

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

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THE MIRACULOUS MUGGING!

In the second quarter of the 20th century, there lived in New York City a poor Jewish widow. Her husband, who had been a Rabbi, suddenly passed away just a year or so after the birth of their first son, Moshe, in 1921, leaving her alone to provide.

She managed to make ends meet by cleaning houses and somehow scraped together enough each week to get along and even to put a bit of money aside. But then tragedy struck.

Moshe became ill and the standard treatments that their family doctor prescribed didn't help. He referred them to the hospital where, after extensive testing, they also admitted that they couldn't diagnose the disease but it looked bad.

She had spent her meager savings but she certainly did not give up. After frantic searching and inquiring someone mentioned the name of a great specialist. Sparing no time, she got his phone number, called his office, requested that he make a house call and assured him that money was not an obstacle.

When the professor arrived at her run-down apartment building he began having serious doubts, and when he knocked on her door, entered and saw that poverty was screaming from every corner he had an urge to just turn around and go home. But something told him to accept it with equanimity.

He examined the boy, went to the sink to wash his hands, turned to her and said. "Your son has a rare disease. I know what it is, I know what the cure is and I know where you can get the medicine. It's in a large drug store about three miles from here. They are the only ones that can make it. But there's a problem. It will be very expensive; a few thousand dollars.¹ I'm willing to forget about my payment, but do you have money to pay for the medicine? They won't give it to you for free, that's for sure. What are you going to do?"

The woman, tears of gratitude filling her eyes, thanked the doctor profusely and firmly stated that as far as the money goes she was sure that G-d would help.

He packed up his instruments, wrote out the prescription, she thanked him again and again and as soon as he left she ran outside, caught a taxi to the

¹ An enormous sum. A dollar in 2020 was equivalent to over \$15 in 2020!

pharmacy, approached the counter and handed the prescription to the pharmacist.

The pharmacist took the prescription and as he examined it his brow raised in wonder and he glanced at her several times. Then he leaned forward, narrowed his eyes and said to her skeptically, "This will take a while and will cost a few thousand dollars. Have you got the money?"

She stood straight, stared him back in the eyes and replied that she was prepared to promise that she would come in and clean the drugstore every evening after she finished work until she covered the bill. She was willing to even to put the agreement in writing and sign it, but she needed the medicine to save her son's life.

The pharmacist relaxed a bit. He smiled and replied that, in fact, she was in good luck because their cleaning woman just quit and they needed a replacement. But it would only be for two hours a day and at that rate it would take...he took out a pencil and paper, began calculating, and when he finished he looked up and announced: one year and eight months to pay off the debt!

She immediately agreed, signed a paper obligating herself to work until she had paid for the cure, and in one hour was on her way out the door with several bottles of medicine and instructions how to use them in her purse.

However, when she looked in her pocket book she realized that she had spent her last of her money on the taxi and now didn't even have a coin for bus fare. So she began walking home, striding along as quickly as possible.

It was cold outside but she was sweating. It was over an hour's walk to her house and by the time she had walked one hour it was already dark. There was no one around, she was alone, it was getting really cold and she was passing through a bad neighborhood. She put her purse under her coat so as not to draw unwanted attention, quickened her gait, said a few prayers, looked down at the pavement in front of her and walked as fast as possible, careful not to look up.

But it didn't help.

Suddenly she felt someone grab her by the shoulders from the front, push her against a wall and say almost sarcastically, "Whatchu got there under that coat?"

She looked up to see a massive man who had wrested her purse from her and was opening it. A freezing wind was blowing. No one was around.

"Please" she pleaded. "I have no money. All I have is medicine for my sick son, he's dying. Please...please let me go!" But that didn't work either.

"Medicine!?" he smiled! "Let's see. Medicine huh? Maybe it's something good!" He opened one of the bottles, took a big smell and waited for something to happen.

