



Saturday Night
FULL MOON

True Stories
of Kabbala Sages,
Chasidic Masters,
and Other Jewish Heroes

YERACHMIEL TILLES

[Outline for Web-Preview]
Saturday Night, Full Moon:
TRUE STORIES OF KABBALAH SAGES, CHASIDIC MASTERS AND OTHER JEWISH
HEROES

(Items in blue are included in this preview and are hyperlinked)

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FOREWARD

What a happy occasion! The first book of stories from Ascent. The Ascent Center in Safed is a place where thousands of people come annually to find out more about what it means to be Jewish. Perhaps the most successful vehicle to do this is through the stories about tzadikim, mystics, sages, chasidim and men and women of action. The tales of the righteous are not simply historical records of events that happened many years ago, rather each story serves as an example of how we can better live our lives with integrity.

Each expert story teller recounts his stories through his or her own particular lens, with his or her unique style. Stories have been a part of the Ascent tradition for 30 years and Rabbi Tilles, one of Ascent's founders, is our master story teller. After decades of sharing his wealth of knowledge, we bless him in this most successful endeavor and pray that this book is not only well received, but that it is the first of many to come.

Rabbi Shaul Leiter

Director, Ascent of Safed





The stories of Rabbi Tilles are tremendously creative and engaging. Rabbi Tilles enables the reader to enter the life of the story - to experience in a very real and tangible way its feelings, beauty, life and drama. Rabbi Tilles' stories have been on the front page of the Living Jewish weekly publication for years. People will approach me on the street, in shops, and enthusiastically tell me how much they enjoyed a particular story. The Living Jewish readership is particularly diverse yet the stories have the ability to appeal to people from a wide array of backgrounds. Rabbi Tilles has an amazing gift and I am very excited that with this new book more people will have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from his stories.

Aaron Schmidt
Editor, Living Jewish

INTRODUCTION

This is an introduction, so let me introduce myself to those of you who don't know me already.

I have been hearing, reading and telling Jewish-Chasidic stories for forty years--including 35 years here in Tzefat (Safed)--and translating, adapting, editing, compiling and e-mailing one per week for the past sixteen years to many thousands of subscribers and readers, and now many of them have been translated into numerous languages as well.

From my archives, I culled nearly a hundred stories which I feel are book worthy...and reasonably trustworthy: with verifiable details or at least from reliable sources, yet are mostly not so well known that you would have read them in other collections. That is enough for three volumes, as I tend to longer stories. The first and third volumes are general, while the second, due to appear a year after this one, will focus on the cycle of Jewish holidays.

In this first volume, the stories are divided into four clearly distinct time periods, and are in approximate chronological order within each section. I've included in the Table of Contents a few intriguing sentences about each story so that you can easily see what you are getting into. In addition each story is also introduced with some biographical background about the main characters, and also, for those of you who feel the need, suggestions about how to connect each story to specific times in the Jewish year and to certain main themes. This information is also available in the indexes. I make a point of crediting my source/sources for each story. I also cite where each story was first published, even though many of them were since extensively revised for this edition.

I could now launch into a pithy discourse about the significance of Saturday nights in Judaism, with an emphasis on storytelling, but why should I keep you from the stories themselves. Instead, I put it in the back of the book, as an appendix, along with another one about 'Saturday Night' as a traditional Jewish story-telling time.

Also saved for the back is a "Glossary of Confusing Terms" and an Afterword, where I acknowledge the wonderful people that have helped me to get this book out, and all the relatives, good friends, and students who have offered me continued encouragement over the years (decades!) to finally do this.

It is long overdue, so I won't keep you any longer. Enjoy!

Yerachmiel Tilles

In the Mystical City of Tzefat in the Holy Land of Israel
5 Menachem-Av 5773 (July 2013) – 441st yearzeit of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the
"Holy Ari" of Tzefat
<YTilles3@gmail.com>

To receive a new story weekly by email, free, write to: weekly@AscentOfSafed.com
(story)

OUTLINE OF ALL STORIES

Three of the 33 titles are live links ([blue](#)).

Click on them to see the entire story.

Part A. Kabbalists of 16th-17th Century Tzefat and Jerusalem

1 Revealed on a Forehead

*How the extraordinary sixteenth century kabbalist, **Rabbi Yitzchak Luria**, the “**holy Ari**” of **Tzefat**, could tell everything about a person by gazing at his forehead! And how reluctant he was to divulge such gleanings.*

2 In Defense of Elijah

*Did you know that the world-famous kabbalists and rabbinic authorities in 16th century Tzefat all deferred to **Rabbi Moshe Alsheich** as the master of scriptural interpretation? And that he once defended the honor of Elijah the Prophet at great personal expense? And that the two are causally connected?*

3 A Delicious Offering

*Can there possibly be Show-Bread offerings 1500 years after the destruction of the Holy Temple? And the Al-mighty Himself consumes them? The **holy Ari**'s dread pronouncement to another 16th century Tzefat rabbi's fatal words.*

