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Who was 'La La Salica'?

In the city of Fez, Morocco, near the graves of two famous Moroccan rabbinical judges, Rabbi Yehuda ben Atar¹ and Rabbi Avner Hasaphatim,² lies a grave inscribed: "La La Salica." This is the grave of the young Jewish woman, **Salica**. These three graves are secluded from the others, and with good reason; according to tradition, The Divine Presence dwells there! We also know, from tradition, that those who visit the graves, praying to G-d on the merit of the beloved deceased who rest there, are likely to have their prayers answered

Who was this girl, Salica, buried next to two righteous *tzaddikim*?

Salica's family lived in Morocco. Her father, Shlomo, supported her family through selling house utensils. He worked hard, with absolute honesty. Salica's mother and sisters, as herself, were all modest and G-d fearing. Salica, especially, stood out for her wisdom and goodness, and her graceful Jewish charisma, beaming from her face.

Not far from her house lived Muslim families, some of whom belonged to the elite circle of government authorities. One young man from these families noticed Salica, the Jewess. Awestruck by her charm, he resolved to take her for a wife. As he matured, and the time came for him to choose a wife, he informed his father of his fervent desire to betroth Salica. "I will have nothing to live for, father, if I don't marry Salica," he told his father.

The father accepted his son's requests, and was certain that Salica's father would be delighted if she were to marry into an honorable, rich family such as his. Of course, Salica would have to abandon her faith, and convert to Islam, in order for the marriage to occur. But neither the son nor father saw any problem with this.

Now, this boy's father was a distinguished man. Normally, his requests and desires were fulfilled on demand, immediately, without fail. So when Shlomo, Salica's father, outright refused to agree to the marriage, he was shocked throughout all his being. He decided to fulfill his son's will, regardless of all obstacles.

Outraged, feeling his honor soiled, he prepared to take drastic steps. "You shall see," said he to Shlomo; " your daughter, Salica, will marry my son, for

¹ 5416 (1656) – 19 Sivan 5493 (1733), the father of the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*)

² Perhaps Rabbi Vidal Haserfati? (hyomi.org.il)

the good - or for the bad..." Adamant, Shlomo turned his back, ignoring his words altogether.

As expected, a few days afterwards, Shlomo and his family heard knocking on the door. "We come to take Salica, in the name of the Law!"

The authorities had grounds for their decision. They had been informed, fallaciously, by a certain rich and distinguished Arab, that Salica had converted to Islam, but then returned to her heritage, her Jewish faith.

The police ransacked the house, searching for Salica. To their surprise, she was not to be found! Reacting to rumors that the authorities sought her arrest, she had already escaped to a nearby town, where she was hiding with relatives.

The authorities were clever, and did not give up so easily. Instead, they arrested Salica's mother as a hostage until Salica would appear and hand herself over for prosecution. When Salica heard of this, she immediately returned to the city, for the sake of her mother's freedom. Upon handing herself over to the authorities, they arrested and imprisoned her.

A few days later, she appeared in court, for judgment. "How dare you convert to our faith, then abandon it," roared the prosecution.

All the Jews of the community, her family, her friends - they trembled at the aggressiveness, the recklessness of the prosecution. They dreaded the probable verdict....

But Salica did not fear. She remained firm and strong, outwardly demonstrating her will and determination, before the judges and prosecution. She proudly maintained, "Never, never did I leave my faith. I never became a Muslim, and I never, ever will! I was born a Jew, and thus shall I die!"

Nevertheless, the judges, accepted the accusations of the prosecution, listening to their cursed lies. The prosecution "proved" that she had converted to the Islamic faith, but then returned to Judaism, the faith of her ancestors. The judges declared the verdict: She was sentenced to be killed by the sword.

The guards, with cruelty and viciousness, imprisoned Salica. Meanwhile, messengers from the wealthy Muslim families came to influence her heart. Even so, isolated in a dreadful cell, Salica refused to listen. The promised her riches, wealth, prosperity -- all the good in the world -- but in vain. Salica would not give in.

Even the leaders of the Jewish community came to her, sadly begging that she convert, and marry the Arab. Otherwise, they pleaded, the entire

community would suffer. Still, she remained strong. The pleading went unheeded.

Next, the prison guards were sent to brutalize and torture her, in an attempt to forcefully persuade her to abandon her faith, convert, and marry the Arab. The torture, the brute force, the terror - this, too, went unheeded. "I cannot betray my G-d, the G-d of my ancestors, the G-d of the Universe."

The prison guards even forcefully brought the Jewish leaders, once again, and compelled them under force, to command her to convert, and to marry the Muslim. She refused, outright. Salica remained strong, in her heart and in her mind; she would not betray her faith.

In the last few moments of her life, as she awaited the execution, the final fulfillment of the verdict, she was visited by the Muslim boy, the very cause of her misfortune, the source of her sorrow and torture.

He whispered, "Please, Salica, my love, listen to me. This is your last opportunity. You can be saved, Salica, saved from death. You don't even have to become Muslim, Salica. Just pretend to, outwardly. Just marry me, please! I don't desire your death, your harm. Your religion is of no importance to me."

To his shock, Salica turned her head, refusing to so much as acknowledge him. In the last seconds of her life, bound in chains, while the executioner held the sword high, raised above her neck - Salica screamed the ancient cry of the Jewish martyr:

"Shema Yisrael - Hear, O Israel, G-D is our G-d, G-D is One!"

Salica sanctified the name of G-D in her life, and even more, in her death. *"A woman of worth, who can find? For her price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10).*

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Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition in *"Hear and Your Soul Shall Live"* as told by **Rav Moshe Weber**. First published in Hebrew (in *L'ma'an Yishma'u*) by Rabbi Yitzchak-Ido Erhlich-Weber, and roughly translated into English by Emanuel Behar and Ari Chester.

Connection – weekly Torah reading of *Vayishlach*: the episode of Dina bas Yaakov (Gen. 34:3-5)