Chanoch Regal

Abir Yaacob







The Lives and Times
of the Saintly Grand Rabbis
Of the Abichazira Dynasty



PART 1

The Lives and Times
of the Saintly Grand Rabbis
of the Abichazira Dynasty

Chanoch Regal

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27 Abir Yaakov
Nahariya, Israel

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Yeshivat 'Abir Yaakov – Ohr Meir Simcha'
27 Abir Yaakov
Nahariya, Israel

Compiled, Written, and Edited by: Chanoch Regal
Translated into English by: Nehemiah Klein
English Editor: Caroline Fletcher
Computerized Layout and Typesetting: S. Berger, Ashdod
Cover Design: Rachel Feld, Yerushalayim
Printer: Dudu Printers, Hebron

Published by **Yeshivat 'Abir Yaakov – Ohr Meir Simcha'**
27 Abir Yaakov

Printed in ISRAEL

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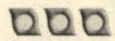
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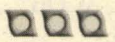
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LETTER FROM MARAN RABBI DAVID CHAI ABICHAZIRA SHLIT"A

"ברכות לראש משביר" (משלי יא: כו)

"BLESSINGS FOR THE PROVIDER"



"HE WHO IS GENEROUS WILL BE BLESSED" (Mishle 22:9)

This book Abir Yaakov is being published through the benevolence of our dear distinguished and exalted friend, renowned for his love of Torah and its scholars, who bears the yoke of Torah support, the honorable philanthropist

RAV ZALMAN ELIYAHU (RICHARD) GROSSMAN SHLIT"A

May the merit of our esteemed holy ancestor, whose pure and exalted light illuminates the world, he of praise and glorious name, the majestic and holy patriarch Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira זצוק"ל, protect him and his wife and family. May the A-lmighty protect them and sustain them and shield them from all harm and bestow upon them an abundance of good and blessing with happiness and much success. May he merit continuing to support Torah with holiness and purity for all his days.

This book is also the product of the tremendous efforts of our dearly beloved and distinguished friend

HARAV HAGAON AHARON BINA SHLIT"A

Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh at the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, whose total involvement in Torah dissemination and acts of chesed is beyond measure. May the merit of this great Mitzvah protect him and his righteous Rabbanit and their wonderful family. May the Source of all Blessings shower them with an abundance of good: blessing,

longevity, and sustenance. May he merit establishing many more students, Torah supporters, and leaders of Klal Yisrael. May he and his exalted Yeshiva merit many more years of glory and splendor, vigor and vitality, sanctity, and fear of Hashem. May he merit seeing the building of the Beit HaMikdash and the coming of Mashiach speedily in our day. Amen.

David Chai Abichazira

Nahariya

Nissan 5766

PREFACE

Hashem, Creator of the World, has taken from the hidden light reserved for the *tzaddikim* for the Days to Come, and has used it to light the way for their devoted followers "making known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do" (Shmot 18:20). Already then when the A-mighty created the light of the Seven Days of Creation, He set it aside for the true *tzaddikim* for the future. "Your people who are all righteous" (Yeshayahu 60:21) endeavor to learn from the behavior of the *tzaddikim* and follow in their footsteps.

A great privilege – far greater than I deem myself worthy of – presented itself when I was asked to compile this book about the Grand Rabbis of the Abichazira family, may their merit protect us. The impressions left on me from that time – from the days and nights I spent researching their life histories, drafting, writing, and rewriting, will remain with me forever. It is my privilege to be counted among those to remove the veil shrouding their holy conduct, and it is my prayer that this privilege does not detract from any merits I may possess.

It is with song and thanksgiving that I bless Hashem Who has not withdrawn His kindness from me. It is only through Divine Assistance that I was able to complete this project and submit it to the public. It is Hashem "the G-d Who has shepherded me from my inception until this day" (Bereishit 48:15) Who has directed my footsteps and allowed me to carry out this project – even though I am not at all worthy.

I cannot adequately express my thanks to HaGaon HaRav David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a who has given me the opportunity of thus being involved in the Holy of Holies. He has taken me into his inner sanctum and has treated me like a son, guiding me each step of the way. He has directed me and helped me clarify my thoughts and ideas. During the entire period of writing this

book I felt clearly that I was not blowing the *shofar* but that I was simply the *shofar* through which Hashem's voice could be heard in all its majesty, for sounding the *shofar* is an art ...

May his saintly ancestors, who through their holy acts forged links in this golden chain, speak well on his behalf before the Throne of Glory, to grant him a long life filled with good – healthy in body and strong in spirit. In peace and tranquility may he continue to bring about public as well as private salvation for the people of Israel never losing the strength and vigor necessary to continue in his holy work.



This undertaking, the result of which is presented before you, was not entrusted to my hands alone. Many people provided valuable assistance during the entire duration of the project.

First and foremost I must give thanks to a dear friend who wishes to remain anonymous. A congenial, gifted individual, he stood by me from the outset, even taking an active role in the writing of some of the chapters. I pray that the merit of the *tzaddikim* whose lives he researched bring him never-ending blessings from the Source of Blessing for peace of mind, happiness, and much success.

With deep esteem and appreciation I would like to express my thanks to those close adherents of the Baba Sali and his son Rabenu Meir who agreed to share their memories with me. While the names of some of them are to be found within the pages of this book, many others chose to remain anonymous. May the merit of these *tzaddikim* grant them salvation from Above, each for his own needs.

A special thanks to my esteemed colleagues – Rav Baruch Lev and Rav Menachem Gesheid – who with their flair for writing were the first to address the subject of Rabenu Meir and who allowed me to make use of articles they had written for HaModia

Newspaper. May they be blessed that all their hearts' desires be fulfilled for the good and may they "find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and man" (Mishle 3:4).

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to express my gratitude as well as admiration to my dear parents HaRav Shlomo Zalman and Mrs. Sarah Esther Regal whose highest priority was always their children's education. They paved the way and directed my footsteps. May our Father in Heaven Who sees into the hearts of man reward them for their sincerity and good intentions and may they be blessed to see children and children's children involved in Torah and Mitzvot.

May they merit fulfillment of their wishes all the days of their lives achieving much *nachat* from their offspring. May their descendants follow the example they have set of sterling character, piety, and strict adherence to Torah and Mitzvot. May the A-mighty grant them many more joy-filled years.

As I leave this holy undertaking, while my emotions are still impassioned by the great privilege that has come my way, I would like to pray to the Creator that He guide me and direct my footsteps with clear Divine Assistance as it says "show us your kindness Hashem" (Tehillim 85:8) and that I be worthy of this. May the merit of these true *tzaddkim* stand my family and myself in good stead. May my prayers for spiritual as well as material salvation be accepted on High.

Chanoch Regal
Shevat 5764

"WITH TREPIDATION I OPEN MY MOUTH TO BRING FORTH WORDS"

(*Shacharit* for *Rosh Hashana*)

Standing here at the gates of the palace – the palace of the Grand Rabbis of the Abichazira family[5] we peer inside with our physical inadequate eyes, with fear and trepidation in this attempt to produce a book describing their sovereignty. We are well aware that Hashem in His kindness has planted a *tzaddik* in every generation[6], yet "they are planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish"[7]. While they may be "set earthward", yet "their heads reach heavenward."[8] These special individuals have reached very lofty spheres and have no connection with our material world whatsoever. Anyone observing them eating, drinking, and conversing in the manner of ordinary mortals must realize that such acts demand of them to come down many levels, like Moshe Rabenu who "descended from the mountain to the people."[9] In fact the higher they rose in their service of Hashem and cleaving to Him, the more detached they became from this material world.

It is therefore, brazen of us, creatures of this material world of falsehood, even to try to understand the actions and the deeds of the righteous. How much more inappropriate is it for us to try to sketch a profile of their character, to point a finger saying "This was their Torah, this is the level which they attained, this

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5. As the Zohar teaches "Who are the kings – they are the Torah scholars", Zohar Parshat Balak, see Gittin 62a.

6. Compare this to the words of the Gemara. (Yoma 38b) "R' Chiya bar Abba said in the name of R' Yochanan: 'The Holy One, Blessed is He, saw that the righteous were few, He rose and planted them in each and every generation, as it says: 'For to G-d are the pillars of the earth, and He set the world upon them' (Shmuel I 2:8)"

7. Tehillim 92:14

8. Bereishit 28:13

9. Shmot 19:14

is the essence of a *tzaddik*," for "(their) ways are higher than our ways, and their thoughts are higher than our thoughts."[10] How can our minds even begin to comprehend how deep this is? "If the early ones were sons of angels, we are sons of men; if the early ones were sons of men, we are like donkeys"[11] Can man begin to understand the ways of the angels? Can a donkey hope to understand the affairs of human beings?

On the other hand, the *tzaddikim* are the pillars of light[12] illuminating the world. Following in their footsteps teaches us "the path in which we should go and the deeds that we should do."[13] Shlomo *HaMelech*, wisest of all men, teaches: "If you know not where to graze, fairest of all women, follow the footsteps of the sheep."[14] The *Vilna Gaon* comments: "[If] you have lost the methods of elucidating the Torah and observing the *mitzvot*, 'follow the footsteps of the sheep' – follow the path of your holy ancestors who were in this land before you and do not stray from the path which they have forged." The conclusion to be drawn from this is quite clear. Although we are unable wholly to grasp the ways of the *tzaddikim*, we are nonetheless obligated to study their conduct and deeds, so that we may learn how to lead our own lives. While "You are not required to complete the task"[15] and you do not have the tools with which to complete a half, a third, or even a quarter of what they have done, nevertheless, "you are not free to withdraw from it."[16] We must do our best.

We were awestruck at the mere suggestion of undertaking this sacred endeavor of documenting the accounts collected from the

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10. Based on Yeshayahu 55:9

11. Shabbat 112b

12. As our Sages have commented on the verse "Let there be light", "light" refers to the actions of the righteous (Bereishit Rabba chapter 2)

13. Based on Shmot 18:20

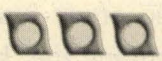
14. Shir HaShirim 1:8

15. Avot 2:21

16. Ibid.

family and from devoted followers in order to portray the lives and times of these spiritual giants. Whose heart does not tremble at the mere mention of the holy names of these leaders who led the nation as a pillar of fire to illuminate the darkness and as a pillar of cloud to smooth the paths before them? Their cloud never rejected a single Jew; in fact they "turned away many from iniquity"[17] and brought them closer - under the Wings of the Divine Presence. At the same time, these leaders used that same cloud to conceal their essence.

It was not our talents or abilities that allowed us to produce this work, but the powers of these saintly individuals. We tried to peek behind the *pargod*, the curtain that conceals their holy conduct, in order to gather whatever sparks from their great light that our eyes could tolerate. The entire project, beginning with gathering the material through the final editing stage, was carried out with "a great person standing over us"[18]. We were given precise instructions and our work was very stringently reviewed.



17. Malachi 2:6

18. Sukkah 42b

HIDING IN THE TENT

"He has told you, O man, what is good! What does Hashem require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your G-d?"[19] This has been the guiding light for true servants of Hashem and *tzaddikim* throughout the generations. On the one hand they serve the public by sitting in judgment using their tremendous breadth and depth of knowledge, promoting peace between man and his fellow man and between man and wife. At the same time, without the slightest concern for their dignity, they travel tirelessly from city to city and from province to province, collecting funds for the poor and for supporting Torah scholars. Their ears are constantly attuned to the cry of the orphan and the widow. Notwithstanding their achieving perfection in their character and in their service of Hashem, they make the extra effort to "walk humbly with [their] G-d."

Much has been written regarding the "thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim*" of every generation.[20] Even those *tzaddikim* who stepped out into the public arena and became leaders of the nation can still be counted among the "hidden *tzaddikim*", because for every handbreadth they exposed, thousands of cubits remained concealed. They would hide their essence and cover up the true measure of their loftiness. One of the great Hassidic *Rebbes* once explained that the true hidden *tzaddikim* are those whose doors are always open to the public. While the public may think they understand, they lack true appreciation of such a high level. Only the "Judge of all the Earth" who "knows all that is hidden" is aware of their great accomplishments and noble stature. The Creator has allowed His Divine Presence to dwell within them and so He is with them in every step they take. As our Sages have derived from the above verse: "Do not read it as

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19. Micha 6:8

20. See Sukkah 45b

'Walk humbly with your G-d,' rather as 'Walk humbly and G-d is with you.' As long as you walk with Him humbly, He will remain with you."[21]

As we prepare to ascend the mountain, we repeatedly emphasize this idea which so beautifully describes the essence of the *tzaddikim*. The top of the mountain gives us the closest view we can achieve of the courtyard of the Grand Rabbis of the Abichazira family. Their dynasty forms an unbroken chain from the earlier generations until the present, encompassing approximately four hundred years of compassionate and strong leadership. Each of them served as "a hill towards which all mouths turn"[22] and his light illuminated the entire world.

All that has been told of them during their lifetimes and after their passing is merely the revelation of a handbreadth of their saintly conduct in comparison to the thousands upon thousands of cubits that will always remain hidden and unknown. No matter how much we describe these *tzaddikim*, we will never totally capture the extent of their eminence or the purity of their character. Even those things that have been revealed to us are shrouded in mystery, making it impossible for such earthbound people as ourselves to understand. During their lives they kept themselves hidden and they preferred to remain that way after their deaths as well. Fulfillment of this wish was guaranteed by the promise of the prophet, whose interpretation by the Sages we cited earlier: "so long as you walk humbly with Him, He will remain with you".

They remained hidden and no matter how much is told of them, it does not detract from their humility. This makes them even greater after their deaths than they were during their lives. It is not surprising to discover that their great powers continue to come to the aid of any Jew. "Their righteousness endures

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21. Tanna deBei Eliyahu Rabba 28

22. Brachot 30a

forever"[23] as is evident from the many stories of miracles that come about through the influence of their powers even after their passing. What greater and more reliable testimony to this can there be than the statement once made by the Baba Sali, told to us by his grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, that his (the Baba Sali's) grandfather the Abir Yaakov was to act on behalf of his people for the next thousand years. Let us bear in mind that we have not yet completed the first fifth of the thousand years.



23. Avot 2:2

"FROM THE SUMMIT OF ROCKS – I VIEW IT" (Bamidbar 23:9)

What we have said becomes more pointed as we approach the task of chronicling the little we know of the patriarch of the dynasty, the holy Rabenu Shmuel Abichazira. Rav Shmuel hid his true essence during his lifetime and the little he did expose remained within the confines of his own limited area. The moment he became known for his efforts to save the Jewish community of Yerushalayim, he fled into exile in Damascus. He departed this world leaving behind a legacy shrouded in darkness. Beholding the Abichazira family throughout the generations, it is obvious that they drew their nourishment from their saintly ancestor. A tree whose spreading branches shade so great an area and whose fruits are so large and sweet is proof that its trunk was immensely strong and that its roots were nourished with vast amounts of water, for "a shoot will sprout from his roots."[24] This is precisely what Rav Moshe "Baba Si ben Yoseph" Turgeman wrote about this family.[25] "They became known to the world, because many Sages of Israel and *Rabbanim*, great and holy people who illuminated the world, descended from them."

Regarding the verse: "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm, like a cedar in the Lebanon he will grow tall,"[26] our Sages explain, "Had it said only 'a date palm' but had it not said 'a cedar', I would have said 'Just as the trunk of a date palm does not regenerate, so too, Heaven forbid, the trunk of a righteous man does not regenerate,' therefore it states 'a cedar'. If it had stated 'a cedar' but not stated 'a date palm', I might have said: 'Just as a cedar does not produce fruits, so too, Heaven forbid, a

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24. Isaiah 11:1

25. From his introduction to the writings of the master Abir Yaakov, may his merit protect us.

26. Tehillim 92:13

righteous man does not produce fruits, therefore both a date palm and a cedar are stated."[27]

The holy and righteous Rabenu Shmuel Abichazira merited that many generations succeeded him, and the fruits of his labor are all holy and pure. His family was "filled to the brim with scholars, new and old."[28] It is known that the prophet Eliyahu frequently revealed himself to several of them. From Heaven it was ordained that our lowly generation in this pre-Messianic era merited that they would serve as intermediaries between ourselves and G-d.

In this manner "the Torah came around to its home"[29] and was passed down as a legacy from generation to generation, from father to son, in its wanderings from exile to exile, from the holy city of Jerusalem to Damascus in Syria, from Damascus to Tirgleil in Morocco, from Tirgeleil to Tafilalet, until the sky was illuminated by "a star issued from Jacob"[30]. Miraculously, through *ruach hakodesh*, Rabenu Shmuel's descendant Rabenu Masud took a second wife and with the birth of his son the Abir Yaakov, the sun rose. At his birth "the entire house was filled with light"[31], a light which was transformed step by step into the flames of a holy fire which would in time illuminate the entire Diaspora.

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27. Taanit 25a

28. The Abir Yaakov, summarizing the family genealogy said: "praise to the L-rd, this family is filled to the rim with scholars, new and old. May the L-rd in His kindness and mercy fulfill within us and the entire nation that 'My words that I have placed in your mouth will not be withdrawn from your mouth' (Isaiah 59:21)".

29. Baba Metzia 85a

30. Bamidbar 24:17

31. See Sotah 12a

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

"Yaakov was a wholesome man abiding in tents"[32] - wholesome and complete in every way.[33] This verse describing Yaakov Avinu applies to his namesake, the Abir Yaakov. "A righteous man (who was) the foundation of the world,"[34] whom the entire House of Israel depended on, the "chief shepherd" – appointed over the flock of the King of the Universe - "he shepherded the stone of Israel."[35] He was pure and righteous and gave of his whole self to influence the nation and to be their intermediary with Hashem, showering upon "the congregation of the assembly of *Yeshurun*" an abundance of holiness and purity, Torah and fear of heaven. He understood the many needs of the people and dealt with each person according to his level. In the words of our Sages, "The entire world receives its sustenance in the merit of Chanina, My son."[36] Our Sages have explained that the *tzaddik* becomes the conduit for bringing down an abundance of good from the Higher Source to the ordinary people. This conduit, in whose merit the world exists, is clean and pure, and serves as the foundation for "the three pillars on which the world stands: on the Torah, on the Temple service, and on deeds of lovingkindness."[37]

From early childhood, while secluded in his room in his father's house, he devoted himself entirely to Torah study - the Torah

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32. Bereishit 25:27

33. See the commentary of Onkelos to the verse: "Yaakov was a wholesome man" – a complete man. We can now understand the words of the holy *Zohar* – "complete in everything – complete in kindness, complete in justice, etc." (Zohar volume III, 257).

34. Mishle 10:25

35. Bereishit 49:24. Compare this to the commentary of the Metzudat David to the verse: "The chief of Saul's shepherds" (Samuel I 21:8) who explained "the greatest and the one appointed over the shepherds of the flock of the king."

36. Taanit 24b

37. Pirke Avot 1:2

taught to him by his revered father. He was then educated by the finest of teachers, who concluded after a short time: "I have learned much from my teachers, and from my colleagues more than my teachers, but from my students more than from them all"[38] as they watched their young prodigy ascend to great heights from which he was able to provide them with insights into the methodology of learning.

With great effort and perseverance, whilst sanctifying and purifying himself and abstaining absolutely from the pleasures of the world, Rabenu Yaakov became so immersed in the Talmud that "no secret was hidden from him."[39] At the same time, with the same purity and depth, he studied *kabbalah* until he was as familiar with the paths of the hidden Torah as he was with the streets of Tafilalet. He did not "withhold good from its rightful recipients"[40] and "developed many disciples"[41] – both his very close students in his exalted Yeshiva, as well as the masses who would come to hear the word of Hashem and to have their cases judged before him.

Our Sages teach: "If anyone prays for mercy on behalf of his fellow, when he himself needs that very same thing, he is answered first."[42] The holy R' Meir from Premishlan explained that this refers to one who asks for Divine Mercy not simply because his fellow is experiencing difficulties, but because he is so overwhelmed by his friend's suffering that he literally feels the same pain. A prayer on this level is guaranteed to be answered first. The Abir Yaakov's prayers were known to last an entire hour, following in the ways of the *tzaddikim* of earlier generations, who would begin praying only after lengthy

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38. Taanit 7a

39. Daniel 4:6

40. Mishle 3:27

41. Avot 1:1

42. Baba Kamma 92a

preparation[43]. Rabenu Yaakov felt the pain of every Jew on the individual level, as well as the needs of the Jewish nation as a whole and he would cry as a servant before his Master. "The voice is the voice of Yaakov"[44] (Bereishit 27:22) – "His power is in nothing but his mouth"[45] – and he was answered first.

His entire life he gave of himself unstintingly for the sake of his Jewish brethren, helping victims of injustice, and promoting peace between disputants. "His soul yearned to do justice and good for every wronged soul, he would answer before he was even called."[46] He would go to great lengths, even at times dirtying his own hands, in order to determine whether a couple could once again live a life of intimacy. He prayed for the sick and despondent, like an errant son he pleaded before his Father. His prayer was fluent, and was therefore certainly accepted.[47] He worked hard to "silence foe and avenger"[48] from among the nations, who morning and night for any variety of reasons would inflict harm upon our Jewish brethren. He would display his strength to show the nations that "the Name of G-d is proclaimed over you"[49] (Devarim 28:10).

Influential priests and sorcerers would hide their idols and not dare to inflict harm upon any Jew, because "All flesh then knew that I am Hashem, your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty

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43. See Brachot 32b. The Abir Yaakov warns his students in his composition "*LaHashem Melech*," printed in "*Yagel Yaakov*" (5761[2000/01] edition, page 41): "Sanctify your hearts, purify your minds, as you approach the place of your worship, in the House of the King". See also there (page 44), how he describes the work of the Evil Inclination "Before I arrived at the place of prayer, it first sat itself down in order to divert my attention to idle things."

44. Bereishit 27:22

45. See Rashi Bamidbar 22:4

46. From the *piyut* composed by Rabenu Masud, may his merit protect us (Yagel Yaakov 5761 edition, page 179).

47. See Brachot 34b regarding Rav Chanina ben Dosa

48. Tehillim 8:3

49. Devarim 28:10

One of Jacob."[50] "For I am your redeemer using supernatural means ... I will do so for the sake of my relationship with Yaakov."[51]

Had this wonderful chain ended with the Abir Yaakov, misguided and ignorant people could have claimed that these stories of wonders and miracles are an exaggeration, being nothing but "empty pitchers that they hung"[52] upon a great tree. This can be disproved however, for even our generation has merited the continuation of this great dynasty in the Baba Sali and his son Rabenu Meir. Their conduct is a continuation of the path paved by their fathers, a wondrous supernatural path in which no law of nature stood in their way. These are not stories which our fathers heard from their fathers, but there are people alive today who stood in the shadow of these great trees and witnessed these miracles with their own eyes. The later stories are testimony to the earlier ones - these are not mere exaggerations but are all authentic stories which have been transmitted from generation to generation by reliable sources, chief among them the Baba Sali who would spend many hours relating stories telling of the life and times of the revered Abir Yaakov.

The truth of the matter is that it is only because we are flesh and blood and so immersed in the material world that we consider these stories incredible. To those holy men who distanced themselves as heaven from earth from every negative trait and from all of the desires of this world, there was nothing unusual about rising above the laws of nature or even altering them for the sake of a *mitzvah* or another holy endeavor.

On the verse: "The righteous man rules through the fear of G-d,"[53] *Chazal* explain, "Who rules over Me? A righteous person!

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50. Isaiah 49:26

51. Malbim there.

52. Baba Batra 7a

53. Shmuel II 23:3

For I decree a harsh punishment and he cancels it with his prayers."[54] We lesser minds cannot comprehend that it is possible to live beyond the limitations of this world. We have no choice but simply to believe that the thoughts of *tzaddikim* are not our thoughts and their ways are not our ways. The Holy One and His retinue sit and await their words of wisdom, as our Sages tell us, "The Heavenly Court above does not enter into judgment unless the court below has sanctified the month."[55]



54. Moed Katan 16b

55. Rosh Hashana 8b



"A HERITAGE OF THE CONGREGATION OF YAAKOV" (Devarim 33:4)

The Abir Yaakov was an ever-increasing spring. The Torah and blessing he left for future generations, the "heritage of the congregation of Yaakov," lit up the world like the rays of the sun. He 'brought forth a blossom and sprouted a bud'[56] with his awesome works which were written with incredible wisdom and knowledge."[57]

Twelve of his books merited seeing the light of day. These books are woven with the words of the Written Torah, interlaced with *Mishna, Gemara,* and *Halacha,* as well as a sprinkling of *Aggada.* His derivations on the text used the full range of *pardes,* combining all methods of analysis and commentary into one. One of the countless examples of this is the names of the children of Ketura. Each name is analyzed with an eye as to how the name alludes to one involved in Torah and holy pursuits.[58] His works were extremely profound and he was able to convey ideas of great depth using language that is understandable by all. "Beautiful to behold and pleasant to the eye – its fruits are to be eaten and its leaves provide healing"[59].

Our Sages have told us: "Everything depends on *mazal* even a Sefer Torah in the Sanctuary." (Zohar volume III, 134a). Not all of the Abir Yaakov's Torah novellae were published. In addition to his published works, he had many insights into the Talmud and the sanctity of the *Shabbat* which were subsequently lost, while his well-known commentary on Rav Chaim Vital's "*Pri Etz*

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56. Bamidbar 17:23

57. From the introduction of Rabenu Aharon Abichazira, son of the Abir Yaakov, who was entrusted with publishing his holy books and passing them down to future generations.

58. See Pituchei Chotam on Bereishit 25:1-4

59. From the introduction of the publisher (Nahariya edition 5761[2000/01]), by his great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a.

Chaim" went up in flames after he finished writing it, fulfilling the words of the Talmud "the parchment is burning and the letters are taking flight."[60]

Any attempt to portray the great personality of the Abir Yaakov must also focus on his holy books since they are an inseparable part of his character. From his own works we can learn that a person's *chiddushei* Torah are his offspring, for he writes "A person who does not produce *chiddushei* Torah can be compared to a barren woman who has not given birth (*Pituchei Chotam, Parshat Toldot*)[61].



60. Avoda Zara 18b

61. This is the appropriate place to point out the interpretation of the Abir Yaakov in his work "Levona Zakka" (Nahariya Edition 5761 page 169) of the verse: "O how I love Your Torah! All day long it is my conversation" (Tehillim 119:97). "Conversation" implies the appearance and influence of the Divine Spirit. This is what King David said - he loves the *Torah* so much that he studies it for its own sake, and has therefore merited having its secrets revealed to him, allowing him to offer many new and incredible insights. (see Pirke Avot 6:1). This is what the verse means: "O how I love Your Torah" – from this great love I have for it; "all day long it is my conversation" – from this great love I have acquired, Divine Inspiration and the hidden parts of the Torah are therefore revealed to me. I have now become like a "steadily strengthening fountain and like an unceasing river." (ibid.) The Holy One Blessed be He derives great pleasure from new insights offered on the *Torah*, particularly when they are on the path of truth. His words endure forever as testimony to the writer that he achieved that level – that through his great love of Torah and his studying it for its own sake, "he merited having the secrets of the Torah revealed to him and he became like a steadily increasing fountain."

"FROM THERE IT DIVIDES INTO FOUR HEADWATERS" (Bereishit 2:12)

The expounders of verses were wont to say that the name of the Abir Yaakov and his family is alluded to in the verse: ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים – "Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt."[62] It is not for naught that the Torah describes the "living" of the Abir Yaakov next to the word Egypt. His burial place, the Dimanhor of today, is the Biblical land of Goshen and we know that "the righteous even when they are dead are called alive"[63] (*Rashi*, Bereishit 11:32).

The chronicles of the Abir Yaakov did not end on the day of his passing in Dimanhor on the twentieth of Tevet 5640 [4th/5th January1880], as *Chazal* explain "Yaakov our forefather did not die ... just as the offspring of Yaakov are living, so too Yaakov is living."[64] The Abir Yaakov's offspring were very blessed. Four sons continued his legacy, leading their lives in the manner in which he reared them. Their names were: Rabenu Masud, Rabenu Aharon, Rabenu Avraham, and Rabenu Yitzchak.

While much has been recorded and said about the greatness of the Abir Yaakov throughout the generations, very little has been preserved regarding his holy sons. The little we do know from their disciples, the family, and the testimony of the Torah scholars of their time is that the light of three of the brothers illuminated the entire Diaspora during their lifetimes. Although the fourth brother, Rabenu Avraham, secluded himself in Tiberias, the luster of his brightness was apparent too, and many benefited from this light.

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62. Bereishit 47:28. In these words we can find the name אביחצירא (even the popular corruption which has become deep-rooted over the years, to pronounce the name אבוחצירא (Abuchazeira) rather than Abichazira is also found in the words ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים.)

63. Rashi Bereishit 11:32. Going one step further, "R' Chama bar Chanina said: 'Tzaddikim are even greater in death than they are in life.'" (Chullin 7b)

64. Taanit 5b

Chief among the sons was the eldest Rabenu Masud, nicknamed "Grandfather of law" who succeeded his father in the Rabbinate. He composed *piyutim* and melodies to elevate the soul of his esteemed father and other *tzaddikim*. His homiletic work on the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* was well-known among the scholars. He would ignore all his worldly affairs until he had meticulously completed his writings, ensuring that they were written with great accuracy."[65]

His many insights using the *pardes* method of derivation both in the revealed and hidden parts of the Torah were never printed. Nor were the many *halachic* rulings which he carefully formulated using his sharp analytical ability. The pressures of his involvement in communal work and the leadership duties he inherited from his father left him no time to publish them.[66]

His brother Rabenu Aharon was appointed to assist him in leading the community. which he undertook in addition to his immense efforts to publish the Abir Yaakov's works. The youngest brother, Rabenu Yitzchak, named for the Ari HaKadosh was renowned for his expertise in *kabbalah* and assisted in the running of the Yeshiva. Tragically this great tree was felled in its prime. During a fund-raising trip for the Yeshiva, he was attacked by highway robbers and shot at the age of fifty-three. He left behind many blessings in the form of precious compositions both in *drush* (homiletic interpretations) as well as *pilpul* (hair-splitting analysis of the Talmud – some of which were published).

