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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

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## ***The Secret of Lavish Hospitality***

A frequent visitor to the home of **Rabbi Yisrael Abuhateira** once remarked that he was always amazed at the warm hospitality that was the hallmark of **Baba Sali's** home. This man witnessed thousands of people pass through the portals of this holy home and everyone was offered food or drink. This began early in the morning and continued until late at night. Many of the visitors would also be invited for entire meals.

In his heart, he wondered why the Rav treated all his guests with such generosity and honor. It seemed to him such a waste. Even the wealthy did not display such openness.

One evening, Baba Sali asked this frequent visitor to stay overnight. The young man did so, not exactly understanding what the Rav wanted.

The next morning after the morning *Shacharit* prayer, Baba Sali called the man to his side, opened a *Gemara* (Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 67a) and began to read:

A very poor man came to [the great Talmudic sage] Rava for help. Rava first challenged the man, "If you are so poor, why do you always feast on the most exotic foods and the finest wines? Why don't you consider the people who give you charity and who had to pay for all this costly food. Why don't you eat simpler food and not put everyone to so much trouble?"

The poor man heard the admonishments of Rava and said, "If He created the food, and it is available – why should I push away the bounty of the Creator?"

At that very moment, Rava's sister came in. She had not seen her famous brother, the great and holy Rava, for a long time, and had brought him gifts of exotic foods and fine wines.

As soon as Rava saw this, he set the table and served the poor man, saying, "This is a sign from Heaven that you have indeed been decreed to eat such foods, just as you said, so eat and satisfy yourself."

Baba Sali closed the *Gemara* and turned to the young man.

“Know that whatever I have been given,” he said, “is not for me, but for those who happened to be in my house at the time. This house is not *my* house – it is the house of the One Above, and all His people are welcome to come and eat to their heart’s content. And this is why there is so much; it is theirs – not mine!”

The guest, who had never told Baba Sali or anyone else his misgivings, rose to his feet in awe.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from one of the English *Baba Sali* books, which is not in my possession at this moment.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzeira** [*Rosh Hashana* 1889 – **4 Shvat 1984**] known as **Baba Sali**, was born in Tafilalt 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, 4 Shvat on the Jewish calendar, is the 38<sup>th</sup> hilulah-yahrzeit of Baba Sali.