4 The Umbrella Parade

*“You Jews better do something to end this life-threatening draught or I will expel every last one of you from Jerusalem,” said the Turkish ruler to **Rabbi Moshe Galante II**.*

Part B. Chasidic Masters: 1st three generations 1734-1815

5 Happy Birthday!

*How the key to financial salvation for a Jewish man in crushing debt can be simply to listen to his wife's advice. And how the **Baal Shem Tov** was able to help people in mysterious, uncanny ways, even when they didn't believe in his holiness and powers.*

6 Beyond Space

*How can it be that even though he lived in **Mezritch**, he never once went to visit “**the Great Maggid**! And how can it be that one can be south and north at the same time!*

7 Popular Names

*Why did the **Baal Shem Tov** not give them the blessing they so desperately sought? What happens to a childless couple after 120? Why take them to a distant village and quiz the children?*

8 The Forest and the Rose

*A mysterious journey of the mysterious tzadik, **Leib Sarah's**. The discovery of a special soul in an orphan boy goat herder. The liberation of sparks from the holy Temple in the first **Kaliver Rebbe's** song.*

9 To See the Rebbe's Face

The Rebbe screams for extra light in the Study Hall; the chasid of Rabbi Menachem-Mendel of Vitebsk gets lost in the forest; the secret shining house and the master record books.

10 “Enough Already!”

*How the major supporter of **Rebbe Nachum of Chernobyl** turned into his biggest enemy. How his son and successor, **Rebbe Mottel of Chernobyl**, showed no sympathy for his servant suffering terribly from psoriasis. How the two are connected.*

11 Double Treatment

*A great scholar learns that when one is seriously ill, he should 1) listen to his mother; 2) follow completely the advice of both holy brothers: the **Rebbes Elimelech and Zusha**.*

12 Beginner's Luck

*Why did it have to be that the obvious decision **Rabbi Levi Yitzchak** would have to issue in his very first court case in **Berdichev** would make him an object of derision in his new city? A three-generation saga.*

13 Special Delivery

Wherein is revealed the secret that one of the few things better than receiving good news is receiving that good news quickly, and how love becomes transmuted into blessing.

14 Crossroad Puzzle

The puzzling travel decisions of the Seer of Lublin; the Shabbat host who had no food; the secretive boy in the forest.

15 What You See is What You Get

*What advice could the **Apter Rebbe** possibly give to a Jew who with one glance could detect another Jew's most intimate secrets and hidden sins?*

16 The Joker's Shabbat

*What happens when a 24/7 comedian suddenly turns serious. What happens when one's weekday lifestyle is in conflict with one's Shabbat persona. How the **Be'er Mayim Chaim** acquired an unexpected disciple.*

Part C. Chasidic Masters: the 2nd hundred years 1820-1920

17 Forty Days and Forty Nights

*A perplexed Kabbalist; **Rebbe Yisrael of Rhyzhin** and his team of white horses; why Elijah the Prophet never showed up.*

18 Yaakov the Innocent

*Trouble in Heaven because he only forgave two years' rent! The **Tzemek Tzedek** to his Chasidim: "Choose between Gehinom (Purgatory) and reincarnation!"*

19 The Onion Plot

*Can there possibly be Shabbos without 'eiyr-un-tzibl' (mixture of chopped eggs and onions)? Would **Rabbi Naftali of Rophshitz** succeed in finding a solution? How could such a coarse Gentile peasant gain access to the private room of the **Seer of Lublin**?*

20 An All-Purpose Kaddish

A plucky widow in Pressburg, five unmarried orphan daughters, a mysterious benefactor, a fainting bank manager, a frightening dream.

21 The Most Desirable Apples

*How to discern an excellent quality apple. Hands-on help from the **Divrei Chaim of Sanz**.*

22 The Farmer Method

What happened when rabbis in Jerusalem decreed an extra fast day but didn't send word to the country folk, including a farmer who can't keep straight what to pray each day.

23 A Surgical Procedure

*Do you want to know what the **Belzer Rebbe** thought about while on the operating table? And that caused the surgeon's face to turn frost white then beet red.*

24 Silence Speaks

*Why did **Rabbi Ysrael of Vizhnitz** go uninvited into the home of the Reform Jew? Why did he sit here in silence? Why did the bank manager follow the Rebbe home? Who didn't sleep that night?*

25 "Him--Not Him"

*How an old-fashioned yeshiva student amazed the professors in Petersburg, and how the professors surprised the Jewish prodigy, and how the **Rebbe Reshab** was more knowledgeable than all of them.*

Part D. 20th Century: Chasidic Masters and other Jewish Heroes world-wide

26 A Soul's Scream

A thrilling escape from a Concentration Camp. But how could it be that a non-religious Jew with a non-Jewish father had more honed Jewish instinct than the most religious of the other escapees?

