

## ***A Shavuot Deposit***

Sunset and the festival of ***Shavuot*** were fast approaching. The Jewish merchant hurried frantically towards the *Beit Midrash* Study Hall in Lishinov, Austria. He was in the midst of a journey to purchase merchandise and pursue investments, and had detoured to spend Shavuot with his rebbe. Now though, while it was still permissible to carry money, he had to quickly find a secure place to hide the thick wallet of currency that was bulging in his jacket pocket. Yet hours had already passed in an unsuccessful search.

In desperation he decided to reconsider his first idea, which he had originally rejected as being too impudent. He would ask the rebbe himself to keep the money in a safe place until the 48 hours of the festival ended. Who could possibly be more reliable than the rebbe!

He ran into the Beit Midrash, took a few deep breaths, gathered his courage, and in fear and trembling, respectfully requested from the rebbe that he allow him to deposit his wallet with the Rebbe for safe-keeping over the holiday.

The Rebbe, **Rabbi Mordechai of Neshkiz**, presented his chasid a big smile and said that he is happy to oblige him. He took the money, and with the owner watching him closely, he stuck the wallet deep within a large kitchen cabinet filled with pots and dishes, placing it inside a large bowl, and then inserting another bowl of the same size on top of it.

“Now you don’t have to worry anymore,” he addressed the merchant; “your money is hidden securely with us. So, go right away to the mikveh and prepare yourself for the holy occasion.”

The chasid felt as if a great load had been lifted from his shoulders, he was so relieved. He thanked the rebbe and parted from him with a light heart.

Before sunset, he joined the crowd of chasidim that packed the Rebbe’s synagogue. He found a place to sit between two friends, opened a book of Torah thought and began to study intently, completely detached from all thought of the work week that had passed, and even of the week to come two days later.

The atmosphere of festive holiness was palpable. The Evening Prayer for Festivals exalted the spirits of all present even higher, an exultation that continued through the holiday meal and reached its apex at the Rebbe’s ‘*tish*’ (open ‘table’), where a large crowd of chasidim gathered after concluding their own meals.

A flow of inspiring words from the Rebbe initiated preparation for the receiving of the Torah anew the following morning. Throughout the night, the chasidim read the

traditional long passages of Torah in the “*Tikun Layil Shavuot*.” As soon as the sky began to brighten, the appropriate Morning Blessings were recited, and they delved deeply and enthusiastically into Torah study in preparation for the festive morning prayers.

After the first long section that concluded with the singing of the *Hallel* prayer, the Rebbe returned to his room to prepare himself for the recitation of the *Akdamot* [a prayer unique to Shavuot day]<sup>1</sup> immediately prior to taking out the Torah scroll from the ‘Holy Ark.’ Some of the chasidim, knowing it would be a while until the Rebbe returned and feeling weak from the all-night vigil, darted into the Rebbe’s house to nibble a bit of pastry in order to strengthen themselves for the major part of the Shavuot morning service. They returned quickly to the synagogue and joined the congregation in anticipation of the Rebbe’s return.

At last, the Rebbe entered and strode up to the table in the middle of the shul upon which the Torah scroll would be rolled open and read. His demeanor was fiery, but his voice was sweet as he began to chant the *Akdamot* and pour out his soul to the Creator of all. He himself read aloud from the open scroll, and when he started the portion of the Ten Commandments, every one present felt as if they were assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Evening and morning, night and day. The 48 plus hours passed in a rarified spiritual atmosphere, with total detachment from the weekday world. The second day came to a close, darkness settled, and the large braided candle was lit for the concluding *Havdala* ceremony. Afterwards, it was only with difficulty that the chasidim were able to depart from the Rebbe’s ‘court’ and his presence.

Also the merchant chasid felt it difficult to descent from the spiritual heights he had crested and turn to the business affairs that awaited him. Still full of emotion, he entered the Rebbe’s home to request the return of his money.

The Rebbe hurried to the hiding place inside the kitchen cabinet and moved aside the upper bowl that concealed the wallet. It was not there!

The rebbe was shocked momentarily, but then he figured that perhaps it had fallen from the bowl deeper inside the cabinet. He felt along the sides and on the lower shelf, but there was no trace of it, not a single bill. He hastily summoned his entire household to help in the hunt. The traumatized merchant stood frozen in place, his face white as frost.

All the frantic searching produced zero results. The rebbe approached the stunned merchant and did his best to calm him. “Don’t worry. I’ll give you now all the money I have in the house, every last *ruble*, and the rest I will with G-d’s help pay you back in installments.”

“Heaven forbid that the Rebbe’s savings should be drained on my account,” the chasid cried out. I won’t take even a *kopek*<sup>2</sup> from the Rebbe.”

