

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

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Honoring One's Teacher; Honoring One's Student

He stood before his great teacher, known as 'the *Ohr HaChayim*,' Rabbi Chayim Ben-Attar, his heart bursting with emotions. It was now several years that Yinon ben Shlomo [not his real name] had heard Torah lessons from his master's mouth and poured water upon his hands [i.e. served him as his attendant]. Now he had decided that it was time to emigrate from Morocco, settle in the Holy Land, and there to wholeheartedly serve the Creator by dedicating his life completely to Torah study, sincere prayer and *mitzvah* fulfillment.

The Ohr HaChayim was pleased with his beloved student's decision, but because of the strong relationship between them, he requested that his disciple remain with him for another several days before making his final departure. Yinon was happy to agree.

It was well he did. During those few days he received from his master secrets of Torah and words of wisdom the depths of which he had never merited to hear before.

The day of parting soon arrived. Before leaving his teacher's home, the Ohr Hachayim asked of him a personal favor. He handed him a signed note and said, "Please, when you arrive in the Holy Land, go to the remnant [i.e. the Western Wall] of our destroyed glorious Temple and place this note in one of the crevices between its holy stones."

Yinon of course agreed to this special request and stuck the note deep into his pocket.

The wearying journey replete with difficulties lasted several months. Finally, he reached the target of his dreams – the holy Land of Israel. Immediately he headed in the direction of Jerusalem, filled with happiness and gratitude to G-d that he would be privileged to establish his residence there.

While still on the way, he made a firm resolution to himself that here in the holy land he would not try to earn a living through his Torah knowledge; rather, he would engage in physical labor in order to support himself.

Upon arrival in the capital, he set out to acquire a horse and wagon. Spending the last of his meager savings gained him a horse that was already old, and a wagon of similar vintage. Still, possessing them enabled him to eke out a bare living, by transporting the merchandise of businessmen from one place to another. After some time, he managed to establish a group of satisfied regular customers.

Each day, as soon as he earned enough money to cover his basic needs, he would enter a certain *beit midrash* ['House of Study'] of the *Sephardim* [Mediterranean Jewry] in Jerusalem, and spend the remainder of the day engrossed in Torah study. The Jews who studied there regularly barely paid any attention to the visibly poor young man who tucked himself into a corner of the room and looked into one book or another. Yinon himself made every effort possible to not stick out. Anyone who happened to take interest in who he was and where he came from received a mumbled answer – or half-answer—that was not at all clear.

And thus he conducted his quiet modest life for a length of time. But then, one day, tragedy struck. In the midst of pulling its usual heavy load, his loyal aged horse toppled to the ground, dead.

Yinon felt immense sorrow. In a single instant, his ability to support himself had vanished. He certainly had nowhere near the sum required to purchase another horse. What would he do now?

Would he actually have to become dependent on the kindness of others? The thought distressed him greatly.

Yet, even more than worries about his financial situation, what pained him the most was the possible significance of the sudden loss of his horse and his *parnossa*. He was frightened that perhaps he had committed some sin, and because of that he was being punished from Heaven. For the next several days he closed himself in his house, studied and prayed intensely, all the while undergoing several fasts and other manners of affliction in the hope that he would gain atonement for whatever sin he had done, even though he couldn't figure out what it was.

One day, he 'happened' to be searching for something in the pockets of some old garments. In one of them he felt a piece of paper, folded. When he extracted the paper from the depth of pocket, his whole body began to shake. It was the note that his teacher, the Ohr Hachayim, had entrusted to him to place in a crack between the stones of the Western Wall.

He couldn't believe what he had done. Nor could he conceive of any possible excuse or justification for his lapse in fulfilling his revered master's personal request. How could he have totally forgotten his promise? It was incomprehensible. He was convinced that it was this unconscionable act of forgetfulness and failing to honor his great teacher that had brought about his current suffering.

He jumped up and hurried as fast as he could to the *Kotel*, and there inserted the note as deep as he could into a crack between two of the huge stones. After that he felt a bit less disgraced, and that it was permissible for him to return to his usual study location.

When Yinon appeared in the doorway, all eyes turned towards him. Some of the regular attendees rose from their seats and rushed to bid him welcome and shake his hand. They even asked him his name and what he was doing in Jerusalem.

Yinon was so surprised at the attention that he didn't know how to react. The whole lengthy time that he had been sitting and studying in this Beit Midrash, hardly anybody had paid him any attention, and now, all of a sudden, everyone is interested in him?

He asked them, "*Ma nishtana hayom hazeh mikol hayomim?*" – "How does this day differ than all the other days" [parallel to the immortal question at the Passover Seder]? They replied that indeed his face was familiar to them, but now he looked like a completely different person. "A special light is shining on your face. Now we are certain that you are not just a regular someone who wandered in from the marketplace, but a special person who is 'head and shoulders above all' [a biblical expression of superiority -- first used about King Shaul].

At that hour, 'happened' to be sitting in the room the *Chacham Bashi*,¹ [the title of the Chief Rabbi of Sephardic Jewry in each region of the Ottoman Empire]. He was among those who had left his seat to go greet the young Yinon, because he too was impressed by the shine of his face. After the other men had dispersed and returned to their seats, he turned again to Yinon and asked him to explain what had he done to merit this special light.

Yinon, who was as surprised as everyone else about the matter – or even more so! – didn't know what to respond. Finally, he related to him about how he had failed in the mission the holy Ohr Hachayim had given him to deliver a note to the Kotel. Apparently his rectification of finally placing the note had led to his dramatic spiritual change of appearance.

¹ There was also – primarily – a *Chacham Bashi* over the entire Ottoman Empire. At the time of the above story, this rabbi was *Chacham* Abraham ben Ḥayyim Rosanes, who served from 1720–1745.

As soon as he completed his recital, the chief rabbi expressed his interest in seeing with his own eyes the holy handwriting of the Ohr Hachayim. He asked Yinon to guide him to the spot where he had placed the note into the Kotel.

Yinon was reluctant to agree. He feared that he would again be degrading the honor of his teacher. But when the chief rabbi pleaded with him again and again, he finally felt that he had no choice and he agreed to go with him.

Together they descended to the Western Wall. Yinon indicated the location and the chief rabbi inserted his hand and gingerly removed the note. Just a few words were written on it: *“I request that You come to the aid of my holy student at the time of his dire need.”*

The very next day, HaRav Yinon ben Shlomo was crowned as an official Halachic [Jewish Law] authority and Rabbinical Court judge for the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings.

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*Source:* Translated and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from “*Sichat HaChag*” (Shavuot 5719).

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Chayim (ben Moshe) Ibn-Attar**, popularly referred to as ‘the ***Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh***’ [of blessed memory: 5456 - 15 Tammuz 5503 (1696 - July 1743)], known as the “***Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh***” after his acclaimed commentary on the “Five Books of Moses,” was one of the most prominent rabbis in Morocco. In 1733 he decided to leave his native country and settle in the Holy Land. En route he was detained in Livorno by wealthy members of the Jewish community who established a yeshiva for him. It is well-known that the *Baal Shem Tov*, founder of the Chasidic movement, had the utmost esteem for the *Ohr HaChayim*. His resting place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is the occasion for a large annual pilgrimage on his *yahrzeit*.

*Connection:* This Thursday, 15 Tammuz, is the *yahrzeit-hilula* of the *Ohr HaChayim*