Rabenu Avraham chose to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*. He settled in the holy city of Tiberias where he fled from any honor or position of authority, choosing to seclude himself within the four cubits of *halacha*. The Tiberian sages and scholars, however, immediately recognized him as "a giant among giants" – as the

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65. From the introduction of HaGaon Rebbi Masud Atzraf zt"l to the book "Yagel Yaakov"

66. This is the testimony of Rav Moshe Turgeman in his introduction to "Petach HaOhel" written by Rabenu David Abichazira *Ateret Roshenu* may Hashem avenge his blood.

Midrash teaches in reference to Avraham Avinu.[67] When they also discovered his lineage, they did not allow him to remain in seclusion but they came to refresh themselves from his pure and holy waters.

No amount of paper would suffice for all there is to be written about the life and times of all of the descendants of the Abir Yaakov. This holy family is replete with scholars and writers, all holy and pure, their stature "a ladder set earthward, its top reaching heavenward."[68] However, because they tried to live among the common people, shying away from positions of leadership, little has been written about them and their life history has not been recorded. In this book, we have elected to concentrate primarily on the dynasty of the Grand Rabbis of the family, mentioning only a few of the other family members who were close to them.



67. See Bereishit Rabba 14

68. Bereishit 28:12

THE CROWN OF ELDERS IS GRANDCHILDREN

A grandson of the Abir Yaakov, son of his son Rabenu Masud, reached the pinnacle of spiritual heights and separation from this world. Not only his followers but even the spiritual giants around him were in such great awe of him that they were afraid even to utter his name, referring to him instead as *Ateret Roshenu*. This was Rabenu David Abichazira, may Hashem avenge his blood. From Tafilalet he led the entire Moroccan Jewish community and his influence spread throughout North Africa.

The Abir Yaakov, by virtue of being patriarch and prince of the entire dynasty, is known even to our generation; we are all familiar with the Baba Sali and his son Rabenu Meir because little time has elapsed since their passing. Perhaps the main contribution of this book therefore is the life history of *Ateret Roshenu*, presented here for the first time.

The level of abstinence that Rabenu David adopted was beyond belief. Even other saintly individuals considered him exceptional. He was perceived by his community as a holy individual so far above human experience that we trembled at the thought of trying to find the words to describe him. We can do nothing more than record what we have heard and quote detailed testimonies.

His four *amot* were holy and pure and his eyes would never stray beyond them. If he needed to go into the city, he would walk swiftly along the rooftops after announcements that no woman leave her house while Rabenu David was crossing the *Malach*. For six years he secluded himself in his room being seen by nobody, not even his own family. When he did emerge, he was glowing with purity and his entire being projected fear of G-d to the extent that people dared not look at his face.

His entire life was dedicated to striving for higher and higher levels of sanctity, until he yearned for the opportunity to die sanctifying Hashem's Name. This wish was accepted by Hashem and he met his death *al Kiddush Hashem.*[69] Death had been decreed upon the entire Tafilalet Jewish community and all the men, women, and children had already been assembled, when the wicked leaders suddenly changed their minds and decided to kill *Ateret Roshenu* in exchange for the entire community. A cruel and unusual death was chosen for him; he was placed in the mouth of a cannon which was then fired, yet his pure and saintly body remained intact.

We have been given the great and undeserved privilege of being asked to sketch his life and times as part of the greater picture of an illustrious family of which he was considered the crowning glory.



69. We heard this from his nephew Rabenu Meir who was full of praise for his uncle who chose such a death and who merited its fulfillment from Above.

HE WILL RECEIVE A BLESSING FROM HASHEM

His sudden and untimely death caused the sun to set at midday. Yet, even before then, the shining light of his saintly brother, the Baba Sali, had already risen. We have been privileged to amass many testimonies from eyewitnesses, disciples, and others close to him; we have simply recorded their words. As they speak their emotions run high, their eyes flow with tears, and we cannot help but be moved with them. Their spirits soar as if they are transported to his home in Netivot. We, who never had the privilege of sheltering in his holy lee, are carried away by the storm of their emotions.

Not only was the Baba Sali one of the few *tzaddikim* to be planted in his generation, but he could be counted among the *tzaddikim* of a number of generations, for his leadership spanned several decades. From the time he assisted his elder brother *Ateret Roshenu* in leading the community at a mere eighteen years of age, there were to be seventy-five years of leadership, of imparting his glory to the nation until the bitter day in which his light was extinguished on 4 Shevat 5744 [8th January 1984].

During the two decades since his parting, thousands of stories of his great miracles have become known. Publicizing these stories, however, has been neither our goal nor our purpose. We have striven to present a picture of his glorious leadership insofar as ordinary men can see and understand the conduct of an angel of G-d. Fear of G-d continues to envelop his sacred memory.

There is no question that no one could ever accurately portray the character of the Baba Sali, because we can never perceive his lofty level of righteousness. The observations of those close to him, and the stories he told about himself do not even scratch the surface. Although he kept most of his conduct secret, there was no need for him to do so, for nobody was able to really

understand him or to peek through to the other side of the curtain. The giants of the generation who knew him from the time of his arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*, some of whom are still with us, treated him with tremendous respect and were in awe of him, always deferring to his rulings. They who were able to come close to him "saw and were indeed astounded"[70] by the sheer level of his holiness and of his service to *Hashem*. Earthbound people such as ourselves saw nothing.

There were people who did not realize that a mere two hours distance away was the entrance to the Garden of Eden. "Angels of G-d ascending and descending on it"[71] and whoever wished could partake from this holiness – with full permission. After he departed from this world, as reliable witnesses circulated stories of his miracles, many were dismayed at the realization that they had missed the opportunity to be part of the holy assembly that gathered at his house because they had failed to realize who he was during his lifetime.

"ישא ברכה" "He will receive a blessing." This was how the Baba Sali referred to himself in his writings, and this was how the giants of Israel addressed him in their correspondence. This appellation was incredibly fitting, as our Sages tell us: "'He will receive a blessing from Hashem'[72] – this refers to Moshe, who became the Rav and king for all of Israel."[73] He himself used this description in the spirit of R' Tanhuma's understanding: "Do not read it as 'he will receive a blessing', but rather 'he will bring blessing to others.'"[74]

Just as we learn that Avraham Avinu studied four hundred chapters in Massechet Avoda Zara, (see Zohar 275b) we can

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70. Tehillim 48:6

71. Bereishit 28:12

72. Tehillim 23:5

73. Midrash Tehillim 24

74. Devarim Rabba 11

describe the Baba Sali as having studied four hundred chapters in Massechet Brachot [blessings]. His mouth would pour forth an abundance of blessings upon the children of his holy nation, both those who sought his countenance as well as those who were not in his presence. He never ceased bestowing blessings upon his people Israel, speaking well of his people, and effecting salvation on their behalf. His blessings bore fruit and these fruits have produced fruits and fruits of fruits.

He himself benefited not iota from the abundance surrounding him; he left everything for others. They would benefit and he would bless them; they would draw from the wellsprings of salvation and he would draw up for them more and more. While paving the path from which the entire world was to be sustained, in the manner described by our Sages: "The entire world receives its sustenance in the merit of Chanina, My son" (Taanit 24b), he fulfilled the latter half of the statement: "[while] Chanina My son finds it sufficient to live on just one kav of carobs from one Sabbath eve to the next Sabbath eve[75]".

Our sages compare this world to a wedding hall.[76] The *tzaddikim* explain: just as the wedding hosts do not partake of the festive meal, being hard at work hosting all who come to celebrate with them, yet the guests are seated comfortably and are able to eat to their hearts' content, so too the righteous of this world are the conduit bringing down abundance to this world, while they themselves do not benefit from even a little finger's worth. Their sole purpose is to bestow good upon the Jewish nation and to shower upon them an unceasing abundance of good.



75. Ibid.

76. Avot 4:16



A CLEAR GLASS

With fear and trembling at this holy endeavor, let us take quill in hand, dip it in the inkwell of coals and write with a red fire on a background of black fire, the history of that "holy angel who came down from heaven"[77], the man of G-d who succeeded in humbling his character so as to transform it into G-dliness. This is the Holy of Holies, Rabenu Meir Abichazira, may his merit protect us and the entire nation of Israel. Amen.

We become weak-kneed with fear at the mere idea of peering with our physical and inadequate eyes through the tiny cracks through which Rabenu Meir revealed one *tefach* while concealing thousands – afraid lest we sin with our words and somehow, G-d forbid, disqualify this holy offering or that we sin by imagining that we have sufficiently praised his holy conduct. How does one regard this incredible life story spanning sixty-six years (5677-5743) [1916/17-1982/83] that were entirely holy from beginning to end, including fifty years of leadership?

Rabenu Meir, named for the holy *tanna Rebbi* Meir *Baal HaNess* (the miracle worker), was a *Baal HaNess* himself as well. With boundless sanctity and separation that knew no bounds, he was continuously striving upward. While he secluded himself in his house in Ashdod, his net spread throughout the four corners of the world. His eyes which never strayed from beyond his four cubits were able to discern what was happening to each and every person. They could see uncanny distances. To free an imprisoned Jewish child Rabenu Meir sketched the streets of London, though he never set foot in them. With disjointed sentences, his mind and hands occupied with the workings of clocks, he would nullify many terrible decrees. A cup of *araq* poured for someone could contain a *segula* for salvation, whether it was for the birth of children, or any other form of salvation.

77. Daniel 4:10

Any words he uttered without explanation (סתם) can be understood by a rule that appears in the *Gemara*: "An anonymous (סתם) *Mishna* is attributed to R' Meir[78] and "*halacha* follows an anonymous (סתם) *Mishna*."[79] As for himself, we learn that "The one for whom the miracle occurred does not recognize this miracle."[80] He attached no significance to wondrous acts that were taking place in his room and he took no credit for himself.

When the eulogizers stepped forward to bewail the loss of the *tzaddik*, HaGaon HaRav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner opened his remarks with the words of the *Gemara*: "The following was a familiar lesson in the mouth of R' Meir: 'Learn with all your heart and all your soul to know My ways and to be industrious in the doors of My Torah. Guard My Torah in your heart, and let My fear be before your eyes, and guard your mouth from all sin, and purify and sanctify yourself from all trespass and iniquity, and I will be with you in every place.'"[81] When it came to Rabenu Meir, not only was this the roadmap of his life, but his life's goal was "And I will be with you in every place," to cleave to the Giver of Life and to connect with His presence every hour and every moment. He merited that the Divine Presence dwelt within him and he had Divine Assistance in everything he did. Whatever came forth from his mouth was never returned unanswered. The fact that he merited the words of the end of the *Gemara* indicates that he fulfilled all the conditions mentioned at the beginning.



78. Sanhedrin 86a

79. Ibid. 34b

80. Nidda 31a

81. Brachot 17a. The eulogy in its entirety, as with the other eulogies, is printed in "*Mili DeHespeda*" (Ashdod Adar I 5744).



HE WOULD MAKE THE EYES OF THE SAGES SHINE ('MEIR')

From when he was a small child, "the book of the Torah did not depart from his mouth."[82] He would forgo the normal play of children in order to devote himself entirely to toiling in Torah. Even during difficult days or while traveling on the roads, he never stopped studying Torah. He merited fulfillment of *Chazal's* words on the verse: "The working spirit works for itself, when its mouth humbles itself to it."[83] *Chazal* derive from this: "A person toils in this place, and his Torah toils on his behalf in another place."[84] *Rashi* adds, "The Torah toils on his behalf, in that it searches and beseeches its Creator to provide him with its deeper meanings and secrets."

The Torah, in all its facets, was "sharply honed in his mouth."[85] Whatever was spoken in his presence, whether it was the words of *Chazal*, the *rishonim*, *acharonim*, *poskim*, books of responsa, works on *kabbalah* or *Hassidut*, or the great works of *pilpul* of the giants of his time; he was well-versed in all of them and no secret was hidden from him. He had a deep and thorough knowledge of the Torah of the Vilna *Gaon*. Whenever the name of the holy Chatam Sofer was mentioned, on any subject and whichever of his writings was quoted, Rabenu Meir would respond readily with pearls of wisdom from his teachings.

"The books of R' Meir are clothed with light."[86] (Bereishit Rabba Parsha 20) His Torah insights and his precious derivations illuminated the words of *Chazal* with a special light – *mussar* intertwined with words of rebuke which would melt the hearts

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82. Based on Yehoshua 1:8

83. Mishle 16:26

84. Sanhedrin 99b

85. Kiddushin 30a

86. Bereishit Rabba Parsha 20

of man. He actually hid the manuscripts containing his insights and commanded that whatever remained after his death be buried with him, and little was recorded by those close to him. They would say, "We believed we would live in his shadow our entire lives."

Although not yet seventeen when he accepted the position of *Rosh Yeshiva* in Morocco, the students would drink in his words of wisdom with great thirst. His method of learning, straightforward yet incredibly deep attracted great Sages to come and benefit from his great light. In later years, after he settled in the city of Ashdod, his name became known among those seeking Hashem, for "One who wishes to gain wisdom should go south."[87] The well-known giants of Israel without exception would frequent his house and would discuss Torah with him. Many came to share their own insights, but eventually realized how much they could learn from him and how little they had to teach him.

He was named for the *tanna* R' Meir, who was the first to carry the holy name. *Chazal* teach us regarding the saintly *tanna*: "Why was he called R' Meir? Because he would make the eyes of the Sages shine (meir) in *halacha*." (Eruvin 13b)

87. Baba Batra 25b



ANOINTED OF HASHEM

With his characteristic humility Rabenu Meir chose to live in a modest apartment in Ashdod, where for several years he managed to conceal himself from the public eye. During those years he spoke only words of Torah even with his own family; everything he did was entirely for Hashem. With superhuman effort he sanctified himself, attaining unimaginable heights. His pure body, the housing for this lofty soul underwent much purification and cleansing until it became totally detached from worldly matters, and was merely an emissary in a foreign land, serving to influence and illuminate the land and its inhabitants.

Some visitors to his home tell us that the purpose of their regular visits to Ashdod was not to ask him to pray for the sick and needy and not to seek guidance, nor even to receive his blessing. Something deep inside them sensed the pure spirit that emanated from his sanctuary. This is what compelled them time after time to make the trip to simply sit in his room and observe the luster of his presence, so that they too could absorb the holiness which pervaded the place. The more sensitive among them testified that the moment they entered the house they could feel the cloud of holiness which enveloped the place.

It was not by chance that the *gedolei hador* described him in their eulogies as כעצם השמים לטהר "the essence of the heaven in purity"[88] – in fact the *gematria* of this description is the same as that of רבי מאיר שלום.[89] Without saying a word, without so much as glancing at those around him, Rabenu Meir radiated boundless sanctity and purity. This atmosphere, which cannot be

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88. Shmot 24:10

89. From the eulogy of the Pittsburgher Rebbe, printed in "*Mili DeHespeda.*" (Ashdod, Adar I 5744 [February 1984]).

(Translator's note: רבי מאיר שלום can be translated both as "Farewell, Rebbi Meir" as well as "Peace be unto you, Rebbi Meir.")

encapsulated in words or even in specific actions, remains etched in the hearts of his students until today. The mere mention of his name fills them with humility as if he were still standing before them. It is therefore not surprising that some of those whom we approached about Rabenu Meir, fearfully refused to discuss him, explaining that they dared not speak of him.

For many years he suffered greatly but he never complained about his pain. He was known to say, "Suffering is a great kindness from the One Above and should be accepted with love." He would share with his students his deep insights into the ways of the Creator saying, "The Creator runs this world only with kindness. There are times, however, when some of this kindness appears in the guise of suffering." Although his illness lasted for almost twenty years, with great fortitude, he concealed the extent of his suffering until the last year of his life.

The world came close to missing the revelation of his glowing light, for he preferred to remain in relative obscurity. When he passed away, we could have lamented him using the words of the prophet, "The righteous one perishes and no man takes it to heart," for while he lived, few paid close attention to the great light that emanated from his sanctuary. In addition, he totally negated himself in his father's presence and he died during the Baba Sali's lifetime, which also contributed to his anonymity. Had it not been for his years of leadership in Morocco, and the few perceptive people who were privileged to spend time with him, it is quite possible that his entire life story would have remained shrouded by obscurity.

Chazal describe the death of King Yoshiyahu at the hands of Necho king of Egypt in the Megiddo valley, saying that his body was pierced with so many arrows that it resembled a sieve. The Talmud continues[90]: "As he was dying, Yirmiyahu saw that his lips were moving. He said, 'Perhaps, G-d forbid, he is saying

90. Taanit 22b

something improper on account of his pain.' Yirmiyahu bent over the dying king and heard him justifying to himself the Divine Judgment, Yoshiyahu was saying: 'It is Hashem Who is righteous, for I disobeyed His utterance.'[91]" Upon hearing these words, the prophet Yirmiyahu greatly honored the dying king with a special eulogy.[92]

We do not possess the tools with which to measure properly the greatness of true *tzaddikim*. From the "*beit midrash*" of the prophet Yirmiyahu, however, we can learn of the essence of the suffering of the *tzaddikim*, and the greatness required to justify the Divine Judgment. Yirmiyahu commenced his eulogy with the words, "רוח אפינו משיח ה'" "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Hashem."[93] The first letters of each of these words make up the name מאיר.[94]



91. Eicha 1:18

92. See Megilla 3a

93. Eicha 4:20

94. The Name of *Hashem* is represented by the letter י.

OBSERVING R' MEIR FROM BEHIND

When we view the unique character of Rabenu Meir, who as we mentioned was named for the holy *tanna* R' Meir, we should keep in mind the words of Rabenu *HaKadosh*. "*Rebbi* said, 'The reason I am sharper than my colleagues is that I saw R' Meir from behind; if I had seen him from in front I would be even sharper." (Eruvin 13b) The commentaries find this passage difficult. Did *Rebbi* have no opportunity to see the face of R' Meir; did the other students of that generation not see R' Meir at all?

It seems that they meant that even though everyone could physically see the face of R' Meir, *Rebbi* alone understood that what the eye perceived of R' Meir's greatness was in fact only a view from behind. It detected merely a ray of light from the great luminary that was visible through the folds of the cloak in which he had concealed himself. With this incisive analysis of R' Meir's uniqueness, *Rebbi* elevated himself far above his colleagues. Not so someone who thinks that he can view R' Meir from the front in all his glory; such a person cannot gain anything from him.[95]

The prophet states: "For the lips of the *Kohen* should safeguard knowledge, and people should seek teaching from his mouth; for he is an agent of Hashem, Master of Legions."[96] *Chazal* explain: "If the Rav resembles an angel of G-d, people may seek Torah from his mouth, but if not, they may not seek Torah from his mouth."[97] The commentaries ask whether anyone has ever seen or could recognize an angel to distinguish if his Rav truly resembles an angel or not. They explain that by comparing the

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95. In the same manner, we can explain Rabenu *HaKadosh*'s claim: "If I had seen him from the front, I would be even sharper." This was meant all humility – "Had I been on a higher level, where I would have been able to see R' Meir in all his glory, I would be even sharper."

96. Malachi 2:7

97. Moed Katan 16b

Rav to an angel, *Chazal* wished to teach us that just as none of us can truly understand the essence of an angel, so too the Rav from whom they wish to learn Torah is far above our perception. Only a person who realizes that he cannot truly comprehend the Rav is eligible to "seek teaching from his mouth." If not, that is, if he thinks that he knows what he is all about, that he knows his essence, then he "may not seek Torah from his mouth, "for he will not be able to gain anything from him.

Rabenu Meir's conduct reflected the beginning of the above verse: "The teaching of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and with fairness, and turned many away from iniquity," was also a fulfillment of the latter part "and people should seek teaching from his mouth for he is an agent of Hashem, Master of Legions." "He is the emissary of the Holy One Blessed Be He, like the ministering angels, who serve Him and enter His Presence" (*Rashi*). It is clear therefore that all that has been said about him is nothing more than "Rabenu Meir's back."

We know as well, that all that is written in this book is but a drop in the bucket. Readers who had the privilege of knowing Rabenu Meir, will be reminded of many more incidents as they read some of these stories. We should like to thank you in advance, if you will share these stories with us, so that we may use them in future editions of this book.

END OF INTR ODUCTION

The name of this book is based on the verse: "מידי אביר יעקב משם רועה אבן ישראל" "From the hands of the mighty power of Yaakov (אביר יעקב) – from there, he shepherds the cornerstone of Israel."[1] In this verse we find an allusion to the names of the Grand Rabbis of the Abichazira family. The patriarch of this family is the Abir Yaakov, whose appellation is found in this verse, while the verse ends with the Baba Sali's name (ישראל). Furthermore Morenu Rabbi David Abichazira points out *Rashi*'s commentary that the word אבן in this *pasuk* is composed of the words אב ובן (father and son), so the "father of Yisrael" (Rabenu Masud) and the "son of Yisrael" (Rabenu Meir) are alluded to. There is a further allusion to Rabenu Meir's name in that the initial letters of the closing part of the verse משם רועה אבן ישראל are the same as the letters of the name מאיר. Furthermore, the word מידי hints at the names of רבי מסעוד and his son *Ateret Roshenu* רבי דוד, may Hashem avenge his blood.

Our Sages have interpreted the verse in the following manner: "From the hands of the Mighty Power of Jacob, from there he merited to become a shepherd of the Jewish people."[2] We entitled this book Abir Yaakov because the Abir Yaakov was the patriarch of the family, and his descendants attributed their special powers to his great merit. It is through his strength that they became "shepherds of the cornerstone of Israel."

As we present the fruits of our efforts, we offer a prayer to The One Above that we not blunder with our language and we not say anything that is not in keeping with the will of Hashem. The tales of the righteous may be as deep as the sea, but it is Torah[3] and we must therefore learn it, even with our unfitting tools and

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1. Bereishit 49:24

2. Sotah 36b

3. It would be appropriate to cite here the words of the *Tiferet Shlomo* from Radomsk (Parshat

in our sorry state. The *tzaddikim* explain the verse "The Torah of Hashem is perfect."[4] to mean that no matter how far we dig and delve it will remain as if untouched. Here as well, we are commanded to dig to the best of our ability.

May it be the will of Hashem that we serve as worthy messengers for this holy *mitzvah*, and properly utilize the strength of our Sender. May the merit of these holy and righteous individuals stand for us and give us the ability to act as we should. May we learn from their lives and ways, and thereby strengthen our own bond with the One Above through faith in the words of the righteous who were planted in this world in our generation.



Chaye Sarah): "The greatness of the tzaddikim, such as our forefathers, is well known. It is *Hashem*'s wish that we speak of their praises and it is like learning *Torah*. The entire book of Bereishit, one of the five books of the Torah, is filled with stories of our ancestors. Although the glory and greatness is only for *Hashem*, and one who praises any of his celestial army and stars is akin to worshipping idols, but it is *Hashem*'s wish that we speak of the greatness of the tzaddikim, for they represent the *Torah*. As it says, "For it is not an empty thing for you." The *Torah* is the six hundred thousand souls of the Jewish people, for there are six hundred thousand letters in the *Torah*. This is the meaning of: "'Give praise the servants of *Hashem*, praise the Name of *Hashem*." (Tehillim 113:1) One who praises the servants of *Hashem* (i.e. the tzaddikim) is in effect praising the Name of *Hashem*, for this is His will.

4. Tehillim 19:8



THE BOOK OF SHMUEL



The narrow scope of human vision as well as our limited ability to comprehend subtleties leads many to believe that all is revealed before their eyes. Logic dictates that one can only judge based on what his eyes see, yet wisdom insists that the eyes do not see the entire picture. Furthermore, even when the eye does see, the human mind cannot always correctly decipher, understand, and interpret.

How, then, can so many people who have such restricted vision claim to have the insight and understanding to evaluate another person's level of righteousness? Those cognizant of human frailties are not misled by what their eyes see and they realize that the only true judge of the level of a person's piety is the One Who Sees into the Hearts — He and only He.

On the verse "... and against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment; I am Hashem." (Shmot 12:12), our Sages expound: "I am Hashem — I and no other!" The emphasis placed by our Sages is not to be limited to this verse, but applies wherever the expression, "I am Hashem" appears in Scripture. For example: "I am Hashem, plumbing the feelings," (Yirmiyahu 17:10) reminds us that there is only One Who has the ability to see into the hearts of man — no other. The greatest of scholars and wisest of men can never explore the hearts of man and give grades for achievement and excellence.

If no mortal has the ability to reveal what is hidden behind the exterior of an ordinary person, how much narrower does our field of vision become when speaking of a *tzaddik*. We are incapable of rendering any judgment; we lack even the basic tools required to judge and discern. The eyes of humans are blinded by the rays of light they absorb, making us oblivious to the hidden rays that do not penetrate our limited consciousness, leading us to assume mistakenly that we are able to sketch the personalities of the righteous.

The truth is — and this is crucial when speaking of true *tzaddikim* — we do not even possess the most basic ability to evaluate their

character and their conduct properly. This is because their quest to live a life of abstinence and holiness involves erecting a screen around themselves, concealing their true essence. Only the Judge of All the Earth, Who is aware of the hidden, can know of their level of righteousness.

Our words take on an even greater meaning when speaking of the patriarch of the royal Abichazira dynasty, Rabenu Shmuel, who strove to remain hidden from public view. Although his name was known throughout the Land and his light shone over the entire Diaspora, much of his true character remained hidden. With great skill he concealed so much of his greatness that what was hidden far exceeded what was revealed. Even after he was summoned to the upper worlds, he left behind a life story shrouded in clouds and mist.

To this day, his name is mentioned as one of the hidden *tzaddikim* who lived about 400 years ago. It was not for nothing that he was known as hidden and it was not only Torah, piety, and abstinence that were passed down to future generations of this family, but the desire to remain hidden from public view also typified the holy Abichazira family throughout the generations.

SOURCE OF THE NAME ABICHAZIRA

It is well known that this illustrious family traces its roots to the Tafilalet region of Morocco, where the patriarchs of the family led the community until they immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael.* Further research reveals that this tree, which produced many fruits, was in fact rooted in the Land of our Forefathers, where the father of the entire dynasty, R' Shmuel Abichazira, lived until he was uprooted and reestablished his residence in Syria, where he is buried.

Rabenu Shmuel's efforts to hide from public view leave us with very little knowledge of his life and times, save for a few isolated incidents passed down over the generations. We cannot blame the historians of the time, who perhaps did not sufficiently record their impressions of the grand spiritual giant walking among them, for Rabenu Shmuel never let anyone catch even a glimpse of his shining countenance. Even if there were archives containing records of his remarkable life, they could not be relied on to reflect that light in all its dimensions.

R' Yoseph Chaim David Azulai (the Chid"a) mentions Rabenu Shmuel in his monumental *Shem HaGedolim* (Names of the Giants): "R' Shmuel Abi Chaziri, a holy man of G-d, would seclude himself in the synagogue of Bei Gubar, in a city today referred to as Gubar. It was due to his great abstinence from this world that he became known as Rabenu Shmuel Abi Chaziri. I have heard from elders regarding his many great miracles and the countless times he brought about the salvation of the Jewish nation."

What is hidden about Rabenu Shmuel is so vast that it darkens the little that is revealed. There is not even a consensus regarding the source of the name Abichazira. Although our most reliable testimony comes from Rabenu Yisrael Abichazira, the Baba Sali, we will cite other sources giving us other explanations for this name, which means אבי המחצלות — "father of the mats," and which became associated

with one of the most glorious families of Torah scholars in the Jewish nation. This is the Baba Sali's account:

The incident took place when Rabenu Shmuel undertook a mission beyond the boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael* for the purpose of a *mitzvah*. After a tiring and weakening journey, he arrived at Jaffa port just as a ship headed for his destination was about to sail.

Rabenu Shmuel, who was materially very poor, without a penny in his pocket, was in fact very rich man, for his confidence in Hashem was so ingrained that Ben Zoma's definition of wealthy (see Avot 4:1: "Who is a wealthy man? One who is content with his lot.") was apparent in every step he took. As with his namesake, the prophet Shmuel: "In all the places that he visited his home was with him" (Brachot 10b). He would embark on every excursion with his few belongings packed in a small bundle: a few holy books, some worn out clothing, and a mat, which accompanied him wherever he went.

Rabenu Shmuel arrived at the shore and approached the dock where the ship was anchored. Seeing that the ship was not full, he asked the captain if he would be so kind as to allow him on board without payment. The non-Jewish captain looked at him scornfully and refused to let him sail unless he paid the fixed fare required of all passengers. Seeing the futility of any further attempts at persuasion, Rabenu Shmuel left the dock, sat next to the wharf on the mat he had brought with him and began studying Torah from the books in his bundle.

A short time later, a loud horn was heard signaling the ship's departure. She pushed off from the dock and set sail for her destination. The captain seated himself in the cabin, while the sailors were busy with their tasks, and the passengers crowded the deck, waving to all the people standing on the shore. The excitement of leaving on a cross-ocean trip had not yet dissipated when another form of commotion suddenly took its place among the passengers on deck.

The tumult caught the attention of the captain, who hurried back on deck to see what had happened. He could not believe the sight that met his eyes.

Sailing right next to his ship was a mat full of holes; very calmly seated upon it, showing no signs of anxiety and appearing unimpressed by the excitement on board the neighboring ship, was that same distinguished-looking Jew whom he had refused to allow to board without payment. He was so immersed in his learning that the captain had to shout himself hoarse in order to invite him on board the ship to a spacious cabin that he would set aside for him.

Rabenu Shmuel declined the captain's invitation. From his perspective, the moment he had made the decision to travel by means of the mat, there was no reason to change his mind. He spent the entire journey seated on the mat, which made its way through the soaring waves next to the ship. It was as if the mat was somehow tied to the ship.

News of this incident quickly spread throughout the Land and his acquaintances spoke with amusement about his voyage. They started calling him אביחצירא, meaning אבי המחצלות (father of the mats). This was how the original name Elbaz was abandoned in favor of Abichazira, and it was by this name that people began referring to one of the better-known families in the eastern part of North African Jewry.

However, from the Chid"a's book *Shem HaGedolim* it appears that the name Abichazira was coined as a result of his great abstinence from this world. Some explain that this refers to Rabenu Shmuel's reputation for secluding himself within his own courtyard (חצר) and immersing himself in Torah study. Thus the name אביחצירא comes from the root חצר.

