

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

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The Second Slap

The sound of a slap was heard in the *shul* (synagogue). Everyone present turned around and were astonished to see that the person administering the slap was no other than **Rabbi Lipa, the Rav of Shargorod**, in Ukraine. For a moment silence reigned but soon people returned to their prayers.

Rabbi Lipa's studiousness was exceptional. He hardly took time to sleep. While studying Torah he disengaged himself entirely from his surroundings to the extent that he was completely unaware of the passing of time. One of the duties of his elderly *shammesh* (attendant) was to remind Rabbi Lipa when it was time for prayers.

Time passed and the old attendant passed away. The leaders of the community looked for a suitable candidate to take his place. Eventually they chose a young man who had decided not to continue his intensive studies. They hoped that being in close contact with the Rav would influence him spiritually for the better.

The rather irresponsible young man wasn't impressed with his new duties. He even used his situation negatively and often caused the Rav distress. All this time the Rav kept this to himself; he said nothing to the people who had appointed him.

One night the young man sat with his friends till early morning. Concerned that if he would go to bed he would not get up in time to remind the Rav that it was time for morning prayers, he decided to lie down on a bench in the shul, hoping that the arrival of the first worshippers would wake him.

He slept so deeply, however, that the entrance of the early comers didn't wake him, not even when the prayers began. The community had waited for a long time for the Rav to join them but when he didn't come they started the prayers without him.

Only in the middle of the prayers did the *gabbai* (manager of the synagogue) notice the sleeping young man. He immediately realized the reason for the absence of R. Lipa. He quickly awakened the young man and sent him to call the Rav.

The young man came to the Rav as usual and said nothing about the delay. The Rav leisurely made his way to shul, but on his entrance realized that the community was about to finish praying. This angered

him greatly and he slapped the young man on the cheek in front of all the worshippers.

The young man accepted the slap with understanding and the people present also felt that it was deserved. But the Rav was terribly upset. His conscience troubled him – how could he have hurt another Jew! His prayer that morning was like the concluding prayer of *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur, his tears flowed from his eyes like water.

Immediately after the prayers, the Rav ascended the *bimah* (platform in the synagogue for the Torah Reading) and announced emotionally: "I deeply and sincerely regret the slap I gave the young man, and I beg him for pardon and forgiveness."

Right away the young man stood up and exclaimed: "Honorable Rabbi, I deserved that slap, already for a long time I had it coming due to all the distress I caused you."

Several days went by when suddenly it became known in town that the Rav left on a long journey, without stating when he would return. The *Rosh Yeshiva* (head of the yeshiva) was appointed as his substitute. Only to the members of his family the Rav revealed that he decided to take upon himself a period of exile [not so rare in those days –y.t.] as penance for slapping the young man in public. He would continue until he received a sign from Heaven that his repentance was accepted.

The Rav exchanged his clothes for the clothes of a simple wayfarer and wandered from town to town. There were times that he would have no food for a long time and times that he found no place to lie down and rest. Often he was jeered at, but he accepted it all with love.

Years passed and he felt his strength weaken, he realized that he would not be able to continue his wanderings but he still awaited a sign from Heaven. One Shabbat eve he came to a town close to Shargorod. He decided to approach the person in charge of the Guest House for help in finding a house where to eat his Shabbat meals.

When he stood in front of the man responsible for the Guest House he was dumbfounded to realize that this was the same young man who was his servant all those years ago. He had married, raised a family and moved to this town. The man didn't recognize the Rav and the latter didn't say anything. He was sent to eat in the house of the head of the community.

From the conversation during the Shabbat evening meal the host discovered that his guest was an outstanding Torah scholar. The community leader was extremely pleased and invited the Rav to stay and sleep in his house. At the end of Shabbat after *havdala* (ceremony

at the termination of Shabbat) the Rav took leave of the household members and got ready to continue his journey.

In the meantime, a tumult broke out in the shul: the valuable silver candle sticks had disappeared. Suspicion fell immediately on the guest, who had hurried to leave the house of his host. The community leader ran to the Guest House supervisor and furiously asked him, "How did you sent me a guest who is nothing but a thief!?"

The supervisor decided to discover the whereabouts of the thief. He took his carriage and set out to find the guest, who hadn't managed to cover much distance. By the time he overtook him he was so incensed that he slapped the Rav on his cheek then ordered him to return the stolen candles.

To his surprise, he saw a big smile appear on the face of the guest. This angered the supervisor even more and he raised his hand in order to slap the guest again.

The Rav raised his hand and said "Enough! I deserved one slap but not more than that."

This remark sounded very strange to the supervisor. Looking searchingly at the man in front of him he suddenly yelled "Oy! Rebbe!" realizing that this was none other than the Rav of Shargorod, Rabbi Lipa!

He threw himself down before the Rav, begging him for forgiveness. Again a big smile spread over the Rav's face. He said "You do not have to feel bad. Finally I have received a sign from Heaven that my repentance has been accepted."

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation by **C. R. Benami**, long-time editorial assistant for [www.AscentOfSafed.com](http://www.AscentOfSafed.com), of an article in *Sichat Hashavua* (#1327)

*Connection:* In "the Three Weeks" leading to Tisha b'Av, we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temples and the exile of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence).