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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

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The Singapore Surprise

Two brothers from the American Wolfson family were hoping to close an important business deal in Singapore involving many tens of millions of dollars. After much negotiation the deal was to be signed with one of the most famous tycoons of Singapore. A man treated by most as a king, a powerful person due to his wealth, and also his character. Even though he was only a business man, many people were afraid of him.

The week the deal was to be signed the brothers arrived several days early in order to finalize the details with their lawyers, a team that worked on the contracts. Towards the end of the week when all was ready, the signing was to take place in the office of this entrepreneur.

When the brothers arrived at the building, the arbitrator was waiting for them by the elevator. He turned to them and said, "Excuse me for bringing this up, but here it is not a good idea to come to this meeting wearing a *kipah* (*yarmulke*, "skull cap"); it might offend certain people. Even though I understand this is a religious thing, I suggest that you take it off."

The brothers answered "We will *not* take off our *kipot!* It is a religious practice. Under no circumstances will we take them off."

"I didn't say to throw away the *kipah*. Just put it in your pocket until after the signing. Then put it on again and wear it as much as you like."

"No way! We won't even consider it."

They argued back and forth. The mediator finally said, "Isn't it a pity that a deal I worked on worth several tens of million dollars will fall through just because of a *kipah*...but what can I do?"

"Well, if we will lose this contract it is from Heaven, but we do not take of our *kipot*."

The mediator had no choice but to go along with their decision. They entered the elevator and arrived at the lavishly appointed hall where the signing was to take place. The furniture was richly upholstered, especially the chair at the head of the table reserved for the magnate.

When he entered the room, all present stood up. He signaled with his hand they should sit, and then he himself sat down at the head of the table. The Wolfson brothers sat on his left side.

Turning in their direction, the magnate addressed them. "Please drink some water. ... And don't forget to say the "*shehakol*" blessing," he added.

Bewildered they looked at him. What is this? To be reminded of saying a blessing before drinking in Singapore by a non-Jewish businessman? How is this possible?

After they said the blessing, the entrepreneur answered "*Amen*." From other interactions during the meeting, they wondered if this man could possibly be a Jew.

He even had asked them in the colloquial of the Jewish people, "Did you *davven* (pray) *shacharit* (the morning prayer) today?"

"Yes."

"In the synagogue?"

"Yes."

"With a *minyan* (quorum of 10 men)?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice that the Rabbi of the synagogue is an Ashkenazi (of European descent) Jew and the congregation is Sepharadi (of Eastern descent)?"

This last remark showed such a knowledge of Jewish internal structure that one of the Wolfson men asked him, "Excuse me sir, but from where do you have such detailed knowledge of Jewish life?"

"I'll tell you. I was born here in Singapore. My parents passed away when I was young, and I was adopted by a Jewish family. My adopted parents were religious people. My adopted father always took me to the synagogue, so I know what *shacharit* is, what *mincha* (afternoon prayer) is, what *ma'ariv* is (evening prayer) is, what the blessings are, etc. I know it all.

"I never converted. I was not asked to and I stayed a gentile. But I'm well versed in all the customs. And I respect Jewish men who are not afraid to be seen as religious, who wear a *kipah* on their heads."

They looked at the mediator and if to say with satisfaction "*Nu*, did the *kipah* cause harm?"

In the end, in the merit of the *kipah*, the magnate smoothed the conclusion of the deal. He proclaimed, "I trust these people, they are true

to their religion and tradition." As a result, the signing was done relatively quickly. The deal went through and was an enormous success.

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*Source:* Transcribed and translated by **C. R. Benami**, long-time editorial assistant for [www.AscentOfSafed.com](http://www.AscentOfSafed.com), from a telling in Hebrew by **Rabbi Yonah Metzger**, former chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Israel, in his WhatsApp group for a weekly video story, which was submitted by Mrs. Reba Cohen. Adapted by **Yerachmiel Tilles**.

***Rabbi Metzger adds:***

What this story shows us is to not be ashamed of our *kipahs*, our *tzitzit* (twisted strands upon four-cornered garments), etc. They will only help you, in daily life and in your business life.

*Connection:*

In both the story and this week's Torah reading of *Pekudei*, mountainous amounts of monetary value are prominent – more than two tons of gold and 7.5 tons of silver in the latter, tens of millions of dollars in the former -- and honesty is being probed and confirmed.