

The Jewish Weekly

In Loving memory of
Mendy Klein
 ר' מנחם משה ז"ל
 בן ר' נפתלי הירצקא
 נפטר ל"ג בעומר
 י"ח אייר תשע"ח
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

The Holy Thief

by Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

In 1929 there died in Jerusalem, at the age of ninety, a chassid by the name of Reb Raphael Wiltz (or Wolf) of Skoli, Galicia. He left a manuscript of memoirs in which he records that in 1881 he visited Shpole, in Russia. While there, he questioned a number of aged local residents about a curious tombstone, next to the grave of Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpola - known as the Shpoler Zeide ('grandfather'), on which was inscribed, "the grave of the holy martyr, Yossele the thief."

How can it be that a man who sanctified the Name of Heaven in public is called in the same breath - a thief? The following is what he learned from them.

It seems the Shpoler Zeide used to keep company with certain thieves in the area. No one knew or could even imagine what business he had with them. Whenever one of them was caught and had to serve a sentence, the Tzadik used to send him food and drink and to attend to all his needs. It was his custom to boast to the Almighty about "my thieves," and people had even heard him say: "Master of the Universe! Just look at my thieves. Why, even the least worthy of them is full of good points!"

Now it once happened that the local thieves planned to steal the whole fortune - silver, gold, gems - that was to be found in the big church in Shpola. It stood in the middle of town, a solid stone edifice with a tall steeple. The only way to reach the interior was for one of them to climb up the steeple. And to break his way inside through a small window near the top.

For this they needed Yossele Ganav ("Joey the thief"). He was a young burglar of slight and athletic build who lived in Shpola, who could clamber up any stone wall with the greatest of ease. Whenever his colleagues were confronted with a professional problem involving a narrow passage, he would make his services available to the cause.

They all waited patiently for the end of the lunar month. That night, the little band of burglars collected in the deepest dark behind the massive walls of the church, while Yossele climbed swiftly up to the top of the steeple, wriggled in through the little window, and found his agile way in the gloom down the steep interior staircase that took him all the way to the floor.

As soon as he landed, he piled all the golden icons and other valuables into the tablecloths that he found there.

While he was on his way up again to the little window, the night watchmen appeared on the scene outside the church. They raised a hue

and cry, and with exemplary alacrity the waiting little band disappeared in all directions.

And just at that moment, unaware of this sudden change of plan, Yossele stuck his head gleefully out of the window in order to give the signal to his cronies in robbers' slang that they should be ready to catch the loot - for he was afraid of being caught up in the bundles and ropes which he still had tied to himself. He called out again, but received no reply. The night watchmen, however, looked up and saw a man who appeared to be hanging near the top of the steeple, calling out in a language they could not understand.

Overawed by this marvel, they surrounded the building, and decided to wake up the parish priest.

All the local gentiles were soon on the scene, and when they opened the church they discovered to their horror that all their bejeweled objects of worship had, like Yossele, ascended on high. They kindled tall candles, and saw him stuck up there in the little window, trailing cumbersome bundles on all sides. They climbed up and seized him, and threw him into prison pending trial.

When the day came, and he was brought before the judges, Yossele argued that his intention was only to test whether the icon they worshipped was a thing of substance.

He had therefore decided to visit it at night, undisturbed by anyone, and to pray to it that he be granted a more generous livelihood for the support of his wife and two children. If it helped, then he would know it was divine, and he would worship it all his life.

When, however, he had prayed there a few times, and had received no answer - a mouth that spoke not, eyes that saw not, ears that heard not - he had lost his patience, and had addressed it as follows: "Look, you're fooling everyone around these parts into worshipping you because they think you are divine. But I can see there's nothing to you. Better that I take you and sell your gold; that way at least I'll have a livelihood."

Yossele continued his explanation to the court: "So I began to move him, and I saw that his hands and legs made no move in self-defense. It was safe to assume, in that case, that the smaller images would certainly be unable to raise any opposition. And so it was. I took them all, together with their ornaments, and not one of them said a single word in protest! You realize, therefore, your honors, that I have done you a great favor, for now you know that there is no point in worshipping things of nonsense."

The judges nevertheless sentenced Yossele to be burned alive in front of the church in the presence of all the populace.

It Once Happened..

After handing him the sentence in writing, the chief justice said: "You still have a way of saving yourself from this wretched death. Because you are so young, and you showed such prowess in climbing to the top of the steeple, we have decided that if you convert to our religion we will let you live. Not only that, we will give you all kind of gifts, and make you rich."

The answer was bold and clear: "I, Yossele the thief, have committed plenty of sins in my lifetime. But to betray my faith - that Yossele the thief will never do, even if he is tortured by all the means in the world.