"Ich! Ugh! It's terrible! It smells like puke!" he yelled as he opened the rest and poured their contents all over her head and coat. Then he pushed her again against the wall and slapped her face hard, knocking her down to the pavement. Spitting and cursing, he threw the empty bottles and her empty purse at her and ran off.

Whimpering silently from the trauma, she determinedly managed to stand up without hesitating. After brushing herself off, she picked up the bottles and returned them to her purse, buttoned up her coat and began walking to the drug store as fast as possible, even though she was limping a bit, while praying it was still open.

An hour later she arrived and with tears thanked G-d that it indeed was still open. She again entered and approached the counter. When the pharmacist appeared from the back room and saw her he gasped, "My G-d, what happened to you!? And what is that unpleasant smell? Your face is all swollen? Please, sit down. I'll get you some water. What exactly is that smell?!"

She refused the water, said she was all right and explained quickly. "I got beaten and robbed. Thank G-d I'm alive. But it's not really important. The main thing is that right now I no longer have the medicine and of course I still need the medicine. Please, give me the paper I signed and I'll sign for another year eight months. Please, I must have that medicine for my son."

The pharmacist stared at her and began to tremble. "Tell me," he asked plaintively, in a voice emanating fear, "that smell and that stain on your coat...that's the medicine?"

"Yes." She answered as she took the empty bottle from her purse and handed it to him. "But it's not important what happened to me. I need...."

The pharmacist cut her short, took the bottle, read the label, put his hand over his face and almost fell over backwards as he repeated to himself "No! Oh no! I don't believe it! It can't be! No!"

As he removed his hand and looked again at the bottle, his eyes filled with tears. He gazed at her as though she was a ghost and kept repeating "I don't believe it. I just can't believe it!"

After a few minutes he came to himself and said almost in a whisper, "Listen! I made a mistake. A terrible mistake! I gave you the wrong medicine! If your son would have taken what I gave you it would have killed him. Do you understand? I would have killed him! He'd be dead."

“It's crazy,” he added, after a few moments of intense thought, “but do you realize what a miracle it was that that you got robbed!”

He wiped his brow, leaned forward, lowered his voice and said, "Listen, lady, please don't tell anyone about this. No one! If this became known I could lose my license. Look, I'll give you the right medicine, and for free. Just wait here." He disappeared into the back room and in a minute returned with several bottles identical to the first.

"Here. No charge. And here, watch this!" He took the contract she signed and ripped it up. Then he took out his wallet and gave her a bill, "Here is a hundred dollars. This time, take a cab home; don't walk! And the rest, spend it on your son."

He also provided her some gauze pads and ointments and put them in a bag. "Here is something for that swelling on your face. But please, you must not tell anyone. Not until I retire, which will be in ten years or so. Okay? If you feel that you deserve more money, just tell me. I'll be delighted to give you."

She shook her head no and even tried to give the hundred dollars back, but he insisted she take it for her son. Next, he escorted her outside and hailed a cab for her, which he promptly paid for in advance.

The medicine worked. Her son not only lived, he grew to be a rabbi of great stature; **Rabbi Moshe Sherer**, who became the chairman of Agudat Yisroel branch in the U.S.A, an eventually of the entire international organization, until his death in 1998. He used to tell this story every year on the anniversary of his mother's passing.

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*Source:* Excerpted and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an emailing of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton in April 2020, who heard it from Rabbi Chayim Dayan in Kfar Chabad.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Moshe Sherer** [5681 – 23 Sivan 5758 (1921 - May 1998)] was co-Chairman of the Agudath Israel World Organization from 1980, and the Chairman of Agudath Israel of America from the 1960s, until his death in 1998 of leukemia. He utilized his prestigious positions, to advocate the interests and articulate the views of Orthodox Jewry for better than half-a-century. (from <https://www.jewage.org/>)

*Connection:* This is the first full week of the Jewish month of IYAR, known as the “Month of Healing.” [In Hebrew, the letters of Iyar are an acronym for “I, G-d, am your doctor.”]