In a different hypothesis, a manuscript of the *Divrei Yoseph*, authored in the year 5433 [1673] by Rav Yoseph Sambari, one of the

sages of Egypt, reveals that Rabenu Shmuel used to wear a mat (מחצלת) upon his head in the shape of a hat. This hat was used when selling sugar in the marketplaces of Syria. Because of this practice, the Syrians began to refer to him as אביחצירא.

Eliezer Rivlin, Ish Yerushalayim, in his newspaper "HaTor," related to his readers that during a visit there in the year 5668[1908] he heard from the elders of Damascus a different reason for the name Abichazira. Those venerable sages quoted in the Jerusalem newspaper claimed that the name אביחצירא came about as a result of his earning a living by weaving straw mats and selling them in the marketplaces of Damascus where his family resided (while he secluded himself in nearby Gubar). Some of the mats were made from thick straw designated for sitting and lying, while others were professionally woven, giving them a unique appearance. These were used as decorations in the homes of the wealthy, in synagogues, and in *Sukkot*. The act of weaving mats in itself would not have been sufficient cause for such an unusual name until the day those mats actually helped save his life. The following is the story associated with these mats:

In the Damascus desert, far from the populated center, lived a witch who would hunt innocent passersby with her sorcery and incantations, eventually killing them and drawing blood from their hearts to be stored in jars and used for her witchcraft. One day, as Rabenu Shmuel made his way from his home in Damascus to the city of Gubar, he passed by the home of the witch. She spotted him from her porch window and began to use all the evil influences she knew in order to ensnare him in her trap. She eventually caught him, and the moment he entered her house, she locked the front door and readied herself to carry out the planned murder.

Rabenu Shmuel pleaded with her to spare his life and not spill innocent blood but the witch refused to listen. As a final resort, Rabenu Shmuel tried to bribe her, suggesting that he remain in her house and weave mats which could then be sold for a high price to

Jews wishing to decorate their *Sukkot* for the upcoming festival. The woman acquiesced and set a small room aside for him. He began weaving the first mat, which was sold in the marketplace the next day.

The moment the mat reached the market, Jews flocked to the market to see it. When they saw how beautiful it was, they suggested to the seller, a servant of the wicked witch, that he accompany them to the home of the local Rav to show him the mat and suggest that he use it to decorate his *Sukkah*. The Rav carefully studied the mat and noted that Hebrew letters had been embroidered on its edge. Although unable at first to decipher the letters, he purchased the mat for a handsome price. When the seller had left, the Rav sat down and very industriously attempted to decipher the code. He was aghast when he finally managed to decipher the words: "I, Shmuel, am at the house of the witch. Come and rescue me!" The Rav immediately called all the local sages to a meeting in his home to form a plan to save Rabenu Shmuel from being murdered. After giving the matter much thought, they devised a sophisticated plot not only to catch the witch but also to finally rid the world of her influence.

The elders of Damascus claimed that this incident was responsible for the name Abichazira, which clung to Rabenu Shmuel and all his descendants.

Since the Baba Sali declared that the story of Rabenu Shmuel sailing on the mat is the source for the family name, we will therefore accept that version as being the most reliable.

TO THE AID OF THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM

The following incident is the best-known example of Rabenu Shmuel's holiness and ability to perform miracles. We can see in it both his miraculous conduct, the nature of which we cannot begin to grasp, as well as his sincere concern for the welfare of the poor residents of Jerusalem.

In those days the terms, "Jews of Jerusalem" and "poor of Jerusalem" were synonymous. The situation of the Jewish residents of the holy city was deplorable. They never had the opportunity to own their own homes because they were forbidden to live on their own plots of land. The little income they were able to earn was extorted by their neighbors. In addition to the rent the Arabs collected from them, they were forced to pay an exorbitant government tax. Poverty and hunger were rampant in Jewish homes and children cried out for bread. It was customary for the Jewish community to send an emissary every few months to the various Diaspora communities to collect funds for the poor of Jerusalem.

The messengers' journey was not an easy one. They traveled precariously by sea and then made their way, alone and vulnerable, through foreign lands. On their return journey, they were in constant fear of bandits, who would attack by land and by sea in search of plunder. An emissary laden with sacks of money to be distributed to the thousands of poor families in Jerusalem, was a valuable prize for these pirates, who instilled fear in every traveler. Often, the consequence of falling into the hands of these bandits was not only a matter of being robbed, for they were experts at covering up the evidence of their crimes — or to be more precise, destroying it.

The task was difficult and dangerous, the journey long and arduous. On the other hand, the desperate situation of the entire settlement in Jerusalem forced the heads of the community to send an emissary

overseas every few months. The *Rabbanim*, would assemble all the residents of Jerusalem on a designated day in order to cast lots to determine who would be their next representative. The residents all prayed, no doubt, that the lot not be cast upon them. However, once a person was chosen, he was usually very willing to carry out the mission, feeling it was an obligation from heaven.

One of these lotteries resulted in Rabenu Shmuel's being chosen as the emissary to collect funds from Diaspora Jewry. When the Jerusalem community saw whose name was drawn, they did not know whether to rejoice or to be sad. On the one hand, every person was overjoyed that it was not his own name that was chosen. On the other hand, Rabenu Shmuel was known as a man of abstinence, lacking any outward poise, whose speech was not very polished. The townspeople feared that his appearance would not impress anyone. Even those aware of his fine character, who knew that he was a great *talmid chacham* who spent day and night learning Torah, had difficulty blessing this decision, fearing that he would not succeed in presenting the desperation of the residents of Zion effectively to the Jews of the Diaspora. However, a lottery is a lottery and the results cannot be reversed. Furthermore, nobody was interested in choosing lots again, for who could be certain that his name would not be drawn the next time around...

Rabenu Shmuel began to prepare for the journey. After taking his leave from the *Rabbanim* of the community, he traveled by caravan to Jaffa port to begin the first leg of his journey to Kushta, capital of Turkey. His meager bundle contained a few personal belongings and some small change set aside for any expenses he might incur along the way. At the port there appeared a dilapidated sailing ship which took in passengers destined for Kushta. Rabenu Shmuel joined the passengers, taking his seat in the stern of the ship. Hardly anyone took note of the fact that this quiet passenger brought with him only a small amount of food, enough for only one meal for a not particularly hungry

man. If they would have noted this, they would certainly have been astonished, for the journey to Kushta took a minimum of a few weeks, and even longer under stormy conditions. The boat set sail at midday. The representatives of the Jewish community of Jerusalem who accompanied their messenger to the port watched from the shore.

The ship had just left the port of Jaffa when Rabenu Shmuel arose from his place in the stern and walked towards the captain, who was busy navigating the ship. When the captain acknowledged his presence, Rabenu Shmuel asked: "What time will we arrive in Kushta today?" The captain laughed and thought to himself: "The journey from the Land of Israel to Turkey takes a few weeks; how can this Jew ask when we will arrive today? This is beyond the realm of possibility!" The captain, thinking that the Jew was mentally unbalanced, did not answer him and continued steering the ship. About a half hour later, Rabenu Shmuel approached the captain again, asking him a second time: "When will we arrive in Kushta today?" This time, the captain could not hold back and asked Rabenu Shmuel whether he was sane; perhaps the waves had made him delirious or he was given to delusions. Rabenu Shmuel was not stirred by the ridicule of the veteran seaman and altered his question slightly. "When would you like to arrive in Kushta?" At this the captain roared with laughter. "I would like to arrive in Kushta this evening, but since when does what I want matter? How could I possibly fulfill my wish?" Rabenu Shmuel responded as in a normal conversation. "Tonight is too late; it would be better if we were to arrive in the afternoon." The captain, realizing that he was dealing with a strange individual seemingly without logic or understanding turned away from him.

Suddenly, the ship began to gain speed. Swiftly, it sped past ports and seashores, while the captain was seated in his cabin dozing. Little time elapsed before the ship arrived at the port in Kushta, Turkey. The captain was amazed and wondered out loud: "Is this really Turkey? Is this really a sailing ship? Did we actually arrive in Turkey before my

watch, which I wound this morning, completed its cycle?" The captain, thinking that perhaps he had happened upon an unknown port, which happened to look like Kushta, asked the guards for the name of the city they had just arrived in. They began to mock him for not recognizing the port of Kushta, the largest of all the European ports and well known throughout the world.

The captain hurried to Rabenu Shmuel to inform him of their arrival in Kushta. He said to him: "I now realize that you are a holy man. You will not alight the ship on your own feet; I will carry you in my arms." Rabenu Shmuel laughed, saying: "Did you not see the great storm in the sea upon our departure from Jaffa? It was the storm that took us with such great speed to Turkey." Before the captain could look round Rabenu Shmuel had taken his belongings and disembarked the ship for the shore.

As if he were a native, familiar with all the streets and alleyways, Rabenu Shmuel made his way through the streets of Kushta, till he arrived at the home of the *gabbai tzdaka,* the person entrusted with the monies collected for the Jewish residents of Jerusalem. The *gabbai*, delighted to host a guest from Jerusalem, ran towards him. His elation turned to disappointment, however, as he saw that his guest was undignified and his manner of speaking was unrefined. Throughout the course of the *Shabbat* which Rabenu Shmuel spent in Kushta, he did not speak in public and did not offer the *Divrei* Torah customarily heard from messengers from Jerusalem. The *gabbai* assumed him to be a simple man and could not understand why the leaders of the community had not cast lots a second time.

On *Motzaei Shabbat*, the *gabbai* and his guest sat down to a *Melave Malka.* The *gabbai* related that every Sunday morning, the sultan traditionally went with his retinue on a tour of the streets of the town. During this tour the Jewish residents, fearing the wrath of the sultan, hid in their homes, sealing their windows so that the sultan could not

spot them and start leveling accusations against them. The *gabbai* suggested to Rabenu Shmuel: "If you would like to recite the blessing 'Who has given of His glory to human beings,' I would advise you to go up to the attic and peek through the holes facing the front of the building. You will be able to identify the sultan passing by, at which time you can recite the traditional blessing." Rabenu Shmuel agreed and in the morning hours, when the bells of the sultan's caravan were heard at the edge of the road, they hurried up to the roof and bent down to peer through a narrow crack in an effort to see the sultan.

To their great anxiety, the sultan commanded that his caravan stop in front of the house where Rabenu Shmuel was lodging. Upon realizing what was happening, the *gabbai* was gripped with fear. He cried out in horror: "It appears that the sultan has spotted us and will now have us killed." The *gabbai*'s great fear did not infect Rabenu Shmuel, who remained tranquil and unworried even after seeing the sultan dispatch his people into the house. The *gabbai* for his part was unable to control his fear, and with his entire body trembling, he began to recite the *Viduy* — for he was certain that the sultan was about to have them arrested. Rabenu Shmuel managed to calm the *gabbai* and instructed him to hide behind a pile of rags in the corner of the attic. Rabenu Shmuel himself remained on the same spot and awaited the entry of the sultan's guards. Upon entering the house, they turned to Rabenu Shmuel, saying that the sultan had commanded them to carry him in their arms and to bring him to his carriage.

They left the house. The *gabbai*, emerged from his hiding place, looked out the window and observed Rabenu Shmuel being carried in the arms of the guards and being seated in the carriage alongside the sultan, who accorded him great honor and dignity. Deep in his heart he began to regret not having relied on Rabenu Shmuel and instead falling victim to his suspicions. Now he had forfeited the opportunity to be a part of the great honor, which the sultan, for reasons unknown, had decided to bestow upon the residents of the house.

When the carriage arrived at the sultan's palace, Rabenu Shmuel was escorted into the grand hall and seated next to the throne. The chief adviser seated closest to the sultan could not hold back from asking him in a whisper how he had chosen to honor a person who was so obviously a Jew. The sultan silenced these whisperings and called out to his ministers: "Do you not see that this is a holy man? Did you not notice the pillar of fire that descended from heaven down to the window from which he peered?"

The sultan asked Rabenu Shmuel where he came from, about his life history, and what had brought him to their city. Rabenu Shmuel explained that he had come from Jerusalem to collect funds for the residents of Jerusalem, who were suffering from hunger and struggling to earn a livelihood. He told him about his miraculous journey, on which a great wind had carried the vessel to Kushta, so that the entire journey took a mere few hours. If the ministers had any hope of the sultan's coming to his senses and realizing the "lie" that the Jew was trying to sell him, their hopes were immediately dashed when the sultan summoned the captain of the ship to the drawing room. The captain not only confirmed the facts as related by Rabenu Shmuel, but even added that Rabenu Shmuel had predicted the length of the journey immediately upon their departure from Jaffa.

In the ensuing conversation, Rabenu Shmuel described to the sultan the harsh conditions under which the residents of Jerusalem were living, with almost no food for themselves or their children. He related what their non-Jewish neighbors were doing to them, forcing them to live in rented houses and charging outrageous rents, beyond their means to pay. He explained how the community had no choice but to send emissaries to the Diaspora in order to help them finance their rent lest they be thrown out into the streets.

The sultan listened and summoned the royal scribe, commanding him to place in Rabenu Shmuel's hands a letter addressed to the governor of Jerusalem stating the following: The Jewish people have

been given the sultan's permission to build houses and synagogues. Furthermore, any taxes that they will owe for their rented houses for the next seven years have already been placed in the royal treasury in Kushta. The letter, written at the behest of the sultan, was sealed with his signet ring and given to Rabenu Shmuel. The sultan was not content with this; he asked Rabenu Shmuel how much money he had planned to collect during his entire journey. Rabenu Shmuel named a large sum, enough to sustain the residents of Jerusalem for a very long period of time. The sultan, asserting that a man as holy as Rabenu Shmuel should not tire himself collecting funds, placed the entire sum in his sack and sent him on his way.

Before taking his leave, the sultan asked Rabenu Shmuel when he was planning to begin his journey back to *Eretz Yisrael.* Rabenu Shmuel responded that his plan was to board the ship scheduled to depart the following day. The sultan sent someone to check the route of the journey and how long it would take. When told that the ship was scheduled to arrive in *Eretz Yisrael* only twenty days hence, the sultan was struck by an idea. He sent messengers on fast horses which would hurry overland to deliver a royal letter to the governor of Jaffa. The letter was written and stamped with the signet of the sultan, stating that on a particular day a ship will arrive from Kushta at the shores of the port of Jaffa with a Jew on board named *Rebbi* Shmuel. "You must give him a royal welcome and escort him under armed guard until his arrival in Jerusalem. There you will have him sign that this command was indeed carried out and then send his signature to the royal palace in the capital city of Kushta."

The following day Rabenu Shmuel boarded the ship and took his place in the stern. In spite of his success, he had not become at all haughty, and he traveled with his typical modesty and humility. As on the outward journey, he boarded the ship with his few belongings, and he proceeded to take out the books from which he wished to learn from his satchel. As the ship set sail, Rabenu Shmuel approached the

captain asking: "When do you wish to arrive at Jaffa today?" The captain became angry and sent him away. Rabenu Shmuel returned to his place at the stern of the ship and continued to learn Torah. By noon, the ship was approaching the port of Jaffa. The surprised captain could not understand how his vessel was able to travel at the speed of the birds and complete its journey in such incredible time. While the captain and his sailors were discussing this great wonder, a small boat approached their ship. Rabenu Shmuel boarded the boat, which began traveling at great speed towards the shore. When the captain spotted Rabenu Shmuel from the deck of the ship, he was reminded of the question he had asked him at the outset of the journey. Only then did he realize that this was a holy man and in his merit the ship had made its way in extraordinary time. This miracle gave way to no less a miraculous incident: In the blink of an eye, the ship was whisked back to the heart of the sea, to the point at which it would have been in a typical journey. Two days later, pirates boarded the ship and took all of its crew and passengers to be sold as slaves in one of the distant countries in Africa.

Rabenu Shmuel, arriving at the port in Jaffa, went straight to Jerusalem and immediately entered the *beit midrash*. Members of the community, who found him there when they began arriving for *Mincha*, were shocked to see him. They began to regret having accepted the lottery and sent Rabenu Shmuel, for clearly he was mocking them and had no plans to carry out his mission. One of the *Rabbanim* approached him, asking: "Are you R' Shmuel?" He responded: "Certainly!" The Rav continued: "Are you not supposed to be in Kushta?" "I went and have already returned," he responded. The people thought he had lost his mind. What fool would believe that he had traveled to Kushta and returned in less than a week! When they heard his story, however, and when he showed them the moneybag filled to the top with gold and the letter from the sultan to the governor of Jerusalem, they all rejoiced and gave thanks to Hashem for having sent His angel to accompany His loyal servant.

A few days later, the messengers from Kushta arrived in Jaffa, bearing the sultan's letter to the governor. Following the orders from the royal palace, the governor's men arrived at the Jaffa port to await the arrival of the ship. When the ship failed to arrive, they did not know what to do. On the one hand, they had no way of fulfilling the sultan's directive, for the Turkish ship had not arrived at the port; on the other hand, the governor was afraid for his position and his life should he not send Rabenu Shmuel's signature to the sultan. Their great fear moved the governor of Jaffa to order his men to prepare his carriage for the journey to Jerusalem, intending to speak to the local *Rabbanim*. Perhaps they would know the whereabouts of the Jew whom the sultan so desired to honor and whose safety so concerned him. When they arrived at the homes of the community leaders, they told him that the man he was looking for had already arrived home. "It cannot be," exclaimed the governor. The more the *Rabbanim* insisted that this man had arrived several days ago, the angrier he became. Unable as they were to convince him of this fact, they asked Rabenu Shmuel to come and meet the governor. Rabenu Shmuel refused to go, saying that if the governor really wished to see him he would have to come to his house; after all, "The Jewish people are all princes," while the governor was nothing more than a clerk who had no connection at all with the monarchy.

The governor was left with no choice but to swallow his anger and accompany the heads of the community to the home of Rabenu Shmuel, which was nothing more than a small room in the attic of a remote house on the edge of the street where the Jews resided. The governor stood before Rabenu Shmuel and showed him the sultan's letter. "Are you this person?" he asked. When Rabenu Shmuel responded in the affirmative, the governor asked him to sign and confirm that he had arrived safely. As a condition for his signature, Rabenu Shmuel asked for a generous donation to aid the poor of Jerusalem. To strengthen his request, Rabenu Shmuel produced the letter that the sultan had written to the governor of Jerusalem regarding

the major concessions for the residents of Jerusalem. Only after the governor of Jaffa had given Rabenu Shmuel a generous donation for the people of Jerusalem did he agree to sign the letter stating that he had indeed arrived safely.

After the governor had left, Rabenu Shmuel instructed the *Rabbanim* and community leaders to deliver the sultan's letter to the governor of Jerusalem the following day, adding that with Hashem's help, happier days were awaiting the Jewish community of Jerusalem. The *Rabbanim* stated that Rabenu Shmuel would lead the way to the governor and they would do as he said. Rabenu Shmuel did not respond.

The following day the *Rabbanim* came to bring Rabenu Shmuel with them to the governor, only to discover that the house was empty. In the middle of the night, Rabenu Shmuel had left Jerusalem with his family for Damascus, where he would be able to study the hidden secrets of the Torah with one of the great disciples of the Arizal — Rabenu Chaim Vital zt"l.

After completing his mission in Jerusalem, Rabenu Shmuel feared all the publicity and praise, and he preferred to live a life of seclusion.

"G-D HAS MADE THE ONE AS WELL AS THE OTHER" (Kohelet 7:14)

R' Yossi Sambari, in his book *Divrei Yoseph*, describes Rabenu Shmuel's great diligence in the study of *Kabbalah*, which established his reputation as a leading authority. He also used *Kabbalah* as a practical means to save the Jewish people from troubles. The following is one of the stories cited in the book:

On the road approaching Damascus, near the street that passes by the city's Jewish cemetery, lived a non-Jew named Mari Girgis. He was an expert in sorcery and from time to time he would cast silent incantations intended to harm passersby. One of his favorite pastimes was standing on his porch when a funeral was taking place near his house and whispering some of those unholy names, which caused the casket carrying the deceased to become as heavy as lead and impossible to move from its place. He would then approach the mourners, demanding a large sum in exchange for freeing the casket from the bonds of his spell.

The local Jewish population was unable to rid itself of this sorcerer. When calculating the cost of a funeral, they had to take this additional sum into account, over and above the cost of the *Chevra Kadisha*, the gravediggers, and the buriers.

One day, Rabenu Shmuel participated in the funeral of one of the beloved Jews of Damascus, an honest man who served Hashem faithfully. The entire Jewish community came to pay their respects and to escort him on his final journey. When they passed the gentile's house, the impetuous, heartless Girgis emerged onto his porch, intending to cast a spell making the coffin too heavy to move.

When Rabenu Shmuel saw what was about to take place, he decided to gather all the holy Names of Hashem for a holy war against the powers of impurity stirred by the sorcerer's dark acts. He turned and

walked towards the porch where Girgis was sitting, calling upon him to open his window, claiming that he wished to speak to him. As he opened the window, Rabenu Shmuel whispered the combination of the holy Names and two horns grew on the head of the sorcerer. These horns were so big that he was unable to put his head back in through the window. The funeral was now conducted calmly and with great ease, and the deceased was honored with a eulogy befitting him.

Word got back to the king's ministers, who were very excited to hear that a wise Jew had been able to defeat the sorcerer. This they had to witness with their own eyes. They hastened to see the great spectacle of the horns that had grown on his head. Upon seeing them, the sorcerer called to the ministers in great distress and asked them to bring the Jew back to compete with him in a war of witchcraft, saying, "Now we will see who will defeat whom." The ministers summoned Rabenu Shmuel to return to the yard of Mari Girgis where each of them would be given permission to do unto the other as he pleased.

Rabenu Shmuel was aware that the sorcerer did indeed possess the ability to place a spell upon him, so he provided one of his students with one of the Holy Names of Hashem, instructing him to recite it with great concentration the moment the spell was upon him, and in this manner the effects of the witchcraft would be nullified. The ministers invited the sorcerer to begin. The sorcerer began his incantations until he transformed Rabenu Shmuel into a dog walking on all fours and barking with a muffled sound. A moment later, Rabenu Shmuel was released from the spell of the gentile via the Holy Name shouted by his student.

It was now Rabenu Shmuel's turn to cast a spell upon the sorcerer. First however, he stood and prayed to Hashem: "Today it will be made clear that there is a G-d in Israel!" He then took a long branch from a palm tree and scribbled upon it combinations of Holy Names. He began to bang on the stick with a hammer, driving it into the ground.

As the branch sank into the loose earth, so the sorcerer sank into the earth where he was standing. When he was already knee deep, Rabenu Shmuel turned to the sorcerer and suggested that he retreat and acknowledge the truth of Hashem as the only G-d. When he refused to repent and change his ways even at the entrance to *Gehinom*, Rabenu Shmuel continued pounding on the stick with a sledgehammer until the sorcerer was buried alive.

While the Jewish people were rejoicing over this great miracle that Hashem, G-d of Israel had brought upon them via His loyal servant, the non-Jews were working tirelessly, digging around the sorcerer and trying to free him from the ground. Upon reaching his body, however, they discovered only a corpse surrounded by mosquitoes. On that very spot, the non-Jews erected a monument named Mari Girgis for the man who was unable to defeat the G-d of Israel and His loyal servant Rabenu Shmuel Abichazira, may his merit protect us.





ABIR YAAKOV



The way of the world is that a person leaves his home and establishes his roots elsewhere, either because he has a reason for leaving his old abode or because a new factor comes into play, prompting him to move. It is very difficult to point to the deciding factor which induced Rabenu Shmuel to leave *Eretz Yisrael* and settle in Damascus. Was it the desire to learn, one-on-one, with the holy kabbalist, R' Chaim Vital, the greatest of the Ar"I z"l's disciples; or was he desperate to flee from the honor that was beginning to pursue him in the Holy Land? No matter what the underlying reason was, the timing suggests that it was prompted by the wondrous events described in the previous chapters.

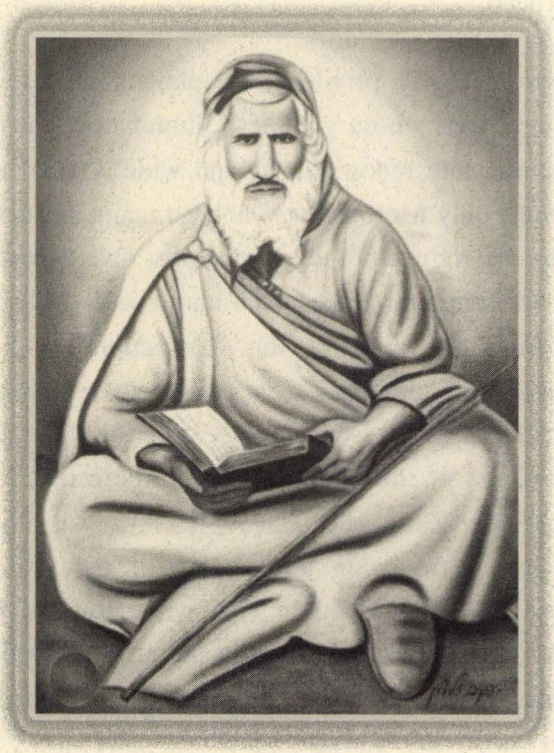
Whether Rabenu Shmuel planned to remain in Damascus or not, the Abichazira family established residence soon afterwards in Morocco. We have no way of knowing who exactly made this decision or why he did so, because we have no information whatsoever regarding Rabenu Shmuel's son, yet we find that his eldest grandson was already buried in Morocco.

Morocco was uniquely privileged in playing host to the guiding lights of that era, men whose greatness illuminated many generations and whose names were renowned far and wide. Out of all the North African countries, only Morocco was able to maintain its high level of sanctity due to the righteous individuals who dwelt there. The North African Diaspora community goes back many years, with Jews already living there from the time of the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash. When the ten tribes were exiled, some of them settled in Morocco. Our Sages of Blessed Memory describe the exile of the ten tribes from the land of the Shomron: "'To where did Sanherib exile the Ten Tribes? Mar Zutra said: 'To Africa'" (Sanhedrin 94a). The first codifier of *halacha* following the sealing of the Talmud, Rabenu Yitzchak Alfasi, the Ri"f, lived in Fez, while Rabenu Yitzchak bar Sheshet, the Riva"sh lived for a time in the area of Tafilalet. Rabenu Chaim ben Atar, the "Or HaChaim" was raised and gained prominence

in the city of Sali in Morocco, and in his later days it was from there that he made his way to the Holy Land.

It is therefore not surprising that the *Malachot* – the streets and alleys of the Jewish community of Morocco, were filled with ancient glory. Thus the members of the holy family of R' Shmuel Abichazira, searching for a dwelling place, chose this land where the sounds of Torah reverberated in the streets and glimmers of holiness glowed in the alleyways.

Had Morocco known what the future held for this family, its mountains would have burst into song and its hills would have begun to dance. From the moment the Abichazira family arrived in Morocco, a new era began in the history of its Jews. These spiritual giants sheltered them in their shadow, and their spirit infused all the inhabitants of the land.



TEN GENERATIONS

The first member of this dynasty known to be buried in Morocco was R' Machluf ben R' Yoseph Abichazira, whose grave is in the courtyard of his home in the city of Tirgileil in the Derah region. R' Aaron Abichazira, the son of the Abir Yaakov, writes in his introduction to the book *Doresh Tov*, that the scholars of Derah had a handwritten letter praising him highly and documenting his miraculous deeds, but we have not merited seeing this manuscript. It is generally accepted that R' Machluf was the grandson of R' Shmuel Abichazira (i.e. the son of Rabenu Shmuel's son). It is however very possible that several generations separate the two, for we are left without a trace of information on this subject.

R' Yichye, son of R' Machluf lived in the village of Tevotzmat, in the Tafilalet region and there we find his final resting place. In the book "Malchei Rabanan", he is praised in superlative terms: "A perfect all-round scholar, he cannot be praised too highly; from the stock of old and venerable sages, the son of holy people, a valiant man of many achievements, his fruits are *'kodesh hillulim'* (lit. sanctified to praise Hashem); such a man was Morenu HaRav Yichye zt'l".

R' Yichye's fruits were indeed "sanctified to praise Hashem" - beginning with his son R' Ayush, from whom Rabenu Yaakov's lineage is traced. A member of the family, R' Eliyahu Abichazira (the son of R' Avraham, the son of R' Yoseph, the son of the second R' Yichye Abichazira) cites this fact from a handwritten letter, in his work "Michtav M'Eliyahu". In his introduction to the book "Maagalei Tzedek" he describes R' Ayush in the following manner: "The perfect scholar, who encompasses all forms of humility and piety – R Ayush Abichazira". In the book "Malchei Rabanan" R' Ayush is described as: "That perfect and comprehensive scholar. To praise one of Israel's finest - he is complete and his scholarship is complete. His memorial is his holy progeny, that holy and saintly Kabbalist - 'the holy seed was the vitality of the Land' (Yeshayahu 6:13)"

R' Ayush had two sons: R' Yaakov and R' Yichye. Rabenu Yaakov testified about his great uncle R' Yaakov, may his merit protect us, in these words: "Our family, as well as the Jewish community of our city, has a tradition that the prophet Eliyahu revealed himself to him. My father, z"l, who was his disciple, told me that he had heard a hint from him that he did indeed see the prophet Eliyahu. My father divulged this hint to me and it is obvious to me that the prophet Eliyahu revealed himself to him".

The second R' Yichye had three sons R' Avraham Abichazira, and his brothers R' Moshe and R' Yoseph, the eldest being the grandfather of Rabenu Yaakov. It is said that the prophet Eliyahu revealed himself to R' Avraham Abichazira, telling him that he might ask for whatever his heart desired. R' Avraham responded: "I ask for little, not for wealth or anything else; all I want is the holy Torah and that no members of my family should perish during my lifetime". In fact, on the very day that R' Avraham was summoned to heaven, forty-six members of his family died! The book "Malchei Rabanan" relates how his prayers could determine events in the heavens. During periods of drought, when the cisterns had dried up, he beseeched G-d and did not leave the place where he stood until the skies darkened with clouds and blessed rain began to fall.

