

bs"D From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

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An Irresistible Team

Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe known as “**the Maharash,**” would often go driving in his carriage in the countryside. On his way he always passed through a certain village near Lubavitch, although he never stopped off at the inn there which was owned by a Jew.

On one occasion, though, he asked the driver to stop the carriage outside it, climbed down and entered the inn, but found no one there apart from two small children.

"Where are your father and mother?" he asked them.

"They've gone to take care of different things," they replied. "They'll probably be back soon."

"And where is your *melamed* (tutor)?"

"Our tutor had gone off home," they said, "because now we have the Month of *Elul* vacation."

"Tell me, what do you learn with the tutor?"

"I learn *Chumash* (The Five Books of Moses)," said the older one.

"And I," said his younger brother, "can read *tehilim* (psalms)."

"Very well," said the rebbe, "Then let me test you. Could you bring me a copy of *Tehilim*?"

They at once bought him the Book of Psalms. He opened it, and told them to read aloud, and as they read, he read along with them, word by word, and so on through a number of passages.

Meanwhile, on her way home, their mother was surprised to see the rebbe's carriage standing near the front entrance. She entered the house through the kitchen, from where she could hear the rebbe saying *tehilim* with her children; she did not dare to join them. And as she listened to a sadness in the rebbe's voice, her heart was so moved and her spirit so troubled, that without quite knowing why, she broke into tears.

The rebbe closed the *Tehilim* and was about to leave. But when he reached the door he paused there for several minutes, then returned to the table and said: "Children, let us read some more *tehilim*."

So they opened the book again, and together read several more passages, as before. Finally, saying "*Shalom*," he mounted his carriage and drove back to Lubavitch.

This incident left the lady of the house all astir, and she waited anxiously for her husband to come home so she could tell him about it.

But her husband was not to be seen. He had gone to a neighboring village to collect debts from a few peasants and was due home at some time in the afternoon – but as the hours dragged on and night fell, his wife and children began to fear the worst.

At midnight they were alarmed by a sudden knocking on the shutters. Fearing the worst, the terrified woman ran to open the door. Her husband took one step in, and fell to the floor in a swoon.

When he came to, he told them what had happened.

He had come to the door of one of his creditors in the village, and was asked to accompany the householder to the barn, so that he could measure out a quantity of the newly harvested grain in payment of his debt, according to the custom of those times.

As soon as they were both inside, the peasant closed the door from within, and told the Jew that he intended to kill him. At first the Jew took it to be some kind of a joke, since they had known each other for so long, but he became convinced soon enough that the peasant meant exactly what he said. He fell at his feet and begged for his life.

"When I make up my mind," said the peasant, "I don't change it."

He started hunting around the barn for his ax, but could not find it. Then he recalled that he had left it in the house, but being afraid that the Jew might escape while he went to fetch it, he took the reins that were hanging on a nail, tied him up tightly hand and foot, closed the door somehow with a stick, and headed for the house.

A minute later, the peasant's wife, who had been working in the fields, opened the barn door, and saw the Jew trussed up in ropes. He told her what had happened, and with tears of desperation pleaded with her to release him. This request threw the poor woman into agitated confusion.

"My husband doesn't fool around. He is a violent robber," she said. "If he figures out that it was I that freed you, he'll kill *me*."

The Jew was not to be silenced; he continued to beg and implore her, but she was too afraid. Then he had an idea; he suggested that she quickly free him and then rush back to the fields, Then, when she saw her husband

leaving the house on his way back to the barn, she should come to meet him, as if she were coming from the fields to the barn for the first time.

At last, finding herself unable to harden her heart to resist his appeals and clever idea, she deftly untied his bonds and let him out of the barn. Then quickly returned to the fields as he had suggested.

Also, she advised him in return not to take the main road home, for then her husband, not finding him in the barn, would surely chase after him and kill him on the highway. Rather, he should hide for a few hours among the loosed sheaves in the fields, and find his way home only when night fell.

He did so. Soon after, from his hiding place he heard the murderous peasant, panting and fuming, bolt from the direction of the barn in search of him.

Terror overcame the poor innkeeper. The peasant, ax in hand, was right next to him. Death was a moment away.

But the peasant did not see him through all the grass and sheaves, and after pacing up and down along the highway he saw that his quarry had disappeared, and stomped back to his house in a rage.

Trembling all over, the Jew waited for night to fall. He freed himself noiselessly from the sheaves, and clambered through bushes and brambles, slowly, stealthily, until at midnight he finally reached home.

When his wife told him of the rebbe's visit, they both could now understand what it was all about. During the first reading of *tehilim* he had been saved from being killed in the barn, and during the second reading, from death among the sheaves. The holy words, as recited by the *tzadik* in combination with the two pure innocent children, had overcome the evil plot.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales*, as translated by R. Uri Kaploun from *Sipurei Chasidim* by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin. I also added the final sentence.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn** [of blessed memory: 2 Iyar 5594 - 13 Tishrei 5643 (1834-Sept. 1882 C.E.)], the fourth Lubavitch Rebbe, known as the **Rebbe Maharash**, was the youngest of the seven surviving sons of his predecessor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the *Tsemach Tsedek*.

*Connection:* Tuesday of this week, 2 Iyar, is the birthdate of the Rebbe Maharash.