

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

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THE BEST WHISKEY OF ALL

Leibel and Shoshana had eleven children, yet they lived a life of ease and comfort. Their tavern was the most popular in their area, as the expertise of Leibel as a brewer was head and shoulders above any competition. In the cellar of their house Leibel had set up a small factory for making whiskey. He labored long hard hours in the production of his unique whiskey, while his good wife administered the business side of the tavern.

One day, though, tragedy struck. Leibel fell severely ill, and in but a short while he returned his soul to its Maker.

His death left his widow totally broken-hearted, nor did she understand how she would be able to obtain the large amounts of food necessary to feed her eleven orphaned children. The tavern was doomed; she hadn't the faintest idea how to prepare the whiskey; nor was there anyone to ask. The secrets of its recipe and its manner of preparation went down into the earth with her husband.

Leibel was accustomed to visit the 'court' of his Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham-Yaakov of Sadigora (the son of the 'holy Rhiziner'). Shoshana well remembered how every time he returned from a visit to the Rebbe, he was in an excellent mood. So she decided that she should now go herself to the Rebbe and seek his blessing.

Face to face with the Rebbe, Shoshana reported her situation through a veil of sobs and tears. The Rebbe listened with full attention and visible compassion to every word. After, he blessed her and encouraged her to place her trust in G-d Al-mighty.

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Several months went by as the widow's financial circumstances deteriorated further. Creditors were repeatedly knocking on her door, including representatives of the *poritz*, the local nobleman landlord, to whom much money was owed even before Leibel's death aggravated the situation.

Shoshana made another journey to the Sadigorer, but this time refused to be satisfied with his blessing only. Feeling under enormous pressure, she began enumerating to the Rebbe various methods she

imagined that the *Ribono Shel Olam* ('Lord of the Universe') could employ to help her.

For example, He could arrange that she should happen to be on the road at the exact moment that the poritz returned from an excursion, and when he descended from his coach his wallet could fall from his pocket, and only she would notice it.

"Then," she explained, "I could extract the money inside it and keep it. After all, the poritz is exceptionally wealthy, so he won't feel damaged by the loss. I'll then take the majority of the money and give it to the poritz to clear our debt to him, while the remainder will provide sustenance for myself and my children for a long while."

Sharing the pain of her desperateness, the Rebbe gazed at the widow with empathy and mercy before responding gently, "We don't need to give advice to the Creator of All; He knows quite well all by Himself how to provide a solution."

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One day not so long after the above encounter, at an hour when the widow was not at home, her oldest son, a lad of fifteen, heard a persistent knocking on their front door. When he opened it, he was startled to see the poritz himself standing there, in all his glory.

"Is your father at home?" he asked. The boy answered that it is months already that his father has not been among the living.

"What!" cried out the poritz in a shocked tone. "I am so sorry to hear that. I was never told about it." Then he immediately switched to the matter for which he had come.

"I have always purchased my whiskey from your father exclusively. In another two weeks I will be making a wedding for my daughter, and I need a very large amount of quality whiskey, like that which your father knew to prepare."

Leibel's son answered that since his father passed away, all activity in the cellar has ceased. "There is no whiskey left. The barrels are all empty."

The poritz, however, figured that the teenager was simply trying to act like a sharp businessman, and his disclaimer was in order to establish a bargaining position. "There is no reason to negotiate," he replied. "I'll pay you double or triple the usual price; just agree to prepare this large order on time for me."

The boy froze in fear. He could not understand what the poritz expected of him, so he remained silent. The exasperated poritz ran out

of patience and raised his voice. “Why don’t you answer me, boy? Take me immediately to the cellar. I want to see for myself what remains.”

Leibel’s son, in trepidation, barely managed to drag himself down the stairs. The poritz, however, was becoming happier and more excited with each step. “Ah!” he exclaimed as he sniffed the air. “The scent of whiskey – good, strong whiskey! – is seeping into my nostrils.”

In the cellar, the poritz began to inspect the barrels, one by one. So far, they were all empty. The son was becoming increasingly apprehensive, frightened even. He knew that the only casks with any liquid in them were the few that were full of water, soaking in order to remove the last dregs of the whiskey. What would be the poritz’s reaction when he finished his survey?

When the poritz reached the first water-filled barrel, he stepped back in surprise. “What is this?” he asked the boy in an inquisitive yet demanding tone.

“Water,” was the one-word response.

Suspicious, the poritz scooped a bit of the contents with his hand and swallowed it. His face lit up and he roared with joy. “I’m amazed. The taste of this whiskey is even better than what your father used to make!

“You tried to fool me! I shall forgive you, but only on the condition you prepare for me in time for the wedding three barrels of whiskey with this supremely delicious taste exactly.”

The poritz next took out his wallet, removed from it a thick wad of bills, and handed it to the trembling teenager. Then he walked quickly up the stairs and departed.

The boy ran to tell his mother the astonishing turn of events. She immediately departed in the first available carriage to Sadigora.

“Rebbe!” She cried out. “How can I possibly acquire three full barrels of high quality whiskey in less than two weeks?”

The Rebbe smiled warmly and answered, “Is water lacking? Fill the barrels with water from the river, as you usually do when cleaning.”

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The woman returned home, astonished and perplexed by the words of the rebbe. Nevertheless, she and her son hurried to fulfill the *tzadik*’s directive. A few days later, she managed to deliver the barrels to the poritz, who was so grateful that he extended to her a generous bonus.

The day of the wedding of the Poritz's daughter arrived. The men guests were out of their minds with delight at how tasty and strong the whiskey was. They demanded to know the identity of its maker. The Poritz revealed that it was a teenage boy! – the son of the departed Leibel, the master brewer.

The next morning, representatives of all the wealthy noblemen that had been at the wedding crowded into the courtyard of the widow. They all wished to buy the unique whiskey they had imbibed the previous day.

Shoshana ran inside to tell her son. They looked at each other, shrugged in bewilderment, and did the only thing they could think of: hustle to the river with a wagon of empty casks and fill them with water from the river. Maybe the miracle would re-occur, they prayed.

Their eager customers nevertheless took the precaution of tasting. They were immensely satisfied; within the hour all the barrels were sold at a premium price.

Not a week passed and nearly all the nobles sent to purchase more of 'the best whiskey ever.' It did not take long after that until Shoshana was able to pay off all their debts to the poritz and other creditors. Nor did that use up all the money from the sales. Plenty remained to support the large family.

Soon after, the widow journeyed to the rebbe again, this time to thank him for his miraculous blessing. The rebbe smiled his warm smile and said, "Didn't I tell you that the Al-mighty doesn't need our suggestions!"

The woman replied innocently. "Please, the Rebbe should believe me. I thought of so many different possibilities for salvation, but this method, that water should be converted into whiskey, I have to admit that never occurred to me!"

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Source: Translated and adapted by Yereachmiel Tilles from the rendition in the book, "Tzadikim l'Mofess" ("Tzadikim and Their Wonders") by Menachem Brod, editor of the popular Israeli weekly, *Sichat HaShavua*."

**Connection:** This story revolves around an incident that is strongly parallel to the miracle that dominates the Haftorah of this week.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Avraham-Yaakov Friedman** (20 Cheshvan 1819-11 Elul 1883), the first of the **Sadigorer** dynasty, was the second and oldest surviving son and successor of his famous father, the holy Rabbi Yisrael of Rhyzhin (1797-1850), who passed away in Sadigora. His own elder son, Yitzchak (1849-

1917), became the first Boyanner Rebbe. His younger son, Yisrael (1853-1907), succeeded him in Sadigora as the rebbe of tens of thousands.