Rabenu Yaakov describes the second son of the second R' Yichye - R' Moshe Abichazira, in superlatives: "I cannot adequately praise him, for he was a venerable sage with a great countenance, whose Torah was his profession. The words of Torah never left his mouth and he was pious in many ways, diligently observing even 'minor' *mitzvot* to a hairsbreadth. He was exceedingly humble and acquired a good name for himself."

R' Avraham's son, R' Masud Abichazira, was the Rav of the city of Tafilalet. He was the father of Rabenu Yaakov.

SANCTIFIED FROM HIS MOTHER'S WOMB

R' Masud and his wife, of blessed memory, had sons who all followed in the ways of Hashem and trod the path carved out by their holy forefathers. One day, a couple seeking a divorce arrived in the Rav's court in Tafilalet. After R' Masud had arranged the details of the divorce, and the man gave his wife a *get*, the woman remained a short while in R' Masud's home wishing to speak to the Rabbanit. When the Rabbanit saw that darkness had fallen, she feared for the woman's safety and insisted that she stay overnight.

That night, R' Avraham Abichazira appeared to his son, R' Masud, in a dream saying: "You should know that the woman for whom you arranged a divorce is destined to give birth to a very righteous man. This righteous person must emanate from the union of that woman and yourself. In three months time, you must marry this woman who will then give birth to this great luminary".

The following morning R' Masud kept the dream to himself, not relating it to anyone. As was his custom, he went to pray the morning service at sunrise (*vatikin*) at the synagogue in his home. He did not know how to reveal the dream to his wife as well as to the divorced woman, so he decided to wait and see how things would develop.

His wife, the Rabbanit, had dreamt the very same dream, in which her deceased father-in-law, R' Avraham Abichazira, appeared to her and informed her of what was to happen. While R' Masud was praying at the synagogue, the righteous Rabbanit approached the woman, who was already preparing to leave and related the entire dream to her. She convinced the woman to view it as a directive from heaven. Understandably, the woman, who was exceedingly righteous, felt very uncomfortable. She feared that becoming R' Masud's second wife could be interpreted as repaying bad for good to her gracious hostess, the Rabbanit. The Rabbanit persisted and spoke to her persuasively until

she acquiesced. She agreed to remain in the town for three months at the end of which she would marry the righteous R' Masud as his second wife.

On R' Masud's return from the synagogue, the Rabbanit approached him, informing him that the woman had already agreed to marry him. R' Masud saw this as a sign from heaven; he began to prepare himself for the wedding, and for that great light that was about to enter the world.

The night before the wedding, R' Avraham once again appeared to his son and told him that a great man was destined to emerge from him. During the period leading to the birth of his son, the child's mother had heavenly dreams – such as seeing the figure of an ox with the horns of a ram – all of which were interpreted by R' Masud as alluding to the child who was destined to light up the world with his Torah and sanctity.

The day his son was born in the year 5566 [1806], R' Masud and the entire community of Tafilalet rejoiced. The joy of the parents exceeded everyone else's, for they already knew the true value of the gift they had merited. On the eighth day, at his *Brit Milah*, R' Masud named his infant son Yaakov, after his great-uncle and teacher R' Yaakov Abichazira, the son of R' Ayush. With the passage of time, the child grew into a man of great stature. He was now no longer referred to simply as Yaakov but as "Abir Yaakov" – the strength of Yaakov.

BUDDING GREATNESS

"THIS ONE IS SET FOR THE HOUSES OF TORAH STUDY" (*Rashi*, Bereishit 25:27)

While still very young, Rabenu Yaakov showed sparks of greatness and holiness rare in children his age. His father, R' Masud, who knew what a great treasure had been placed was in his hands, worked tirelessly to encourage his son to grow and flourish in the paths of Torah and fear of heaven. The son, for his part, exhausted all of these opportunities, maximizing his great potential.

Rabenu Yaakov harnessed the great intellect with which he was blessed, to attain impressive results in the study of Torah. His accomplishments astounded all those who conversed with him on Torah matters. They saw him as a vessel full to overflowing, yet able to absorb still more and more. His diligence and persistence in the tents of Torah together with his unusual abilities meant that, while his friends busied themselves with youthful pursuits, he would spend his time plunging in the seas of the Talmud and fishing out pearls from the depths of the *halacha*.

His Rav and teacher during those years was none other than his father, who set aside time daily to learn with his young son, in spite of his own busy schedule as leader and Rabbi of Tafilalet. He divided his learning according to the directive of our Sages: "A man should always divide the years of his life into thirds; spending a third of them in the study of Scripture, a third in the study of *Mishna*, and a third in the study of Talmud" (Kiddushin 30a). Our Sages explain that "A man is jealous of everyone except his son and his disciple" (Sanhedrin 105b) because the Rav and the father feel that they too have a share in the knowledge of son and disciple; Rabenu Yaakov was his father's son as well as disciple. Had R' Masud not been both father and Rav, there certainly would have been cause for jealousy.

THE TORAH OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

A great scholar had been traveling throughout the Diaspora in order to raise funds for the poor of Jerusalem. Upon arriving in Tafilalet, he came to the home of the Rav of the city, R' Masud, requesting to stay with him. As may be expected, R' Masud was elated to host a scholar who was so well-versed in the Torah of the Holy Land. Furthermore, this emissary, typical of scholars from *Eretz Yisrael*, had vast knowledge in all branches of the Torah.

While at the home of R' Masud, he began to take notice of the Rav's son. He was very impressed with his devotion to Hashem as well as his wondrous behavior; every step was accompanied by grace and fear of G-d. The incredible diligence, which had distinguished Rabenu Yaakov from early youth, had reached awesome heights with the passage of time. This did not escape the eyes of the guest, who found ways to draw the young man into conversation.

One morning, the emissary from Jerusalem watched his host's son diligently studying the first few pages of Tractate Baba Kama, delving into the intricate and complex subject of laws of damages. Realizing that his profound analysis was on par with that of a more experienced scholar, he began questioning him in order to assess just how encompassing his understanding was. As they began to talk, the guest discovered that before him was a very sharp scholar, whose knowledge and abilities in the various sections of the Talmud far surpassed the accomplishments of most people his age. He was pleasantly surprised by the lad's acute questions and was finally forced to acknowledge that the young man's ability in fact far surpassed his own.

The guest told R' Masud that he would like to remain in Tafilalet in order to learn one-on-one with his son. When R' Masud acquiesced, the messenger sent the monies he had collected on behalf of the poor of Jerusalem with a reliable messenger, while he remained in the home of R' Masud taking advantage of many, many hours and days to learn

with Rabenu Yaakov. The two would explore the entire scope of a topic intensively, following the well-known saying of R' Nachman bar Yitzchak, "Why are the words of Torah compared to a tree, as it is said: 'It is a tree of life for those who cling to it'? (Mishle 3:18). Just as a small piece of wood ignites a large one, so it is with Torah scholars the younger ones sharpen the minds of the older ones" (Taanit 7a).

"EACH FOR ITS OWN SAKE, THE JUG AND FLASK WERE BLESSED" (Avudraham)

His great grandson, R' Meir Abichazira z"l, related that when Rabenu Yaakov was ten years old, hunger was rampant in the city of Tafilalet. Even people who had sufficient money were unable to sustain their families because of the shortage of goods in the marketplace. The residents rationed their bread, saving it and storing food for the days to come. Yet as time passed and the "days to come" turned into the present, the pantries emptied and the famine was felt in every home in the city. Even in the home of R' Masud, which generally had sufficient means, the Rabbanit had no food for the family and no solution to the problem.

Her son, a child at the time, offered to search in the marketplace for some flour which she could bake bread to feed the household. The Rabbanit responded that he should not waste his time in the marketplace, for the little that had remained in the stores had already been snapped up at an exorbitant price. The boy, with his great faith in Hashem, did not heed her words and decided to try anyway. The Rabbanit, convinced that there was nothing to find in the market, did not give him any money, but told him that if he discovered some flour, which was impossible, he should return home for the necessary funds.

The child ventured into the street, where before him he suddenly beheld a mule. Sitting on the mule was a black man, a sight rarely seen in the streets of Morocco. Tied on each side of the mule were closed sacks whose contents could only be guessed at. The black man approached him asking: "My lad, would you be interested in purchasing choice wheat from me?" The boy responded in the affirmative: "This was my purpose in coming to the market". The man asked him: "Do you have parents? Show me where they live and I will transport the wheat to their home". The boy brought the man into their courtyard and he entered the house to call his mother to pay for the wheat.

While he was telling his mother about the man with the wheat, and she was taking out her wallet to pay him, the man entered the courtyard and tied the heavily-laden mule to a tree. By the time they came out of the house, the man had disappeared. They could see the mule and they could see the heavy bags containing enough food for many days, yet there was no one around to accept payment for them. They searched all over for the owner, who had disappeared and could not be located. For four days, they made announcements and hung up signs trying to find the person who had lost his mule, thinking someone would come to claim it. When the owner did not turn up, they concluded that the prophet Eliyahu had been sent from heaven to provide food for the home of R' Masud.

In this way, while still a young child, Rabenu Yaakov merited having the prophet Eliyahu reveal himself to him.

"SHOSHANAT YAAKOV - THE ROSE OF JACOB"

In the city of Algiers, in the country of Algeria, which bordered on Morocco, lived one of the giants of the previous generations, the G-dly Kabbalist R' Mordechai ben Shimol. His name was known throughout Algeria and the light of his holiness illuminated the entire country. During that period, anti-Semites fabricated wicked libels against him. The ruler of the city was incensed by these stories, and instructed his policemen to arrest R' Mordechai. He was to be brought before the ruler, bound in chains, in order to stand trial for the accusations hurled against him.

Friends of his, who were on close terms with the ruling party, warned R' Mordechai of his pending arrest, and he managed to flee from the city before the policemen arrived at his house with the signed warrant. The moment he managed to escape from the clutches of the city's guards, R' Mordechai was essentially free of danger and he could have chosen to live in any other city or village. However, faithful to the words of R' Yossi ben Kisma in Pirke Avot, "Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah", R' Mordechai searched for a place of Torah scholars, with whom he could enjoy discussing Torah. He had been accustomed to sitting with his colleagues in the study halls of Algiers, the central meeting point for all the outstanding scholars of the country. In the rest of Algeria there were no other Torah scholars of sufficient stature to satisfy his craving soul.

Until now he had traveled to escape the hangman's rope; R' Mordechai's journey from this point on was in fulfillment of the dictum: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" (Avot 4:18). Determined to live only in a place of Torah, he did not hesitate to cross over the Algerian border into neighboring Morocco. This is how R' Mordechai

came to arrive in Tafilalet, known as a city where the *batei midrash* were filled to the brim with Torah scholars.

However, great disappointment awaited R' Mordechai. As he wandered from one *beit midrash* to another in Tafilalet, he came to realize, to his great sorrow, that none of the Torah scholars, with whom he came in contact measured up to his level of Torah study. Despite their diligence and their Torah lifestyle, most of their learning hours were spent on the Written Torah and *halacha*; they hardly spent any time at all in study of the Talmud. Although the journey to Tafilalet had already been long and arduous, R' Mordechai saw that he had no choice but to continue his wanderings until he found what he was seeking.

A day or two before his disappointed departure from Tafilalet, R' Mordechai arrived early at the synagogue and sat waiting for prayers to begin. From the back of the synagogue emanated the sweet sounds of children learning. Discerning a young teacher instructing his charges in the basics of *aleph beit*, R' Mordechai stepped up to the lectern the better to hear the beautiful sounds coming from these pure mouths which had never tasted sin.

He noticed a book lying on the lectern. A closer glance revealed that it was the Talmud - Tractate Chagiga. Recognizing this *Gemara* evoked R' Mordechai's pain, reminding him of his difficulty in finding a true *Ben Torah* who could help him grow spiritually. In great sorrow, R' Mordechai held the *Gemara* in his hand and lamented out loud, "Chagiga, Chagiga, who brought you here and what are you doing in this parched land? Alone you sit in the *batei midrash* of Morocco and there is no one to turn your pages and understand the beauty of your words. What is here for you and who is here for you?" R' Mordechai continued to wail with tears streaming down his face, not noticing the quiet that had descended over the hall. Those present, the small children and their young teacher, listened with great emotion to the

voice of R' Mordechai crying and lamenting for the humiliation of the Torah.

The children's teacher, his cheeks too wet with tears, approached R' Mordechai and asked him: "Wise man, why are you lamenting over a Tractate named *Chagiga* (celebration) and not one named lamentation?"

"Is there anyone in this synagogue who is capable of studying this Tractate and understanding what is written in it? How can I not cry for it? Does anyone even open this *Gemara* that is thrown in the corner?" - responded R' Mordechai.

"Someone does open it sometimes", replied the teacher.

"Perhaps the *Massechet* is opened in order to remove some of the dust that gathers from its remaining idle for so long".

"When they open it, they learn it" – demurred the teacher.

"They learn it? Probably very superficially, only reading the text", R' Mordechai had a very difficult time believing this young man.

"It is learned both with understanding and in-depth study", corrected the teacher.

Upon hearing this R' Mordechai opened up the volume and asked the young teacher whether he could explain to him the argument of the section of the Talmud found on that particular page. The teacher, who was none other than Rabenu Yaakov, began to explain in a clear and fluent manner. At first he summarized the basic points of the *sugya* and then the *shakla vetaria* (questions and answers). After that he raised various questions and offered hypothetical solutions – building each stage logically, brick by brick, like a castle in the air. It appeared for a moment that he was about to achieve a profound understanding in clarifying the *sugya*, when suddenly he posed a tremendous question which appeared to contradict everything he had said until now. In one

fell swoop he knocked down the "castle" of his hypothesis and began to sketch another approach. So sat the two of them - the clever young teacher of schoolchildren and the great Algerian sage who was beside himself with emotion and excitement.

In the course of their conversation, R' Mordechai asked Rabenu Yaakov who he was, to which he replied "I am Yaakov Abichazira, son of R' Masud of blessed memory, who has recently departed this world. It was he who established my foundations in learning". R' Mordechai decided to research the identity of this Yaakov Abichazira as well as his father. He discovered that he had met the son of the Rav of the region, whose *Rabbanim* had already foreseen for him a bright and shining future. R' Mordechai decided to settle in Risani in order to learn with Rabenu Yaakov.

Before doing so, however, he went to speak to the Sages of the city. After allowing them to become aware of his own ability in learning, he persuaded them to appoint the son of the Rav to succeed his father in leading the community. In spite of his youth - his hair was still dark and his beard had not yet sprouted - R' Mordechai reminded them that a true *zaken* (meaning *wise* as well as old), is "one who acquired wisdom" (Kiddushin 32b). He maintained that there was no one who fit this description better than Rabenu Yaakov, who had amassed an incredible amount of wisdom and had risen to high levels in all areas of the Torah. The Sages and leaders of the community heeded the words of their Algerian guest and fixed a time for the official ceremony.

A short while later R' Mordechai composed a liturgical poem singing the praises of Rabenu Yaakov.

Even many years later when R' Mordechai moved to the city of Shifa, a two hour walk from Risani, he still kept close contact with his young friend, Rabenu Yaakov, and customarily sent him fish to be placed on his *Shabbat* table. This was meant to serve as a *tikkun* for

the souls of the righteous, which according to the *kabbalah*, are reincarnated in the form of fish.

This was the beginning of Rabenu Yaakov's tenure as Rav of the city of Tafilalet. Before long, he became recognized not only as the Rav of the local region, but as leader of the Jewish community of Morocco. The people of Morocco came to rely on him for their spiritual needs, with many coming to his door to seek G-d. From that point Rabenu Yaakov kept his eye on all that happened in the country, spreading his vigilance over the entire valley nestled in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains.

"A STAR HAS ISSUED FROM JACOB"

"A MAN OVER THE ASSEMBLY"

From the time that the task of leading the community was thrust upon him, Rabenu Yaakov totally devoted himself to his people, a loyal shepherd who did not leave his flock for even a moment. He viewed the Rabbinate not as a position of authority but as one of servitude. Rabenu Yaakov was no ordinary servant, but one who entered into this arrangement willingly (as the Torah describes a slave whose ear was pierced, signifying his desire to remain in servitude to his master until the Jubilee year). Indeed for fifty years he was the leader of the Jewish community of Morocco – Rabbi as well as teacher, father as well as mother.

Rabenu Yaakov served as Rabbi and teacher by opening his great Yeshiva and instituting his unique schedule of learning. He served his community as father and mother, participating in all of their experiences, suffering with them in times of worry and rejoicing in their joys. Each problem brought before him merited the same attention, whether it was a matter of public concern or the difficulties encountered by one individual. He would do his utmost to help his people and to find solutions to their problems.

He frequently trod the streets of Morocco to collect funds, disregarding his honor and position. He would go from door to door, even in cities which were unfamiliar to him. He himself had no need for funds, and wealthy benefactors, who desired to support those who learned Torah with the leader of the community, sponsored his Yeshiva. Before his eyes he saw the suffering faces of the downtrodden, the poor and destitute, widows and orphans. He knew full well that the he could raise funds far greater than those brought in by any emissaries, since people generally give donations, in proportion not to need, but to the importance of the person asking. As it says in Avot: "If you learned much Torah, then you will be given

great reward" (Avot 2:16). He felt obligated to take from his own time, including time that would otherwise have been spent in the study of Torah, for this important *mitzvah* which could not have been carried out by anyone else (see Moed Katan 9b and Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:4).

In addition to obtaining huge sums for the poor and needy, his compassionate hand would draw from his own pocket as well. He disregarded his own future needs, believing that giving to the poor in the present took precedence over any financial security that he might be able to establish for himself and his family. He gave to the poor not only money, but any object that he had no immediate need for.

The following story, told by his great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira *shlit"a*, illustrates this point. It happened very late one *Motzaei Shabbat* as the hands of the clock crept into the wee hours of Sunday morning, Rabenu Yaakov went to his closet to put away his *Shabbat* garb and to take out his weekday clothing. To his great surprise, Rabenu Yaakov discovered in his wardrobe a spare article of clothing, which he never wore. Despite the lateness of the hour, Rabenu Yaakov immediately dispatched his assistant to summon to him a particular resident of the city. The man arrived alarmed, not knowing what the Rav wanted from him in the dead of night. Rabenu Yaakov, however, greeted him with a smile, presenting him with the spare article of clothing that he had discovered in his closet, saying, "I noticed when you came to wish me a *Shabbat Shalom* that your clothes were torn. Your distress so disturbed my *Shabbat* rest ... it seems my going to the closet myself, something normally taken care of by my assistant, must be a directive from heaven in order for me to notice this article of clothing and give it to you. Please understand that I woke you in the middle of the night because I was unable to keep the clothing in my house any longer."

Oftentimes Rabenu Yaakov was asked to become involved in communal causes, when the enemies of Israel attempted to incite the

leaders of the government against the Jewish inhabitants of their land. During those days of fear Rabenu Yaakov would work, together with the Heavenly Kingdom as well as against the earthly kingdom, in order to nullify the decrees against his people. At the same time he would brace those around him with strong words of support, encouraging them not to fear, but to place their trust in Hashem Who would not forsake His people.

This was the way of Rabenu Yaakov. There were those who described him as "a Rav who resembled an angel of Hashem". The fact is that he acted in ways beyond even an angel. We know that an angel is incapable of carrying out two missions simultaneously, (see Bereishit Rabba 50) yet Rabenu Yaakov would take upon himself many different missions, and at the same time involve himself in spreading words of Torah, leading the community in areas of *halacha*, while still not forsaking the various needs of the community.

A LOYAL SHEPHERD

Rabenu Yaakov was father and mother to his community. He was like a father who led and guided them in the ways of life, teaching ethics and the proper way to act, and like a mother caring for and protecting her young, making sure they lack for nothing and that no harm befall them. He solved the distresses of each person in his own unique manner, whilst instilling an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood among the people. With all this, Rabenu Yaakov reserved a special place in his heart for the poor and unfortunate, the miserable and the depressed, and people who had been wronged. For these he was willing to do anything in order to ease their burden in lives which had not been easy.

The people of Jerusalem, who never had the opportunity to know Rabenu Yaakov and his noble manner personally, heard about him from a Jew known by all as "Zaki the Hunchback". Zaki used to relate the following story in which he was the central figure, although at the

time this story took place he was too young to realize it. The story was first told by his mother.

The marriage of Zaki's parents was not a happy one and when Zaki was two years old, they divorced. Even after going their separate ways, the couple continued to fight. Now young Zaki became their main point of contention with each side claiming the right to raise him and educate him.

In those days, the Jews lived under the dominion of the ruling gentiles. The gentile family patriarchs divided among themselves the guardianship of Jewish families, each one "adopting" a family from which they would collect "protection" money. The quarrel which erupted between the families of Zaki's mother and father naturally spread and even had a direct effect on the families that were ruling over them. Ostensibly coming to show their readiness to assist in times of trouble, the despicable guardians actually came to strengthen the stand of each side, at the same time adding to their burden by sharply raising the price of protection.

In the manner of non-Jews, the arguments became quarrels and the fights ended in violent brawls. Zaki became the talk of the town, over whose head heavy blows were exchanged between the warring families and their patrons. The fights reached the local courts in Tafilalet, which ruled that the mother should retain custody of the child. The patron family who was upholding the father's rights, as a last resort asked that the court attach Rabenu Yaakov's signature to the judge's decision. "'Until *El Hazan El Kabir* – the great Rabbi - gives his ruling, we will not cease from our battle and we will continue to light fires in the streets of Tafilalet," they threatened.

Zaki's mother immediately went to the home of Rabenu Yaakov to implore him to stand by her side, but Rabenu Yaakov was away on one of his fundraising expeditions for the Yeshiva and the poor. Given the urgency of the matter, the woman did not hesitate and she ran out

trying to trace Rabenu Yaakov. She managed to catch up with him on the road between two towns and she approached his carriage bemoaning her misfortune.

Upon hearing the woman's complaint, Rabenu Yaakov instructed his assistant to stop the carriage for her. The assistant pointed out that the area they were in was dangerous and that it would be better to continue until they reached an inhabited area. To this Rabenu Yaakov responded in anger: "In my eyes, it is a danger that a Jew is taken advantage of in an attempt to sway true justice." Rabenu Yaakov stopped at that very spot and listened to the claims of the woman. Only after he signed the ruling in her favor did he continue on his way.

This was typical of the way Rabenu Yaakov dealt with his community, ignoring other issues, no matter how pressing, to give his full attention to their needs, inspiring in them a sense of confidence that he would take care of them.

"FOR THROUGH WISE STRATEGIES CAN YOU WAGE WAR FOR YOUR BENEFIT" (Mishle 24:6)

As leaders of communities often must, Rabenu Yaakov from time to time had to come out strongly against those who "broke down the fences" and distorted the ways of the Torah. There were some serious cases, albeit rare, in which speaking against brazen individuals with no fear of G-d, was not sufficient. In order to coerce them to leave their evil ways and change their behavior towards their brothers, Rabenu Yaakov would have to take staff in hand and wage a strategic war. The great-grandson of Rabenu Yaakov, R' Meir, related the following incident involving one of these traitors who was a member of the Ben-Kiba family:

This man had accused fellow-Jews of tax evasion and shirking payment of their debts; when their assets were confiscated, he had manipulated the funds to bribe his way into a close relationship with

the rulers. He eventually attained a higher stature than many of the governors and was considered one of the close confidants of the ruler of the province, who was responsible for the welfare of the residents of Tafilalet. Those who had been defrauded of their gold and silver wept aloud, while those who had not yet been betrayed to the authorities lived in constant fear. No one in the community could challenge the traitor's high ranking in the provincial government.

Finally, a decree which was impossible to fulfill was issued from his pen against the entire Jewish community of Tafilalet. The heads of the community and its supporters hastened to the home of Rabenu Yaakov to inform him of the rash actions of this individual. When Rabenu Yaakov heard of the evil man's deeds, he heeded their request, declaring: "We have no choice but to act with him in a manner which is 'a transgression for the sake of heaven'. As our Sages teach us, 'A transgression committed for the sake of Heaven is greater than a *mitzvah* performed for ulterior motives' (Nazir 23b)". Rabenu Yaakov instructed the leaders of the community to prepare deeds in this person's name, stating that he borrowed and now owed enormous amounts of money to the Jews of the town. These contracts were to be backdated, so that they could file a lawsuit for overdue payment. Rabenu Yaakov signed every one of these documents to verify the authenticity of the suit. Everyone in Tafilalet, Jews as well as non-Jews, trusted Rabenu Yaakov and they would honor any document bearing his signature.

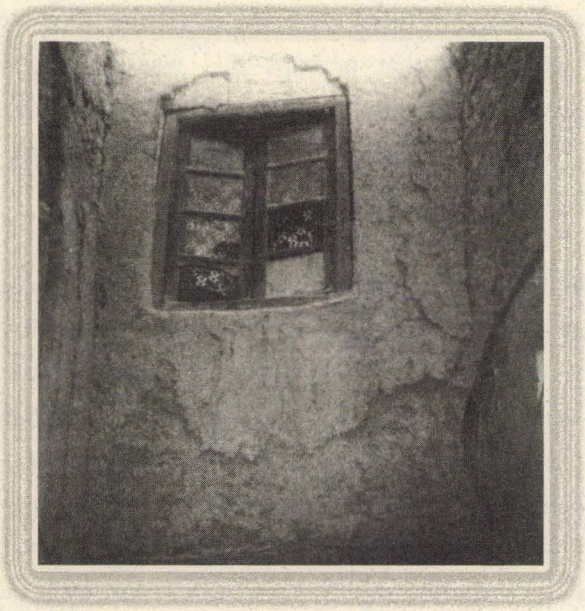
When these documents were presented to the local judge, who recognized Rabenu Yaakov's signature, verifying the claim, he promptly summoned the traitor ordering him then and there to pay the sum of all these loans, or to present him within twenty-four hours with an installment plan for how he intended to pay back the members of the community.

The Jew, who knew that the whole basis of the lawsuit was a lie, was very surprised to see that Rabenu Yaakov attached his signature

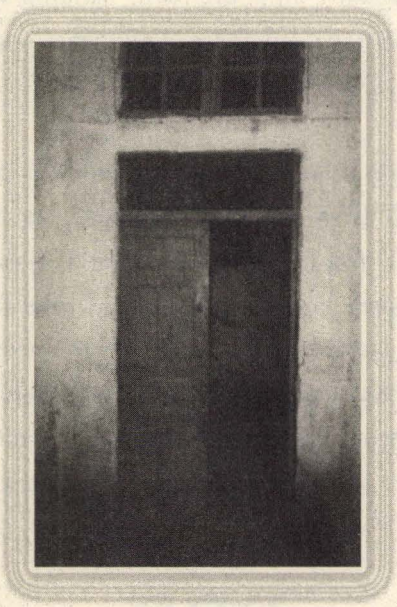
to all of the documents without researching whether they were genuine. He thought to himself that perhaps this was a deliberate scheme concocted between Rabenu Yaakov and the benefactors of the community. He had no choice but to approach Rabenu Yaakov to speak to him.

In the middle of the night while others were fast asleep, the Jew made his way from his glamorous villa in the center of town to the other side of the *Malach*, where Rabenu Yaakov lived among his community. With great misgivings, the person appeared before Rabenu Yaakov and expressed his shock that such a Torah sage would lend his hand to acts of deceit and forgery. Rabenu Yaakov replied gently, for "A gentle reply turns away wrath" (Mishle 15:1). "I see that you are having difficulty standing up to this test; your evil inclination is overpowering you and is inciting you to conspire against your brethren. I saw no recourse but to bind you with these false documents of debt, in order that you should know and always remember that if you continue this libel against your brethren, handing their assets over to the authorities, I will take out these documents and demand that you pay them until the very last penny".

The man realized that he was trapped, and would not be freed until he distanced himself from dastardly acts such as these. He promised Rabenu Yaakov that from then on he would improve his ways and immediately cease such behavior. Within a mere few days, members of the community started to see him in the synagogue and *batei midrash*, praying with a *minyan* and setting aside time for learning Torah. They no longer feared him and what is more, they benefited from his being close to the monarchy – "From the strong came forth sweetness" (Shoftim 14:14).



The window to the Abir Yaakov's room through which he would respond to questions



The front door of the Abir Yaakov's house in Tafilalet

THE SANCTUARIES OF JACOB



In opening his great Yeshiva, Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, Rabenu Yaakov followed in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestors, who had spent many years leading the Jewish community of Morocco and teaching Hashem's Torah to those seeking their countenance. It was there that the many promising young scholars who came to Tafilalet from all over the country and beyond, assembled in their quest to draw from the wellspring of Rabenu Yaakov. And there Rabenu Yaakov, like his biblical namesake, stood by the well, removing the rock from the mouth of the well for anyone having difficulty with his learning, drawing from it words of Torah and quenching the thirst of those assembled around his table.

Tafilalet was a city of Torah and its outlying suburbs were filled with both young scholars and venerable sages, all immersed in their studies. Day and night, the sound of Torah could be heard emanating from its many *batei midrash*. The residents of Morocco coined a folk saying: "If you are searching for sharpness and hairsplitting analysis, go to Marakesh; if you are searching for beauty, take your footsteps to Fez; if your soul yearns for the holy Torah and piety then you will find your wish in Tafilalet". The people of Tafilalet lived lives of purity and even the simplest of its residents, were people of stature who lived lives of abstinence.

Interestingly, in that province, whose every corner and plot of land was saturated with the very fragrance of Torah, only one Yeshiva existed at whose door every young scholar knocked. This meant that the Yeshiva of Rabenu Yaakov was filled with thousands who studied and prospered in their learning. It was from there that Torah learning issued forth to the public, as many of the Yeshiva graduates became *Roshei Yeshiva* and crowned leaders of the Jewish community of Morocco.

The students had a heavy daily schedule, beginning before midnight when they rose to recite *Tikkun Chatzot*. Next came immersion in the

mikveh followed by morning prayers, where careful attention was paid to every word, as if they were counting their coins. This early start allowed sufficient time for reciting the *Shma* just before daybreak in order to begin the *Shmone Esrei* at sunrise. The students would then study *Chok leYisrael*, which was followed by breakfast. They would then begin their Talmud study for the day.