27 Silence Speaks

Living in fear in the Warsaw Ghetto. A little Jewish girl braves the streets. Arrest-Salvation-Deal Breaker.

28 A Reserved Chair

*Why did the **Rebbe Rayatz** want him to make the long subway ride from the Bronx to Brooklyn again so soon? And if he likes the synagogue, why care about its caretaker? And how can a synagogue be a butcher shop?*

29 Rotten Seeds

*The unexpected scarcity of seed for the year after the Sabbath of the Land. The unexpected result of the unexpected scarcity. The unexpected judicial decision of **Rabbi Benjamin Mendelson**.*

30 The Tenth Man

*A most remarkable aerogram from **the Lubavitcher Rebbe**. The Moshav, the spring and the factory; the plane, the bus and the taxi. But what's in those sugar cubes?*

31 Don't Be Surprised

*What and why the translator for the **Nadvorna Rebbe of Tzefat** refused to translate. How going against his advice turned out to be complying. Why there was no reason to be surprised.*

32 Slaps of Love

A life-changing tour of Jerusalem. How Rabbi Moshe Weber dealt with a Jewish man who wanted to marry a non-Jewish woman, and how they met again in Pittsburgh.

33 Tied Up

*A dream about the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** and neckties. Do Chasidim wear them? If not, why not? If yes, what kind? The opinion of a fierce Jewish lawyer.*

18 century (2nd half) Eastern Europe

Beginner's Luck

Biographical note for this story:

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1810) is one of the more popular rebbes in chassidic history. He was a close disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the *Maggid of Mezritch*, successor to the *Baal Shem Tov*. He is best known for his love for every Jew and his perpetual intercession before Heaven on their behalf. Many of his teachings are contained in the posthumously published *Kedushat Levi*.

This story can be related to:

Weekly Readings: *Shoftim* – Deut. 16:18-20 (“Appoint yourselves judges...in all your cities....They shall not pervert justice; nor show favoritism.... Justice, justice shall you pursue....”)

Holidays:

Jewish Calendar date: *Tishrei* 25 (a few days after Simchat Torah) - *yahrzeit* of the Berdichever.

Main Themes: court: rabbinical, orphans; **Other Topics:** judges, buying-selling-divine justice

Beginner's Luck

LESS THAN A WEEK after the *tzaddik* Rabbi Levi Yitzchak moved to Berdichev in 5745 (1785 C.E.) to serve as chief rabbi there, three men knocked on his door to ask him to judge a question of Jewish law for them. It would be his very first case as a rabbinical judge in his new position.

A wealthy merchant from the nearby town of Hemelnick had brought several barrels filled with honey to sell at the big fair in Berdichev. Unfortunately, just then, the price of honey dropped sharply. Not wanting to suffer a loss on his investment, he asked an acquaintance to store the honey for him until the price would rise again.

The two were old friends, and the local man was happy to oblige. Knowing each other to be completely honest, they didn't write down anything of their arrangement or call in witnesses.

Time went by. The price of honey remained low, so the barrels remained in their Berdichev cellar, untouched and unnoticed.

More time went by. The man on whose property the honey was stored contracted a fatal disease and passed away. Everything happened so quickly, he never had a chance to explain to his family anything about the state of his affairs.

More time passed. The price of honey finally began to slowly climb. When the increase became significant, the owner of the barrels showed up at his deceased friend's house and claimed his honey from the sons who had inherited and taken over their father's business. They, however, having heard nothing about it from their father, refused to honor the Hemelnicker merchant's claim. After some discussion, they decided to proceed to the *bet-din* (rabbinical court) to present the case before the new rabbi.

RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK listened to the litigants carefully, even though the law in such a case was clear. Of course he would have to rule against the out-of-town merchant. Even if there had been witnesses or a signed document, Torah law stipulates that claims against "orphans" (i.e., heirs who are disadvantaged by the fact that they have no way of knowing what transpired between the deceased and their litigant) cannot be collected without first swearing an oath as to the validity of one's claim; and here there were neither documents nor witnesses.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak hesitated to pronounce his verdict and resolve the case. Two nagging thoughts disturbed him. Why, in his first days in his new position, did the Almighty arrange for his inaugural judgment to be something so straightforward and clear-cut, with no room to maneuver left or right to attempt to arrive at any sort of compromise? Could it be a hint from Heaven that his practice to

always pursue accommodation and compromise was not correct? That only adhering strictly to the letter of the law can be considered the way of truth? The other thought that made him uncomfortable, perhaps even more than the first, was: Why did the Supernal Judge arrange it so that his very first ruling in this town would be considered bizarre by the entire populace? After all, the merchant from Hemelnick was well-known to everyone in town as a scrupulously honest man, as someone who was already wealthy and as such immune to monetary pressure, and as far from theft as east is from west. Furthermore, everyone knew that the merchant and the deceased were old friends who trusted each other explicitly, never resorting to documents or witnesses in their transactions.

Surely, the entire town would be paying attention to the first ruling handed down by their new rabbi. Everyone was sure to wonder: Why should the law of the Torah be so opposite to common sense? "Why me and why now?" thought Rabbi Levi Yitzchak to himself.

He couldn't bring himself to issue the verdict just yet. The contradiction between the natural sense of what was right and the law of the Torah was too great. Even though the claimant and defendants anxiously awaited his decision, he asked them to excuse him for a few more minutes.

TURNING ASIDE to a corner of the room, he poured forth in silent prayer his frustration, beseeching G-d to enlighten him with understanding.

Suddenly, the owner of the honey jumped off his seat as if struck by a bolt of lightning, and exclaimed: "I remember! I remember!" So struck was he by his recollection, and so convinced of its importance and relevance, that he didn't hesitate to interrupt the rabbi, who was standing in the corner, absorbed in his personal prayer.

"Honored Rabbi, please forgive me," he called out excitedly. "While waiting here I had the most amazing realization! An old memory, which I haven't thought about in many years, just flashed through my mind. Rescued from oblivion! I'm talking about something that happened fifty-three years ago, when I was just a lad of 14.

"Our father died suddenly, leaving us a large inheritance in cash and possessions. Included in this was a storage room filled with casks of wine and oil.

"One day, the grandfather of these two young men, may his rest be peaceful, came to our home in Hemelnick. He claimed that the wine and oil were his, that he had stored them with our father for safekeeping. My brothers and I were still quite young then, and had never been involved in any of our father's business affairs. We had no idea what we were supposed to do, but we were reluctant to give up the merchandise just like that.

"We all went to the rabbi of the town and presented our case. He ruled in our favor, explaining that nothing can be taken from the inheritance of orphans without absolute proof and an oath. The wine and oil remained in our possession. After a while, we sold the entire lot for a good price.

"What I just realized is that the money we received for that wine and oil is exactly equal to the value of my honey, which is now in the possession of the sons of my departed friend!"

RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK's face shone with inner happiness. With his apt comparison of the two parallel events fifty plus years apart, the merchant had conceded his own present case. For the same reason that, as an orphan, he was entitled to keep the wine and oil from before, he had to relinquish his claim on these orphans for his honey that day.

Now, all was clear to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. Divine Providence had presented him this case so early in his new tenure, to teach him an important lesson. What seems obvious and true to human eyes is not necessarily the truth, or even fair. Absolute truth resides only with the laws of the Torah. G-d's ledger is always open, and all accounts are forever being reckoned and balanced. Some may take fifty years for resolution, some more, and others less. What is guaranteed is that the Master of the Universe constantly oversees all to be sure that justice is done.



[Source: Translated-adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the Hebrew weekly *Sichat HaShavua*, #593 and #1170. (First published on *chabad.org*, in 5762/2002.)]

20th century (2nd 1/2) Israel

Rotten Seeds

Biographical notes:

Rabbi Benyamin (ben Menachem Mendel) **Mendelson** [?-24 Iyar1979] was born in Plotzk, Poland. He emigrated to Israel after WWII, where he became the founding rabbi of Komemiyut, a religious moshav in the south, which under his guidance and rabbinical leadership became one of the first settlements to observe *all* the biblical and rabbinical agricultural laws which apply to the Holy Land. He is still is considered a foremost authority on the laws of the Sabbatical Year.

This story can be related to:

Weekly Readings: *Bahar* – Levit. Ch. 25 (“The Sabbatical Year”)

Holidays:

Jewish Calendar date: the next Sabbatical year begins Rosh Hashana 5775 (Sept. 2014)

Main Themes: Sabbatical year; **Other Topics:** Israel, moshavs and kibbutzes, farming, Divine supervision

Rotten Seeds

MY NAME IS Dov Weiss and I was one of a group of about thirty religious young men that started *Moshav Komemiyut*, a agricultural settlement in the south of Israel. It was in 1950, after we had completed our army service. I was still a bachelor then. Among the founders was also the well known Torah scholar and rabbinical authority, **Rabbi Benyamin Mendelson**, of blessed memory. He had previously immigrated to Israel from Poland and had served as the Rabbi of Kfar Ata.

At first we lived in tents, in the middle of a barren wilderness. The nearest settlements to ours were several kibbutzim associated with the left-wing *Shomer Hatzair* movement: Gat, Gilon, and Negvah. Several of our members supported themselves by working at Kibbutz Gat, the closest to us, doing different types of manual labor. Others worked in our fields, planting wheat, barley, rye and other grains and legumes. I myself drove a tractor. Our produce, which grew throughout the 15,000 or so *dunam* [nearly 4000 acres] allotted us, we sold to bakeries and factories.

At that time, there were not yet water pipes reaching our *moshav*. We had to content ourselves with what could be grown in dry, rugged fields. Every few days we would make a trip to Kibbutz Negvah, about 20 kilometers distant, to fill large containers with drinking water.

THE SECOND YEAR we were there, 5711 on the Jewish calendar (Fall 1950-Summer 1951) was the *Shmitah* year which comes every seventh year, in which the Torah commands to desist from all agricultural work (see Lev. 25:1-7). We were among the very few settlements in Israel at the time to observe the laws of the Sabbatical year and refrain from working the land. Instead, we concentrated on building, and succeeded that year in completing much of the permanent housing. The *moshav* gradually developed and expanded, and more and more families moved in, as well as a number of young singles. By the end of the year we already numbered around eighty people.

As the Sabbatical year drew to its completion, we prepared to renew our farming activities. For this we required seed to sow crops, but for this purpose we could only use wheat from the sixth year, the year that preceded the *Shmitah*, for the produce of the Seventh Year is forbidden for this type of use. We went around to all the agricultural settlements in the area, near and far, seeking good quality seed from the previous year's harvest, but no one could fulfill our request.

All we were able to find was some old wormy seed that, for reasons that were never made clear to us, was laying around in a storage shed in Kibbutz Gat. No farmer in his right mind anywhere in the world would consider using such poor quality seed to plant with, not if he expected to see any crops from it. The kibbutzniks at Gat all

burst into loud derisive laughter when we revealed that we were actually interested in this infested grain that had been rotting away for a few years in some dark, murky corner.

“If you really want it, you can take all that you like, and for free, with our compliments,” they offered in amusement.

We consulted with Rabbi Mendelson. His response was: “Take it. The One who tells wheat to sprout from good seed can also order it to grow from inferior wormy leftover seed as well.”

In any case, we didn’t have an alternative. So we loaded on a tractor all the old infested seed that the kibbutz had offered to us free of charge and returned to Komemiyut.

The laws of *Shmitah* forbade us to plough and turn over the soil till after *Rosh HaShana*, the beginning of the eighth year, so we didn’t get to actually sow the seed until the next month, *Mar’ cheshvan*. This was two or three months after all the other farmers had already completed their planting.

THAT YEAR, the rains were late in coming. The farmers from all the kibbutz and moshavs gazed upward longingly for the first rain. They began to feel desperate, but the heavens were unresponsive, remaining breathlessly still and blue.

Finally it rained. When? The day after we completed planting our thousand dunam of wheat fields with those wormy seeds, the sky opened up and the rains exploded down to saturate the parched earth.

The following days we were nervous in anticipation, but we turned our attention to strengthening our faith and trust in G-d. Anyway, it did not take a long time for the hand of the Al-mighty to be revealed clearly to all. Those wheat fields that were planted during the Seventh Year, months before the first rain, sprouted only small weak crops. At the same time, our fields, sowed with the old infested seed and long after the appropriate season, were covered with an unusually large and healthy yield of wheat, in comparison to any standard.

THE STORY OF the “miracle at Komemiyut” spread quickly. Farmers from all the agricultural settlements in the South came to see with their own eyes what they could not believe when they heard the rumors about it.

When the farmers from Kibbutz Gat arrived, they pulled a surprise on us. After looking in open-mouthed astonishment at the impressive bountiful quantity of wheat flourishing in our fields, grown from the infested seeds they had provided us, they decided to renege on their generosity. They announced they wanted payment for the tractor load of old rotten wheat they had scornfully given us for free only a short time before.

Even more startling: they said they would file a claim against us at *beit din*, the rabbinical court, and with Rabbi Mendelson himself, no less! Probably they figured that in a secular court such a claim wouldn't have the slightest possible chance of gaining them even a single penny.

Rabbi Mendelson accepted their case seriously, and in the end judged that we should pay them. His explained that the reason they gave it for free was because they thought it worthless for planting, while in truth it really was excellent for that purpose. We were astonished to hear his ruling, but needless to say, we complied.

The whole story became an extraordinary *kiddush Hashem* (glorification of G-d), in the eyes of people throughout the country. Everyone agreed it was a clear fulfillment of G-d's promise in the Torah:

IF YOU SHALL SAY, "What shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold we shall not plant, nor harvest our produce!" I will command my blessing to you...." [Lev. 25:20-21].



[Source: Translated-freely adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the Hebrew weekly *Sichat HaShavua*, #721. (First published on *AscentOfSafed.com*, in 5761/2000.)]

Translator's note:

In addition to being a leader in the observance of the agricultural commandments that apply in the land of Israel, **Komemiyut** is world famous for its high-quality (and tasty!) *shmurah* matzah--round, hand-made matzah prepared under exacting supervision from the time the wheat is harvested through the end of the baking to guard against the minutest moisture.

20th century (2nd half) USA

Tied Up

Biographical notes for this story:

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson מ"נ [11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754 (April 1902 - June 1994 C.E.)], became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law's passing on 10 Shvat 5710 (1950 C.E.). He is widely acknowledged as the greatest Jewish leader of the second half of the 20th century C.E. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

This story can be related to:

Weekly Readings: *Tetzaveh* - Ex. 28:2 ("...garments that are *l'kavod u'l'tiferet* /dignified and beautiful.")

