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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles [editor@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:editor@ascentofsafed.com)

## ***Unintended***

When he was a youngster, Rebbe Naftali Katz, who would become the head of the Rabbinical Court of Posen, was once playing outdoors with his friends. They were throwing rocks, and Naftali accidentally hit the passenger of a fancy carriage that was nearby. Unfortunately, that passenger was none other than the High Prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The prince's guards arrested the boy for this act of "rebellion." He was brought to court and found guilty. His sentence: public execution.

Naftali was to be escorted by a guard to the empire's capital, where his sentence was to be carried out. It was a difficult journey, and the stormy weather they encountered made travelling almost impossible. At one point they stopped at an inn that was owned by a Jew.

While the guard made himself comfortable in a corner by the stove, young Naftali sat and listened to the innkeeper's sons studying Talmud with their tutor. Naftali knew this tractate by heart, and when the boys and their tutor were stumped by a question in the tractate, Naftali supplied them with the answer.

The innkeeper realized that this was a brilliant boy, and when he found out why Naftali was being kept in custody, he thought of a plan to save the boy's life. The innkeeper offered the guard free food and drinks, thus convincing him to stay at the inn for a few days until the weather cleared up.

After a while the innkeeper approached the guard casually: "What would happen if a prisoner was to die in custody as he was being escorted from one city to another?" he inquired.

Replied the guard, "The escort would simply have to present a document testifying to the prisoner's death, signed by the local authorities."

Using his connections, the innkeeper obtained the required document and handed it to the guard, along with enough money to bribe him. The guard left Naftali with the innkeeper, who took the boy in and raised him as if he was a member of his own family.

Years passed. Naftali had become of marriageable age, as had the innkeeper's daughter. The innkeeper proposed a match between the two young people and they both agreed. The wedding date was set.

One night, some time later, the innkeeper passed by Naftali's room and heard him talking. He peeked through the keyhole and saw Naftali sprawled

on the floor, begging and pleading. "What can I do?" Naftali was saying, "these people saved my life."

The scene repeated itself the next night. The innkeeper could not contain his curiosity, as he knew no one was in Naftali's room, and he asked Naftali for an explanation. "My parents keep appearing to me and telling me that your daughter is not my intended mate."

The innkeeper, realizing that a Heavenly hand was guiding the young man, told him to obey his parents' wishes, and that he bore Naftali no ill will.

Before Naftali left, he requested that the innkeeper give him a written account of the money paid on his behalf to bribe the guard so many years before.

"I have merited to fulfill the commandment of redeeming a hostage, and seek no reimbursement," exclaimed the righteous innkeeper.

Naftali insisted and the innkeeper finally gave him a paper stating the sum paid to the guard. Naftali left and became famous for his exceptional qualities. He married and was appointed the rabbi of the city of Posen.

The innkeeper's daughter married a storekeeper, and settled in a town near Posen. One night, as she was walking home from the store, she was kidnapped by a wealthy landowner and brought back to his estate with obvious intentions. Despite the dangerous situation, the young woman maintained her composure. "I will go along with all your wishes," she told the landowner, "but first you must go to town to purchase some fine liquor for me." The landowner readily agreed.

While he was in town, the clever woman looked for a means of escape from the mansion. The only window she found unbarred was very high up. Realizing the jump was dangerous, she looked for something to cushion her fall. She found the landowner's heavy lambskin overcoat and, wrapping herself in it, offered a prayer and leaped out the window. Miraculously, she was not hurt. She fled home, still wrapped in the coat.

The husband was thankful for his wife's narrow escape. He related the entire incident to the rabbi of Posen.

Rabbi Naftali told the husband, "Your wife is a righteous woman and her level-headedness is admirable. G-d is truly with her. Open the seam of the landowner's coat, and you will find money that rightfully belongs to you and your wife."

A few days later, the landowner came into the husband's store to make a purchase. He complained about "some Jewish woman" who had not only outwitted him, but had managed to steal his overcoat that had a large sum

of money sewn inside it. The husband returned to Rabbi Naftali and told him what the landowner had said.

"This finally concludes a much longer story," Rabbi Naftali replied, and proceeded to tell the husband the whole story of his arrest and ransom. "That landowner," he concluded, "was the guard who had escorted me. The amount of money in the coat is the sum that your father-in-law paid for my release. Wait, I will show you a bill which confirms the figure exactly."

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*Source:* Supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition on //LChaimWeekly.org (#1010), with permission.

*Connection:* Weekly Reading of *Lech Lecha* (Gen 14:10-17 -- Abraham rescues from captivity his nephew and brother-in-law).

*Biographical note* (from: *Rabbi Naftali HaKohen Katz: His Life & Legacy & Ethical Will*)

**Rabbi Naftali HaKohen Katz** [c. 5409 - 5479 (c. 1648-1719)], an important sage and kabbalist, served as Head of the rabbinical court and the yeshiva of Ostroh (Ukraine), Posen (Poland) and Frankfurt-am-Main (Germany), and at a certain time was also appointed as head of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* ('the Council of the Four Lands'). At the end of his life he accepted an invitation to become the chief rabbi of **Safed**, but unfortunately he passed away on the ship to the Holy Land.