Rabenu Yaakov instituted a specific method of *Gemara* study. The first time they read the page of *Gemara*, they would cover the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Tosafot* with a piece of paper, concentrating only on the words of the holy *Amoraim* in an effort to understand the meaning of the *sugya*. Only after that was accomplished, did they remove the paper and begin to analyze the writings of *Rashi* and *Tosafot*, gauging just how accurate their own grasp had been. The following expression was commonly heard among those studying in Morocco: "First 'roshi' (my mind); if not 'roshi' then *Rashi*."

Afternoons were devoted to studying practical *halachic* issues in the Tur. Just before the end of the day they would study works of *mussar*, eventually becoming fluent in works such as "Reishit Chochma", "Peleh Yoetz", and "Shevet Mussar".

It is therefore not surprising that the products of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov were truly sanctified fruits of whom it could be said: "The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem" (Tehillim 111:10), and that their deeds exceeded their wisdom (see Avot 3:12).

"HOW GOODLY ARE YOUR TENTS O JACOB"

"WHOEVER ENGAGES IN TORAH STUDY FOR ITS OWN SAKE MERITS MANY THINGS"

As with Yaakov Avinu, who was "a wholesome man abiding in tents" (of Torah learning) and who then secluded himself in the tents of Shem and Ever, Rabenu Yaakov did not budge from the tents of Torah. Every moment was devoted to Torah study, until it could truly be said, "the Torah and Israel are one" (Note: in the book of Bereishit, Hashem changed Yaakov's name to Israel).

A perusal of the writings which Rabenu Yaakov left for future generations reveals the great emphasis he placed on the importance of studying Torah *lishma* - for its own sake. We find this point etched deep within him; as he writes, "It comes as a warning that those who study Torah should do so for its own sake. It is not enough for a person simply to say: 'I am learning for its own sake'. R' Meir of blessed memory used to have certain signs that would identify those who were learning for its own sake, and if these signs were not upon the one learning, he would retreat to the back in embarrassment knowing that he was *not* studying Torah for its own sake. He would then work on strengthening himself, trying to rise in levels of sanctity and purity until he indeed merited Torah study for its own sake ... You must realize that the Torah itself can detect and announce whether or not a person is studying *lishma*, for 'Whoever engages in Torah for its own sake ... the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him and he becomes like a steadily increasing fountain ... the Torah clothes him in humility and fear ... moves him away from sin and draws him near to merit.' (Avot 6:1). These signs and effects of the Torah, will indicate whether or not a person is studying for its own sake" (Pituchei Chotam, Parshat Pekudei, and several other places). These words are very fitting for their author, for he was definitely involved in Torah for its own sake

and he was indeed crowned with all of the benefits recorded in the *Mishna* by R' Meir (Avot 6:1).

Rabenu Yaakov did not achieve his immense scholarship easily. It was the fruit of his own labor all the days of his life - a concentrated effort, which began during his youth and continued throughout his miraculous and incredible life. In the words of our Sages: "Torah scholars have no rest" (Brachot 64a).

"YOU SHALL CONTEMPLATE IT DAY AND NIGHT" – Its Simple Meaning.

Rabenu Yaakov's diligence knew no bounds, and his incredible concentration became obvious during these long days in which he hid in the attic of his house, so that he could devote every moment to Torah study. From his early youth until his old age, "He applied himself to the words of Torah as an ox to a yoke and as a donkey to a burden" (Avoda Zara 5b). Like that same ox, whose entire world is pulling the plow, and like the donkey, for whom carrying the burden is the way of life, this was the way Rabenu Yaakov related to the study of Torah, not as a mere "obligation" but a way of life, following Chazal's exposition: "If you will go in My statutes' (Vayikra 26:3) – you should be laboring in the Torah" (*Rashi* there).

This is the appropriate place to cite the words written about him by his son R' Aharon, may his merit protect us, in his introduction to Pituchei Chotam, where he describes his father's daily schedule.

"'**Day** following day utters speech.' (Tehillim 19:3) – 'The words of Hashem are pure words.' (Tehillim 12:7), 'Night following night declares knowledge.' (Tehillim 19:3) – He knows by heart the six orders of the *Mishna*. Each night he learns eighteen chapters with sanctity and purity. Then he studies the words of the *poskim,* searching for the sources of their words in the *Gemara*. Near midnight he takes a short nap and from then on remains awake, reciting *Tikkun Rachel* with

cries and supplications and *Tikkun Leah* in song and praise. At that moment the gates of acceptance and the gates of mercy open up and eight gates of holiness stand before him like a shining light. The books, "Etz Chaim" and "Mevo Shearim" are ready in his hands when he enters the inner sanctum. He is illuminated by the light of the holy Zohar. He produces his own unique insights and allusions to the new Zohar and the book, Tikunim HaNoraim. As the morning sun awakens from her slumber, like an eagle he swiftly swoops to fulfill the *mitzvot* of *tzitzit* and *tefillin* and then makes haste to the synagogue to be among the first ten. His prayer is that of the pious, clear and pure. There he sits studying the Torah, for that is his place. He eats only that which is necessary to sustain him, and then busies himself with giving charity to the poor and destitute, providing respite for weary souls. This describes only a few of the activities of this *tzaddik*, who can be likened to a winged angel. The earth reverberates with everyone proclaiming "*mekudash*" - *he is sanctified by the heavens* – O great Rabbi - pious, holy, and abstinent! That fortress of strength - the G-dly Kabbalist renowned both in name and good deeds – R' Yaakov Abichazira zt"l."

"...WHO APPROACHES THE KING IN THE INNER COURT, WHO IS NOT SUMMONED ..." (Esther 4:11)

His great-grandson, Rabenu Meir Abichazira relates the following story which took place in his great-grandfather's home.

Rabenu Yaakov had a granddaughter, the daughter of his son R' Aharon. She, like his other descendants who frequently sought his presence, was used to being constantly in and out of the home of their revered grandfather.

One day the granddaughter, Aziza, arrived at the house desiring to see her grandfather immediately. So great was her longing for him that she had no patience to wait for him to conclude his learning in the seclusion of his attic. She was well aware that when Rabenu Yaakov

was learning in his room, no-one was permitted to enter the room with the exception of his assistant or one of his children who were there to serve him. She, however, was "sick with love" (Shir HaShirim 2:5), and so longed for her beloved grandfather, that she felt that if she could not see the splendor of his countenance she would not have the strength to continue.

Given these circumstances, the granddaughter mustered all her strength and ascended the staircase which led to Rabenu's room. Hearing his holy voice emanating from the room where he was studying the holy Torah with such intensity, her longing increased. She knocked very lightly on the door, hoping to attract her grandfather's attention.

At that moment Rabenu Yaakov was engrossed in a Torah topic which required great concentration, and the knocking disturbed his train of thought. Rabenu Yaakov became very distressed, uttering words that had the minutest tinge of a curse. The words had hardly left his mouth when his granddaughter collapsed lifeless on the steps. The assistant, who was in the room, heard the sound of the fall from the other side of the door, and when he came out to see what had happened, he was shocked to see Rabenu Yaakov's granddaughter lying on the ground. Realizing that this was the result of those words uttered by Rabenu Yaakov, he ran to the girl's father, R' Aharon to tell him. R' Aharon came in to his father's room and asked him for his blessing.

Rabenu Yaakov told him that he had in fact been very disturbed by her knocking on the door, but he did not realize that the knocking was from his granddaughter whose great love for him always intoxicated her (see the commentary of R' Moshe HaDarshan cited in *Rashi* to Mishle 5:19). As a result a curse had issued forth from his lips; however, now he would fulfill the verse: "I struck and I will heal" (Devarim 32:39). Rabenu Yaakov ordered that a cup of water be brought to him. He uttered a few verses of mercy and gave the cup of water to the girl's

father instructing him to pour the water over his daughter. To the great wonder of all those present, she regained her strength and rose from the ground as if nothing had happened.

This was the last time anyone had the audacity to disturb Rabenu Yaakov while he was studying Torah.





THE GENIUS OF YAAKOV

Rabenu Yaakov had expertise in all areas of the Torah – in his eyes all of its paths were clear and brightly lit. Like an experienced captain, he would navigate through endless waters, finding treasures of wisdom and illuminating them with brilliance. Placing one gem next to the other, he was able to analyze topics on which little may have been written in one place, while they were richly explored in another. A mere glimpse into his holy writings proves that the author of these lofty words was proficient in all areas of the Torah and that no gate was locked before him. It is known among the family, who published his works, that Rabenu Yaakov authored a unique, lengthy and profound commentary on the entire *Shas*, manner, yet it was lost and the world never merited its revelation.

His illuminating Torah novellae, are established on pillars of holiness and supported by strong foundations of reliable sources and dazzling logic. His brilliance and insight is clear to all, as is his greatness in Torah, which was unsurpassed in all of the western North African countries. However, his insights did not become "common Torah talk" and not every inspiration was written down. Rabenu Yaakov approached the task of presenting new Torah insights very seriously, and he would constantly sift through them and re-edit them to decide which ones were worthy of being told over to his students and recorded for posterity by the pen of the scribe.

We find this approach in one of Rabenu Yaakov's writings where he explains the purpose of new Torah insights. These words were evidently written by a holy individual whose eyes had gazed at heavenly paths. They are worthy of being displayed at the entrance to every *beit midrash*, and should be shown to anyone who thinks that the idea of *chiddushei* Torah is nothing more than man's ability to express his thoughts. He writes as follows:



"Chiddushim, when they are properly documented and based on reliable sources, may be learned. These sources should be based upon the Torah, by bringing proof from one place to another, or from a *Mishna* or *Gemara*, perhaps even from later commentaries. *Chiddushim* of this type you may learn, delve into, and enjoy. If the novellae, however, do not rely upon any prior sources, you should know that they are simply castles in the air, and they give power to evil demons to grow and become stronger. These *chiddushim* are an abomination to you. You should not learn them and anyone who comes across them should bury them." This was the stern tone of the entire letter.

As mentioned earlier, his greatness in Torah was the fruit of many years of diligence. It is interesting, however, to discover in the writings of Rabenu Yaakov a fascinating explanation of methods of Torah study, positing that the Torah itself assists man and opens his eyes in comprehension. This is what he writes in his work "Pituchei Chotam" (Parshat Chaye Sarah): "When the Torah sees his great desire and yearning for its words, it refers to him as its master and honors and elevates him, enabling him to learn without difficulty. The Torah hurries to teach him, allowing him to accomplish more each day. Opening his heart to understanding, allowing him to acquire the wisdom needed to learn without too much trouble ... just as he desires to learn, the Torah desires and yearns to teach him ..." Rabenu Yaakov wrote these words from the heart, as a wise man of experience.

THERE IS NO GREATER JOY THAN THE REMOVAL OF DOUBTS

Regarding Rabenu Yaakov's incredible genius, his great-grandson, R' Meir Abichazira writes:

The *Rosh Yeshiva* and Chief Rabbi of the city of Tituan in Morocco was HaGaon HaRav Yitzchak ben Wallid of blessed memory, referred to as Maharib"u. His great Yeshiva was a magnet for hundreds of budding young scholars and *bnei Torah*, who sought his guidance and

followed his example. They drank in his words thirstily and developed their Torah learning skills under his watchful eye.

One day, Rabenu Yaakov arrived in Tituan incognito. While he was in his hotel, one of the students from the Yeshiva of the Maharib"u happened to enter. Realizing that this was a scholar from the Yeshiva, Rabenu Yaakov entered into conversation with him inquiring about the Yeshiva and its administration. While they were discussing the topics being studied in the Yeshiva, the student related that during the last few days most of the students had been working hard to resolve difficulties in one particular *sugya*. Rabenu Yaakov asked the young scholar to elaborate on these difficulties. As soon as he finished speaking, Rabenu Yaakov took out a quill and paper and wrote down one answer which resolved all the doubts and set the entire *sugya* straight. He handed the sheet of paper to the student asking him to show it to the students of the Yeshiva to check if his approach made sense to them.

The student, elated at this new understanding of the Torah that had just been revealed to him, hurried to the Yeshiva with the letter containing the solution. He rushed to the room of the *Rosh Yeshiva*, R' Yitzchak ben Wallid, and presented him with the piece of paper. R' Yitzchak immediately recognized the righteous handwriting of Rabenu Yaakov, with whom he had corresponded on several occasions. When he read its contents and saw how it resolved all the questions they had, he assembled all of the students in the *beit midrash* and lectured them on the proper analysis of the *Gemara*, setting out each word in its proper place. As he finished, the Rosh Yeshiva informed the students that he was convinced that the handwriting on the piece of paper was Rabenu Yaakov's. He then dispatched some of his students to search all of the inns of the town, in order to take advantage of the great privilege of hosting this righteous and holy man.

The students found him sitting in a carriage ready to leave the city and continue his journey. They entreated him until he admitted that he

was indeed the Rav of Tafilalet and the leader of the Jewish community of Morocco. With great ceremony, the students brought him to the home of the *Rosh Yeshiva.* When the two met, they became engrossed in a Torah discussion and they reached such an understanding that Rabenu Yaakov agreed to extend his stay in Tituan for another six months.

"THERE ARE MISSING WORDS AND IT ACTUALLY TEACHES THUS"

Another story from Rabenu Meir:

One day Rabenu Yaakov arrived for a visit to the city of Marakesh. The community was very excited at the prospect of his coming; everyone stopped working during the festive days of Rabenu Yaakov's visit to their town. Among those who went out to welcome him were the town's greatest scholars, the most distinguished of whom was the Rav of the city and head of the Yeshiva, the great scholar R' Yaakov Abtu, who invited him to visit his Yeshiva. The Sages had already discussed the visit among themselves and decided that they would pose before him only one question. This was as a result of the following incident:

Several days prior to Rabenu Yaakov's arrival in Marakesh, the students of the Yeshiva were having difficulty understanding a particular *Tosafot.* Several days of toilsome analysis had not produced any results. All the Sages and the Torah giants of the city were summoned to join the Yeshiva students in an effort to understand what *Tosafot* was saying. Since not one of the scholars was able to plumb the depths of the *Tosafot*'s words, they came to the conclusion that there must be some error and that there were a few words missing from the *Tosafot.* The words they added now made the picture much clearer. When everyone had accepted this change, all of the *Gemarot* in the Yeshiva were then edited by adding the two lines which appeared to be missing from that edition. A few days later a different

edition of the *Gemara* was found in the home of one of the city's sages. This volume contained the words of the *Tosafot* in their entirety, including those same additions suggested by the local scholars. Upon seeing this they sang praises to the A-lmighty for having enlightened them and guided them to the truth.

Now that they were about to be honored by the visit of Rabenu Yaakov to their Yeshiva, it was decided that they would present before him these difficult words of *Tosafot* and ask him to explain them.

When Rabenu Yaakov arrived at the Yeshiva, it was midwinter and the temperature was so icy that each student had placed a small heater next to him to keep him warm. A *Gemara* was brought to Rabenu Yaakov and the question was duly posed. One of the scholars inquired as to whether they could provide him with a heater as well. But he replied that he did not need one, as his clothes provided him with sufficient warmth. As Rabenu Yaakov became more engrossed in the text of the *Gemara*, the onlookers noticed that beads of sweat were beginning to form on his forehead. After a while the beads became rivulets that started dripping on to the pages of the *Gemara*, to the extent that every few minutes he needed to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief, as if it had been the middle of the summer.

After only a short time, Rabenu Yaakov lifted his head from the *Gemara* and asked whether anyone had a quill handy, for he wished to alter a few words in the *Tosafot*. They brought the pen to him and saw that he was adding two lines to the text. When he had finished writing, he said to them: "Now the words of *Tosafot* can be understood".

Years later, his eldest son, R' Masud, asked Rabenu Yaakov who, in his opinion, was the greatest of the Moroccan scholars. He answered, "You should know, my son, that in Morocco, thank G-d, there are great and important scholars. The greatest among them include R' Yitzchak ben Walid who is in Tituan, R' Yaakov Abtu

residing in Marakesh, R' Shaul ben Danan the *Rosh Yeshiva* in Fez, and R' Yehuda Amoyal who leads his flock in Mogador".

"LIKE A NOTE FROM HEAVEN"

A further incident involving Rabenu Yaakov: one day without warning, he asked his household to prepare food for the road and to reserve a seat for him in a carriage leaving Tafilalet for the city of Fez. No one had the audacity to question the purpose of the saintly man's trip. Rabenu Yaakov, however, told one of his close students that he had a Divine revelation that the students of the Yeshiva in Fez and their teachers had been struggling for several days to understand a puzzling section in the *Gemara*. He was now on his way to enlighten them with his understanding of the words of the *Amoraim*.

Rabenu Yaakov removed his rabbinic garb and set out on his journey dressed as a simple traveler. On his arrival in the city of Fez, he left his belongings at the local inn and directed his steps towards the *beit midrash* of the Yeshiva. On entering, he saw all the students gathered around the table of the *Rosh Yeshiva*, arguing about this particularly difficult question. The scholars were discussing the issue, one explaining it one way, another explaining it differently, but they were unable to arrive at any clear conclusion.

Rabenu Yaakov's face was not familiar to the people present, and in addition he was dressed as a pauper, so he did not attract any attention as he sat down at the table trying to listen to the conversations of the students. He remained in his seat even as noon approached and the *Rosh Yeshiva* announced that it was time for everyone to take a rest. One by one each of the scholars arose from his place and left the *beit midrash*, leaving behind only the wayfarer, who was dozing off by the table. Even when the caretaker, wishing to lock the door, "woke" Rabenu Yaakov from his "sleep", the wayfarer indicated that he preferred to remain in the *beit midrash* and he agreed to be locked inside until the scholars returned from their rest.

The moment the caretaker removed the key from the keyhole, Rabenu Yaakov took out his pen and inkwell and a sheet of paper and quickly wrote down the entire resolution of the *Gemara* in great detail, in a way that ran entirely contrary to the sharp analysis of the scholars who had racked their brains trying to understand the passage. He placed the piece of paper inside the Rosh Yeshiva's *Gemara*, which had been at the bottom of a pile of books he was using to aid in understanding the *Gemara*. He placed the *Gemara* on top of the stack of books and continued to "doze". When the caretaker came back and opened the door, Rabenu Yaakov "woke up" and left the *beit midrash* on his way to the inn with the intention of returning that same day to his home in Tafilalet.

When the scholars and the *Rosh Yeshiva* returned, they tackled the *Gemara* once again to come to grips with the depths of the challenging passage. As soon as he opened the *Gemara*, the Rosh Yeshiva discovered the page with the question and the solution. To his great excitement, it contained a very clear understanding of the *Gemara* – obviously what the scholars of generations before had had in mind. The intent of their words was now very clear.

Knowing that the caretaker was an ignorant man whose main concerns were keys and cleaning, the Rav understood that someone else had placed that note in his *Gemara*. The scholars called the caretaker and questioned him: did someone visit the *beit midrash* after they had left? He responded that the same poor wayfarer who had arrived at the end of the morning learning period had stayed in the *beit midrash* when everyone else had gone to rest and the moment he opened the doors, the traveler had woken up and gone on his way. The *Rosh Yeshiva* instructed the caretaker to go and search for the wayfarer, for he was deserving of great honor, being one of the great Torah masters from whom nothing was hidden.

The caretaker found Rabenu Yaakov packing his bags and belongings, preparing for his trip home. He asked him to accompany

him to the *Rosh Yeshiva*, who wished to see him. Rabenu Yaakov acquiesced and returned with him to the Yeshiva, where he revealed his identity and admitted that it was he who had placed the note inside the *Gemara*.

The scholars wished to make a great feast in honor of the Torah and to celebrate their great joy at having resolved their difficulty. Rabenu Yaakov agreed to participate. The scholars vied with each other to host the *tzaddik* in his own home. They decided that the only fair solution was to auction the *mitzvah*, with the honor going to the person who bid the highest amount. The honor fell upon one of the leading scholars, who obligated himself to give Rabenu Yaakov a very handsome sum of money. The scholars and the distinguished guest proceeded to the home of the host. When the meal was completed and the host wished to give Rabenu Yaakov the sum of money that he had promised, Rabenu Yaakov refused to accept it and instructed him to give it to the poor of Fez. He took his leave of the scholars of Fez, very happy at having been given the opportunity to guide them.

IN THE INNER CHAMBERS OF THE KING

"THE KING BROUGHT ME INTO HIS CHAMBER"

(Shir HaShirim 1:4)

Rabenu Yaakov's phenomenal skills in profound analysis were not limited to the revealed sections of the Torah; he also merited rare expertise in the hidden areas of the Torah, *kabbalah*. Furthermore, all his toil in the revealed part of the Torah was only a preparation for this, an introduction to entering the private chamber of the King. He wrote in "Pituchei Chotam" (Parshat Bamidbar) – "The Torah is composed of four areas: *pshat, derash, remez,* and *sod*". Knowledge of sod, the hidden realm of the Torah, is paramount, in order that man know and understand his G-d and learn how to serve Him, as David HaMelech said: 'I will elevate him because he knows My Name' (Tehillim 91:14)". He quotes the verse: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'So shall you bless the Children of Israel, saying to them ... Let them place My Name upon the Children of Israel and I shall bless them.'" (Bamidbar 6:23,27) and explains it as follows: "'So shall you bless the Children of Israel' – this refers to the blessings over the Torah; 'saying to them' – that they should devote themselves to Torah study, until they master all of its sections; 'Let them place My Name' – this refers to the hidden parts of the Torah, and when they merit all of this, then 'I shall bless them'".

How can we attempt to appraise the scope of Rabenu Yaakov's accomplishments in the area of *kabbalah*, that innermost part of the Torah? We are too lowly to evaluate him and we are well aware of our shortcomings as we take our first steps towards the inner chamber of the King. Had he not written what he did, we would not have had the courage to quote the following, which in his eyes was an obvious and known "truth" while to us it is nothing more than "belief" in our hearts.

The Baba Sali relates the following, which his grandfather had declared to his firstborn son Rabenu Masud, when presenting him with

a *siddur* organized according to the Ar"I's *kavanot* (that is, the goals one should have in mind while praying): "You should know, my son, that the objectives that are written in the book 'Etz Chaim' are only a few of the thousands of things that a person should think about. Even if this room was chock-full of papers from floor to ceiling it would not suffice to contain all of the *kavanot* of the Ar"I z"l. One who is meritorious is shown from heaven even that which is not written."

IF IT IS A TRADITION, WE WILL ACCEPT IT

The Abichazira family traditionally had its own unique approach to the works of the Ar"I, dating back to the early days, when the family patriarch, Rabenu Shmuel studied together with the Ar"I's greatest disciple – Rav Chaim Vital.

The Baba Sali related that he once heard from his father Rabenu Masud, that when he used to study *kabbalah* with his father, Rabenu Yaakov, they would learn it with specific points in mind, some of which contradicted the writings of one of the greatest commentaries in the area of *kabbalah*, R' *Shalom* Sharabi (the Rashash), may his merit protect us.

One night the Rashash revealed himself to Rabenu Masud in a dream and said to him: "It is my wish that you ask your esteemed father why he does not learn from my works." When morning arrived Rabenu Masud ran, very agitated, to tell his father about his dream and to ask him the question of the Rashash.

Rabenu Yaakov responded: "My son! He will reappear to you in a dream in order to hear your answer. Please tell him that according to the method that we have taken upon ourselves, there is opposition to his commentary; for this reason we do not study his works".

Who among us can begin to understand the conversations of these lofty *tzaddikim*, these angels? To them, the many generations which

separate them are insignificant and the paths of the heavens are as brightly lit as the courtyards of their own homes. All we can do is to relate the stories as they were heard from the Baba Sali.

"FOUR HUNDRED SILVER SHEKELS – GIVEN TO THE MERCHANT" (Bereishit 23:14)

One who wishes to take upon himself to investigate Rabenu Yaakov's incredible knowledge in *kabbalah* can gain some understanding from the following story, heard from his grandson the Baba Sali.

One day while busy studying the works of the Ar"I z"l and his students, Rabenu Yaakov wished to glance through the book "Arba Meot Shekel Kesef", by Rav Chaim Vital. He sent his assistant to fetch the book, only to discover that there were thirty pages missing. Rabenu Yaakov took it upon himself to fill in those pages from memory. In a few hours the job was done and he placed the missing pages inside the incomplete book.

Among those who frequented Rabenu Yaakov's home was a merchant who would journey from province to province in search of a livelihood. He attributed his wealth and success to the blessings which the *tzaddik* bestowed upon him every time he entered his home. It would have been very difficult to attribute his success to any other cause, since the merchant's intellectual level was no higher than that of a simple market vendor; he had not even totally mastered the letters of the alphabet.

In his great desire to bring pleasure to Rabenu Yaakov, the merchant used to search for rare old books or newly printed works to bring to Rabenu Yaakov. Being illiterate, the merchant naturally had no way of distinguishing one book from another. The only way he could determine whether or not to spend a goodly sum of money on it for Rabenu Yaakov was by the cover.

On one of his journeys the merchant was unable to find a book to his liking, with the exception of one rare volume whose long name indicated that it must be a very important work, "Arba Meot Shekel Kesef". As soon as he crossed the threshold of his host's room, Rabenu Yaakov asked him whether he had brought any books with him. When he responded in the affirmative, Rabenu Yaakov insisted that he bring it to him immediately. With his special powers, Rabenu Yaakov had already identified the work and having restored the book as we described above, Rabenu Yaakov was interested in the original - it was as if the heavens had specially sent this book to his home via the ignorant merchant.

With great excitement, Rabenu Yaakov took the book from him, eager to compare the original with what he had recorded from memory. It would be superfluous to note that the two versions were identical – Rabenu Yaakov had recorded it verbatim without a single mistake!

BURNING OF SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS

We are incapable of evaluating the greatness of Rabenu Yaakov and his rare familiarity with all areas of *kabbalah*; no one among us truly knows how high a level he reached. Who among us, however, would know better than his great-grandson Rabenu Meir who once said to those close to him: "My esteemed great-grandfather R' Yaakov was very attached to the Ar"I z"l."

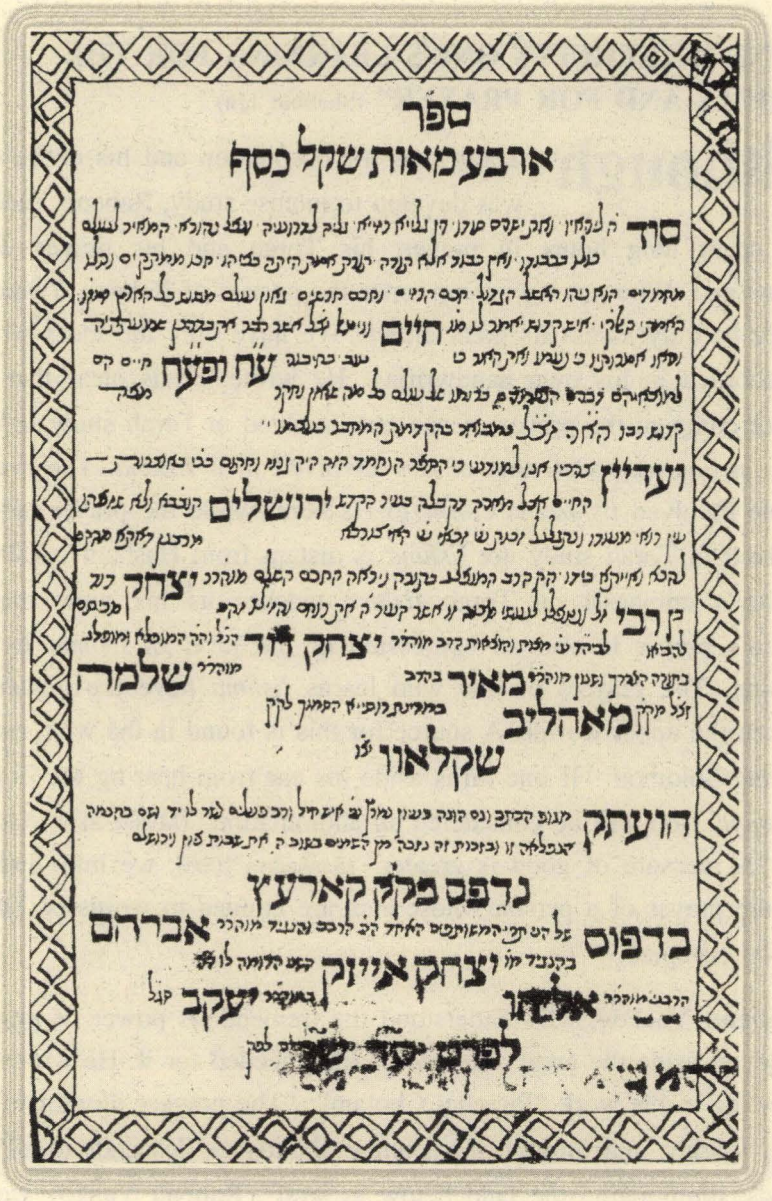
The following story, recorded by his grandson the Baba Sali can shed but a single ray of light – anything beyond that, our lowly generations cannot comprehend. We will simply relate the story as it was told:

Rabenu Yaakov had spent much time writing a book that would encompass the works of Rav Chaim Vital; it was now very close to completion. His insights were recorded in the margins of the pages of

the holy book, "Etz Chaim" which is recognized as one of the basic books on the principles of *kabbalah*. There is no doubt that, had the world merited the radiance of these profound writings, they would have become the basis for the study of *kabbalah* in future generations. Unfortunately, the moment Rabenu Yaakov finished his work and laid down his quill, the candle fell out of the lantern and set the manuscript on fire. Before he could extinguish the flame, the entire book had caught alight, yet only the margins containing the footnotes of Rabenu Yaakov were burned; the printed part remained unscathed!

Rabenu Yaakov was very distressed until he had a Divine revelation that his commentary was so lofty that it did not belong in this world. Therefore it was completely burned for Hashem. There is however a place reserved for it in the upper worlds.

Anyone wishing to touch even the tip of the iceberg of Rabenu Yaakov's greatness in *kabbalah* should read any one of his twelve works that are available to us. These works are filled from beginning to end with explanations and insights drawn from the wisdom of the hidden areas of the Torah.