Holidays:

Jewish Calendar date: *Nissan* 11 (4 days before Pesach) - birth date of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; *Tammuz* 3 (two weeks before Fast of the 17th) - *yahrzeit* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Main Themes: dreams, Divine supervision; **Other Topics:** tefilin, mitzvah mobile, neckties, chasid-rebbe

Tied Up

[There are other versions of this story extant, but this one is truer – see Source notes at end – and, amazingly, more wondrous than the distorted versions.]

I REMEMBER it as clearly as if it happened yesterday. It was Tuesday night, after midnight, *Gimmel Adar Rishon* 5749 (March 8, '89) when I had the strangest dream. **The [Lubavitcher] Rebbe** appeared to me. He was smiling, which is a wonderful sign. He addressed me by my first name and said, "Tomorrow you should wear a necktie."

Now, even in a dream that sounded ridiculous. I'm one of those yeshiva guys who goes with shirttails hanging out, and I can't claim that I put on a fresh clean one everyday either. I guess you could call me a bit extreme. And I should put on a necktie. Preposterous!

I thought that in the context of the dream, and even more so when I woke up. When I went around the corner to [the yeshiva at] 770 [Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn] to board the tank, I didn't tell any of the others about the dream. It was too ridiculous, even though the rebbe was in it.

ON FRIDAYS, all the yeshiva students scatter from Lubavitch World Headquarters in Brooklyn on "Tefilin Campaign" to points all over the city in order to encourage fellow Jewish males to put on tefilin with our help. We also distribute Shabbat candles to Jewish women, and in general to do whatever we could to be a helpful Jewish presence. Most traveled by subway. But on Wednesdays I also had a route in Manhattan with some other students and we went there in a "mitzvah-mobile," or Tefilin Tank, as we liked to call the specially designed mobile-home vans that we used. That Wednesday, as we set out, I briefly remembered the dream and again shook my head in disbelief.

We drove to our usual "station" on Sixth Avenue and Forty-Second Street, convenient to both the Garment and Diamond districts. I strolled away from the Tank a bit and began asking men that looked Jewish if they were indeed Jewish and if they wanted to put on tefilin. A few hours passed and I was thinking about taking a break to get something to eat when a man with an attaché case walked up to me and addressed me in Yiddish!

It turned out he was an old Jew from Europe and his attaché case was filled with, of all things, neckties! "Perhaps you want to buy a nice tie," he asked.

"MISHIGAS" ("NONSENSE"), I replied, even though I immediately recalled my dream of the Rebbe the night before. The concept of wearing a tie was still much too

foreign. "What would I do with a tie? I've never worn one in my life. Look at me; do I look like a necktie type of person to you?"

"Still, you should have one," he insisted. "It will go well with your white shirt. And I have a very nice selection."

I shook my head firmly, but at the same time I began to question myself. First the dream and now this? Maybe I really had to consider it.

He continued to urge me and finally I relented. "Okay, I'll look at what you have. But if I am really going to get a tie, which I can't believe, I wouldn't consider anything except what the Rebbe himself wears."

"What's that?" he quickly queried.

"Solid black and 100% pure silk," I told him.

"Oh, I happen to have one like that," he said. "Let me find it for you....Ah, here it is. As you can see it is of very fine quality. You have good taste. For you, only \$80."



I burst into laughter. "You can't be serious! Me, spend \$80 on a necktie? Even if I had so much money I wouldn't do it, but of course I don't have. Not even close."

"So how much do you have?"

I PULLED OUT all the single dollar bills and loose change from my pockets. A vigorous shaking produced another few nickels and dimes. "A bit over five dollars," I said ruefully.

His eyes opened wide. "Well, in that case, perhaps you would like one of my cheaper samples. They are also very nice."

"No," I said firmly. "Like the Rebbe's, or nothing."

He was silent for a minute, a thoughtful look on his face. "Okay, I'll let you have it for five dollars. But you have to put it on, and wear it too."

I gulped. This was not turning out as I had expected. I never imagined he would give it to me for such a small fraction of his "special" price. I thought I was rid of him and now I was stuck. "But I can't put it on now. I don't know how," I tried.

"Don't worry," he rejoined. "I'll tie it for you."

I was afraid he would say that. I gave him the money. He counted it carefully and then placed the tie around my neck and under the collar of my shirt. After some mysterious twisting of the two ends he was finished with the knot. He stepped back and said, "Ah. Wonderful. It looks very nice on you. Very becoming. Now you look like a *mentsch*."

I felt like I was choking. I figured as soon as he went away I would take it off, but it was if he read my mind. He insisted that I leave it on for the day and I reluctantly agreed. He smiled, nodded, turned away, and soon disappeared from sight.

THEN, SOMETHING STRANGE happened. I had resumed asking the Jewish-looking men walking by if they would like to put on tefilin, and after a while I noticed that I was getting a much higher percentage of positive responses than usual.

