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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

Story # 1254 (5782-16) 16 Tevet 5782 (Dec. 20, 2021) FREE [email subscription](#)  
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## **WWII Dream Mission**

They were the days of tension and fear. The Nazis were advancing step after step on their way to fulfill their insane ambition to conquer the whole world. They left death and incomprehensible atrocities behind everywhere they went. Millions of Jews had already been deported to the ovens. Jews in other countries were overcome with anxiety, dreading the possibility that their countries would also be conquered by the Germans.

In the spring of 1943 the "Two Hundred Days of Fear" began in *Eretz Yisrael*. The small Jewish settlement, which was already threatened by the Arabs, now found themselves in an even more ominous situation: the division of the German army in North Africa, under the command of Field Marshal Rommel, were advancing towards the Suez Canal. From there it would be easy to invade Eretz Yisrael.

Opposing the Nazis was the British army, under the command of General Montgomery. Everyone was expecting a big battle that could change the face of the world. In Egypt, the Arabs, under the protection of the German victories, had already begun to abuse the local Jews. In Eretz Yisrael the Arabs were rubbing their hands in excitement, gleefully imagining what they would do to the Jews, their hated enemies. The atmosphere of tension continued to increase like the heat of the desert towards midday.

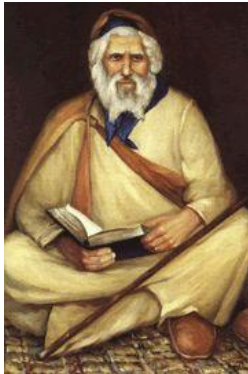
One day Arab rioters entered the Jewish cemetery in the city Damanhur in Egypt. They approached the burial place of the *tzadik* (perfectly righteous Jew) **Rabbi Ya'akov Abuhatzzeira**, around which a prayer hall had been built. Inside stood a glorious Holy Ark, containing a Torah Scroll. The rioters destroyed everything that they could lay their hands on. In their crazed impudence, they took out the Torah Scroll, trampled and burned it, after which they set the whole building on fire.



At that time there lived in Jerusalem a holy Jew, **Rabbi Yitzchak Alpheya**. That same night he had a dream. He beheld a Jew of refined and impressive appearance, dressed in the distinctive garment of a Moroccan Torah scholar. His whole being compelled respect.

Turning to Rabbi Yitzchak he said: "You are accustomed to pray at the grave sites of righteous men, why do you not come to me?"

In his dream Rabbi Yitzchak answered him: "Who are you, honored sir, and where is your resting place?"



"I am Ya'akov Abuhatzzeira."

"And where is your resting place?" repeated Rabbi Yitzchak.

"In Damanhur in Egypt", was the answer, and after a pause he added: "And now, go quickly to my grave; know that the saving of the Jewish People depends on you doing so!"

Rabbi Yitzchak awoke in panic, overcome by the astounding dream. He hurried to the synagogue Beth-El, and there shared the dream with his colleagues. Together they decided to go to the Commander of the British district to get a permit to travel to Egypt.

At first, the guards would not allow them entry to the Commander, but Rabbi Yitzchak insisted and refused to budge. Suddenly a high officer came out of the Commanders' office, and when he saw the Rabbi he asked the guards why he is standing outside. "There is a state of emergency", the guards explained, "People without invitation are not allowed in."

The officer turned around, went into the room of the Commander, and after a moment came out again and invited the Rabbi to enter. The Commander listened attentively to the request of Rabbi Yitzchak, then responded: "You want me to allow a *minyan* (a quorum of ten men) of Jews to go down to Egypt to prostrate yourselves on a grave? And you say that in that merit the Germans will retreat!" asked the astounded Commander. "No civilian can enter Egypt! Only soldiers making their way to the front."

After pausing to reflect a moment, he said: "If you want I will allow just you to join the soldiers. If the border police won't stop you on the way, you will be able to realize your dream."

Rabbi Yitzchak thanked him and returned to his friends, who tried to prevent him from making this trip. "You will be endangering your life!" they warned him, "Anyway, you will stand out in the company of the soldiers and the border police will stop you from going."

Rabbi Yitzchak told them decisively that he was not afraid, and the merit of the *tzadikim* would protect him. The next morning he took his *tallit* and *tefilin* and went to the train station.

While standing on the platform and looking around him, two officers approached him and asked his name. His heart started pounding...will they send him away? To his great surprise the two officers told him to accompany them and took him on the train to Egypt. They sat next to him all the way to

Cairo. There they brought him to the Jewish quarter and quickly disappeared.

Rabbi Yitzchak entered the synagogue "Keter Torah", where he was received by the scholars with great surprise. They couldn't believe that the famous scholar from Jerusalem succeeded in coming to Cairo in these chaotic times. When they heard about the dream, they hurriedly gathered food and arranged a large delegation consisting of tens of Jews to pray together at the burial site of Rabbi Ya'akov Abuhatzeira.

For three consecutive days Rabbi Yitzchak and his companions prayed and studied Torah in the burnt study hall next to the grave of Rabbi Ya'akov. On the third night one of the scholars went outside and to his astonishment discovered that the city of Damanhur was completely lit up, in contradiction to the blackout orders of the military command. Soon it became known that it was in celebration of the good news from the battle field: the British army was victorious and had defeated Rommel's forces.

When Rabbi Yitzchak returned to Jerusalem he hastened to write a beautiful Torah Scroll in gratitude for the success of his mission, which after some time was brought to the study hall at the resting place of Rabbi Ya'akov Abuhatzeira.

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Source: Translated by **C. R. Benami**, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com, from the rendition in "Sichat HaShavua" #1519, based on *Ayelet HaShachar*. Edited and supplemented by R. Yerachmiel Tilles. Photo of Rabbi Alpheya is from **Wikipedia (Hebrew)**; of Rabbi Abuchateira from **worldjewishcongress.org**.

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Ya'akov Abuhatzeira** 1808 - 20 Tevet 1880] served as the chief rabbi of Tafilalet, Morocco, until shortly before his death. He was an accomplished scholar and kabbalist renowned for his piety, who performed many miracles. His many distinguished descendants include his grandson known as "Baba Sali." His written works include Torah commentaries (*Abir Yaakov*) ethical works (most of a kabbalistic nature) and responsa on Jewish law. His tomb in Egypt is an official antiquity site protected by the government of Egypt. On his yahrzeit a ceremony attended by hundreds of devotees is held there, many travelling from Israel whenever permissible

**Rabbi Yitzchak Alpheya** [5638 – 26 Elul 5715 (1878 – Sept.1955)], born in Aleppo, Syria, became a leading rabbinical judge and Kabbalist in Jerusalem. Former Chief Rabbi of Israel, R. Mordechai Eliyahu, testified of him that he was one of the 36 *tzadikim* upon whom the continued existence of the world depends.

*Connection:* Tevet 20 (Friday) is the yahrzeit of R. Yaakov Abuhatzeira.