influential person, and he responded, “I am always careful with my tone of voice when I give advice to others!”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.*

# A New Dress or a Fancy Gemora?

Rav Shimon Finkelman once related a story. In Lithuania in the last century, there lived a very poor couple, but they were full of Yiras Shamayim. They had very little in the way of furniture, but were very wealthy in Torah and Mitzvos. The wife did not have any nice clothing to wear on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

## **A Few Coins Each Week for the Purchase of a New Dress**

One day, her husband decided that it was time for his wife to buy a new dress. They put aside a few coins each week, until they had enough money to buy a dress. The wife went to a seamstress and chose the garment that she wanted. As the husband walked through the town's streets, he noticed a man selling Seforim, and he was surrounded by many customers.

The dealer was offering one specific Sefer. It was a new edition of a Gemara Masechta Bava Kama, with the commentary of the Rashash, Rav Shmuel Strashun, zt"l. This was the first printing of a Gemara that had this commentary.

The man inspected a volume. What a work of beauty! He was not thinking of his own learning, though. His mind was on his son, who was a diligent Yeshivah Bachur. He knew his son would soon begin learning Bava Kama, and he needed a Gemara.

## **What Would His Wife Say?**

The dealer told him the price, and it cost almost as much as the dress. The man stood in silence, pondering what to do. Of course, this money was intended for his wife, not his son. But what would his wife say? There was no time to go home and ask her. The volumes were selling quickly, and only a few remained. The dealer would soon leave town, and would probably not return for another six months.

"I know my wife better than anyone," he thought. "Surely, she would be willing to make any sacrifice for the sake of our son's learning." Having reached that decision, he handed the dealer the money, and asked him to wrap up the Gemara. On his way home, the man met the city's Rav, who asked him what he was carrying. When the man told him what he had purchased and why.

The Rav excitedly asked if he could come home with him to see his son's reaction, when he would receive the Gemara. The two walked up the path to the couple's home.

Suddenly, the husband stopped. “What’s wrong?” the Rav asked. The husband replied, “I bought the Gemara after coming to the conclusion that this is what my wife would want me to do. But what if I’m wrong? What if she will be upset?” But it was too late. His wife had come to meet him at the door. He greeted his wife, and she welcomed him and the Rav into their home. He slowly opened the package and told her who the Gemara was for, and he waited for her to react.

To his surprise, his wife smiled broadly and said, “Oh, I’m so delighted! This is the most wonderful gift that I have ever received!” and she explained how she would much rather have something that would help her son learn Torah than a new dress.

This story was related by Rav Avraham Kalmanowitz, zt”l, the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Mir in Europe and America. The couple in the story were his grandparents, and their son was Rav Kalmanowitz’s father, Rav Aharon Aryeh Leib, zt”l!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Chaya Sarah 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah.*

# Giving it a Chance

**By Rabbi Yechiel Spero**

Standing inside a Meah Shearim shul in a long ponytail, a tank top, shorts, and sandals, the man most definitely stood out among the congregants normally gathered there to daven. Perhaps he had gotten lost and somehow landed there? But he seemed to have a purpose in coming that day, as he turned to Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, the rav of Yerushalayim, and asked him directly, “When is Minchah? Can I lead the davening?”

What a ludicrous request! The man was not dressed appropriately. Shockingly, though, Rav Tzvi Pesach said that it was time for Minchah and directed him to the amud to lead the davening. Whoever heard the exchange was flabbergasted. That man is going to be the chazzan? How could the rav allow this?

Nevertheless, no one dared oppose the direct ruling of the rav of Yerushalayim. The man led the congregation through the recitation of Minchah. Soon after, Rav Tzvi Pesach motioned to him to continue, and he davened Maariv, as well. When he was finished, he turned and walked out the door.

Immediately, the befuddled crowd approached Rav Tzvi Pesach to gain some clarity into his actions. Rav Tzvi Pesach’s response was cryptic. “If I would not have allowed him to daven, no one else would have allowed him either.”

The following day, the man returned once more, this time in a proper shirt. The day after that, he had added long pants. After a week, the fellow was about to leave after his Minchah/Maariv duties when Rav Tzvi Pesach managed to stop him and get in a shalom aleichem.

“Nitzachtani, you’ve won me over!” the man exclaimed and began to cry. Rav Tzvi Pesach was confused. All he had done was say shalom aleichem to the man, but he was afraid that he had triggered something painful.



**Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank**

And then, quite suddenly, the man ran out of the shul. Though Rav Tzvi Pesach hoped that the man would return and the rav would be able to find out what had gotten him so upset, the man did not come back the next day. A full week passed, and then another. Finally, three weeks later, the fellow walked in, dressed from head to toe like the other men in the shul.

Once more, Rav Tzvi Pesach approached him and again the man began to cry. This time, though, he composed himself and told his story: One month ago, I came here directly from the funeral of my mother, who passed away at the age of ninety-six. I loved her so much. She was my world, and now she was gone. Though I was raised religious, I had thrown the yoke of Torah and everything that I’d been taught and went off to an irreligious kibbutz.

Before she died, my mother had one request: that I say Kaddish for her. I didn’t know what to do. Where would I go? Besides, I had no interest in saying Kaddish, so I decided to perform a test. I would go to a shul in Meah Shearim, and if they allowed me to daven for the amud, I would continue to recite the Kaddish for

her. But if they would turn me away — which seemed more likely — I promised myself I would never walk into such a place again. Even more, I would do the absolutely worst things a Jew could ever do.

“As I said, I was almost certain you wouldn’t allow me to daven. But you did. I felt like I wanted to show a little more respect the next time, so I wore a proper shirt and then long pants, but I still wasn’t prepared to fully embrace your standards. But after a week, I felt that I had been won over. During all those days in which I davened for the amud, no one said a bad word to me. You even allowed me to take my time and go at my own pace toward adopting your standards.

“At that point, I realized that the life I had been living was not the life I wanted to continue to live. My mother was a smart woman. She knew I just needed another taste of Yiddishkeit and I would be hooked. Well, I went back to my kibbutz, and seeing with my own eyes that there was no life for me there, I packed up my stuff. I’m going to live here, where I can continue to grow. And then he concluded, “Nitzachtani — You’ve won me over.”

*Reprinted from the Parshas Lech Lecha 5784 edition of At the ArtScroll Shabbos Table. Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “The Soul of Kaddish” by Rabbi Yechiel Spero.*

## The Baal Shem Tov and the Shepherd

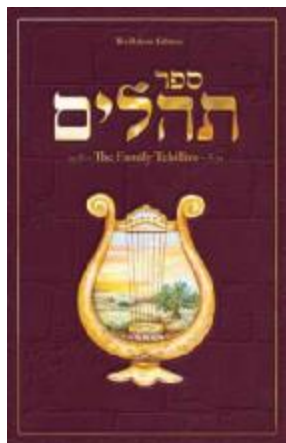
The Baal Shem Tov once invited his talmidim: “Come with me and we will learn a lesson about how to love HaShem.” He led them to a large field where a young shepherd was tending his flock. Spontaneously, the shepherd called out, “Master of the world, I love you!” He then questioned aloud, “How shall I serve you?” And he answered his own question: “I will dance for you!” And with that, he broke into a long and joyful dance.

A short while later he called out again, “Master of the world, I love you! What shall I do for you? I will jump back and forth over this little pond for you!” And so, he repeatedly jumped over the pond out of his love for HaShem.

After some time, he once again called out, “Master of the world! What can I offer you? Here, I have a coin in my pocket and I will give it to you.” He took the coin and cast it heavenward. Some tell that the coin never descended.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeira 5784 edition of The Weekly Farbrengen.*

# The Villager Who Always Read Tehillim



In the Baal Shem Tov's time a certain Jewish community was under a decree of destruction issued by the Heavenly Court. The Baal Shem Tov summoned two of his colleagues, hidden tzaddikim named Reb Mordechai and Reb Kehos, to join him in constituting a beis din, to consider how to nullify the decree.

However, when the Baal Shem Tov experienced aliyas haneshama, he learned that the decree was final and not to be annulled. Returning past the chambers of Gan Eden, he passed a chamber that shone with unusual brilliance. This was the chamber of a villager who said all of Tehillim five times every day, and the words of his Tehillim sparkled.

The Baal Shem Tov traveled to the home of this villager and said to him, "If you knew that by sacrificing your share in the World to Come you could save a Jewish community, what would you do?"

"If I have any share in the World to Come, I give it up," was his prompt response.

The decree was annulled. It had been the custom of this villager to say Tehillim always, incessantly. While chopping wood he kept reciting Tehillim, and so too while doing any work. It is quite conceivable that he wasn't scrupulous about his immediate environment, even saying Tehillim where one should not, since he was uneducated. But he didn't know the din and his intentions were pure, so his Tehillim was effective.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeira 5784 edition of The Weekly Farbrengen.*