"Could it really be the tie?" I wondered to myself. "It just doesn't make sense." Even so, it somehow made an impression, and I accepted that I should probably leave the tie on.

Another hour went by and I had already forgotten I was wearing it. Then it was time to split up and make our rounds of the offices in the vicinity, where a number of the Jewish professionals were used to our weekly appearances. Many even looked forward to our visits.

ONE EXCEPTION was a certain law office, which was on my route. Although the non-Jewish lawyers were friendly, and several of the Jewish lawyers were agreeable, the head of the firm never let them take the few minutes to put on tefilin with us. He would complain about "wasting time" and get upset about "whoever let these people in." After a few muttered words to one of his staff he would stalk away, and soon thereafter I would be politely asked to leave. The situation worsened to the point that the reception people were reluctant to buzz me in the front door, and many times they wouldn't. But I kept trying.

This day, however, they let me in immediately. But as soon as I entered, the first one I encountered, before I could even say hello to the receptionist and the secretaries, was the boss man himself. He gave us a hard stare and said "You!" in a loud firm tone, and pointed his finger directly at me. "Come with me. Now!"

"Uh oh," I thought. "It finally happened. This lawyer is going to call the police on me or something." But there was no choice. I followed him into his private room.

He closed the door behind us and locked it. I couldn't help noticing how fancy and prosperous-looking his office was. He tried making some small talk with me in halting Hebrew. He said that he had been to Hebrew University for a year in his college days. He already was aware that my English wasn't that great. I assured him that I understood much better than I could speak.

He stared at me again. Then he spoke. "I want you to help me put on tefilin," he said quietly, averting his eyes.

COULD I BELIEVE what just entered my ears? I must have looked stunned, although it probably wasn't difficult for him to figure out how surprised I was. "I am sure you want to know why today I suddenly agreed to let you put tefilin on me. I'll explain afterwards."

I nodded and quickly took the tefilin out of its pouch. I wrapped him up and coached him in the blessings and recitation of the *Shma Yisrael* prayer, in which tefilin is mentioned twice. When he finished, I removed the tefilin, returned them to their place, and looked at him expectantly.

He sighed. "I'm sure you see me as a very successful person, but the truth is that I am having a difficult time now. I've been having a number of personal problems, and lately I've been feeling that I could use some aid and advice, but I didn't know where to turn.

"Then, yesterday, I happened to see one of the cards you fellows left here with your rabbi's picture on it, and it struck a chord. I wondered if he could possibly help me.

"NOW COMES THE PART that may be difficult for you to believe. Last night I had a dream. I dreamt that I saw the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He smiled and I asked him if he could help me. He answered, 'But I send you a few people every week.' To which I replied, 'What, those slob? They look like a bunch of vagrants! Who can respect them? Why, none of them even wears a tie!'

"The Rebbe smiled at me again and said 'You want a tie? Okay, I'll send someone with a tie!' And I woke up.

"So when I saw you wearing a tie I immediately understood that the dream was real. I knew I should put on tefilin with you so I brought you in here. I hope now that my situation will improve."

After that day, he began putting on tefilin on a daily basis, by himself. I saw that his personal and spiritual situation definitely took an upturn. Even after I returned to Israel I maintained contact with him. We speak on the phone before every holiday, and whenever I get to New York, we see each other. He seems to be as prosperous as ever, or even more so. Just this winter, eighteen years after this story, he came to Brooklyn to visit me.

By the way, I continued to wear the tie whenever I went on Tefilin Campaign and I consistently noted increased success. If you are wondering why the other students didn't follow my lead, it is because they never saw me wearing a tie and I never told

them about it. I would put it on only when there were no other fellows around. To be seen wearing a tie? How embarrassing.



[*Source:* Based on the version told to Yerachmiel Tilles in Hebrew in great detail by Yosef, the main character of the story. (First published on *AscentOfSafed.com*--#500 in the email mailings for the week of 3 Tammuz 5767/2007.)]

Yerachmiel Michael Tilles was born in the Jewish month of Adar (Pisces), 1945, graduated from Harpur College (SUNY Binghamton) in 1965 with a degree in philosophy and awards as president of the senior class and co-captain of the basketball team, served as a Peace Corps volunteer English teacher in Thailand for two years, and then lived there for another three months in a Buddhist monastery.



After some time in India and Greece, and sailing on a freighter to various Mediterranean countries, he returned to the USA. In 1969 he was an overnight guest of J. D. Salinger, and the next year started and managed a macrobiotic restaurant.

In 1971 he went to a synagogue for the first time in almost exactly 13 years since his bar mitzvah, became Chasidic and married at the end of 1973. The young couple moved to Israel in the beginning of 1978, and to Tzefat (Safed) a few months later where they have been ever since.

