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AN OUTRAGEOUS MARRIAGE MADE IN TSFAT

During his stay in Tsfat (Safed) in 5683 (1923), my father ['**Baba Sali**'] made discreet inquiries about which *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars) were in need of receiving *tzedakah* (charity).

The Rabbis of Tsfat informed him that **R. Tzion Cohen**, a distinguished and elderly *talmid chacham*, was physically disabled and in desperate need of charity. His wife and all his children perished in the terrible famines of the First World War, leaving him to suffer his pain in utter solitude. Being that he was partially paralyzed, even the most minor chore was an excruciating task for the sick and elderly man.

My father visited Rabbi Tzion in his tiny, stale, unlit room. It measured no more than four *amot* by four *amot* [2 meters x 2 meters]. He found the elderly man lying helplessly in his bed, unable to move. Were it not for the generosity of the men and women who came regularly to feed him, his situation would have been much worse. My father gave him a substantial sum of money from his charity fund and then he prepared to bless him with a speedy recovery, intending to take his leave immediately afterwards.

But the sick man suddenly turned to my father and pleaded with him: "Rebbe! Give me a *perfect* blessing!"

My father, surprised by such a request, asked him, "What blessing do you want me to give you, Grandfather?"

He answered, "Give me a blessing that I should merit to heal from my illness that I should marry and bear children, on order that I may leave offspring in my memory."

My father was astounded by the sick man's request. How could he pray to G-d that an invalid man in his seventies should marry and bear children? This request was beyond the ways of nature.

R. Tzion discerned my father's astonishment, and with confidence he encouraged him. "Rebbe, I have absolute faith that if you will bless me as I have requested of you, my wishes will be fulfilled."

Still, my father was uncertain. "Do you really have total faith?"

"Yes!" the sick man answered. "Otherwise I would not ask this of you."

At last, his perfect faith succeeded in inducing my father to give him the blessing he so strongly requested.

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Ten years later, in the year 5693 (1932), my father once again visited *Eretz Yisrael*. When he arrived in Tsfat, he suddenly remembered the sickly Rabbi Tzion Cohen and the blessing he had given him.

When he made inquiries about R. Tzion's state, one of the prominent rabbis of Tsfat led him to a fine house. There, to my father's amazement, was none other than R. Tzion, sitting on the porch on an elegant couch, dressed in the finest clothes. At his feet played two youngsters.

After having refreshments brought in, R. Tzion invited my mystified father to listen to his miraculous tale.

"You see, Your Holiness, a wealthy widow from South America arrived in Tzfatz with her seventeen-year-old daughter. Upon asking the rabbis of Tzfatz to whom she should give charity, she was directed to my poor home.

"When she saw my awful state, this saintly woman became extremely distressed, and she took pity on me. She ordered her servants to remove all the furniture from my tiny room at once, to paint the walls, and to purchase a new bed and linen. As well as covering all the costs, she personally supervised that her orders were executed precisely according to instructions.

'But this was not the end of the miracle.

'The holy woman decided not to return to South America, but instead, to remain at my side and to take care of me. An interpreter informed me of her decision, and I protested strongly.

"G-d forbid! I will not remain in seclusion with a woman and thereby violate the prohibition of *yichud* ('aloneness': remaining in seclusion with any woman other than one's wife [or mother or grandmother or sister]).

"The interpreter relayed my refusal to her, but the determined woman asked, 'What can I do so that I will be permitted to stay by your side?'

"The bewildered interpreter answered, 'The only way is for Madam to marry R. Tzion according to Jewish law.'

"And can Your Holiness believe G-d's ways in the world – she consented to marry me immediately!

"I again protested vehemently, however, much to the surprise of the local rabbis.

"They threatened me, stating, 'If you refuse to marry this woman, we will announce a prohibition against helping you any further.'

"So, when I saw that there was absolutely no other choice, I went even further and made what must have seemed to be quite an outrageous request: 'If you really want to help me, then ask her to allow me to marry her daughter!'

"Well, when the widow was told of my latest request, she again startled us all and answered, 'The decision is not mine to make. My daughter must decide for herself.'

"At that point, the daughter was told the entire conversation as well as about Rabbi Tzion Cohen's firm belief that he would father children, and asked whether she would agree to marry an old, sick man. Of course we all assumed the bizarre tale had reached its conclusion, but her answer also astonished everyone.

"I will do whatever my mother says. If my mother agrees, then I am 100% willing to marry him. It will be a great privilege and a merit to be married to such an important Torah sage and to bear the children that he so absolutely has faith will be born.'

"And so, my dear Savior, this apartment was rented immediately, the best medical care was made available to me, and thank G-d, I have recovered from my illness. But again, that is not the end of the miracles--your blessing came to be; I have borne two sons!'

"And you know, Your Holiness, all of these blessings came to me as a consequence of my devotion to the study of Torah and my fear of Heaven, as it says, 'G-d desires the prayer of the righteous, He hears their supplications, and fulfills their words.'"

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*Source:* Freely adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*Our Master, Our Teacher. The holy Baba Sali*" by [his son,] R. Baruch Abuhatzera, (I don't have the book in my possession, so I can't report to you the identity of the translator from the original Hebrew volume.)

*Connection:* This Saturday night, the 4th of the Jewish month of Shvat, begins the 40th yearzeit of Baba Sali.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzera** [Rosh Hashana 1889 – 4 Shvat 1984] known as **Baba Sali**, was born in Tafilalet Morocco, to one of Jewry's most illustrious families. From a young age he was renowned as a sage, miracle maker and master kabbalist. In 1964 he moved to Eretz Yisrael, eventually settling in 1970 in the Southern development town he made famous, Netivot, and where, since 1984, his tomb has become one of

Israel's most visited pilgrimage sites. A number of collections of stories featuring him have been published, including at least two in English.