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Story #1343 (5783-50) 18 Elul 5783 (Sept.4, 2023)

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THE SINGLE UNATONABLE SIN

He was a wealthy and respected, happily married man, whose world collapsed after his wife gave birth to twins that were paralyzed from head to toe. They grew up unable to speak, confined to wheelchairs, and needed to be fed, clothed, cleaned, and changed. He couldn't take the suffering any longer and took to drinking as an escape route.

His friends brought the matter to the attention of Rabbi Yosef Netanyan, asking him to intervene. R. Netanyan promptly went to visit **HaRav Ben-Tzion Abba-Shaul** and told him the man's story. The Rav immediately said, "Bring him to me!"

Netanyan went and told the man about the greatness of HaRav Ben Tzion, but he paid no attention. He said, "What could he possibly do for me?"

"The key to salvation is in his hands," Netanyan replied. "They heed his words in Heaven!"

After much persuasion he finally agreed. They went together to the Rav, who seemed to be waiting for their arrival. The Rav sat the man to his left and Netanyan in front of him. The Rav then turned to the man with affection and said, "Tell me what the problem is."

Years of suffering erupted in bitter tears. "I'm healthy, I have money, I have everything. Yet, my life is miserable!" He exclaimed. He then explained to the Rav about the two children and how he's unable to continue living and had even thought about committing suicide.

He cried, "Either the Rav performs a miracle that at least one of them will be healed, or he pray for me that I die!" He then sobbed uncontrollably.

Netanyan thought that HaRav Ben Tzion would comfort him, but to his surprise, the Rav's great wisdom led him to rebuke the man harshly.

"You should be ashamed of yourself! You should know that all sins can be atoned for, except suicide.



That sin completely removes one from *Olam HaBah* (the next world [of everlasting life]).

"Do you know why? Because this world is the world of tests, like a war zone. A soldier is sent into battle. If he gives his life, fights fiercely, and wins, he will receive recognition and a medal of honor, and will be promoted to a higher rank. But if he is negligent and shows resentment, he will be condemned and even punished. But for one act, there is absolutely no forgiveness, desertion. Despair of life is like desertion!"

No one ever spoke to him like that. He stopped crying and listened intently. HaRav Ben Tzion then told him about an incident that happened in Izmir, Turkey, about three hundred years ago.

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Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen, the *Shevet Mussar*, was invited to a *seudat mitzvah*, and when he arrived, the hosts' wife yelled at him to leave.

"What injustice did you find in me?" he wondered.

"Nothing, but it is forbidden for a *rasha* (evil person) to look at the face of a *tzadik* (righteous person). I can't stand your *kedusha* (holiness)!"

Perplexed, Rabbi Eliyahu asked, "What makes you think that you are a *rasha*?"

"Not me," she answered, "rather the spirit possessing me."

When the Rabbi heard this, he began speaking with the spirit, asking him why he received this punishment.

The spirit explained "I was born in Germany to a Torah-observant family. In my teens, I connected with bad friends, and they enticed me to commit the most severe sins. After a while I started to feel remorse and wanted to return to my community.

"The community didn't agree to take me back. Rather they denounced and expelled me. The friends I left also mocked me for trying to go back. I wandered around tormented. My soul had been beaten from all sides, it was too hard for me, and I couldn't take it anymore. Then, one clear day, I committed suicide.

"My soul ascended to heaven and there they didn't even agree to look at me, because suicide had no atonement. They cast me back to this

world to wander for eternity, persecuted by ruthless *malachei chabala* (angels of destruction) full of wrath."

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen promised that he would pray and dedicate a certain amount of his Torah study for him, and in that merit he would be permitted into *Gehinom* (Purgatory), to be cleansed.

Upon hearing this, the spirit agreed to leave the woman.

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After the Rav finished telling the story the man murmured, "But poor guy, he couldn't stand life anymore."

HaRav Ben Tzion was determined, "There is a rule in Torah that says that no one can receive a test that they are unable to withstand, just as a soldier isn't sent into a lost battle. The Talmud (Ketubot 33b) brings proof for this by telling us that Chananya, Mishael and Azariah sacrificed themselves and didn't bow down to Nebuchadnezar's statue, thereby sanctifying G-d's name in public.

"The Talmud then reveals that if they had been tortured they wouldn't have stood the agony and would have bowed down to the statue (because it wasn't actual idolatry, rather a monument in honor of the king, as the *Tosafot* commentary explains there).

"How did the Sages know that they wouldn't have withstood the torture? The answer is that one doesn't receive a test one cannot withstand. They were tested by being thrown into a fiery furnace and they endured it. If they could have withstood a more difficult test such as torture, they would have been tested with that instead.

"Listen carefully. That young man was tested with terrible depression and stress, and he was required to withstand it. You are being tested from heaven with an enormous test, but you're required to withstand it and therefore able to do so. Don't desert the battle! Getting drunk is also a kind of desertion."

The man had a gloomy look on his face. He asked, "But why? Why? Why were these souls sent into the world if they're bound like cocoons? and why were we chosen to be their parents?"

HaRav Ben Tzion's face lit up. "You want to know why? You want to understand? Good! Who these souls are I won't reveal to you. But why they chose you I will tell you. In your previous *gilgul* (reincarnation) you..."

As the Rav began speaking, the man became pale. Rabbi Netanyan felt that the matter was personal, a secret from the world of souls. He called to the Rav and said "*Kevod HaRav*, maybe I should step out?"

The man stared at me. HaRav Ben Tzion muttered, " That's it. That's enough!"

"No! Please HaRav, tell me," begged the man.

The Rav replied, "It is from Heaven that we were interrupted. It is a sign that I shouldn't continue. But know that everything is justified. Everything is precisely measured. Everything is for the best.

"But this I can say: this is the height of your suffering. You won't suffer from health problems or from earning a living, and the rest of your children will be healthy and will bring you utter satisfaction and joy!"

The father left HaRav Ben Tzion's home invigorated, his face glowing and his soul strengthened, and now able to accept the judgment of heaven wholeheartedly and with joy. And indeed, they subsequently had healthy children and today are a happy and joyous family.

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the report of **Rabbi Yosef Netanyan** in the book, *Rabbeinu HaOhr LeTzion*, and translated to English in "*MESILLOT: Pathways to the Soul*" (#27), the weekly publication of **Rabbi Yisrael Abergel**.

*Connection:* see Deut 29:14.

*Biographic notes:*

**Rabbi Ben-Tzion Abba-Shaul** [29 Tammuz 1924 – 19 Tammuz 1998], born in Jerusalem, became a leading Sephardic rabbi, a judge on the Supreme Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem, and an eminent authority on Jewish medical laws. For the last 15 years of his life, he served as the head of the prestigious yeshiva, Porat Yosef. In addition, he penned thousands of *halakhic responsa*, some of which are printed in his book, *She'eilot U'Teshuvot Ohr LeZion*. He was also well-versed in *kabbalah*, and in the 1960s he founded the *Emet VeShalom* Yeshiva for learning kabbalah at night. [*Mostly from Wiki*]

**Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen of Izmir, Turkey** [1650 - 1 Adar B 1729], is best known as the author of *Shevet Mussar*, a major work of Torah ethics and morality. He also wrote *Midrash Talpiot*. In the historical work, *Shem HaGedolim*, it states, "Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir wrote almost 40 books and turned many away from sin with his public lectures."

*Compiler's note:* The **video** story and **audio** story this [Saturday Night](#) are both for *Selichot*.