

From: <http://www.ascentofsafed.com> **Story #1231**(5781-43) 3 Menachem-Av 5781(July 5,2021)
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The Genuine Royal Signature

A Jewish community far from **Safed** once found itself in dire danger. It had always suffered under the hands of its despotic, anti-Semitic ruler but now he issued a decree throughout his kingdom demanding that the Jews pay a huge sum of money within three months or suffer banishment.

The Jews were devastated. What were they to do? How could they possibly raise such an astronomical amount? "Even if we were to sell all our possessions we could not gather such a sum!" they said to one another in despair. The ruler was hard-hearted and would not agree to compromise at all. From where could come their help?

Following centuries-old tradition, they all gathered in the synagogues - men, women and children - to pray. They blew *shofars*, said *selichot* (Supplication prayers) and wept in the hope that G-d Al-mighty would see their plight and have mercy upon them. They sent a small delegation of dignified messengers to all the Jewish communities world-wide to urge them to pray as well. The messengers traveled day and night without rest, knowing full well the danger that faced them and their people.

Late one Friday afternoon they reached Safed, weary, dusty and travel-worn. Before they made any arrangements for the coming Shabbat, they rushed to the home of the 'holy **Ari**' and told him of the impending calamity threatening their community. For **Rabbi Yitzchak Luria** was famed as a holy man and miracle worker, so they knew that he was the person to whom to turn.

When they reached his home, they found him dressed for Shabbat in a flowing white robe. He looked like a heavenly angel. His disciples already gathered about him, prepared to go out to the fields, as usual, to greet the Shabbat Queen. But a glance at the dusty, nervous travelers showed that they were there on pressing matters. The Ari sat them down and gave them his undivided attention.

Weeping and breathless, they gasped out their tale of woe. The Ari reassured them, saying, "Do not fear. G-d's salvation comes in the blink of an eye. You will be my guests this Shabbat. Go now, and prepare yourselves; forget your worries and get ready to greet the Shabbat Queen, for it is already late. Do not be sad. Shabbat is not the time for anxious prayer. Relax and put your trust in *Him* for you will see, when Shabbat is over, your salvation will already be at hand!"

The messengers quickly readied themselves for the holy day. They spent the Shabbat with the Ari and came to realize that all they had heard about this

holy man was true. Never in their lives had they experienced such an exalted, wonderful holy day of rest.

After *Havdala*, the Ari turned to his guests and invited them to come along with him. He also told several of his disciples to take some strong ropes and come as well.

The Ari went first. Their way was dimly lit by the flickering stars. No one knew where they were going but they followed confidently behind the master. The group proceeded thus for a long time, not uttering a syllable, until the Ari came to a halt. The Ari pointed to a spot in front of him. By squinting, the men could make out a deep pit.

"Unwind the ropes and lower them into the pit," the Ari commanded. The *talmidim* did as he said. When only the ends remained in their hands, the Ari ordered them to pull. They began hauling the ropes back up, but felt, at once, that the ropes had been caught onto something. They heaved and pulled while the Ari stood over them, urging them on. They tugged with all their might.

Slowly, the weight at the end of the rope rose. Finally the object came into view. They had drawn up a magnificent four-poster canopied mahogany bed. And in it lay a figure, still fast asleep. His clothing and his appearance told them that he was a man accustomed to ruling others.

The Ari approached the bed and began shaking the sleeping figure violently, waking him. The man looked all around him, perturbed.

The Ari addressed him angrily, "Are you still stubbornly determined to banish the Jews of your country?"

The man looked back at him arrogantly and said, "Yes!" The messengers recognized him to be their king.

"Very well," said the Ari, "then you must draw up all the water in this pit with this before morning." And he handed him a pail which lacked a bottom.

The king looked at the pail and shuddered. "How can I do that?" he asked. "Where I to live one thousand years, I would not be able to draw up even a single drop of water with that!"

The Ari ignored him. "Get to work, or else..." The king was terrified and begged for mercy.

"How do you expect me to show pity when you yourself are heartless? The decree you passed against the Jews of your land is just as impossible as this task. They do not have the means to raise such a preposterous sum of money! If you do not agree to abolish your decree, this very pit will be your grave!" the Ari thundered at him.

The king trembled uncontrollably. His teeth chattered with fear; he stammered a promise to nullify the decree against the Jews of his land. The Ari then drew out a document, already written out, and read it aloud: "I hereby affirm by my own hand, that I have received the sum imposed upon the Jews of my country and that said sum has been deposited into the royal treasury. Thus, the decree is hereby null and void."

The king nodded and with a shaking hand, signed his name at the bottom of the document and handed it back to the Ari. The Ari rolled it up and gave it to the messengers who stood there, hardly believing their eyes. The Ari turned to his disciples and told them to lower the bed back down into the pit.

The next morning when the king awoke, he found himself in his own bed, in his own bedchamber in the palace. His head ached and his limbs felt heavy. "What a strange dream I had last night," he murmured. "What curious figures peopled my dream. I must have overexerted myself yesterday for I feel as if I have come a great distance. And, oh, how my head whirls!"

The three months' ultimatum drew to a close, but the king had forgotten about his strange dream. Gleefully, he began making plans for spending the money or, as seemed likely, getting rid of the hated Jews.

He smirked, Anyway, he would gain much wealth whether they paid the fine or not. For upon banishing them, he would confiscate all of their property.

He congratulated himself upon his brilliant plan.

On the designated day, he sat in his palace, impatiently awaiting the arrival of the Jewish representatives. He waited, but, in vain; they did not appear. Vexed, he sent his soldiers to the head of the Jewish community, demanding that they appear before sundown, or he would banish them all from his borders.

The messengers who had been sent to Safed went to the king, bowed before him and said, "Your Majesty, may your kingdom flourish, we have already paid up the sum. Here is the document which you, yourself, signed. We do not owe you anything. There is no reason to talk of banishment."

They unfurled the scroll bearing the king's signature and showed it to him. When the king looked at the document, a veil suddenly lifted from his memory.

He relived the events of that terror-filled night. So! It had not been only a nightmare, after all! Who knows what else that mighty rabbi intended to do to him. If the Jew had been powerful enough to transport him in his bed in the middle of the night, he was completely at his mercy! With trembling lips,

the king acknowledged that he had, indeed, received the full sum and that the edict was no longer in effect.

From that time on, he was very wary of the Jews in his kingdom. He even issued a new decree proclaiming that the Jewish people were his protected subjects and whoever harmed them in any way would be severely punished.

It is said that after the king learned the identity of the holy rabbi who had whisked him away in the middle of the night, he always begged the Jews in his land to mention him to the Ari and ask him for a blessing. And in uttering his name, he would shake his head incredulously and murmur, "He cannot be mortal. Surely he is a living angel!"

[Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*The Arizal - The Life and Times of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria*" by Nechamiah Piontac (Mesorah)]

Biographic note:

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria--the Holy Ari [of blessed memory: 5294 - 5 Av 5332 (1534 – July 1572 C.E.)], the leader of the **Tzefat** Kabbalists during the last years of his life, was the most influential Jewish mystic since Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai 1400 years earlier. Much of Chasidic thought is based on the Ari's teachings, as recorded by his main disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital. (For a more detailed biography of the Holy Ari and of Rabbi Vital, go to //ascentofsafed.com or //KabbalaOnline.org.)

Connection: Tuesday night-Wednesday, 5th of the Jewish month of *Menachem-Av* (2021: July 14), is the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria.