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## THE CONFLICTED TAILOR

Meshulam was a simple tailor. He lived in the Polish city of Apta. His income was meager, he barely made enough money to bring home bread for his family. Their life was one of constant frugality and lack.

His poor economic situation disturbed him greatly. He looked for ways to increase his income but never succeeded, always ending up bitterly disappointed.

When he couldn't stand his desperate situation any longer, he went to the *tzadik* (righteous person) who lived in his city, the "**Ohev Yisrael**" of Apta.

The rebbe looked at him with pity, blessed him warmly and spoke words of comfort and encouragement.

The blessings and encouragement somewhat bolstered Meshulam's state of mind, but when the days went by and there was no improvement in this situation, he felt he needed an additional dose of reassurance.

Again, the rebbe received him warmly. Also this time he didn't stint his words of comfort and support. As a result, Meshulam left feeling uplifted.

The visits to the rebbe became a regular occasion. Meshulam held on to the encouragement of the rebbe as a drowning man would grab onto a straw.

He would show up often at the *tzadik's* home, bow his head in submission and he again began to feel full of hope that the Creator would improve his situation, like it says: "G-d's salvation can come in the blink of an eye."

But then, one day when he entered the rebbe's house, it seemed as if another Meshulam had arrived. It wasn't the same depressed and despairing one. His energetic step and the smile on his face bore witness that something had changed.

Indeed, Meshulam was in a great mood. He told the rebbe that the neighboring village was sold to another landowner, and as a result an

opportunity for a better income opened up for Meshulam. The new owner requested of Meshulam to supply clothes for his entire family!

As the orders started coming in, so did the money. With G-d's help he saw nice profits from his work.

"Like I shared my troubles with the rebbe, I wanted to share the success that, thanks to G-d, came my way," he said joyfully.

Some time went by before Meshulam again visited the rebbe. "There are rumors that the new landowner is actually a Jew who converted," he told the rebbe.

The Ohev Yisrael's expression became grave. "Check this thoroughly and let me know what you find," he told Meshulam.

After painstaking research, it was ascertained that it was indeed the case. He was a Jew who had left the heritage of his parents and ancestors, and even converted in order to mix with the gentiles in the surroundings. In this he succeeded; he was extremely successful in business, to the extent that he was able to buy an estate close to Apta.

Meshulam told the Apter rebbe everything he had discovered. The rebbe listed to him intently. Then he gave him a strict instruction: "Be careful not to sew him a garment containing *shatnez*."<sup>1</sup>

The tailor took this instruction to heart.

It wasn't long before the land owner sent him material for a new garment. Meshulam was in a quandary. He remembered clearly what the rebbe had told him, but his fear of losing his income gave him no rest. He couldn't make up his mind what to do, so in the meantime he put the material aside and didn't start sewing the garment.

The expensive material was lying there useless while Meshulam thought what to do.

After several days the land owner came to see how the work was progressing. Meshulam tried to avoid answering. The man became angry, "I understand that you didn't advance any with your work. You should have told me before and not let me wait for nothing!" he reproached him.

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<sup>1</sup> A mixture of wool and linen

The tailor tried to justify himself by telling him that he was not to blame, that it was the Apter rebbe who had told him not to sew a garment for a Jew that contained shatnez.

The land owner grew furious. He stormed out of the house of the tailor and made his way to the house of the Ohev Yisrael to demand to know how the rebbe dared to interfere with his affairs. How dare he tell Meshulam the tailor not to sew a garment the way he ordered him to.

The rebbe looked at him pleasantly, until he was finished spilling his complaints. Then he responded. "Our Sages said 'A Jew, even if he sins, is a Jew'. Theoretically what is so special about that saying, can one think differently? Is it written anywhere that an apostate Jew is not a Jew anymore?"

"What the Sages wanted to highlight was the virtue of the Jewish people. Their words are directed at someone like you, a Jew who left his religion and converted to another one. You want to cut off all connection to your G-d and your people, you're convinced you will succeed. Our Sages explain that you are mistaken. Your being a Jew cannot be changed. It is impossible to lose or release yourself from it. Your Jewishness is your essence and you cannot change your essence.

"Now maybe you understand why I told Meshulem not to sew you a garment containing shatnez. If our Sages define you as Jew, in that case you are obligated to keep all the *mitzvot*, among them the mitzvah of not wearing shatnez. How can I allow a Jewish tailor to cause you to fail and commit the sin of shatnez?!"

When the rebbe finished speaking the expression of the landowner was unreadable. But the Apter's words must have affected him deeply. Without a word he left the rebbe's house. Not many days later he returned to the rebbe, this time to ask him to show him the way back.

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*Source:* Enhanced by Yerachmiel Tilles from the translation by Mrs. C.R. Benami, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com, from the popular Hebrew weekly, *Sichat HaShavua* #1755.

*Why this Week?* This week's Torah reading contains many commandments. One striking prohibition is to not wear a garment with a wool and linen mixture.

*Biographic note:*

**Rabbi Avraham-Yehoshua Herschel** (1755- 5 Nissan 1825) the **Apter Rebbe**, was a main disciple of the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhinsk. He is also often referred to as "**the Ohev Yisrael**," both after the title of the famous book of his teachings, and also because its meaning ("Lover of Jews") fits him so aptly.