ספר
ארבע מאות שקל כסף

סוד
חיים
עץ ופעח
ועדיון
ירושלים
יצחק חוד
רבי
שלמה
מאיר
מאהליב
שקלאוו
הועתק
נדפס פה קארעץ
אברהם
בדפוס
יצחק איזיק
יעקב
אלטון

Title page of the book *"Arba Meot Shekel Kesef"*

THE PRAYER OF YAAKOV

"ONE INTERRUPTS ONE'S LEARNING FOR THE SHEMA AND FOR PRAYER" (Shabbat 11a)

Although Torah was his occupation and his entire day was devoted to intense study, Rabenu Yaakov also spent long hours in prayer; his Torah and his prayer were intertwined. Who among us can enter the portals of Rabenu Yaakov's prayer or truly assess its great effect? We have only the ideas which he recorded in his own handwriting. He wrote: "It is clear that we cannot compare the prayer of one not involved in Torah study *lishma* – (for its own sake) with that of one involved in it *lishma*. The prayer of one involved *lishma* is closer to Hashem, while the prayer of one involved in Torah study not *lishma* is distant from Hashem". Rabenu Yaakov's emphasis on Torah *lishma* teaches us his view that a person's prayer is also an expression of the level of *lishma* in his learning. The prayers of one who learns *lishma* have the power to awaken the upper worlds. A source for this is found in the wise words of King Solomon: "If one turns aside his ear from hearing the Torah, his prayer, too will be considered an abomination" (Mishle 28:9). Given that "A measure of good is greater" (Sanhedrin 100b), we may deduce that the prayer of a person whose ears are attuned to words of Torah will be accepted.

Rabenu Yaakov, who understood the tremendous power of prayer, would set aside the great amounts of time needed for it. He wrote the following in his work "Pituchei Chotam": "The prayers illuminate the upper worlds, and through them, great abundance descends to all the worlds, illuminating the land below as well". Rabenu Yaakov would encourage his students and followers to direct their hearts towards their Father in Heaven during the time of prayer in order that the prayers become "service of the heart" and not remain lip service. In his writings he expounds on the reason why mere mouthing of the words is not sufficient for prayer. "After all," he writes, "prayer is



referred to as 'words which stand at the pinnacle of the world'. The reason is that prayer is made up of words and these words ascend to the heavens and act to raise the Divine Presence higher and higher. This cannot be achieved without properly directing the heart. If one does not do so, and his words become mere lip service, his prayers will not be accepted."

Rabenu Yaakov warned his followers not only about properly directing the heart, but also regarding the manner in which the prayer is carried out. We find in his holy writings: "A person's prayer must be recited slowly and he must think about the meaning of the words that come forth from his lips. For the principal unification of the upper worlds and the influence they have is during the times of prayer ... you must guard yourself during prayer from all kinds of thoughts that may disturb you, and your heart must be clear from any semblance of impurities, being as pure as fine flour .... the words of prayer that come forth from your mouth, do not recite them in a hurry but rather enunciate them slowly ... when your prayer reaches such a level, with pure heart and lips, it is worthy of being offered as a gift to Hashem and will not be rejected ... when your prayer is like this, it will rise higher and higher and create unifications, causing abundance to descend downwards to all the other worlds ... This is to be taken as a stern warning that there must be nothing extraneous mixed in with your prayers at all, that a person's heart should not turn to idle matters and he should not feel any desire during prayer. How is it possible to be involved in service of the A-lmighty and in unifying the worlds and then to bring one's self to an act that will negate his service? ... If his heart should turn towards idle matters or if he feels any desire, then his prayer is nullified ... every person must shed tears during his prayer, for all the gates have been locked save for the gates of tears (see Brachot 32b). This means that although a person, in his own right, may not be worthy of having his prayers accepted, when he sheds tears, Hashem becomes filled with mercy and his prayers are answered". (These ideas are elaborated on in "Pituchei Chotam" on Parshat Vayikra).



"THE EARLY PIOUS ONES ... WOULD SPEND NINE HOURS A DAY IN PRAYER" (Brachot 32b)

His son Rabenu Aharon described his father's prayer as "prayer of the pious – bright and pure," with the commitment of his entire physical and mental strength. To have some idea of Rabenu Yaakov's prayer service to Hashem, suffice it to note that his *Amidah* alone lasted for one full hour! His prayer before the King of the Universe was "in fear and love"; the awe of Hashem which enveloped his motionless body was visible to all observers.

There was no difference whether he prayed alone in his room or surrounded by the congregants in the synagogue. Even while traveling, including when he had to stop in places where there was a risk of highway bandits or wild animals, there was no discernible difference in his prayer. It is interesting to note that when he stopped to pray on a journey, it was not just for the *Amidah*; he would not move from the moment he began his preparation for prayer until he had finished completely. This could amount to about three hours at a time.

We can learn from here just how many hours a day Rabenu Yaakov devoted to prayer, even in times of great peril, in order to be able to concentrate properly. We can also imagine how much further he could have traveled had it not been for spending one third of his day in prayer, like a servant before his Master.

"HASHEM IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION – WHOM SHALL I FEAR?" (Tehillim 27:1)

The incredible concentration that characterized Rabenu Yaakov's sincere prayer, his plumbing of the deep and hidden meanings, were such that each time he set out to pray, it was a totally new experience, filled with new insights. He was absolutely unaware of anything that was taking place around him, for his senses were totally engrossed in cleaving to the Divine Presence. Why would he have any idea of what

was taking place on earth, when he himself was enveloped in the upper worlds?

His great-great-grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira *shlit"a*, heard from his holy ancestors the following story, which took place in Rabenu Yaakov's *beit midrash*. Two people involved in a financial dispute could be heard throughout the alleyways of the *melach*. The argument eventually led to fisticuffs and one of the men got up and ran to the sanctuary of the synagogue, in the hope that the other person would not dare raise his hand against him in such a place.

The Jews of Tafilalet ran after him to the synagogue, half of them to come to the aid of the man who was fleeing and the rest to assist his pursuer. The entire synagogue was in an uproar to the shame and disgrace of all.

During the entire commotion Rabenu Yaakov was so engrossed in prayer that he did not move from his place, even with all the tumult surrounding him. Upon concluding his prayers and sensing the large gathering near his seat, he appeared greatly surprised at what was taking place, like an outsider who had stumbled into the marketplace and could not understand the cries of the merchants.

His great-grandson R' Avraham Abichazira, the son of the Baba Chaki, and son-in-law of the Baba Sali, testified that he had heard from the people of Fez how they once decided to test Rabenu Yaakov, to see if he would notice the commotion they were planning to create in his midst. When he arose to pray, a group of people came and began to create a great rumpus where he stood in prayer - even going so far as to take out a gun and fire a shot right next to his ear. To the astonishment of all nearby, Rabenu Yaakov continued to pray as if nothing had happened.

When they later approached him to beg his forgiveness for having had the audacity to disturb him during his prayer, Rabenu Yaakov was

very surprised to hear that there had been a loud commotion. He was so totally absorbed in his lofty thoughts that he had not noticed any disturbance.

The story is told that on one of Rabenu Yaakov's travels from Pranda in Algeria to his sacred dwelling in Tafilalet, the time for *Mincha* was approaching. His party was passing through an area known to be the territory of armed bands of robbers, who had instilled fear in the hearts of passersby. Usually, unless someone found it absolutely necessary to be there, people would distance themselves from this place by at least ten *parsahs*. One who unfortunately had no choice but to cross that area would first stop outside to let his horse rest so that once they entered, they would be able to race through in great haste, with the rider clinging to the horse, gripped with fear.

When Rabenu Yaakov's caravan arrived there, laden with all manner of good things and accompanied by a company of soldiers from the legion of Pranda's ruler, the sun had sunk to the treetops. Rabenu Yaakov ordered the driver of his caravan to stop for *Mincha*. Understandably great fear seized the entire group and their legs threatened to buckle beneath them. The commander of the soldiers begged Rabenu Yaakov time and again not to have them stop in this dangerous place, especially as there was still time until the sun actually set. The *tzaddik* refused even to listen to such a possibility and while the soldiers readied their weapons and the rest of the people looked around frantically, to see from which direction they would be attacked, Rabenu Yaakov prepared himself for prayer as if there was nothing to fear. When he finished his preparations he prayed calmly at his usual slow pace; then they continued on their way.

It was a long time before the members of the group recovered from their fear and trembling. Rabenu Yaakov had not even felt any anxiety, his entire body being absorbed in his audience with the splendor of the King of kings.

"LET ALL SOULS PRAISE G-D" (Tehillim 150:6)

The following story, related by his student R' Avraham Marciano zt"l from the city of Devedo, who was personally involved in the incident, shows us the greatness of Rabenu Yaakov's prayer. Thousands of souls from the World of Truth would crowd into his synagogue in order to merit a *tikkun* by virtue of his properly directed prayer. This was how R' Avraham related the story:

Once, while he was studying in Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, a spirit entered the body of R' Avraham, disturbing his learning and causing him and those around him tremendous distress and grief. One evening at the conclusion of *Maariv*, the entire congregation went out of the synagogue, leaving R' Avraham alone in the *beit midrash*. The moment he was alone, the spirit began to harm him, whereupon he fainted and fell to the ground. Had his friends not realized at dinnertime that he was missing, who knows when and in what state they would have found him? When they noticed that he did not come to eat, they went to the synagogue to see why he had remained behind, and they found him sprawled out on the floor. Because some of his close friends knew of the personal suffering and distress he was undergoing as a result of the spirit, they went and related the entire story to Rabenu Yaakov.

Rabenu Yaakov summoned one of his prize students, who had expertise in the making of amulets, requesting that he hurry to write one to prevent the spirit from harming R' Avraham. However, the amulet was of no help and the student remained motionless on the floor of the synagogue. When the people returned and related to Rabenu Yaakov all that had unfolded, he rose from his place and went to the synagogue.

When Rabenu Yaakov arrived, he stood at the entrance and called the student by his name. To the great surprise of all, R' Avraham got up off the floor, went to Rabenu Yaakov and said "I do not know what it is that I have ..."



"Come with me", said R' Yaakov tersely and the two left.

Upon their arrival at his house, the spirit left the student and stood at the entrance. It addressed Rabenu Yaakov in a loud and clear voice: "What do you wish from me?"

"What do you want from this man who is my student? Who gave you permission to disturb him in the middle of his learning and to confuse him when he is trying to serve Hashem?" Rabenu Yaakov rebuked the spirit.

"Holy *Rebbi*! You should know that when you pray in the synagogue, thousands of souls that have been cast aside and require some form of *tikkun* gather there and derive great pleasure from your prayer. Many of them even merit through your prayer to return to their proper place, whole and remedied. I am one of those souls; for a long time I have been careful to be present in the synagogue for all the prayers. This student, however, gets in my way, leaving me no room. He has pushed me out of the place I have chosen for myself in the synagogue, casting me aside from the shadow of the *tzaddik*. I can find no other place; I fear that my soul will continue to be ousted from the place which it will enter when it becomes totally whole. I therefore decided to enter his body and cause him distress and pain until he falls ill and will cease coming to the prayers in the synagogue. Then I will be able to find my place anew and I will be able to continue enjoying your prayers that penetrate the heavens and allow the dispersed of Israel to take their rightful place".

Rabenu Yaakov commanded the spirit to leave the student immediately and not to harm him further. In reward for this, he promised, he himself would find him a place in the synagogue so that he would be able to join the prayers until he succeeded in mending his soul as required. Rabenu Yaakov then sat at the table, dipped his pen in the inkwell and proceeded to write a special amulet to prevent the spirit from disturbing R' Avraham again.

In spite of all this, one day the spirit suddenly returned to torment the student as it had done before. R' Avraham reported to the Rav that the spirit was not fulfilling its promise. Fear and trepidation seized those present, as Rabenu Yaakov approached the student and shouted at the spirit, "Why have you returned to disturb my student? Did I not warn you and make you swear not to do this? I even wrote a special amulet for him forbidding you from approaching within four *amot* of him. Now you have not heeded my words and you have resumed your evil ways, I will ostracize you and prevent you from entering the Jewish nation. You will perish from this world and your *tikkun* will be lost for eternity!"

In response, the spirit told him that the moment he had sat down to write the amulet, he prayed to Hashem that Rabenu Yaakov forget one of the Holy Names, so that the amulet would not prevent the spirit from gaining entrance into the student's body. He added that it had been a great pleasure for him to be present and to converse with the *tzaddik* of the generation. Now that he had merited this one more time, he would immediately leave the body of the student never to return.

To the amazement of all those present, the spirit's words were confirmed when the amulet was opened and in fact one of the Names was missing, rendering the amulet useless. Thereupon the spirit asked Rabenu Yaakov if he could command those present to leave the room for he had something private to discuss with him. The two remained alone in the room discussing important and lofty ideas, until Rabenu Yaakov left. After this, the spirit did not return to harm the student R' Avraham Marciano until the day he died.

Although this incident showed Rabenu Yaakov's greatness in that he had complete control over spirits and that they obeyed whatever he told them, let it also serve to give our limited human minds some idea of how lofty the prayer of Rabenu Yaakov was, to the extent that it was able to facilitate repair of thousands of souls that had been cast

aside. It also teaches us that the service of *tzaddikim* is not something that we can understand. Even those who merit being in their midst and following their service of Hashem from close quarters, can relate no more than what their eyes see.



"IN ALL YOUR WAYS KNOW HIM" (Mishle 3:6)

"A MAN'S TABLE ATONES" (Brachot 55a)

Anyone who has spent even one day in a Yeshiva, indeed any child, is familiar with the saying of our Sages of Blessed Memory "Now (that the Beit HaMikdash has been destroyed) a man's table atones for him." The simple interpretation of this adage is that eating at one's table in a pure and sanctified manner atones for any sins a person may have committed. In addition, the giants of Hassidism provide us with a new understanding of how a man's table atones for him. They explain that in the foods on a man's table are the reincarnations of souls in need of a *tikkun*. When the food is eaten in sanctity and purity, a man's table atones for him, not only for sins that he has committed but also by helping those souls along their proper paths.

The *Baal Shem Tov* had an insight into the verse: "Hungry as well as thirsty, their soul grew faint within them" (Tehillim 107:5). He explains that the reason the Creator created the concept of hunger and thirst, is that souls are enveloped "within them" (in the food) which desire to achieve their *tikkun* through the person who is eating.

Rabenu Yaakov tried very hard to conceal many of his practices, but he would speak openly about some of the hidden meanings behind eating. He would teach about achieving *tikkun* for the souls which appeared at his table. Like many of the stories that have been preserved about him, this incident was heard from the Baba Sali, who heard it from the sons of the man in whose house it took place.

During his visit to the city of Grama, Rabenu Yaakov was a guest at the home of R' Machluf HaLevi. His host accorded him great honor and made every effort to insure that his every need was taken care of, allowing him to rest and not to trouble himself. On a Thursday afternoon while they were eating, Rabenu Yaakov's host entreated him to extend

his stay in their town until after *Shabbat*, promising to take care of all his needs and to treat him as a king at his table. Rabenu Yaakov whose decisions were motivated by considerations that the average person cannot even begin to understand, declined the invitation, explaining that he needed to return to his home in Tafilalet early in the day and before the start of *Shabbat*. R' Machluf heard him and accepted what he said.

Towards the end of the meal, a kid from the flock of goats which R' Machluf kept in his yard suddenly entered the house and climbed up on to the table. He stood there with his face turned towards the prince of G-d, seated at the head of the table. The goat stared at Rabenu Yaakov who looked steadily back at him for several full minutes. Rabenu Yaakov then said to the kid: "Return to the flock. I have done as you wish." When the goat heard this, it turned around, jumped off the table and left the house.

Those present were astonished at the silent conversation that had taken place between the animal and the revered guest, yet they did not have the audacity to ask or to make any comment. Finally, Rabenu Yaakov turned to his host saying: "Now I will have to remain with you until after *Shabbat*, on condition that you slaughter the goat and serve it to me for my *Shabbat* meals. That goat contains the soul of a great Torah sage. I desire to eat its meat with the proper *kavanot* in order that it achieve its *tikkun* and be able to return to the lofty place which it deserves." The host went to prepare his slaughtering knife. He showed it to Rabenu Yaakov, asking him to stand next to him with the proper *kavanot* in mind while he slaughtered the goat.

When the highly spiritual *Shabbat* meal had ended and the household members had gone to rest, the host, who was sleeping in the same room as Rabenu Yaakov, heard someone speaking to him, saying: "Just as I have merited reaching my proper place with a proper *tikkun*, may Hashem increase your greatness and may you merit many more years." When he asked Rabenu Yaakov the meaning of this

conversation, Rabenu Yaakov explained that this was that same *talmid chacham* whose soul had achieved its *tikkun* during the meal the previous evening and had now reached its proper place. He had just come to thank Rabenu Yaakov and to bless him for all he had done for him.

This is how a man's table atones – a man who is not in need of any atonement for himself. All his eating was carried out with *kavanot* and *yichudim* aimed at extracting something precious from the act of eating to serve as a *tikkun* for the soul of whoever needed it.

"A SATISFYING AROMA TO HASHEM"

It is a common, albeit mistaken, assumption that ordinary human beings, with their limited intellectual capacities, can truly understand the acts of the *tzaddikim*. People think that when we speak of "hidden *tzaddikim*", we are referring to anonymous people who sit in dark rooms faithfully serving their Creator with all their heart without a single ray of light being visible through the cracks. Even assuming there are such people, we have already mentioned that the hidden *tzaddikim* are the truly righteous people in whose merit the world stands and who sustain all of us. What our eyes absorb are only rays that these righteous people have given us the right to approach and see. How can we, with our limited vision, as if we were wearing glasses smeared with filth, succeed in seeing beyond what our eyes recognize?

To "recognize" the *tzaddik* and be able to describe his acts on our behalf means to be able to point to the prayers he pours forth, to the many hours he spends learning, to his acts of kindness and charity, and to the salvation he brings about for the sake of the Jewish nation. However, when it comes to that which we cannot comprehend, how can we hope to describe him or assess him?

Although our comprehension is limited, we are privileged in that a single testimony, that was told by Rabenu Yaakov directly to his son

Rabenu Masud, who in turn passed it on to his son the Baba Sali, has been preserved for later generations. This is what Rabenu Yaakov said to his son Rabenu Masud when he showed him a *siddur* he had made which was embellished with all of the *kavanot* of the Ar"I HaKadosh: "You should know that all of these *kavanot* that you organized and wrote here, I have in mind ... when I take snuff!"

Let us try to imagine what those close to him and those who frequented his home were thinking when they saw him smoking his pipe ... they probably thought that he did it because it was good for him, perhaps they even would try to find him better flavored tobacco ... but this they certainly never thought of![98]

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98. This is a good place to quote from the diary of one of Rabenu Meir's close followers who recorded what Rabenu Meir had said regarding taking snuff, in which he followed the practice of his holy ancestors. On the 23rd of Sivan 5742 [14th June 1982] he spoke about how some tzaddikim would take snuff while others smoked. This is what he said: "My holy grandfather too would take snuff, as did my esteemed father. I sniff just a pinch from a distance ... The holy Baal Shem Tov used to smoke ... It is told of one of the Grand Rabbis that before speaking words of Torah he would smoke – explaining it with a play on words from a pasuk in Tehillim: the verse begins "Smoke rose up in his nostrils" and continues "a devouring fire from his mouth" (Tehillim 18:9).

When Rabenu Meir was asked why his father took snuff, he answered, "They would stay up late into the night learning Torah and they would smoke for their own peace of mind."

About a month later (19 Tamuz 5742 [10th July1982]) Rabenu Meir had a discussion at his Shabbat table about his snuff boxes, one of which was made of silver, while one was of gold. When asked when he used the silver one and when the gold one, he replied: "The gold alludes to judgment while the silver to kindness and mercy ... in this way the judgment is sweetened ... the Talmud states 'Silver acquires gold' (Baba Metzia 44a), and it is written there in the name of the Ar"I that the silver, which alludes to kindness overpowers the gold, which is the judgment". They then asked about the Mishna which states, "The gold acquires the silver; the silver does not acquire the gold." (Baba Metzia 44a). What would this mean in light of these words of the Ar"I z"l. He answered, "What we have said is an allusion; the simple meaning is not like that".

Although his concise words do not shed light on the *tzaddikim*'s practice of taking snuff, perhaps a minor lesson can be learned from the words of his holiness presented here for the first time.

If we now analyze once again the verse which has been chosen as the title of this chapter, "In all your ways know Him", how appropriate it is to proceed to the next chapter, which is titled by the continuation of that same verse, "and He will smooth your paths". Not every person merits having his paths smoothed from heaven and his every step guarded, like that righteous person who knew His Creator in all ways and who contemplated all His ways and served Him with every step he took.



"AND HE WILL SMOOTH YOUR PATHS"

(Mishle 3:6)

"HE GUARDS THE STEPS OF HIS DEVOUT ONES"

(Shmuel I 2:9)

Not everyone merits Divine protection of his every step. Only a person who completely channels all of his capabilities into every endeavor is worthy of constant Heavenly assistance to ensure that his efforts bear fruit. Such an exceptional individual also merits protection from circumstances he cannot withstand, as we are told: "To the G-d Who fulfills (lit. finishes) for me." (Tehillim 57:3). From the well-known words of *Tosafot*: "It is degrading for a *tzaddik* to eat forbidden foods." (*Tosafot* Gittin 7a "Hashta") we can learn that the *tzaddik* is protected from Heaven lest anything unworthy come into his mouth.

Indeed, there have been many instances, in the present and the past, involving Torah giants, who were served food of questionable *kashrut*, although neither they nor their companions had any way of knowing it at that time. The *kashrut* lapse was only discovered when someone investigated why the *tzaddik* had refused the food. A verse from the Torah was interpreted by the earlier scholars as alluding to this; the *pasuk* states: "To distinguish between the contaminated and the pure and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten." (Vayikra 11:17). They explained that when the distinction between pure and impure is well-defined and clear, it is not hard to distinguish between the two ("...between the contaminated and the pure ..."). Yet, there are instances when the flaw in *kashrut* is not obvious and it is only this extra protection from Heaven which prevents one from eating - "the creature which may not be eaten" – literally. True *tzaddikim* feel revulsion when such food is placed before them.

Rabenu Yaakov experienced a number of such incidents and it is worthwhile to record them for future generations.

EATING "*EVER MIN HACHAI*" (A LIMB DETACHED FROM A LIVING ANIMAL)

A dinner to honor Rabenu Yaakov took place in the home of HaRav Yaakov ben Kiva in Tafilalet. There were about forty people present, mostly followers of the *tzaddik.*

When it was time for the main course, the servants brought out big platters of roast chicken. Rabenu Yaakov's portion was placed before him; he took one look at it and asked his host where the chickens had been slaughtered. The unsuspecting host responded that he had given them to his sons to bring to the slaughterhouse where the slaughterers worked under the strict supervision of the local *Rabbanim.* Rabenu Yaakov summoned his host's sons to inquire which of them had actually brought the chickens to the slaughterhouse, and which slaughterer's knife was used. The sons answered that they had given the chickens to one of the servants with instructions to bring them to the slaughterhouse as their father had requested. Rabenu Yaakov then questioned the servant who said that he had duly taken the chickens but when he arrived at the slaughterhouse, he found no-one there. "I knew that the cooks back home were impatient for the chickens. I had stood by the slaughterers on many occasions watching their work, so I knew that I too was capable of wielding a knife and carrying out the slaughter in the proper manner." (!)

It now became clear why Rabenu Yaakov had refused to eat the chickens; they were slaughtered, not by a certified *shochet* but by an ignorant servant using an ordinary kitchen knife! Of course, the meat was removed from the table immediately. Those assembled, however, were not dismissed until they had each drunk thirteen glasses of *araq*, singing praises to Hashem for having saved them from eating forbidden foods.

The above story was related to the Baba Sali by Rav Yaakov Alizara who heard it directly from his father, who had been one of the guests at the table. That night, R' Alizara's deceased father came to him in a

dream, accompanied by an elderly distinguished-looking individual. His father introduced the man to him as Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira and instructed him to "kiss his hand and receive his blessing". As he approached him, Rabenu Yaakov said to him: "You related the story involving the chickens to my grandson R' Yisrael. Tell him that it was not for nothing that we drank thirteen glasses of *araq*. The numerical value of the word *ahava*, love, is thirteen and two times thirteen is the numerical value of the Name of Hashem. Drinking those thirteen glasses unified the Name of Hashem for having protected us from having transgressed the prohibition of eating forbidden meat."

Over the course of time, whenever the Baba Sali told this story, he would add the contents of R' Alizara's dream. Upon concluding the story, he would describe the incident, punning on the verse: "The G-d of my father came to my aid and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." (Shmot 18:4) He had the privilege of hearing from his grandfather about the unification of The Name of the A-lmighty while being saved from the "sword of Pharaoh" – that *shechita* with the servant's kitchen knife.

FROM THE HEAVENS HE MERITED

Rabenu Yaakov had a grandson, the son of his daughter Esther, named R' Yichye Adahan, who had the privilege of being raised close to his revered grandfather and who enjoyed a special relationship with him. Out of all Rabenu Yaakov's descendants, he was closest to two of his grandsons, who were exceptionally pious. The first one was Rabenu David Abichazira, *Ateret Roshenu*, may G-d avenge his blood, and the other was R' Yichye Adahan. According to the Baba Sali, R' Yichye abstained from all matters of this world and inflicted on his body penances of many kinds. The Baba Sali writes of him in a letter: "All that is written in Megillat Taanit was fulfilled by him". He related further that he underwent *taanit hafsaka* (fasting from the conclusion of one Shabbat until the beginning of the next) at least one hundred times throughout his life, in addition to fasting regularly on Mondays and Thursdays.

One year, during the scorching hot days of the month of Tamuz, he fasted two of these *taaniot hafsaka* in one month!

After Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu,* was killed sanctifying the Name of G-d, and the yoke of leadership was thrust onto Rabenu Yisrael, the Baba Sali, Rabenu Yisrael nominated his cousin R' Yichye as head of the Yeshiva, to allow the students to be influenced by his majesty and be guided on the proper paths. He was confident that R' Yichye would leave his imprint of sanctity and piety on the atmosphere of the Yeshiva.

The Baba Chaki heard the following story from him, and when he told it over, his listeners hurriedly copied it down in writing.

During one of his travels, R' Yichye visited a remote village in an outlying area of Morocco and was invited to dine at the home of a distinguished resident. R' Yichye politely refused the invitation, perhaps because he was in the midst of a fast or perhaps he did not trust the level of *kashrut* observance in the home. The host, assuming that it was for *kashrut* reasons, responded sharply, "Are you any better than Rabenu Yaakov who usually eats in my house when he passes through our village!" R' Yichye answered: "Even if this is true, and I do not even reach the ankles of my esteemed grandfather, the Abir Yaakov, for I am mere dust and ashes compared to his great and lofty level, yet Rabenu Yaakov was given a signal from heaven regarding where to eat and whether or not the food placed before him was kosher. Me? Who am I that I should rely on my mouth and my innards ..." The host interrupted him in mid-sentence and said: "Now that you have mentioned this, let me tell you about the following fantastic incident involving Rabenu Yaakov that took place in my home."

During one of Rabenu Yaakov's visits to this villager's home, his household prepared a very elaborate meal, consisting of some of the greatest delicacies in all of the western lands. A large chicken was roasted whole, without a limb missing – even the head and the legs

were not totally severed following slaughter. When the chicken was brought to the table, Rabenu Yaakov was given the honor of apportioning it among those present. He took one look at the chicken and said, "This chicken is still alive! How can you ask me to dish it out when it is still alive?" His table companions did not understand until he explained that the chicken was not slaughtered in accordance with the dictates of *halacha*. He went on to show that the majority of the necessary vital "signs" were not properly slaughtered. To him it was tantamount to the chicken's being alive. When the host went to check into the matter, he discovered that the chicken had been inexplicably exchanged for another. Only Rabenu Yaakov with his great clarity of spiritual vision was able to detect it.

"IF THERE IS NO TORAH – THERE IS NO FLOUR"

The last stop on the Baba Sali's first trip to the Land of Israel in the year 5682 [1921-22] was in the city of Tiberias, one of the centers of devout Jews, where many Torah giants and Hassidic masters gathered. Rabenu Yaakov's son, R' Avraham and his son-in-law R' Yaakov Turgeman also lived there. The students of R' Yaakov Turgeman, chief among them R' Eliyahu Iluz, the head of the Rabbinical courts, appreciated the Baba Sali's greatness and pleaded with him to remain with them and to establish his residence in their city – but to no avail.

When they met, R' Eliyahu Iluz told the following story to the Baba Sali which he had heard from a reliable eyewitness – R' Mordechai Ben Jo, who had been the Rav of the city of Tangiers in Tunis. R' Eliyahu introduced his story in this way:

"'**My** transgressions do I mention today.' (Bereishit 41:9). It was approximately ten years after Rabenu Yaakov's departure from this world when I traveled as an emissary from the *Kollel* of the Sages of Tiberias to raise funds in the western North African communities. In Tangiers I was a guest at the home of R' Mordechai Ben Jo. He took



care of me and did all he could to insure the success of my mission. I told him that it was well-known that the people of Tangiers had given a very generous donation in honor of Rabenu Yaakov; perhaps they could also give a donation of similar magnitude in honor of the Sages of Tiberias.

Upon hearing these words, R' Mordechai Ben Jo responded: "Hold your tongue! Never again make such comparisons! With all due respect to the great Sages of Tiberias, who are you to place yourself alongside or even in the shadow of the great Rabenu Yaakov? If the local people hear the manner in which you speak, they will drive you out of the city on your hands and knees without giving you a single penny".

To reinforce his words, the Rav of Tangiers related the following story to R' Eliyahu Iluz, who in turn related it to the Baba Sali.

While Rabenu Yaakov was in the city of Tangiers, he was invited to visit the home of the head of the local Jewish community. When Rabenu Yaakov arrived the house was very crowded with many important local dignitaries and Sages left standing. It goes without saying that among those present was also the Rav of the city – R' Mordechai Ben Jo.