In Tzefat, Tilles first taught English and was the managing partner of an art gallery. After that he studied Torah full-time for several years. Then he co-founded the Ascent-of-Safed Jewish educational institute and hostel in 1983, translated "A Mother in Israel" (Kehot) in 1984, had sons in 1983 and 1988, launched his weekly email list of Chasidic stories in 1997, originated KabbalaOnline.org in 2001, became an "answering scholar" on AskMoses.com in 2002, produced a small book of stories for sons' weddings in 2006 and 2009, began to have grandchildren in 2007.

Many of Tilles's stories have been included in various print and online publications in six continents. In 2013, he compiled "Saturday Night, Full Moon" the first of a three-volume series of Chasidic stories. Volume 2, "Festivals of the Full Moon," is slated to be published in 2014.

Some Feedback
for the announcement of the soon-to-be-released
“Saturday Night, Full Moon”
and for the content of this preview

A. GENERAL

At Ascent in Tsfat on Saturday night, reluctant to relinquish the Shabbat spirit, everyone gathers for "King David's Table." Sure, it may be that no one is really hungry again, but the main attractions are not the food and hot drink. Instead, following hallowed traditions, all present eagerly attend to the mesmerizing stories told by Ascent co-founder Yerachmiel Tilles, and the songs and tunes serenaded by one group or another of modern Tsfat's astonishingly large number of talented Jewish musicians and vocalists.

Chayim Clorfene (1985)

I just wanted to tell you that your stories that you email each week often move me to tears.

Natalie Shell, Tel Aviv Israel

As always, you've given us another jewel of a story. I just can't get enough of reading these wonderful tales! Please keep them coming!

Posted by: Hippie Yid

I thank you for the stories you send out. It has kept me going in some difficult times.

Hilary Grunthal, South Africa

Great stories and beautifully written. You never cease to amaze me with these tales. Thanks again for sending me these.

Shlomo Elspas

I was moved by the hope and meaning of the Holocaust story you posted and have sent it on to all Unitarian Universalist churches and to the students at the Harvard Divinity School where I lead an ecofeminist lecture program. Thank you again.

Sandra Schonbrun Wayne.

Thank you so much for your masterpieces; the stories you send me are the highlight of my week. I'm sure many have told you this however I personally must tell you that when I read your weekly story I feel a strong shot of faith and trust and joy.

Daniel Y. Kaye, Sydney Australia

I love your stories each week, I use them for my classes and really appreciate them.

Chanie Posner

A wonderful lesson. I never tire of reading of the great sages. It gives me strength to continue my journey here in Malaysia.
Thanks. Theresa

This is such a funny story. G-d has a great sense of humor. While reading this story, I laughed so much, it took out of my heart the sadness I been having for the past three weeks.
Ruth
Mesa, Arizona, USA

Thank you for including me to receive your stories. They are so good and so rich. The ways of a Jewish People are so opposite of the world that it's staggering! Some of these Truths we have never even "thought of" before! But you teach them in such a beautiful way. Your ways are soft and gentle with each other, and I just love that about the Jewish people. You have so much to teach the world.
Annie

The story this week brought tears to my eyes. Thanks for your great work.
Tzvi Meir Cohn (Howard M. Cohn, Patent Attorney)
Executive Director
Baal Shem Tov Foundation

April 2000
Very nice. Now, what about a book?
Rabbi Shaul Leiter, Director - Ascent of Safed

July 2003
My wife and I have been enjoying and learning from your stories for quite a while. I print out them nearly every week and read them at the Shabbos table. A book would be a project well worth pursuing. Please keep in touch about this.
Yehoshua Kunkel, Brooklyn

June 2004
I think it a book of this sort is an excellent idea. I definitely would buy and I know others that would too. What a beautiful gift it would be to give someone! I am eager to see what comes of this venture.
Warren Browning

June 2011
I would like to know if you are going to take all these wonderful stories and make a book out of them.
Asher Levy

B. THE 3 STORIES in the Preview

On story # 29:

What an amazing and inspiring story "*Rotten Seeds*" is. For those of us with little faith, this is such an encouragement.

JASHofAT
Charlotte, USA
ohrhatorahnc.org

On story # 33:

What an awesome story! Kol Hakavod!
Lenny Solomon lenny@shlockrock.com (founder of Shlock Rock)

C. THE OTHER 30 STORIES in SNFM

On story #16:

I really enjoyed this inspiring story, "*The Joker's Shabbat*" ...and I hope I also will be able to feel the pure taste of Shabbos.
Yossi Overlander, London England
chabadlive.com

On story # 17:

The "*Forty Days and Forty Nights*" story was so good! I laughed and laughed! How wonderful that an audio version has been put up on your site!
Rachel

On story#20:

I loved "*The Onion Plot*". It has just the right touch of humor.
Ruth Housman, Marshfield Hills MA

On story #23:

"*A Surgical Procedure*" is a great and touching story.
Jose Martinez, El Paso TX

On story #24:

"*Silence Speaks*" was such an awesome story it gave me goose bumps from its very profundity. Very powerful. Thanks.
Cydank, Melbourne, Australia