

The Jewish Weekly

The International Wedding

By Rabbi Shmuel Butman

In Poland four and a half centuries ago lived a very wealthy man named Moshe. For a long time he had been seeking an appropriate match for his daughter, without success. This was surprising, since besides her background of wealth, she was also clever, attractive and gracious. Numerous proposals had streamed in from all over the land and outside it, but some fault was found in each of them by either one of the parents or the girl herself. Finally, a match was proposed that pleased all of them. Most surprisingly, it came from Egypt!

The young man was a bright Torah scholar, of excellent character, sensitive, courteous and of pleasant personality. A series of unusual circumstances had brought him from his distant tropical home to Eastern Europe, which made possible his involvement in this most excellent match.

The young man was promised an extraordinarily large dowry. The wedding itself took place in Egypt, where it was conducted with great pomp and luxury in the presence of a large crowd of family, friends, and many other distinguished guests. The bride's family was also well represented, as a large contingent of relatives made the rigorous journey from Poland to Egypt to participate in the festivities. After the Seven Days of formal celebration, the relatives of the bride all returned home to Europe, while the bride and her new husband remained in the land of the Nile.

Just months after the joyous celebration, tragedy struck. The young bride passed away suddenly. Her husband and his parents were overcome with grief and shock. His loud uncontrollable sobs over the grave of his tender wife stabbed the hearts of all the local populace, and no doubt pierced the highest heavens as well.

Several weeks later, the grieving young widower received another shock. A letter arrived from his dead wife's father in Poland, demanding back the money of the dowry. He based his claim on the decision of the renowned Tosfot master, Rabbeinu Tam [1100-1171], grandson of Rashi, who in the 12th century had ruled that the husband does not inherit when the wife passes away during the first year of marriage. Many subsequent major authorities endorsed his ruling and thus it had been accepted in most Jewish communities, Moshe wrote.

The bereaved husband investigated the matter, and discovered while this interpretation of the law was indeed accepted in Ashkenazic lands, that had never been the case in the Mediterranean countries of the Sephardim. He sent a letter to inform his father-in-law of this, in which he concluded that as a Jew from Egypt he was under no obligation whatsoever to return the dowry money, which had come

into his possession honestly and legally. A reply soon came from Poland, expressing the opinion that the judgment should be according to the law in force at the source of the money, not at its final location.

Moshe realized that he would have to travel again to Egypt in order to press his claim. Before he left, he went to several of the greatest rabbinical authorities in Poland, who put for him in writing their considered opinion that the money must be returned. One of these was the world-famous Rabbi Shlomo Luria of Lublin, known as the Maharshal.

After a long exhausting journey, Reb Moshe finally arrived in Egypt. His first stop was to visit the grave of his daughter. After that he turned to pursue his financial problem. He arranged meetings with the leading rabbinical judges of Egypt and showed them his letter from the sages of Poland. They were not overwhelmed as he thought they would be, not at all; rather, they coolly insisted that the decisions of Rabbeinu Tam were not binding to the countries of the Sephardim. (Indeed, Egypt had its own great Torah scholars, including Rabbi David Ben Zimra ("Radbaz"), who was the chief rabbi of Cairo for forty years, until shortly before the events of this story.**)

One of these sages, Rabbi Montzur, felt deeply the pain of Reb Moshe. He tried to comfort him and offered him advice. He told him that a Jew of extraordinary holiness and wisdom, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, known as the "Ari," used to be part of their community until recently, when he had moved to the Holy Land. Although his mother's family was from Egypt, his father was of European descent, and he himself signed his letters "the Ashkenazi" and followed Ashkenazi practices. Surely it would be appropriate for you to consult with him, the sage concluded.

Reb Moshe agreed, and soon after set out for the Holy Land and all the way to its north, to Tsfat. He located the modest dwelling of the Ari and requested an interview. He related to the master Kabbalist the tragic story of his daughter, and then all the details of the dispute over the dowry.

The Ari gazed at him intently for a long moment. Then, his eyes glowing with love and care, he said to him gently, "My advice to you is to give up your claim to the money."

Reb Moshe gulped, but felt he had no choice but to accept his decision. However, he could not stop himself from asking for an explanation.

The Ari's expression turned serious. "If you are asked the reason for my verdict," he said gravely, "you may say in my name that so it is written in our holy Torah, in the section, 'And these are the judgments' [Ex.21:24]."