"Tell me: are you out of your minds? Who would do such a thing - to exchange the living G-d for a dumb stone, fashioned by the hands of mortal man, a thing which wasn't even able to defend itself against me? True, Yossele is a thief. But to change his faith, that he will never do, whatever happens."

He was thrown back violently into his prison cell, and when the day arrived an eager crowd assembled to watch the spectacle. First he was placed on his feet next to the fierce flames of a burning barrel of tar. Then the parish priest addressed him in measured tones: "My son, you still have a chance to save yourself from a horrible death - if you will convert to the religion of love. If not, you will be thrown into this burning barrel and boiled alive."

The answer rang loud and clear: "I, Yossele the thief, am Yossele the thief, but to change my faith? Never!"

They seized his shackled hands and plunged them into the barrel.

"Your chance is not yet passed!" declaimed the priest. "If you will change your religion, physicians will heal your hands, and we will let you live long and happily!"

Yossele writhed in unspeakable agony. He was held up only by the hands of the burly gentiles who surrounded him. But he cried out at the top of his voice: "Yossele the thief will be burned in the fire; he will suffer all the tortures you can invent; but he will not convert!"

When it was all over, his mortal remains were handed over to the Jewish community for burial, and the simple gravestone in the old cemetery of Shpola records the date of his martyrdom.

"You see," the Shpoler Zeide would say, "it is not in vain that I speak in praise of my thieves!"

Reprinted from an email from KabbalaOnline.org.

Editor's Note: Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpola - known as the Shpoler Zeide ז"ל's 209th Yahrzeit was Thursday, 6th Tishrei - September 24th of this year.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Ha'Azinu - Shuva

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	5:56	7:07	7:47
Tel Aviv	6:11	7:09	
Haifa	6:02	7:08	
Be'er Sheva	6:13	7:09	



The Apartment Next Door
By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

Reb Meirke of Mir, one of the chasidim of Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitch, once interrupted a journey in order to enter an inn to say his prayers. While he was there, a whole caravan of wagons arrived, full of itinerant paupers with their wives and little waifs. Reb Meirke saw one man in their midst, of old and venerable appearance, whose face bespoke a rare purity of mind. As he watched him closely, the innkeeper's wife placed bread and other food on the table. While the other poor folk all grabbed their slices to allay their hunger, that old pauper walked deliberately over to the water basins, and examined a dipper carefully to see if it was suitable for netilat yadayim. Before washing his hands, however, he took up the slice of bread over which he was due to say the blessing - but he immediately laid it down, took instead some other bread that was there, recited the blessing over it instead, and sat down to eat.

The paupers all left the inn soon after, and the old man left with them. But throughout his prayers and his evening meal, Reb Meirke could not stop thinking about that aged beggar. Why did he not eat that slice of bread?

He had to find out. He approached the landlady and asked: "Excuse me, but when did you bake that bread?"

"Why, yesterday or the day before," she replied.

"And do you recall," he continued, "whether you remembered at the time to separate the tithe of challah from the dough?"

"Woe is me!" exclaimed the woman. "I forgot to take off the tithe!"

It was now clear to Reb Meirke that the old man was divinely inspired. He immediately harnessed his horses and made haste to catch up to that ragged crew. He found them soon enough, but his man was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is that old man who was with you?" he asked.

"Why should you ask after that crazy old fellow?" they answered. "He tagged on to us a few weeks ago, and he travels wherever we travel, and he sleeps wherever we sleep. But he behaves as if he is out of his mind. Nearly every day he leaves us for a while and stands alone for some time among the bushes in the forest. And once, in midwinter, when he saw a lake frozen over, he broke the ice and went for a dip in that freezing cold water."

When Reb Meirke followed the direction in which they pointed, he came upon this strange man standing under a tree, entranced in his thoughts, his face burning like a brand.

"Rebbe, bless me!" he exclaimed.

The pauper asked him for a copper coin, and then gave his blessing.

When in due course, Reb Meirke again visited Lechovitch to see his Rebbe and told him the whole story, the Tzadik said: "How fortunate you are! For the man who gave you his blessing was none other than the saintly Rabbi Leib Sarahs!"

* * *

This same Reb Meirke once lost his way while traveling alone through a forest. As evening fell he spotted a house with a stable next to it, and on entering the house found no one at home but a woman who was busy cooking.

"Is there room here to lodge for the night?" he asked.

"Most certainly," she said.

But when the owners of the house returned later that night, he saw at once that they were a gang of murderers. Nor was he at all reassured to overhear the woman telling them: "We have a very worthwhile guest..."

There was no chance to escape; every door and every window was locked. He therefore found himself in a quiet corner, and as he recited Vidui, he wept over his confession with the honest tears of a man who is nearing his end.

