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## *In the Rocking Chair*

Joshua [Dr. Yehoshua Ritchie] and I [his wife, Liliane] were privileged to hear the extraordinary story of a special friend, who had surreal interactions with Baba Sali.

Do you think angels are ethereal beings that are very rarely seen in our world? I have known angels in human form – they are the gentlest, most humble, deep, loving and caring human beings ever encountered in our busy, anxious, pragmatic world. Perhaps you have also met some, without realizing who they were.

I was fortunate to meet one of these angelic beings a number of years ago in Los Angeles. We both felt blessed with an immediate connection. A beautiful woman in every way, Rifka [not her real name] radiates an aura of grace, kindness and beauty. Her voice is melodious and comforting, her words filled with sparkling, inspired, unique healing thoughts and ideas. Her laughter is catchy, communicating a joyful lightness of spirit. In her company, life seems like an exciting adventure filled with potential yet to be discovered.

Before we met, life had not been easy for her. She had learned to survive an abusive husband, had given birth to five children, divorced and, being strong and courageous, she lovingly raised her children on her own until they were grown. Then a spiritual awakening turned her life around. She focused in her search for what is the loftiest, purest, loving and meaningful purpose in her life.

With our help and encouragement as well as of a soul brother who was going through a similar spiritual process, she began to draw closer to her Jewish spiritual roots. Loving to read about our great *tzadikim* (holy spiritual masters), Rifka felt especially drawn to the revered father [“Baba”] of Sephardic Jewry, the **Baba Sali**.

Unexpectedly, to Rifka’s delight, people began to bring her photographs of Baba Sali, even though they knew nothing about the deepening soul connection with him that she felt. And more photographs kept coming her way from different sources.

Rifka came to settle here in Jerusalem alone with \$450 in her pocket, her entire savings. She was welcomed at the family home of our son David and wife Natanela. Roaming about Jerusalem, she was thrilled and awed by the holiness of the atmosphere of this city.

When Rifka’s money had dwindled down to \$20, she gave it away to someone who seemed to need it more than her. The next day, an unexpected check arrived for her in the mail for \$20.

As soon as she could, Rifka took the bus with her spiritual soul brother to the desert town of Netivot to meet with Baba Sali. When she arrived at his home, she was quite disappointed to hear that he does not see women at any time. Her soul brother reassured her that Baba Sali was just as effective in his connection and blessings towards women when he received their written request. So Rifka wrote down her request, gave it to the *gabbai* (personal attendant) and took a seat in the waiting room.

There, she began to enjoy listening to the stories of the other people in the room. She was fascinated to hear of the healings which had occurred for them after they had connected with their holy master Baba Sali.

At one point, she asked for directions to the bathroom and walked her way through some meandering corridors. Suddenly, she saw an open door, peeked inside -- and there was Baba Sali [whom she recognized from her photos,] sitting in deep meditative study, waiting for the next person who needed his blessing.

Rifka just stood there transfixed, hardly daring to look at him. How long? It seemed a moment touching eternity. Then someone came bustling about and re-directed her to the bathroom.

Thereafter, Rifka felt that Baba Sali knew who she was, that he had directed her to him so that she wouldn't be too disappointed at not being able to see him in person.

A few days after receiving Baba Sali's blessings, two of them were fulfilled when Rifka found a small apartment in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, as well as work as a caterer for a *yeshivah*. She couldn't bear to give less than quality meals for the students, even though there was very little funding from the Yeshivah. She even went into debt buying the right kind of food for them.

Aside from that, her kitchen was open to many young spiritually searching souls wandering through Jerusalem. Whomever she touched was uplifted and comforted.

In the meantime, the beloved master of loving kindness, [divine inspiration and Torah scholarship,] Baba Sali, left this world in 1984. Many hundreds of thousands of Jews mourned his departure. He had been fasting most of his life, yet he lived until 94<sup>1</sup> years of age. He left behind an awesome legacy: his radiance of loving kindness, of powerful strength, humility, purity, clarity and wisdom, through his ceaseless, absolutely committed devotion to God and man. The countless miracles he engendered throughout his life were uplifting and strengthening the entire nation in many ways.

Almost a year later, as Rifka was returning home from an errand, she found her helper, a simple, humble and devoted man who was doing the food shopping for her, standing there looking a bit bewildered.

"Rifka," he said empathically, "you really should lock your door."

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Ritchie wrote "105," but I changed it in accord with the most widely accepted opinion. – y.t.

“Why?” she responded. “There is nothing much here worth stealing. Besides, somebody might need a place to eat and rest.”

“Nevertheless, I really think you should lock your door.”

“Why?”

“I found someone sitting here in your rocking chair.”

“So?”

“He was an old man, all dressed in white.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. There are all kinds of mystical souls roaming around here. You don’t need to be worried.”

Rifka’s helper looked pensive and awed. He didn’t say any more.

A few days later, Rifka was invited to attend a *Hilulah* (celebration: [to honor] ) Baba Sali. Rifka brought her humble helper along. When they arrived at the home that was hosting the celebration they saw a portrait of Baba Sali hanging on the wall at the entrance. The moment Rifka’s helper looked at the portrait, he pointed to it. “That’s him! The old man who was sitting in your rocking chair just a few days ago! That’s him!”

Why wasn’t Rifka privileged to see Baba Sali herself? My guess is that Baba Sali knew that if he would appear to her, she would have fainted on the spot! So he chose to appear to someone else and through this he was able to relay the message that he was with her, very much aware of the holy work she was doing.

Soon after, Rifka found her soul mate, a physician. She and her beloved husband now [2014?] live in a beautiful home in Jerusalem. Rifka works as a counselor at Refuah Institute [see ‘Source note’ below]. How could it be otherwise? She counsels from a loving heart, a high spiritual vision, and a soul-healing inner strength.

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*Source:* Excerpted and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a longer, sweeter article by Mrs **Liliane Ritchie** published on *JewishOutlook.com* in 2014.

**Dr. Joshua Ritchie** is the founder and director of the Refuah Institute in Jerusalem, a non-profit orthodox-Jewish center which provides training in therapy techniques, life-coaching, marriage and youth counselling based within the Jewish halacha. – *Wikipedia*

His wife, Liliane--a talented artist, mother of their 5 children, a counselor, teacher and author--assists in all the Refuah projects. – *Aish.com*.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzzeira** [1890 – 4 Shvat 1984] known as **Baba Sali**, was born in Tafilalet Morocco, to one of Jewry’s most illustrious families. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 1964 he moved to Eretz Yisrael, eventually settling in 1970 in the Southern development town he made famous, Netivot, and where, since 1984, his tomb has become one of Israel’s most visited pilgrimage sites. A number of collections of stories featuring him have been published, including at least two in English.

*Connection:* Thursday (Jan. 23), 4 Shvat on the Jewish calendar, is the *hilulah*-yahrzeit of Baba Sali.