All of a sudden the Rav noticed Rabenu Yaakov whispering something into his assistant's ear. The assistant left the room only to return a few minutes later. Just then Rav Ben Jo needed to leave the room and as he did so he encountered the host's wife, with tears streaming down her cheeks. When the Rav asked what was troubling her, the woman responded that the honorable guest and assistant had just told her in Rabenu Yaakov's name not to prepare any food for him, for he would not partake of any food prepared by her.

Rav Ben Jo returned to the room and asked Rabenu Yaakov what was amiss. The woman was known to be very righteous and her *Yirat Shamayim* (fear of heaven) was well-known throughout the city. He

inquired why Rabenu Yaakov did not rely on her *kashrut* at all. Rabenu Yaakov answered that he had just become aware that this woman had violated a very severe sin of the Torah in private and he did not wish to benefit from anything she had made. Upon hearing this, the Rav returned to the woman, who was shocked to hear what he knew. Eventually she admitted everything he had said down to the last detail.

"Do you really think you can compare yourself to someone so pure and holy?" asked R' Mordechai Ben Jo of his guest from Tiberias. "You and I – our eyes cannot see anything which is hidden from us. Rabenu Yaakov however has everything revealed to him, even events which took place in total seclusion".



"THE ENTIRE WORLD WAS CREATED ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF THIS PERSON"

(Brachot 6b)

"EVERYTHING HASHEM MADE, HE MADE FOR HIS SAKE" (Mishle 16:4)

If only the eye had been given the ability to see perfectly, and man had been given greater ability to comprehend, we would be able to perceive with our own senses how the entire creation revolves around one axis – the *tzaddikim*. Millions of people go about their daily lives, unaware that their real raison d'être is to provide some benefit for the *tzaddikim* who follow in the ways of the A-lmighty. In light of this, it we might suggest, for example, that the entire transportation system was created so that the *tzaddikim* might arrive at their desired destination quickly and comfortably. We need not mention all the companies that produce parts for this industry and those who manufacture the tools needed. This idea can be expanded ad infinitum.

One may ask why the Creator nourishes the entire world with the same type of food, or why He satisfies the same needs for all the creatures, when only one *tzaddik* is destined to benefit from it. The answer to this question can be derived from the writings of our Sages: "Each and every day a Heavenly voice issues from Mount Chorev saying 'The entire world is sustained for the sake of Chanina My son' (even though) Chanina My son is satisfied with just a measure of carobs from one Sabbath eve to the next Sabbath eve" (Brachot 17b).

One who raises his eyebrows in wonder upon reading this, or one who speaks out against it, will find support for what we are saying in the Rambam's introduction to his commentary on the Mishnayot Seder Zeraim: "Even though he is comfortable with all his wealth and assets, he will command his servants to build a palace 'perfect in beauty' and to plant an impressive vineyard, as kings and other noblemen are wont

to do. Perhaps this mansion will serve a pious individual who will arrive at the end of days and will seek shelter in its shade and in this way will be saved from death ... or one cup of wine will be taken from this vineyard to make balm, so that one righteous man may escape death after being bitten by a cobra". Our Sages relate: "Ben Zoma saw a multitude of Jews while he was standing on a step of the Temple Mount ... and he said the blessing: 'Blessed is the One Who created all these to serve me'" (Brachot 58a). Such quotations corroborate what we have just said.

The routine of our daily lives causes us to forget that there have been visible upheavals in nature for the benefit of a righteous person or to aid him in carrying out a mission. At such times, the entire nation witnessed that the statement, "The entire world was created for the sake of one person," is no exaggeration.

The collection of stories in this chapter provides us with a glimpse of this idea.

"THROUGH RIVERS THEY WILL NOT WASH YOU AWAY" (Isaiah 43:2)

Rabenu Yaakov would often be accompanied on his travels by his loyal assistant R' Avraham Alon, of blessed memory. He related the following incident, both as an eyewitness and as a participant, to his son-in-law HaRav Mishael Dahan who told the story to R' Avraham Abichazira the son of the Baba Chaki.

This event took place on the eve of the *Shabbat* when Rabenu Yaakov and his assistant were en route to the Jewish village where they had planned to spend *Shabbat*. On the way, they came to a wide and turbulent river, which they would have to cross to reach the village. Both banks of the river were teeming with people awaiting the arrival of a raft to ferry them across the river. The people discussing

the situation among themselves, concluded that they would rather the raft arrived late, for the condition of the river posed a great danger – the waves were raging and the storm might well sink the raft which would be filled to capacity with passengers.

Rabenu Yaakov understood that their only chance of reaching the village while it was still daylight was to cross the river at once. He addressed his assistant: "R' Avraham! Carry me upon your shoulders and let us cross the river!" Hearing the mission which was expected of him and seeing the setting in which it must be performed, R' Avraham was understandably filled with fear. Rabenu Yaakov reassured him. When he repeated his request as calmly as he would ask him to perform routine tasks, the assistant did not hesitate and he set out to do as his Rav commanded.

As the two approached the river, the bystanders realized what they were planning to do and protested loudly in an attempt to prevent them from doing something so dangerous. Some even tried grabbing on to R' Avraham's coattails to stop him apparently risking suicide. The coarser ones among them began to divide among themselves the possessions of the two, as their greedy eyes wandered towards the horse and all the packages by its side. The assistant, by now quite accustomed to Rabenu Yaakov's miracles, did not pay any attention to their warnings and continued walking into the waters of the raging river. The shouts continued ...

When they reached the other side of the river, the shouts still continued, although their tone had changed. They were no longer cries of warning and calls to stop; this time it was whistles of amazement! The Ishmaelites who waited on both sides of the river called to each other in voices louder than the roar of the waves, "This must be a holy person." Those standing on the far side of the river hurried to kiss the hem of Rabenu Yaakov's robe, while those on the near side disappointedly at the loot that would never be theirs.

The story does not end there. After crossing the stormy river, Rabenu Yaakov instructed his assistant to cross back to the other side in order to retrieve the horse and belongings that they had left there. With as much ease as one strolling in his own courtyard, the assistant made his way back to the other bank of the river, and in no time at all, a horse and its rider appeared, making their way across the river. In this way Rabenu Yaakov managed to arrive at his destination before nightfall.

The raft, needless to say, did not arrive until Sunday.

"A SERPENT ON THE HIGHWAY" (Bereishit 49:17)

This was not the only incident which demonstrated that miracles are performed not only for the *tzaddik*, but for his assistant who caters to his needs as well. At least one other incident has been preserved from the endless treasure of stories of the Baba Sali.

Once, when Rabenu Yaakov was returning from a trip to the villages of the Tafilalet region, as he often did in his role of shepherd to his flock, he discovered that he had forgotten one of his books in a village he had just left. It was very late at night and no wagon driver could be found to retrieve the book.

One of the students of the Yeshiva, who was brave as well as physically fit, was summoned to Rabenu Yaakov's home. Rabenu Yaakov asked him to go to the neighboring village to retrieve the precious book. In spite of his well-known strength and daring, the student was frightened and tried to persuade Rabenu Yaakov to wait until after daybreak the next morning, according to what our our Sages tell us in the name of Rav: "A person should always enter 'when it is good' (i.e. light), and depart 'when it is good.'" (Pesachim 2a). The student explained that the journey would be very dangerous during the hours of darkness, for there were many wild animals prowling around the unlit paths, as well as highway robbers, who were just now awakening to begin their night's work. Rabenu Yaakov however was not to be

put off and repeated his request, promising his disciple that nothing untoward would befall him. When the student saw how much the book meant to his Rav, he agreed to go.

Whispering a silent prayer, the student embarked on his journey, trying his utmost to think of other matters in order to take his mind off the potential perils that awaited him. As he approached the area of danger, he was alarmed to spot a snake of huge dimensions - its gigantic head double the size of a human head - walking alongside him. His breathing stopped, the blood in his arteries froze, and he began to turn blue. However, he remembered the blessing he had received before embarking on the journey and was able to gather his wits. Before his eyes, he saw the face of the great *tzaddik* and this image gave him the necessary courage to continue his journey. Suddenly he noticed the snake jumping several steps ahead of him and then waiting for him to catch up; again the snake leaped ahead waiting for the student to arrive. In this manner the serpent accompanied him throughout the dangerous area and he continued on his way filled with joy.

When he returned with the book in his sack, he discovered that the snake was waiting for him at the beginning of the perilous path. The suspenseful drama was now replayed with the snake serving as his "bodyguard" protecting him from dangerous creatures which might be in search of fresh flesh.

Once again those close to Rabenu Yaakov saw his great power – the Divine protection that even Rabenu Yaakov's assistants merited.

A LION IN THE *TZADDIK*'S DEN

Once, in the black of night, in the heart of the forest, Rabenu Yaakov and a small band of his followers gathered around the small bonfire they had lit and sat down to eat. It was not a safe place to be late at night and they could all feel fear creeping into their hearts. Did we



say they were all overcome with fear? There was of course one person who was not afraid – RabenuYaakov! It was he who elected to remain in that isolated forest, in spite of the warnings of his followers who begged him not to tarry there, for it placed their lives as well as his own in great danger. It was he who had stopped the caravan at that point and decided that they should camp there overnight. He had his reasons for choosing that particular spot, known to be a dwelling place for wild animals and armed bandits, yet he did not reveal his reasons to anyone. Not a trace of fear gripped him. He had never feared any of these creatures. If there was anyone to fear it is only the One Whom he fears now – Him and no other.

There they sat, sipping tea, their glances stealing towards the horizon, as they wondered tensely what was to come. Suddenly there was a sound in the distance, getting louder and louder as it approached them – the roar of a lion! Two minutes later it appeared - an immense lion taking enormous strides towards them, growling in anger at these creatures who had dared to disturb his sleep and to invade his private kingdom. The wayfarers clutched each other in terror, and in unison they turned their heads from the menacing lion to their leader, who was seated calmly, as if he did not hear the lion's roar and as if he was not familiar with the lion's eating habits.

The lion edged closer and closer towards them; then suddenly he crouched down, folding his tail and assuming a relaxed position. As time passed and the lion remained crouching in the same position, all present understood that it had been sent from heaven to protect them from the dangerous inhabitants of the forest. Now they were finally able to relax and get some sleep.

In the morning, at the conclusion of *Shacharit*, and after the lion had received a large piece of meat as "payment" for protecting them, the beast rose to its feet and made off with a growl, while Rabenu Yaakov's entourage continued on its journey.

"LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, O GATES"

Not only the animals that were given just enough intelligence to distinguish between light and darkness feared him. Not only those about which Noah and his sons were promised by Hashem, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth" (Bereishit 9:2) feared him. Even the inanimate objects of creation proved that the power of the *tzaddik* rules them to the extent that they negate themselves and change their natural essence in his honor and for his sake.

Rav Yitzchak Dahan, who was about 100 years old, told the next story to the Baba Sali. R. Yitzchak, who was present at the incident, described it to him as if it had just happened the day before.

R' Yitzchak had the great privilege of being counted among the close disciples of Rabenu Yaakov, who accompanied him on his travels across the country. Being so accustomed to Rabenu Yaakov's miraculous behavior, he did not bother recording in his memoirs many noteworthy events, save for this and a few other isolated occurrences:

During their visit to the city of Sifro, Rabenu Yaakov desired to go to the cemetery and visit the grave of the "holy young man". This was the burial place of a young Torah scholar who had departed this world in his prime. On arriving at the cemetery, they were informed that the young man's grave, which was in a chamber off a long catacomb, had subsided so deeply into the ground that its roof almost touched the ground. Instead of entering at the gates and advancing down the hallway from room to room, one had to bend over and crawl slowly until they reached the grave. Members of the local Jewish community who wished to pray at the grave of the "holy young man" did so at the entrance to the cave, where the gates had sunk so low that they were barely visible.

As Rabenu Yaakov approached the entrance to the cave, before he had even placed his foot on the threshold, the gates arose and stood as tall as a man. Not only did the gates stand up straight but even the

inside of the cave widened out, all in honor of the *tzaddik* of the generation so that he would not have to exert himself too much.

Rabenu Yaakov entered the cave and spent approximately two hours at the grave. The moment he left, the gates returned to their former sunken position leaving no trace of their elevation. Rabenu Yaakov turned to his escort, R' Yitzchak Dahan, and told him "Know that at this moment the deceased is not in his grave, he is at present in the holy city of Jerusalem. Tomorrow he will return and we too will return to meet him at his burial site". The following day when they arrived at the cave – after the gates once again rose to human height – Rabenu Yaakov entered the crypt, and when he emerged he was elated that he had found the "holy young man" in his grave.

Not only did R' Yitzchak not understand exactly what Rabenu Yaakov was telling him, but he did not even attempt to understand! Before his eyes, he had witnessed behavior that could not be fathomed by ordinary human beings ...

"WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH WATER I AM WITH YOU" (Isaiah 43:2)

Rabenu Yaakov once traveled overseas for the purpose of a *mitzvah*. After completing his business, he wished to return to his home in Risani. He sent some of his followers to enquire about the schedule of vessels leaving from the nearby port en route to Tafilalet. They returned with the information that a ship left that port but once a month. The next ship was due to leave in the afternoon hours of the coming Friday. Rabenu Yaakov heard their report and did not respond.

When Friday arrived, Rabenu Yaakov went about his daily business as one who is not planning a journey on that day, for it is forbidden to begin a sea journey within three days of *Shabbat*. His hosts and his attendants surmised that he wanted to postpone his trip by a month and they spent a pleasant *Shabbat* in his company. On Sunday Rabenu Yaakov asked his disciples to pack his bags and get ready to travel

because he now wished to leave for home. Although this appeared highly unusual, in light of their having just discovered that there were no ships leaving at that time for their destination, they did not question Rabenu Yaakov's actions and they began to prepare for the journey. Their host even asked a driver to bring his carriage to transport the *tzaddik* to the port.

The wagon driver refused, claiming that on the one hand he could never take money for the ride from Rabenu Yaakov, while on the other hand he could not afford to miss a day's work! After a search for another carriage produced no results, the host returned to the driver and insisted that he accept payment from him for transporting the *tzaddik* to his destination. Given that the hour was already very late and no other passengers had yet requested his services, the driver agreed to transport Rabenu Yaakov and even told him that he would take him free of charge. Rabenu Yaakov responded: "Had you persisted in your refusal to take me, you would have continued to wait in vain until the end of the day for more passengers and you would not have earned a single coin. However, since you have agreed to come, I will pay you the full price for this ride, and only under this condition will I agree to travel with you".

On arriving at the port, Rabenu Yaakov's entourage was surprised to see the ship still at anchor. The sailors, who were scurrying busily about, explained that for two days, since from Friday afternoon, they had been unsuccessfully trying to move the vessel, and could not understand the source of the breakdown. Rabenu Yaakov summoned the captain and instructed him to go to the ship and to try moving it now, and with Hashem's help the motor would come to life. After the captain was informed of Rabenu Yaakov's identity, he agreed to do his bidding. To everyone's surprise, the motor responded immediately.

Quickly they weighed anchor, the sailors manned their positions, and the ship sailed on its way.

A CLEAR GLASS

"A PLEASANT APPEARANCE" (Samuel I 16:12)

How far can man see? It depends on who is asking and about whom. One person may be blessed with the ability to see a great distance, while another's vision may be very limited. When speaking of the crystal clear vision that the truly righteous were blessed with, no one can answer this question, for distance placed no limitation on their abilities.

How deep can man's vision penetrate? It depends on the type and number of layers covering the object from the person's sight, and what means are used to aid his vision. We cannot compare something totally uncovered to that which is enveloped in coverings, and we cannot compare one who looks with the naked eye to one armed with an x-ray machine. Furthermore, when speaking of the visual capacity of the *tzaddikim*, it appears that at times *nothing* prevents their penetrating deeply into things and uncovering what the most sophisticated x-ray machines cannot.

Had we wished, we could have written an entire book under the title of this chapter. Most readers will agree that many of the stories gathered in this volume have a common thread: Rabenu Yaakov's ability, with Divine inspiration and with his pure eyes, to see over great distances and to tremendous depths, beyond the scope of ordinary human beings. Stories abound in which Rabenu Yaakov revealed to those close to him his miraculous ability to know everything and see everything. We have chosen, however, to devote only one chapter, titled "A Clear Glass", limiting it to a few incidents that fit this definition.

"'AN INHERITANCE FOR THE FAMILY OF JACOB' – DO NOT READ: '*MORASHA*' (AN INHERITANCE), RATHER '*MEORASA*' (A BETROTHED ONE)" (Pesachim 49a)

When his Rabbanit passed away, Rabenu Yaakov did not wish to remarry and he lived alone.



At the end of the year following the passing of their mother, his children thought of suggesting to him that perhaps the time had come to find another wife. They did not dare, however, to suggest this to him directly. They were well aware that all his actions were meticulously thought-out and he had no need for their advice. On the other hand, they could not refrain from bringing up the idea. They were only interested in his welfare and honor – very much aware that "an accomplished woman is the crown of her husband" (Mishle 12:4). In addition, they felt that the burden of managing the household should be removed from his shoulders.

They elected to send one of his prize students, a wise and clever man, whom Rabenu Yaakov held in very high esteem, to speak to him regarding this matter. They had no doubt that this scholar would be able to present things in their proper light and to elicit a clear answer from their father.

To his great surprise, the student was greeted with these words on entering Rabenu Yaakov's room: "Tell my sons, who sent you to try to persuade me to get married, that I have no need for it whatsoever".

If that student lingered in Rabenu Yaakov's room for even one extra moment it was only because, in his state of shock, he had trouble finding his way to the door.

"'THE NAME OF HASHEM IS CALLED UPON YOU' – THESE ARE THE *TEFILLIN* THAT ARE ON THE HEAD"

(Brachot 6a)

While in the city of Marakesh, Rabenu Yaakov sought an expert and G-d- fearing *sofer*. He was introduced to the chief scribe of the city who was lauded not only as the most proficient in his field but as a man of great stature, steeped in Torah.

Rabenu Yaakov sent for him, and asked him to write top quality *tefillin* for him. Rabenu Yaakov, however had two stipulations. Each

time he was about to write one of the Holy Names of Hashem, the Scribe would immerse himself in the *mikveh*. In addition, while inscribing the Holy Name he would have in mind all the special *kavanot*, intentions as prescribed by the Ar"I z"l. Following in the footsteps of the Ar"I, who felt that money was no object when it came to purchasing *tefillin* and who would customarily place his open wallet in front of the *sofer,* instructing him to take whatever amount he saw fit, Rabenu named a handsome sum of money, far beyond the market value of the *tefillin*.

The *sofer* accepted these conditions and took upon himself to fulfill all the wishes of the *tzaddik*. However, while dipping in the *mikveh* prior to the writing of each of the Holy Names was hard enough, the *sofer* began to realize how difficult it was to remember to have proper intent when writing each of the Holy Names. In spite of this, he garnered all his strength, overcoming many stumbling blocks along the way until he was about to complete his task.

And then it happened! When he arrived at one of the final Names on the *tefillin*, something prevented the *sofer* from having the proper intent on one of the Names. When he realized that the Holy Name that he had written lacked the proper *kavana,* obliging him to rewrite the entire *parshiot* from the beginning, a frightful dilemma confronted him. In the end he decided to ignore the missing *kavana* on that one Name and to give the *parshiot* to Rabenu Yaakov as they were, hoping that all his efforts would count for something and that he would accept them.

When the *sofer* handed the completed *parshiot* to Rabenu Yaakov, Rabenu Yaakov was very impressed with the quality of the writing as well as the parchment. He examined each letter of the *tefillin* and when he arrived at the Name in question he began to analyze the writing from all angles. For many long minutes the *sofer* watched and trembled, until finally Rabenu Yaakov concluded with certainty that when it came to that Name, the *Sofer* had forgotten to have all the proper *kavanot* he had agreed to.

The *sofer* from Marakesh, not being accustomed to Rabenu Yaakov's manner, was gripped with fear. Covering his face in shame, he acknowledged that the required intentions for this Holy Name were indeed lacking. Because he admitted his guilt, Rabenu Yaakov forgave him, and agreed to his request to be given another chance to rewrite the *parshiot* in accordance with the initial terms.

"WHO IS THE WEALTHY ONE?"

The Yeshiva world of one hundred and fifty years ago was radically different from the one we know today. Of the hundreds of students in the Yeshiva, many were from other towns. There were also many poor students who, even had they lived locally, could not have assuaged their hunger at home; in their homes *biur chametz* was not only on *Erev Pesach*. There was never a crumb to be found! There were practically no dormitories as we know them. These students had to find lodging in the homes of residents who were willing to host Torah scholars at their meals and set aside room for them to sleep either in their homes or in their places of work. This arrangement, which became known in the Yeshiva world as "eating days", was unacceptable to Rabenu Yaakov, who wished his students to devote themselves wholeheartedly to learning.

He therefore devised the idea of the dormitory, inviting all the students of the Yeshiva to dine at his table in order not to embarrass those who had nothing (see Pesachim 82a and Taanit 31a). Thus one of the first Yeshiva dormitories was established next to Yeshivat Abir Yaakov in Risani, Tafilalet. It was there that the Yeshiva students resided, among them many impoverished students of whom our Sages write: "Take heed with the sons of the poor, for from them Torah will go forth." (Nedarim 81a)

To defray the expenses involved, Rabenu Yaakov instituted a system by which the residents of the city of Tafilalet would support the Yeshiva financially, each in accordance with his means, with Rabenu Yaakov

determining how much each family was able to give. The residents of the city rejoiced at being able to fulfill the wishes of the *tzaddik*, honoring Hashem and willingly supporting the study of Torah with great enthusiasm.

Rumors began to spread, however, that a particular man possessed immense wealth. There was no evidence to support this claim, as he gave the appearance of being in dire financial straits, wearing torn clothing and eating at the local soup kitchen, which suggested that even a loaf of bread was beyond his means. In fact the man was exceedingly wealthy (although he did not fit the Sages' definition of "measurably wealthy" (see *Rashi* Gittin 52b "velo", and *Rashi* Baba Kama 62a "amid"), for his wealth was so well concealed that people had no way of estimating it.)

One day Rabenu Yaakov sent a delegation to visit this individual, asking him to undertake to donate one franc a month towards the maintenance costs of the Yeshiva. This meager amount was insignificant compared to his true wealth. He could have given much more, yet even this amount was beyond the means of a person living the life of poverty he had painted for himself. The messenger found himself face to face with a man who had just returned from the soup kitchen and claimed that he did not have a penny to his name.

Rabenu Yaakov, from whom the truth was not concealed, sent a second messenger. The rich/poor man sent him away empty-handed, angrily expressing his astonishment that the *Rosh Yeshiva* could not understand that he should not expect donations from certain people. When Rabenu Yaakov heard the man's words, he summoned three of his top students and told them: "I am appointing you as envoys to this man. Tell him that if he gives the amount I request of him, all will be well. If, however, he persists with his stubborn refusal then you should read the following lament to him". Rabenu Yaakov then read to them one of the laments that used to be read before the deceased.

The wealthy miser refused to heed the tzaddik's request for a donation, and the students recited before him the said lament. Three

days later the miser died, leaving his heirs with astronomical wealth. Even before he was buried, the family decided to take all the money that he had left and donate it to the Yeshiva, in order that the merit of charity should put him in good standing in the Next World. In the "World of Truth" the wealthy person would no longer be able to deny the truth that he had refused to acknowledge while in this "World of Falsehood".

"HE WILL CHARGE HIS ANGELS FOR YOU"

Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, headed by Rabenu Yaakov, produced many students who later became leaders in the Moroccan Jewish community, as community Rabbis, judges, and *Roshei Yeshivot.* It is interesting to note that many of Rabenu Yaakov's students became leaders in other areas as well, such as administering charitable causes. Many students, in addition to their Torah greatness, would devote themselves to this great *mitzvah* and would persuade others to give for the sake of their needy brethren.

One such person was R' Shlomo Chayun, one of Rabenu Yaakov's top students and a close friend of his eldest son R' Masud, with whom he spent many hours discussing the questions of Abaye and Rava. We learn just how closely connected R' Shlomo Chayun was to Rabenu Yaakov from his introduction to "Pituchei Chotam" (written during Rabenu Yaakov's lifetime): "I came here for myself, who can truly feel for and honor this person more than me? From my youth he raised me as a father and his hand did not leave mine ... the soul of my Master is bound up with my own."

R' Shlomo, in addition to being a giant in Torah wisdom, was greatly involved in charitable causes, serving as one of the overseers of the *tzedaka* fund, walking from city to city and from village to village collecting for the poor and needy.

In the year 5632 [1872], R' Shlomo spent time in the city of Midelt, trying to raise funds. As was his custom, he lodged in the home of

the head of the community for several days, remaining there until he had raised the necessary amount. This was the way R' Shlomo carried out his fundraising - he would set for himself an amount he wished to raise from a particular city and would not leave until he had raised that sum. During his stay in Midelt Rabenu Yaakov arrived in town and there he met his student from many years earlier.

As soon as Rabenu Yaakov saw R' Shlomo he gave him a very penetrating look, exclaiming: "R' Shlomo! Do not tarry here ... return immediately to your home in Tafilalet ... do not hesitate to fulfill my words. I will follow you in about two hours". In spite of his student's persistent requests, Rabenu Yaakov refused to explain his strange command, but continued insisting that he fulfill his wishes and leave immediately. Rabenu Yaakov promised that he would arrange to have someone lend R' Shlomo the money he had expected to raise in Midelt and he would even have one of the local townspeople replace him in order to provide his fellow residents the opportunity to give to charity.

The communal leaders of Midelt, hearing of R' Shlomo's sudden departure hurried to Rabenu Yaakov's lodgings to hear directly from him what brought about this decision. Seeing that R' Shlomo had already left the city, he explained as follows: "When R' Shlomo entered my room and I looked at him, I saw that written on his head covering were the names of the angels that accompany a person to his final resting place. I understood that the time had come for him to depart from this world. Because I felt that it would be better for him to die at home on his own bed, so that his body would not have to be carried from place to place, I sent him home at once."

When Rabenu Yaakov returned to Tafilalet, he found R' Shlomo collapsed on his bed, his condition deteriorating rapidly. On *Shabbat* when Rabenu Yaakov came to visit him again, his situation had worsened - he was having difficulty speaking and the doctors attending him said that it was only a matter of time. When asked after his welfare, R' Shlomo wisely responded: "I can see that what was closed

is now opening and what was open is now closing," referring to the grave being dug and to his mouth which had been open and was now becoming closed for he was hardly able to speak. In a matter of hours, R' Shlomo returned his pure soul to his Maker, the heavenly angels accompanying him to his final resting place.

WHO IS A JEW?

An ordinary person knows only what his eyes see and what his mind can analyze, yet Rabenu Yaakov had uncanny powers of perception. With little more than a passing glance, his penetrating eyes were able to uncover what was deeply concealed and things that others could not even imagine. His words often defied all logic and appeared at times to be self-contradictory, yet it always became clear in the end that he was right; his discernment could pierce the densest of coverings.

This story, told by his great-grandson, R' Meir Abichazira, as it was heard from the people of Marakesh, provides a good illustration of this faculty.

One *Shabbat Parshat* Matot-Masei, while Rabenu Yaakov was visiting their town, he was asked by the Rav and the community benefactors to address the congregation in the synagogue. Rabenu Yaakov immediately agreed, wrapped himself in his tallit, and went up to speak. He spoke of the sanctity of speech, the text of which is found in his commentary "Pituchei Chotam" for that Parsha.[99]

It so happened that on that particular *Shabbat*, another visiting scholar was also present in the synagogue. At the conclusion of Rabenu Yaakov's discourse, the leaders of the community honored this visitor too with sharing a few words of Torah. As opposed to the words

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99. When R' Meir related this story, he was wont to point out that part of the Dvar Torah delivered that Shabbat in Marakesh is printed in Rabenu Yaakov's work "Pituchei Chotam". He would add that the local residents were so excited by the "Divrei Torah" that they asked Rabenu Yaakov if he would allow them to write down these insights of his. Many years later the people of Marakesh still held on dearly to these handwritten "Divrei Torah".

of *mussar* spoken by Rabenu Yaakov, this sage's sermon comprised phenomenal hair-splitting derivations, which amazed the scholars of the city. As he finished his delivery, the Rav of the city – the great sage HaRav Yaakov Abtu asked Rabenu Yaakov what he thought of the other scholar's discourse.

Rabenu Yaakov responded "While he spoke very well and his words were filled with very interesting ideas, I am convinced that this man is uncircumcised and I am almost certain that he is not a member of the Jewish nation."

R' Yaakov Abtu was shocked at these words and expressed his amazement aloud, "Is it possible that a great scholar, whose life has been well spent, and who thinks in such a straight manner, is not a member of the Jewish nation?" Rabenu Yaakov who was very sure of what he was saying, did not retract his words and did not rescind his assessment. He recommended that the Rav send someone to follow this scholar secretly.

The Rav obediently sent a reliable messenger to follow the guest around. After a thorough investigation, the "scholar" broke down and admitted that he was an Ishmaelite disguised as a Jew. He had even spent a great amount of time studying the Torah to aid him in his quest to mislead people. He now realized that his chances of practicing any sort of sorcery on the Jewish people were nil, for the truly righteous were able to uncover dastardly acts such as these.

THAT WHICH IS HIDDEN IN THE PICTURE

Rabenu Yaakov was able to discern the depths of a person not only by looking at him in person. A mere glance at his picture was sufficient to penetrate his innermost being and to reveal that which was in his heart. "Man sees what his eyes behold but Hashem sees into the heart." (Samuel I 16:7) Rabenu Yaakov was able to see, with his eyes, that which was in the depths of the heart.

The following incident took place in the city of Timosnat and was heard from the Baba Sali. He had heard it from R' Michael Said zt"l, the Rav of the city of Ohran, who heard it from a man who merited being Rabenu Yaakov's assistant for six months. This assistant was named R' Shmuel.

While in the city of Timosnat, Rabenu Yaakov would lodge in the home of one of the heads of the Jewish community, Mr. Simon Laknoi. Mr. Laknoi was a religious man who gained Rabenu Yaakov's trust and confidence.[100]

His children, however, did not follow in the paths of our forefathers and they walked in evil ways.