The words of the Ari soon spread throughout the land, south to Egypt, and across the ocean. When the Maharshal (who happened to be a great-uncle of the Ari) and the other great sages of Poland who had signed the letter supporting the return of the dowry

It Once Happened...

heard of the Ari's decision, they were astounded. And outraged. A rabbinical storm brewed and bubbled.

One day the Ari gathered his closest students explained to them the meaning behind his words. He told the following story:

Several decades ago, two big-time merchants set sail on a ship for a distant fair. They were good friends as well as business associates. Before they reached their final destination, the wallet of one of them was stolen. This was a great disaster, as the wallet contained all of his capital, the huge sum of money that he had brought along for purchasing and investment.

His friend did not abandon him. He offered to lend him a significant amount of money. "Use it for business now so that you can earn a profit, and when we reach home you can pay me back."

The loan was taken but never repaid. The two men moved to different areas and they never saw each other again. After many years the lender passed away, and a short time thereafter so did the borrower. Their souls -and the matter of the outstanding loan between them- rose up to the Heavenly Court.

The court decreed that the two would have to descend to this physical world again in order to rectify their uncompleted financial transaction. The soul of the lender became the person who grew up to be the young husband, while the soul of the borrower became his bride. G-d directed events so that the girl from Poland would marry the boy from Egypt in order that the money could be returned to its rightful owner. As soon as that happened, the mission of the bride's soul in this life was completed.

This sequence of events, explained the Ari, is hinted at in the words, "And these are the judgments." Targum Onkelos translates: "These are the laws"; Petach Eliyahu* interprets: "These are mercies"; the holy Zohar explains "These are the secrets of reincarnation."

* Recited before the Friday afternoon prayer - from Tikunei Zohar

This episode shows how these three seemingly contradictory interpretations are in fact complementary, he continued. The judgments of the Heavenly Court are law, but always grounded in mercy, which often manifests in the opportunity for the soul to return again to the physical world to accomplish its rectification.

**Editor's note: Among the students of the Radbaz in Egypt were Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi ("Shita Mekubetzes") and Rabbi Yitzchak Luria ("Arizal").

Reprinted from an email of Sichat haShavua.



Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Chayei Sarah

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:05	5:19	5:57
Tel Aviv	4:19	5:20	
Haifa	4:09	5:18	
Be'er Sheva	4:23	5:22	



Full Repayment By Asharon Baltazar

Rabbi Shmuel Shtrashun, the Rashash, was revered not only for his Talmudic brilliance. He was greatly respected for his many public activities and his devotion to the Jewish community. Also a wealthy man, he established and managed an interest-free loan fund for the people of Vilna.

The Rashash was very careful in keeping the accounts of this fund. He made certain that people repaid their loans as soon as they were due, else there would not be any money available for other people to borrow. He would mark every transaction carefully in his books.

Once, a simple Jew, a baker, borrowed one hundred rubles for four months. On the day when the loan was due he went to the Rashash's home with the money, but was told the rabbi was in the beis midrash [study hall]. The man went there, and found the Rashash deeply engrossed in a complex subject in the Talmud. The man laid the money in front of him. The Rashash looked up, nodded, and resumed his study, without interrupting. Certain that the rabbi had acknowledged his receipt of the money, the man went his way.

But the Rashash had only nodded automatically. His mind was totally concentrated on his study. He pored over the gemarah tome for a long time, turning pages back and forth. When he finished, he shut it and put it back on its shelf, oblivious of the money pressed between its pages.

Every week the Rashash would go over the ledgers to see which loans were paid up and which still had to be collected. When he came to the name of the baker, he noticed that the loan was still outstanding. He summoned him and demanded that he repay the one hundred rubles.

"But I already paid you!"

"You did not. It is written here that you still owe the money."

"I put the money on the table right in front of you!" the man insisted.

The Rashash did not remember, but trusting his meticulous records, he continued to demand payment. The man kept refusing, insisting that he had already paid. Finally, the Rashash summoned him to rabbinical court. When word of the case spread to the Jews of Vilna, the man fell into public disgrace. How dare he stand up against the famous scholar? He was, in effect, calling him a liar!

The hearing took place. Both sides were heard and the scholar's story held more weight. The judges postponed their decision for a later date, hoping that

the man would admit that he had not paid back his debt.

