

The Story Behind the Miraculous Torah Scroll of the Baal Shem Tov

by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak

Schneerson (the 'Rebbe Rayatz')

On Tuesday, the 21st of Cheshvan 5658, my father, the Rebbe Reshab, began a journey to the resting places of [some of] the tzadikim [in Ukraine] - in Mezibuz, Postov, Anipoli, Berditchev, Haditch, and Nezhin. During this trip he also had meetings for his communal work in Kiev, Zitimir and Berditchev.

On Sunday, the 26th, at around 12 [noon], my father arrived in Mezibuz. Accompanying him was Reb Binyomin Berlin. Although it was after the time of the morning prayer, the first place he visited was the shul of the Baal Shem Tov. Meanwhile Reb Binyomin went to see if there was a kosher mikvah (immersion bathhouse) because my father was planning on visiting the tziyun (designated 'resting' place) of the Baal Shem Tov that evening and then continuing on his way.

By the time my father, the Rebbe, entered the shul of the Baal Shem Tov, most of the worshippers had already left. One elderly man, Reb Tuvia Leib the shamash (caretaker), sat in tallit and tefillin at the front of the shul, while around him stood a few people. He was telling them a story of the Baal Shem Tov that he had heard from his father and grandfather.

This Reb Tuvia Leib, due to his old age, was not able to serve as a shamash for the shul, not even for the smallest task. However, because he sat every day in the shul, davening (praying) and learning Torah, and stemmed from the family of those that had served the Baal Shem Tov, he was bestowed with the honorary title, "Shamash of the Baal Shem Tov's shul".

(Interestingly, his grandfather, Reb Yosef Tzvi, served the Baal Shem Tov in his last ten years and was blessed by the Baal Shem Tov with a long life for him, his children and grandchildren. Reb Tuvia was living proof of the power of this blessing.)

At the time the shul was in disrepair and in need of renovation. The people who davened there, mostly poor and elderly people, couldn't afford to fund it, and those of the city with the means for the renovation didn't notice the great need.

The elders of the shul, headed by Reb Tuvia Leib, were greatly pained by the situation, for they had a tradition that as long as the shul stood, the city would have peace and if the building were to fall, chas veshalom ('Heaven forbid'), the city would be destroyed. They deliberated and finally decided that once in a while they would take out the "Miraculous Sefer Torah" (Torah scroll) of the Baal Shem Tov and with the donations of those who would receive aliyot (called up to the reading of the Torah) they would be able to repair and renovate the shul.

When my father entered the shul, Reb Tuvia Leib was speaking about the great kedusha (holiness) of the Sefer Torah and how many of the tzadikim of the previous generation had made the journey to Mezibuz specifically to get an aliyah on this Sefer Torah and kiss the cloth of the Baal Shem Tov that lay on the bima (raised platform).

Never, cried Reb Tuvia Leib the shamash, had the zechut (merit) been sold for gold and silver. For years the Torah would only be bought out for Hoshanot (a special prayer) on Hoshana Rabba (7th day of Sukkot festival), and for Hakafot (the circle-dancing with the Torah) on Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Other than those times, no one would dare approach this Torah. And now, finished Reb Tuvia Leib, for a little money we will take out the Sefer Torah and honor rich people with aliyot! And he wept as he spoke.

In the meantime, Reb Binyomin Berlin returned with the news that there was a kosher mikvah, and that the wagon driver was ready to travel to the Beit Hachayim (cemetery).

My father, the Rebbe, asked Reb Tuvia to tell the story behind the Miraculous Sefer Torah. Here is what he told:

In 5512 (1752) there was, a terrible [heavenly] decree against the town of Mezibuz. Men, women and children got ill with different sicknesses and many were near death. The town was in an uproar, not one house was spared the epidemic.

They came to the Baal Shem Tov and cried bitterly about the sick and begged him to pray on their behalf. The Baal Shem Tov told them that he would not be able to help them, only they could help themselves.

The Baal Shem Tov said: "We say every day in the Amidah ('Standing') prayer 'May the service of Your people Israel always find favor.' This means: always the service of your people Israel can change His will to weaken and nullify a decree. And the service that constantly stands before G-d to make a good will is the Letters of Torah. This can be in two ways: saying the words of Torah and Tehillim (psalms), or through writing a Sefer Torah in which everyone takes part."

When the town's people heard what the Baal Shem Tov said, they immediately decided to write a communal Sefer Torah, in which everyone from the community would take part.