The matter of the theft disturbed the Neshkizer greatly. How much suffering he had caused his devoted follower! He decided that emergency measures were called for.

During this time period, the great *tzadik* (holy man), one of the three main senior disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, **Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz**, was living in the nearby town of Brody. Rabbi Mordechai of Neshkiz decided he would go to Brody and ask the *tzadik* for his advice and blessing, even though he had never visited him even once before.

He set out that same day. The merchant meanwhile was still in Lishinov, waiting and hoping for a positive development.

In Brody, R. Mordechai headed directly to the shul-study hall of R. Pinchas. Before entering he saw in the courtyard a middle-aged Jew pacing back and forth while engrossed in reading *Tehilim* (Book of Psalms). He walked towards him and said, "Excuse me. Please can you tell me when it is possible to speak with the Rebbe?"

The man ignored him. He didn't even break stride or pause his recitation. Maybe I'm not close enough, or maybe I didn't speak loud enough," wondered R. Mordechai.

He stepped closer and raised his voice considerably. No response. "Could he be deaf," he wondered even more, "or is he simply rude?" He decided to try one more time, more loudly and a bit sharper.

"What is the explanation of such behavior? Is it really impossible or so difficult to tell a guest in which hours the Rebbe receives people?"

The man stopped in mid-step and ceased his Psalm-saying. He turned to look directly in the eyes of R. Mordechai and said, "And what is the explanation of the ineptness of a younger man that he does not know how to properly secure the money another person entrusted to him for safekeeping?"

R. Mordechai instantly realized that this Jew must be R. Pinchas himself. He apologized for his brusque speech and reported to him all the details of the unfortunate mishap with the deposit.

"Listen to me," R. Pinchas said in a tone of assurance. "Tomorrow morning, make sure to go up to lead the prayers. When you reach 'The Song of [the Egyptians drowning in] the Sea,' enunciate extra loudly and clearly the verse, '**Amar oyeiv: erdof; aseeg; achaleik shalal**' -- *'Said the [Egyptian] enemy: I will pursue [the Jews]; I will overtake, I will divide the plunder...'* [Ex. 15:9].

"At the moment you are saying these six words, count the men that are praying alongside the north wall of the shul, one person per word. The person who corresponds to the word '*shalal*/plunder,' you can be certain this is the thief!"

R. Mordechai did exactly as R. Pinchas instructed. When he said “*shalal*” he stared intently at the sixth man from the right along the north wall of the shul. Instantly the man’s face turned as white as his shirt and he fainted. The shul was in an uproar until finally the man opened his eyes and stood up, and then returned to his prayerbook.

After the prayers, the man hurried to see the Rebbe privately, and in a broken voice confessed that he was indeed the thief. He told that he was one of those who had gone into the Rebbe’s house on Shavuot morning to taste something, and had noticed the wallet in the cabinet. A strong desire for the money overcame him, so he snuck it all into one of his pockets.

“*Rebbe!* Please!” he exclaimed and burst into tears. “Instruct me how to do *teshuvah* (‘repentance’).”

Only after the man returned the sum in its entirety did the Rebbe prescribe for him a path to rectification. The man fulfilled meticulously every detail in the rebbe’s directive. With the passage of time, he became a well respected chasid of Rabbi Mordechai of Neshkiz.

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*Source:* Translated and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the Hebrew weekly *Sichat HaShavua*, #1586 (based on “*Reshpi Aish*”). [Anyone who like a word.docx of the original Hebrew, send an email request to [TillesTells@gmail.com](mailto:TillesTells@gmail.com) .]

*Connections* (2):

**1-** The festival of *SHAVUOT*.                      **2-** The 8<sup>th</sup> of the 10 Comandments: “Do Not Steal”

*Biographical notes* (in order of appearance):

**R. Mordechai of Neshkiz** [1740 - 8 Nissan 1800] was descended from the Maharal of Prague and Don Yitzchak Abarbanel. He was a disciple of R. Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov. The ill and the unfortunate came to visit him from long distances. It is recorded that he never uttered a negative word about another person. He actively supported settlement in Eretz Yisrael. He was succeeded by his son, R. Yitzchak of Neshchiz. His sayings were collected in *Rishpei Eish*.

**Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz** (ben R. Avraham Abba Shapiro) [10 Elul (1726 - Sept. 1791 C.E.)] was considered to be one of the two most pre-eminent followers of Chassidism's founder, the *Baal Shem Tov* (along with his successor, the *Maggid of Mezritch*). His teachings appear in various collections (such as *Midrash Pinchas*), and are cited in the classic *Bnei Yissaschar*.