The poor man had no sympathizers in all of Vilna. He was considered a thief and a stubborn fool. His good name was ruined. People stopped talking to him and would no longer consider his children for marriage prospects. Finally the man was even dismissed from his job. Still, he continued to insist that he had paid back his debt. His son, a promising young scholar, could not bear the disgrace and left Vilna altogether.

Nearly a year passed and the Rashash needed to research the same tractate. He pulled the volume down from the shelf. As he was leafing through the pages, he discovered a sum of money—one hundred rubles. For a moment he was puzzled, wondering how such a large sum could have been misplaced there. Suddenly, it all came back to him. This was the missing money which the defendant had insisted he had repaid!

The Rashash felt terrible. He had wronged a Jew. He had accused him falsely! Shaken to his core, he quickly summoned the man and said to him, "How can I possibly make amends for the anguish I caused you? I am prepared to make a public confession to clear your name. What else can I do to compensate you for your suffering?"

The man stood before the rabbi. His face was gaunt, lined with the ravages of his suffering. He said sadly, "My good name is already ruined. Even if you declare my innocence, people will not forget that I had once been accused of such a terrible thing. They might even think that you had pity on me and therefore cleared my name. They will still consider me a thief and a liar, and insolent for opposing you. No, not even a public retraction would help me now. Nor would it bring my son back, who left Vilna out of shame."

The Rashash was thoughtful for a long time. How could he help the broken man before him, the man whose reputation he himself had ruined? His heart was pounding. Suddenly, he had an idea. "Tell your son to return to Vilna, and I will take him as a husband for my daughter! This will certainly restore your good name!"

The man was overwhelmed. He had never dreamed of such a wonderful thing. That his son should marry the revered rabbi's daughter!

The engagement took place several days later, and the wedding within the month. The cream of Vilna society took part in the affair. The Rashash paid all the expenses. People could not stop talking about the amazing turn of events. "It must have been decreed from birth that this ordinary man's son was to marry the great rabbi's daughter," they marveled. "It came to be only through the mistake about the loan. How amazing are the ways of heaven!"

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.



The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayehi 23), tells us that when Sarah heard of Yitzchak's near-death at the Akeida, she became so overwhelmed with emotion that she died. However, we also learn (Shemot Rabbah 1:1) that Sarah had greater Nevuah (prophecy) than Avraham Avinu. The question is: how is it possible that Avraham was able to perform the Akeidah, when Sarah, who had a greater level of Nevuah, was not able to handle it?

When a person is going through a נסיון - test, sometimes, it seems way beyond the capabilities of that person. However, Hashem does not expect the impossible, rather, He gives the person the strength to be able to pass the נסיון - test. Since the test was given to Avraham, and Avraham did not have the natural ability to perform the task at hand, Hashem gave him the strength in order to perform it. Sarah did not have the same abilities as Avraham did, to overcome that emotional bond, since she was not commanded to do the נסיון - test.

We all go through נסיונות – tests. We have to understand, that Hashem is not out to get us. If He is challenging us, in any way, it is because He is confident in us, His dear children, to be able to pass that test, so He can reward us. We need to know that Hashem loves us and sometimes He will give us “overtime” to earn a “little” extra reward, and He will also give us the strength to achieve it.

The Parsha starts off saying that Sarah's life was one hundred years, twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life. It seems to be that the Torah is repeating itself when it says “these are the years of Sarah's life.” Didn't we just say it was one hundred and twenty seven years? It seems that the Torah is saying that Sarah died early because she heard about the Akeidah. No, the Torah is telling us, this is exactly how long she was supposed to live.

Many times, after a person dies, the family can feel guilty, and say things like, “if we would have used that doctor maybe he would still be alive,” etc... The Torah here is telling us, that we have to understand these are the years of the person's life and we can't do anything to change that.

So let's try to see the positive in every test and let's pray 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 Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NO MITZVOT IN THIS PARSHA

Although none of the Taryag (613) mitzvot are counted from Chayei Sarah, we learn about burial of the dead, and funeral practices such as eulogizing the dead. We also find lessons relating to marriage in this Parshah.

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 105

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1402

NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5314

HAFTORA: Melachim I 1:1-31

Shabbat Mevarchim Chodesh Kislev

Rosh Chodesh - Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2020

חיי שרה
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