The Baal Shem Tov told his own personal sofer (scribe), the tzadik Reb Tzvi, to write two of the yeriot (sheets of parchment).

As soon as the Sefer Torah's writing was begun, the many sick people of the town began to get better. And so this Sefer Torah was named "The Miraculous Sefer Torah."

My father, the Rebbe, davened Mincha (the afternoon prayer), hurried to the mikvah, and from there went to the tziyun (burial place) of the Baal Shem Tov, where he stayed till very late.

When he came back to daven Maariv (the evening prayer), while still fasting, he told Reb Binyomin Berlin to request Reb Tuvia Leib to inquire from the other elders of the shul how much is the cost for the repairs to the shul. They told him that there are two options: either to do a simple, more basic level of repairs, which would cost about 300 silver rubles. Or to do a much nicer and longer-lasting job, but that would cost about 450 silver rubles.

My father, the Rebbe, instructed Reb Binyomin to tell the elders the following, "This man, [meaning the Rebbe Reshab], is a businessman from the city of Arsha, and he would like to donate the entire sum of money needed for the best renovation possible. However, this is on condition that tomorrow, Monday, there will be a minyan (quorum of ten men) over here, in which they will read from the Miraculous Sefer Torah, and he [meaning the Rebbe Reshab] will get an aliyah, and gelilah [binding and covering the scroll]."

In addition, there are certain other conditions which would have to be met. The minyan must be early in the morning. Only the elders may take part in the minyan. A Kohen and Levi must be from those getting an aliyah. For the first three days afterwards, no-one else may find out what happened. Reb Tuvia and the elders happily agreed to all the conditions.

My father, the Rebbe, gave them 200 silver rubles as a down payment, and Reb Binyomin wrote a receipt in his own name, with an address in Vitebsk, at the home of Reb Meir Mordechai Tzernin.


My father, the Rebbe, then went to his hotel room, where he broke his fast with a cup of hot water and some bread he had brought with him. Afterwards he went back to the shul, where he had food and drink brought for Reb Tuvia and the elders, and they sat together till quite late that night.

My father returned to the hotel to rest a bit, and while it was still dark he got up and went to the mikveh. Over there he met some of the elders and they went together to the shul and prepared themselves for davening.

After the prayers, my father went once more to the Baal Shem Tov's tziyun and from there went directly to the train station, to continue his journey.

Reprinted from the Derher Magazine.

Editor's Note: The above Sefer Torah was the inspiration for the project of the Rebbe Rayatz to have written "the Sefer Torah of Moshiach", the writing of which he inaugurated in the early 1940's and was eventually completed under the supervision of his son-in-law, the 7th Rebbe, Rabbi M. M. Shneerson, in 1970.


Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times - Parshat Shelach Lecha

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	7:11	8:30	9:05
Tel Aviv	7:27	8:32	
Haifa	7:20	8:34	
Be'er Sheva	7:28	8:31	

Tragedy in the Bnei Brak Bank

by Tzvi Nakar



A woman entered a bank in Bnei Brak and waited on line to withdraw some money. When her turn came, she asked the teller for 300 shekels from her account. The teller punched in her account number and politely explained that he couldn't give her the money because she was already over her limit.

The woman insisted that she needed the money, and the teller remained calm but firm, explaining that he was not authorized to withdraw any more funds until she deposited money into her account.

The customer was distraught, and without seeming to realize it, she raised her voice so that everyone could hear. "Why are you making such a big deal out of this?" she started shouting. "It's only three hundred shekels, and I need it to purchase basic groceries. Please! Right now, I know that we're in a bad situation, but we'll pull out of it sooner or later, and in the meantime, I don't have money for food! I really need the money!"

But the bank teller was not having it. He lost his patience and snapped back at her, "This is not a charity organization. This is a bank, and we have rules and policies that I'm not authorized to violate. The bank has been very generous until now, and we've sent you numerous letters and reminders that were ignored. There is no way that I can withdraw another shekel from your account!"

All eyes in the bank were fixed on them now. The woman was mortified and stood still with shock and embarrassment. Suddenly, she walked past the teller and straight into the manager's office. Looking at the surprised manager, she burst into tears. "How could you employ such a hard-hearted man? What did I ask for? 300 shekels? I'm not asking for luxuries, but the basics to pay the grocery store. Why did he have to shout at me in front of everyone? What gave him the right to tell everyone my story and humiliate me in public?"

The manager was horrified at the teller's conduct. He told the woman that she was right and apologized profusely on behalf of the bank and the teller, while explaining that regardless of their genuine sympathy for her plight, they were still bound by the bank's policies.