When they had finished their crude meal, the murderers pounced on him from all sides and bound him hand and foot, ready for the slaughter.

"Open up, there!" a raucous voice snarled at the window.

The murderers were so alarmed by the insistent battering on the shutters, that they were afraid to oblige. But the cold was bitter outside. The impatient callers broke down the door, and a noisy crowd of sturdy Russian merchants, who had also lost their way, burst their way in.

In a flash they gathered what was going on before their eyes. A couple of them unbound the poor victim, while the others seized the murderers and trussed them up. At daybreak they lifted them on to their wagons and drove off to the nearest town, where they handed them over to the local police.

"You won't believe this," they said to Reb Meirke, "but we often take this road, and know it well. In fact we have never lost our way around these parts. But today for some funny reason we somehow got mixed up and strayed from the highway, until we landed here. It is clearly the finger of G-d, so that we should be able to save you from death."

When Reb Meirke next visited Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitch, no sooner had he appeared in the doorway than his Rebbe said: "It is all because of you that I couldn't sleep that night. But thanks to the fact that you once gave a coin to Rabbi Leib Sarahs and received his blessing, those merchants lost their way and arrived out there just in time to save you."

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org

Editor's Note: Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitch ז"ל's 210th Yahrzeit is next Shabbat, 15th Tishrei – October 3rd of this year.



The Tishrei Guide is not available in print this year; it is only available online at www.thejweekly.org or ladaat.info, dirshu.co.il, and parshasheets.com

This coming Shabbat in Parshat Ha'azinu which we will read on Shabbat Shuva, the Torah will declare to us: "כי חלק ה' – עמו יעקב הבל נחלתו" – "for the portion of the Lord is his people, Jacob is the measure of his inheritance".

The word 'measure' in Hebrew is 'הבל' which actually literally means a rope and that's because in ancient times the rope was used for measuring purposes. There was a standardized length of a rope, so if for example, you were to say the circumference of my field is 2000 ropes, people would understand exactly what you meant. There is, however, a far deeper message in these words. The Jewish people here are being compared by the Almighty to a rope.

You see, a rope is made up of quite a number of different cords which are twisted together to produce the rope. Each strand by itself is weak and can be broken very easily, but once they are fused together within the rope it's simply unbreakable. The Almighty wants us to know that if we are factionalized to the extent that we have so many splinter groups within our people, we will end up being a very weak nation.

The way forward for the Jewish people must be to have a rope styled existence, and this is a key sentiment that we are expressing now during our High Holy Days: "וינשו כולם – אחדות אחת לעשות רצוננו בלבב שלם" – may the Jewish people produce one single bonded entity in order to perform Your will with a full heart."

We come together over these High Holy Days like one person with one heart to express the importance of the united Jewish people. Similarly, this is a message which will be conveyed through the key practice of the festival of Sukkot. We take the brachah over them if they are bound together as one in our hands, symbolizing the unity of the Jewish people.

The past year 5780 has been a painful one for many reasons, one of which sadly has been the totally unacceptable level of friction within Jewish circles. Such disunity has made us weak. Let's guarantee that the new year, 5781, will be for all of us the 'year of the rope'.

For the coming year, I want to give you and your family a Bracha for a year that is sweet and good. May it be a year full of health and success spiritually, physically, psychologically, and emotionally. May you have success in all your endeavors and enjoy a year rich in sweet growth.

Let's try to be the best we can, by joining all of us together as a rope, by praying with all our hearts, for the recovery of all the sick from this crazy pandemic, as well as praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevre Kadisha members worldwide, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's
PARSHA FACTS
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 0
Some count the mitzvah of Yayin Nesech (Sacramental wine) from this Parsha.

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 52
NUMBER OF WORDS: 614
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 2326

HAFTORA:
"שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל" – Hoshea: 14:2-10; then we conclude with Yoel 2:11-27 (some add verses 7:18-20 from Micah).

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is called **Shabbat Shuva** (Lit. 'Shabbat of Return') because the Haftora which is read on this Shabbat begins with the words **שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל**. Others call it **Shabbat Teshuva**, as it falls in the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. It is customary for the Rabbi of the Congregation to give a sermon on this Shabbat which includes the basic laws of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, and devoted to the theme of Teshuva and hopefully awaken and inspire people to correct their ways with Teshuva.

Yom Kippur starts Sunday Eve, September 27.
Sukkot starts Friday Eve, October 2.

האזינו
This week has been sponsored in memory of מלכה בת יצחק צבי הלוי ע"ה פרנקל who passed away **Erev Shabbat Shuva** ה' תשרי תשע"ט
Sponsored by her **Children, grandchildren & Great Grandchildren**

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