The woman was not placated, and she jumped up from her seat and stormed out of the office in tears.

The manager called out for her to wait and he opened his wallet and took out three hundred shekels to give to her, but she shook her head and refused to accept it. She ran out of the bank and never returned.

The manager walked wearily back into his office and as he passed his associate's desk, another employee of the bank, he saw the man wiping tears from his eyes. This was strange thought the manager, he'd never seen his co-worker cry.

"What happened?" he asked in concern.

The man blew his nose and finally replied, "In my life, there's one trauma from my youth that I never got over, and this image still haunts me forty years later. I was a little boy, around eight or nine, and my mother took me to the grocery store. We didn't have money, and my mother was always very careful about what she put in her shopping basket - bread, milk, a little cheese, a few vegetables - and then she asked the grocer to put it on her account.

"Your account?" the grocer answered with a grimace. "Lady, you're way past that. Do you have any idea how much money you owe already? You haven't paid your bill in months. I'm not going to put another thing on credit. Either pay for the food now or put everything back on the shelves. I'm not a bank, and I can't afford to let customers take food for free!"

"My mother pleaded anxiously. 'Right now, things are tight, but everything will work out in the end, you'll see! Look, it's not like I took anything expensive, just the very basics. Bread, milk, and cheese.' Her tone was so pathetically imploring that I remember cringing.

"But the grocer refused to listen and began taking the items out of her cart and placing them on the counter. 'Pay for it, or leave.' With her pockets empty and her heart shattered, my mother took me by the hand and left the store. As soon as we were outside, she burst into tears, unable to hold back any longer, and hurried home with me."

The bank associate paused for a moment. "I've never forgotten the scene. It was seared into my heart with the agony and helplessness that only a child can feel watching his mother - his rock and security - crumble. But today, when I saw the same scene unfold right before my very eyes, I suddenly recognized the woman. That grocer was her father. Do you understand? Forty years after that man shamed my mother, his own daughter doesn't have money for the basics...."

Reprinted from an email of Torah Tavlin.

People are like trees. This is a message we can derive from this week's Parsha.

Moshe was sending the 12 spies into the Holy Land and he gave them a list of items to notice and to report back on, one of which was 'ה'יש בה עץ אם אין', find out please, he said, 'whether there is or is not a tree in the Land'.

Now what sense can we make of this? Moshe surely knew there were thousands upon thousands of trees in the Land of Canaan.

But according to our tradition, actually what he meant was, find out if there is a person who is like a tree. A person of stature, a person who everyone looks up to, a person through whose merits the Canaanites might survive.

So, therefore, Moshe wanted us to know that a great individual is like a wonderful tree. In this spirit, there is a fascinating anecdote in the Gemarah in Mesechet Ta'anit (5b), it's about a traveler who is walking through the desert, he hadn't had sustenance for a number of days and fortuitously he came across an oasis. In the midst of it, there was a lovely, luscious, beautiful fruit tree with a stream of water alongside it. He immediately ate of its fruit. He drank from the water and then he rested in the shade of the boughs. And when he woke up feeling fully rejuvenated and refreshed, he turned to the tree and he said 'אילן אילן במה אברכך?', 'Oh tree, tree, how can I bless you?' I'd like to give you a Brachah, you have been so good to me!

But then he had a problem. What can I bless you with? That you would have lovely fruit - you have already got it. A lovely source of water - it is there. That you will provide shelter and shade - you do that.

And then a thought crossed his mind and he said 'יהי רצון שכל נטיעות שנושעין ממך יהיו כמותך', 'May it be the will of God that all trees planted with your seed will be just like you'.

I believe that this is a very apposite blessing for our times. Thank God, we are blessed with so many trees, so many outstanding, wonderful people, walking in the footsteps of their ancestors, keeping Torah law.

May it be the will of Heaven, that their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren will be just like them. To embrace a life of Torah and Mitzvot, to appreciate the great legacy that is theirs and in turn, to guarantee that they too will be wonderful and outstanding trees, to produce a flow of outstanding generations to come. And let's pray for those suffering from the current situation in Eastern Europe, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace 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: 3
MITZVOT ASEH: 2
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 1

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 119
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1540
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 5820

HAFTORA: Yehoshua 2:1 - 24

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 3 of Pirkei Avot (outside Israel one studies Chapter 2).

שלה לך
בהעלותך

If you would like to help keep
The Jewish Weekly being published,
or to subscribe or dedicate
an issue please email
editor@thejweekly.org
to help continue our weekly
publication.