On one occasion when Rabenu Yaakov stayed in the home of Mr. Laknoi, he was accompanied by his assistant R' Shmuel. The host honored his revered guest as usual, sparing no effort to provide him with whatever he needed. The guest and his assistant were given a comfortable private room.

When they were alone in the room, Rabenu Yaakov surveyed the room; when he saw one of the pictures hanging on the wall, he ordered his assistant to hurry and remove the picture "immediately!" R' Shmuel

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100. Perhaps this would be the appropriate place to point out the way in which Mr. Simon Laknoi gained the privilege of hosting Rabenu Yaakov on his home. Once, when Rabenu Yaakov arrived in the city of Timostnat he stayed at the home of a poor man who dwelt on one of the main streets near a dark alley in the area where many poor people resided. One evening while Rabenu Yaakov was in the poor man's home, the head of the community of Timosnat, R' Simon Laknoi, happened to be in that dark alley. He was very surprise to see a great light shining forth from the windows of a humble shack belonging to a man whose poverty he was well aware of. His amazement was so great that he went towards the poor man's home so that he could peek in to see what was happening. He was even more surprised to see Rabenu Yaakov whose holy visage was well-known, seated at the table with this poor host. Upon seeing this, the head of the community wasted no time in trying to convince Rabenu Yaakov to join him in his more noble residence. From then on Mr. Laknoi had the privilege of hosting Rabenu Yaakov as his guest.

responded: "But does Rabenu Yaakov not realize that this portrait is of the host's son-in-law? He will certainly be angry when he finds that this particular picture was removed from the wall!" Rabenu Yaakov refused to pay any attention to the assistant's qualms, adding: "I fear no one besides for Hashem whom I am in awe of ... I will now reveal to you that which has been shown to me from the heavens: the man in this picture is evil; he is among the worst transgressors of the Jewish nation. He is currently abroad and within a month he is due to return. Soon after his return, his wife will give birth to a baby boy and you, Shmuel will be asked to perform the *Brit Milah* and enter him into the covenant of Abraham. At the conclusion of the *Brit* the father and the child will both die".

R' Shmuel did not waste any time in fulfilling the directive of Rabenu Yaakov and immediately removed the picture of the evil person. Within a few days, the prophecy was fulfilled. The man returned from the Diaspora and invited R' Shmuel to perform the *Brit* for the son born shortly after his return. Immediately following the *Brit Milah*, father and son left this world.

"HERE YOU DO NOT MERIT HAVING CHILDREN" (Rashi Bereishit 12:1)

There were cases in which Rabenu Yaakov refused to bestow a blessing upon those seeking it, for he knew that that individual was not meant to receive that blessing. He was "a partner of Hashem in the act of Creation" (*Rashi* Shmot 18:13) and it was almost as if he was a member of the Divine household. Nothing was hidden from him and when he was aware that it was impossible for a blessing to take effect, nothing could be done to convince him otherwise.

During one of Rabenu Yaakov's visits to the city of Sifro, he met one of the dayanim of the town, R' Raphael Moshe Elbaz, one of the great *Rabbanim* of his generation, who had written approximately twenty books encompassing all areas of Torah and wisdom. He was

also well-known as a poet-composer of *piyutim,* thanks to his famous work "Shir Chadash" which covered a diverse range of topics. Although he had been married four times, R' Elbaz did not merit having any children. One day he came to pour out his pain and anguish before Rabenu Yaakov, beseeching him to pray that he should merit having children. He even considered divorcing his fourth wife and remarrying. When his wife heard this, however, she came to Rabenu Yaakov crying, begging him to ask her husband not to take such a drastic step.

Rabenu Yaakov heard the words of pain and suffering from the Rav and Rabbanit and requested that they wait one more night; the following day he would inform them what was decreed in heaven.

The next morning Rabenu Yaakov summoned R' Raphael Moshe Elbaz and told him the following: "I saw in the heavens that you will not have the fortune of having children ... in the heavens it has been decreed that your books are your children and they will give you a better name than sons and daughters. You should therefore not worry or be saddened that you do not physically have children and you should not put any further effort into it".

R' Raphael Moshe, having heard the clear words of Rabenu Yaakov, accepted them and from then on did not persist. Prior to his death, he summoned the Rabbanit and related to her that all his days he had dreamed of living in the Land of our forefathers, yet he never had been able to fulfill his dream. Now that he realized that he was destined to die in a foreign land, he asked that at the end of the year of mourning, she make the journey to the Land of Israel. This would be considered as if he himself had come, for "the wife of a *chaver* is like a *chaver*" (Avoda Zara 39a).

The Rabbanit did as her husband had requested, traveling to Eretz Yisrael and settling in the Old City of Jerusalem. Nobody there knew her identity or that of her distinguished late husband. At first she

supported herself with the little money she had brought from Morocco, but when it ran out, and every valuable possession had been sold, her life became filled with pain and deprivation. In time, a very rich non-Jewish merchant arrived from Turkey and opened a food factory for which he hired many Jewish women as workers. The Moroccan women's expertise in this area was well-known and the factory owner had a preference towards hiring them. These women persuaded Rabbanit Elbaz to join them. When they saw that she did not possess the necessary skills to carry out the job, they covered up for her by performing her share of the work, thereby supporting her with their labor. One day the factory owner arrived on a visit and he observed that one of his workers, Rabbanit Elbaz was not working properly. Her inefficiency understandably angered the owner, and even after having heard the excuses of her friends, his anger was not assuaged and he dismissed her on the spot.

That night R' Raphael Moshe Elbaz appeared to the factory owner in a dream saying: "I have come to take your life!" The non-Jew was astonished and asked "Why are you doing this to me?" The scholar answered that the factory owner had degraded his widow that very day, sending her away in sorrow and leaving her with no visible means of support; he therefore had to die. R' Raphael Moshe explained that he had been sent from heaven to carry out this decree. The non-Jew tried to justify his actions, explaining that the woman had not been doing any work, yet R' Raphael Moshe refused to listen, claiming that the other women carried out her share of the work and she therefore was deserving of full compensation. "If you desire life," continued R' Raphael Moshe, "appoint her today as supervisor over all the factory workers in exchange for a proper salary. You first must go to her house in Dor El Kulal and pay her for the embarrassment you caused her – the sum of ten gold pounds."

At that same moment, R' Raphael Moshe appeared to his widow, the Rabbanit and said to her: "Do not cry over your dismissal from

your work, for in a few minutes the non-Jewish factory owner will come and beg your forgiveness. Be aware of the fact that he has obligated himself to pay you ten gold pounds for having trampled your honor – do not agree to accept anything less than that."

No more than a few moments had passed when the non-Jew knocked on Rabbanit Elbaz' door. He apologized for not having realized that she was indeed a woman of great stature, saying he wished to give her a small token of conciliation. She rejected his offer informing him that her husband had appeared to her and had told her the exact amount that he had obligated himself to. She added that if he was not willing to pay the entire amount immediately, he should go on his way and suffer the consequences of his actions. The startled factory owner took out ten gold pounds on the spot and gave it to her. The following day he appointed her as a supervisor in the factory.

She continued in that same supervisory capacity until the outbreak of the First World War, when the Turks were chased out of the Land and the factory was closed. In the year 5681 [1921] when the Baba Sali visited Jerusalem, Rabbanit Elbaz came to him and asked him to bless her in the name of her righteous husband, as the wife of a *chaver*. After the Baba Sali bestowed his blessing upon her, she told him about all the difficulties she had had in the past few years, pointing out, that once again, she was surviving with great difficulty and had no means with which to manage her household even meagerly. The Baba Sali called the heads of the Western communities and requested that the woman be supported with a monthly stipend as was fitting for the wife of a *chaver*.

HIDDEN LOOT

One midnight Rabenu Yaakov arose to prepare himself for *Tikkun Chatzot*, only to realize that the case containing his *tallit, tefillin,* and *siddur* had been stolen. He was lodging in a hotel run by one of the citizens of the city of Izdida. The robbers, under cover of darkness,

had left Rabenu Yaakov without his most important possessions. The owner awoke to find out that many of his belongings had been stolen as well, which distressed him very much.

Rabenu Yaakov instructed him: "Go call two strong young men who fear nothing and I will send them to retrieve the stolen objects. When the two strong men were brought to him, he instructed them to go to the nearby forest and there to look for a specific tree in a particular place. On the right side of that tree they would find a large pit in which the robbers had hidden the stolen objects until they could divide them up among themselves. The people could not believe that Rabenu Yaakov was able to give such a clear description of a forest he had never seen.

There is no need to state the end of the story ... a short while later the young men returned with the stolen property in their hands.



"WHATEVER COMES FROM HIS MOUTH SHALL HE DO" (Bamidbar 30:3)

"THINGS ACQUIRED THROUGH SPEECH" (Kiddushin 9a)

It is disappointing that so little has been preserved of the miraculous stories and holy acts of Rabenu Yaakov from the tenure of his leadership. On the other hand, it would be an insurmountable task to record all these stories, for hardly a day went by without a miraculous incident. There would have been no way to encompass all those stories and preserve them in their original form. Rabenu Aharon Abichazira, in his introduction to his father's book summed up as follows: "If I lived for a thousand years, I would not have the time even to touch upon the tip of his praise". These words vividly express the void that was created with his passing, and the constant sense of wonder that his followers must have experienced when observing his conduct.

While we would encounter this difficulty in describing any area of his life, it would be infinitely more difficult to relate to stories in which we can see for ourselves the power of his words. Even when his statements appeared to be conjured out of thin air, they were eventually proven to be correct; people were astonished when the order of nature and spheres of reality were altered by the holy words that emanated from his mouth. It is common practice today to qualify statements with "I am not obligating myself". There was no such thing when it came to Rabenu Yaakov. Every word that he uttered was a commitment obligating the heavens as well as the world below.

In this chapter we will offer several representations which highlight the power of the words that came out from Rabenu Yaakov's mouth; – not a single word was ever returned unanswered.

"FOR THROUGH ME YOUR DAYS WILL BE INCREASED, AND THEY WILL INCREASE YEARS OF LIFE FOR YOU" (Mishle 9:11)

As a child, Rabenu Yaakov's great-great-grandson R' David Chai Abichazira *shlit"a*, would regularly accompany his father R' Meir on his visits to an elderly man living in Ashdod. That man, a great adherent of Rabenu Yaakov, had spent much time in his company and even though he lived to a ripe old age, his memories of those wondrous days did not fade with the years. That elderly Jew would come to call on Rabenu Yaakov in Tafilalet. He was greatly privileged in that even at the final moments of his life he was able to see the fulfillment of one of Rabenu Yaakov's decrees. Not only was he involved in it, but as we are about to see, the man's entire existence depended on it. The elderly gentleman related as follows:

Rabenu Yaakov was once in search of a tenth man to complete a *minyan*. As we have mentioned, Rabenu Yaakov's prayers were exceedingly lengthy. When this man, who was no stranger to "the holy of holies", was approached to help complete the quorum of ten, he asked: "What will the honorable Rav give me for remaining with his *minyan* for such a lengthy period of time?" Rabenu Yaakov responded: "I will bless you with longevity".

It was almost one hundred years after receiving this blessing that the elderly Jew left this world at the ripe old age of one hundred and nineteen!

Another person who had the privilege of attending to Rabenu Yaakov had helped him cross a river and for this Rabenu Yaakov blessed him too with a long life. Rabenu Meir and his children used to visit him on a regular basis and he finally returned his soul to his Maker at the age of one hundred and twenty.

THEY HAD FAITH IN HASHEM AND IN MOSHE HIS SERVANT" (Shmot 14:31)

The following incredible incident illustrates both the power of the

blessing of a *tzaddik* as well as simple faith in Torah sages. It demonstrates the far-reaching effects of Rabenu Yaakov's blessing. This story has been handed down to later generations by a Tunisian Jew from the island of Djerba, whose very existence was testimony to the story:

On one of his journeys, Rabenu Yaakov arrived in Tunis. Naturally, all the residents of the island went out to greet their distinguished guest and to accord him the honor he deserved. To many Jews this was their great moment of hope. The announcement of his arrival heralded the mercy and salvation that they so desperately needed, as the great Moroccan miracle worker was famed for bringing an end to people's suffering.

Among the many who made their way to Rabenu Yaakov for his blessing was a childless Tunisian Jew. He poured out to Rabenu Yaakov his pain and suffering and his yearning for children who would follow in the ways of Hashem. Upon hearing his request, Rabenu Yaakov handed him a special amulet and informed him that in one year's time, his wife would give birth to a baby boy. As a protection the boy would need to wear this amulet around his neck his entire life and no harm could befall him. However, if he were to remove it for more than a certain amount of time, he would die immediately.

The man returned home to his wife with the news of the holy man's blessing and the happy anticipation of future events, telling her the details of the amulet. The following year the blessing was realized with the birth of a son. The joyous parents took great care to supervise his wearing of the amulet at all times.

When the child grew older and became more independent, his father took him aside to explain to him the significance of the amulet that he had carried around his neck from the time of his birth. It would only be a matter of time before the parents would learn to their sorrow that although their son did heed this warning, he was not strict enough in its observance. Perhaps he did not place enough importance on

Rabenu Yaakov's words, or possibly he did not value life itself sufficiently. In the end, the difference between the two was not great.

The boy had scarcely reached the age of thirteen when he was suddenly discovered sprawled on his bed with no signs of life. It emerged that the lad had gone swimming in the river with his friends and in his haste he had forgotten to tie the amulet around his neck and he had come home without it. When he lay down upon his bed, the angel of death was finally able to snuff out his life, which until that day had been "insured" by Rabenu Yaakov's amulet.

When they learned of the great tragedy that had befallen them, the parents were in a terrible state of shock and mourning. The miracle that they had experienced was a rare event, and at their advancing age, they could not hope for another. While still mourning the loss of their only son, the father announced confidently to his wife: "I am sure that Rabenu Yaakov's blessing was not for naught. Even though his blessing was fulfilled and bore fruit – the fact remains that our child did not merit building a home of his own. What purpose was there to this blessing? I have great faith in the power of the tzaddik's prayer which brought us salvation, and I am sure that this salvation was not for no reason."

At the end of that year, those Jews of simple faith merited holding in their arms a newborn baby boy once again. This miracle, which occurred in their old age, was a combination of Rabenu Yaakov's blessing as well as the special power inherent in their rock solid faith in the word of the holy sages. This incident was related by none other than the second son, who fastidiously followed the instructions of the *tzaddik* as told to his parents and who himself merited seeing generations of righteous descendants.

"CALLING HIS FRIEND BY A GOOD NAME"

In the city of Telimisan lived a Jew whose economic status was never in question. His poverty was so obvious that he was cynically



referred to as "the rich man". This nickname was so ingrained in the people of the city that hardly anyone remembered his real name any more, with the exception of the *gabbai* who would call people up to the Torah.

From time to time Rabenu Yaakov would visit the town of Telimisan, the burial place of the holy R' Raphael Alnekava, chief Rabbi of Morocco and author of the book, "Gate of the Honor of the A-lmighty". On one of these trips, all the dignitaries of the city came out to greet Rabenu Yaakov. The members of the Jewish community, upon seeing the great assembly standing to welcome Rabenu Yaakov, joined in the procession which stretched the entire length of the main road into the city. When Rabenu Yaakov's caravan arrived at the gates of Telimisan, it stopped and all of the residents walked by to greet their distinguished guest with the customary *Sholom Aleichem*, and to receive his blessing. Each of the dignitaries of the community took this opportunity to request of Rabenu Yaakov the honor of being his guest in his spacious home.

The people were astonished to notice the aforementioned poor man dressed in his "Shabbat finery" which was nothing more than worn out rags, also approach Rabenu Yaakov and invite him to be a guest in his home. What was even more surprising was that Rabenu Yaakov immediately accepted the invitation and informed his assistants that he had done so! They attempted to hint at his dismal appearance; the heads of the community informed him of the poverty in which the man had been living for so many years and of the nickname "the rich man" which developed as a result. They even described the dilapidated conditions in which the would-be "host" lived, in an effort to have Rabenu Yaakov retract the approval which he had already given. Rabenu Yaakov's convictions, however, were firm and he insisted on lodging only in that man's home. And so it was.

When Rabenu Yaakov arose to part from his host at the end of his stay, he blessed him as follows: "May it be the will of the A-lmighty

that just as your immense poverty has earned you the title 'the rich man', may you have great wealth and be truly deserving of this description".

Not many days passed before Rabenu Yaakov's blessing took effect and the man became known as one of the wealthiest people in the community.

KNOWLEDGE AS OPPOSED TO CHOICE

An interesting sociological phenomenon often occurs when the time comes to elect community leaders. Often the current situation is quite good and there have been no complaints about the way communal affairs are being handled. Yet when election time arrives, many people feel that removing the current officeholder from his position and replacing him with someone else best expresses the power of the voter. They are not always certain that the second candidate will be any better than his predecessor; what is important is that their voices be heard.

This is precisely what happened to Mr. Shimon Laknoi, head of the Jewish community in the city of Timosnat. There was not a single complaint against the job he was doing, and majority of the community viewed him as one of their most outstanding leaders. In spite of this, when it was time to go to the polls, certain individuals attempted to remove him from office and to replace him with a different candidate, a Mr. Lasri. Mr. Laknoi and those close to him knew very well that the real losers would be the community, but they did not succeed in convincing them of the facts. Mr. Laknoi found himself the victim of propaganda which incited most of the people to vote for his opponent.

While this was going on, Rabenu Yaakov was staying at the home of Mr. Laknoi, as was his custom whenever he passed through Timosnat. The host took advantage of the opportunity and went to Rabenu Yaakov's chamber to pour out his heart and to seek his counsel about opposing those who had taken over the election process.

Rabenu Yaakov heard what he had to say, reassured him and bestowed great blessings upon him. He promised him that no opponent would succeed in removing him from his position.

When Election Day arrived, the opponents polished their propaganda machine and used all their powers of persuasion. It seemed as if they would be successful and Mr. Laknoi would be defeated after all. To their great surprise, however, when the ballot boxes were opened, every vote cast had Mr. Laknoi's name written on it. There was a recount and once again, they found that each vote contained the same name. The Jewish population had underestimated Mr. Laknoi, to whom Rabenu Yaakov had given his full support. While the opposition was working hard preparing for Election Day, the current leader of the community had known without a doubt that he would regain this coveted position.

"CREATOR OF CURES"

Anyone in Morocco, or even other nearby countries, who was suffering or troubled, knew Rabenu Yaakov's address. The door to his room saw many shades of people. The outside of the door saw many sad faces, while the inside testified to the great salvation that blossomed forth from within the room. Many childless couples were granted children, many of the sick were healed, and many despondent people were able to re-ignite the joy in their hearts. Countless other people came to tell him of their troubles and were not sent back empty-handed.

It would be impossible even to attempt to count or relate the many well-known incidents in which Rabenu Yaakov revealed his ability to heal the sick with a simple word, even from incurable, terminal illnesses, because such events were daily occurrences. Nonetheless, the following incredible story, told by an eyewitness, the leader of the Jewish community in Paranda in Algeria, gives us insight into what typically took place in Rabenu Yaakov's environs.



In the city of Paranda lived a very bitter woman whose only son was sixteen years old. He had been stricken with polio leaving him paralyzed in both legs and confined to a wheelchair. His mother, fearful for his welfare, did everything in her power to try to find a cure. The doctors tried all they knew, yet when one attempt after another proved futile, they raised their hands in defeat. His mother, feeling his suffering and seeing that there was no hope, prayed to Hashem that he should die.

The day arrived when Rabenu Yaakov visited Paranda. The entire Jewish community came out to the gates of the city, eagerly awaiting the tzaddik's carriage. When it arrived, he was accompanied all along the main street with drums and dancing. When the procession passed the grand palace, the ruler became aware that something was going on under his windows. Realizing that the Jews were having some sort of celebration, he called over one of the marchers in the procession and asked him what the excitement was all about. The Jew innocently told him they were proudly hosting one of the leaders of the Eastern Jewish community, having waited a very long time for the privilege. When the ruler heard of the great honor they were bestowing upon a foreigner, he became intensely jealous. In a stormy temper he decided that within a few days he would devise an appropriate punishment to levy on the Jewish community, for having bestowed honor upon a foreign visitor rather than upon the ruler of their city.

After having rested a little and met briefly with his host and other dignitaries of the city, Rabenu Yaakov began to receive the large audience that had gathered. Among the multitude was this same woman, who requested of the host to enter Rabenu's room to ask him to pray that her son should ... die! The host, shocked to hear the woman's dreadful request, asked that she explain her trouble to him. After she had described her son's situation, the man entered the room and presented to Rabenu Yaakov all that he had just heard from the wretched woman.

Rabenu Yaakov listened to his words and he then said: "Tell the woman that rather than pray for her son to die, I will pray on his behalf and bless him that he be healed. Tell her to do as follows: she should take her son, bathe him, and dress him in laundered and ironed clothing and bring him here."

The following day, the woman returned, pushing the wheelchair of her handicapped son, who was dressed in the finest of clothing. When the young man was brought before Rabenu Yaakov, who was seated by the entrance to the house, he instructed the host to place the wheelchair under the skylight where the rays of the sun penetrated the house. Rabenu Yaakov sat opposite the paralyzed young man and asked him his name. When the young man responded, Rabenu said: "Get up and walk towards me". Without any difficulty, the young man got out of his chair, walked to where Rabenu Yaakov was seated, and kissed his hand. Rabenu Yaakov instructed him to return to his chair; he did so and repeated the exercise twice more. Rabenu Yaakov then told him that he could now leave with his mother and that he would merit health and longevity.

The entire city pulsed with excitement upon witnessing this miracle that had taken place before their very eyes. Even those who were not present were quite aware of the miracle, for until that day everyone in the community knew that the lad was completely paralyzed and unable to walk even one step on his own.

The mother herself brought the story to the attention of the ruler of the city. The woman used to sell jewelry in the homes of the wealthy people of the city, among them that of the ruler, where many of the dignitaries and ministers would gather. Until then she used to leave her son at home, but now he accompanied her wherever she went. When she came to the ruler's home with her son, she had to explain to him who the young man was and why he had never accompanied her before.

The ruler, aware of just how miserable the woman had been and knowing that she had been to every leading doctor, was amazed to hear of the miracle that had taken place in his own city through the distinguished guest, whose royal welcome had antagonized him. He regretted his plan to punish the Jewish residents of the city for having accorded rightful honor to this *tzaddik*. With great excitement, the ruler invited Rabenu Yaakov to his home, hastily arranging a meeting between him and the other provincial rulers who were also summoned.

A royal carriage was sent to convey Rabenu Yaakov to the palace. The ruler rose and kissed his beard asking all his guests to follow suit. He told his guests all about the miracle that had just taken place, explaining the circumstances and describing how the best doctors had tried and failed to heal the young man, yet, with one word, this man of G-d had succeeded in putting the young man back on his feet!

Amid all the excitement in the ruler's palace, Rabenu Yaakov rose and proclaimed with humility, which is where his true greatness lay: "The ruler and all present here should realize that the power of my word is only because I fulfill the will of the Creator of the world and observe all of His *mitzvot*. It is only because of this that Hashem does what I ask of Him."

Understandably Rabenu Yaakov's response made a great impression upon those present and caused a sanctification of the Divine Name among all those who learned of this incident.

"AND THE PLAGUE CEASED" (Bamidbar 17:13)

Rabenu Yaakov was aware that his actions made an impression in Heaven, and whatever he asked would be immediately fulfilled. Often, decrees that were about to befall the world were revealed to him from Heaven, as it says: "For Hashem/Elokim will not do anything unless He has revealed His secret to His servants, the prophets" (Amos 3:7), and he would put great effort into his prayers in an attempt to nullify

the decree. Even when all the gates of prayer appeared to be closed, he did not stop rapping on them, until he managed to breach the gates and remove the terrible decree. His power was so immense that he managed to challenge the most difficult of decrees, even those which he himself knew were impossible to rescind. We see such a case in a story told by the leader of the community of Fez, who related it to his great-grandson R' Meir Abichazira when he visited their community.

One of the most dangerous of plagues that mankind experienced prior to the advent of antibiotics was cholera which left its tragic mark everywhere. If a case of cholera was diagnosed, the entire city or province was declared a danger zone and all the residents were considered at risk. This was in the time before immunizations were invented and there was no medicine to combat the dangerous disease.

Rabenu Yaakov, "the holy of holies of Morocco", was visiting Fez, at the same time as an outbreak of cholera was bringing catastrophe to many of the local Jewish families. The plague spread from courtyard to courtyard, wreaking havoc until there was almost no home without a patient fighting for his life. The only house in which all of the inhabitants felt immune to the disease, was the home of Mr. Yehuda Shemesh z"l, Rabenu Yaakov's host. All the other homes in that courtyard were stricken with the infectious disease and all the residents cried over their bitter lot.

Rabenu Yaakov, who was aware of the true nature of the decree that had befallen the city, instructed his host to keep his presence a secret and not to allow anyone to come to see him to discuss the plague. From heaven it had been revealed to him that this decree was so powerful that it could not be nullified.

The first *Shabbat* evening of the plague, and of Rabenu Yaakov's stay in Fez, a woman, who was a good friend of Mrs. Shemesh and a frequent visitor, entered the house where Rabenu Yaakov was lodging. The woman was carrying her only son, who had developed

severe symptoms of the terrible disease, indicating that his life was in great danger. Without asking leave of the members of the household, she burst into Rabenu Yaakov's room and began to wail out loud with heart-wrenching sobs over her only son, the love of her life, who was dying before her very eyes. Rabenu Yaakov was not pleased with the host for allowing her entry, but he accepted his apology himself being unable to resist the woman's heart-rending cries.

When he saw that heaven had sent this unfortunate woman to his door, Rabenu Yaakov decided to do everything he could to wage war for the community of Fez against those accusers who had succeeded in bringing this decree against them. He placed his hands on the child and began to pray. The tears streaming down from his eyes began to drip upon the body of the child who was burning with fever. As he completed his prayer, he promised the mother that her child would live.

Before she even arrived home, the child woke up and asked for a drink of water, a clear sign that he was beginning to recover. The mother, who was beside herself, began to shriek for joy, until all of the neighbors came to see what cause there was for happiness at a time when sorrow and mourning had enveloped the city. The woman showed them the child who had awoken and told them about Rabenu Yaakov's intervention.

Once Rabenu Yaakov's presence in the town became known, the elders of the city and the dignitaries led by the head of the *Beit Din*, R' Avner Tzorfati, took action. They went to Mr. Shemesh's residence and asked their lofty guest to pray on behalf of the residents of the city that the evil decree suspended above their heads like the blade of the ever-turning sword, be removed.

After much persuasion, Rabenu Yaakov resolved to wage an all-out war against the accusers. He sat down to write amulets for all the houses of the city, promising that no harm would befall any home that has an amulet hanging in the entrance. The residents of the city who

believed in Rabenu Yaakov's miracles, which surrounded him like legends, did not hesitate to fulfill his word.

And the plague was checked.

When his great-grandson R' Meir Abichazira visited Fez, the local townspeople recounted this event to him. They took him around to all the courtyards and houses to show him the amulets that were still hanging in the entranceways to that day.

"JUST A LITTLE LONGER AND THERE WILL BE NO WICKED ONE" (Tehillim 37:10)

Even when Rabenu Yaakov's decrees were those of tragedy and destruction they were carried out meticulously, down to the very last detail. A harrowing incident took place in the city of Tumisnat when he was a guest in the home of Mr. Shimon Laknoi, the community leader. In this case, he had no choice but to decree that his host's daughters die young.

During that visit the host came into his guest's room and poured out his heart to Rabenu Yaakov, describing how his daughters had decided to marry non-Jews, whom they had met while learning in a non-Jewish institute of learning. His grief was such, he said, that if they continued to reject his guidance, he no longer saw any point in remaining alive; he would go to the grave rather than witness their impetuous behavior.

Rabenu Yaakov listened to his words and then pronounced: "This is my decree and this is its content; if your daughters return to the straight path and abandon their evil thoughts – then all will be fine, but if they do not listen and they set a date to marry these non-Jews, they will never reach their wedding day, for a week before the wedding they will die".

The father tried to use Rabenu Yaakov's decree to convince his wayward daughters to value their life, but his attempts were futile.

Shortly thereafter, they brazenly handed their father the invitation to their weddings. One week prior to the date on the invitation, the two grooms were forced to cancel the celebrations ... their two brides had died.

BURNING PARCHMENTS

Rabenu Yaakov had such confidence that his words would be fulfilled to the maximum, that even when he could have achieved at his goal in a natural way, he would leave it to heaven to accomplish. The following incident, which took place during his early youth, was related by his great-grandson R' Meir Abichazira.

At the time, the name of Rabenu Yaakov was not yet well-known and many of those who honored him did so only because he was a descendant of a golden dynasty of great *Rabbanim* of Morocco. They did not yet know that in the future the era of Rabenu Yaakov would be recognized as the shining epoch of his family, and his name would be known throughout the world. Even so they honored him, remembering the kindness of his ancestors. He was now barely twenty years old and had been leading the Jewish community of Tafilalet, sitting on the throne of his holy ancestors, for just a few years.

One day a scholarly Jew named R' Mordechai arrived at his home bringing a work that he had written on *kabbalah*. He did not come to discuss its contents, but to obtain a letter of blessing and support, as he was a member of a family of well-known *tzaddikim*. Rabenu Yaakov asked him to leave the book with him for a period of time to enable him to review it prior to giving his approval.

When he had leafed through the book, he told his wife that, to his surprise, he found so many mistakes in the book that R' Mordechai could be considered as "chopping down the sapling" (as the Talmud describes "*Acher*" - see Chagiga 14b), G-d forbid. The essence of what he wrote was clearly against true inner wisdom and Rabenu Yaakov felt that was no sanctity in this work.

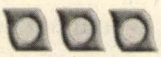
Rabenu Yaakov was now in a dilemma. Clearly he could not give his approval to such a book; on the other hand he wished to protect the honor of the scholar who was many years older than himself. At first he thought of warning him against having the book published for he had found in it many things that were just not true and he did not want the writer to be shamed when the book was printed and distributed throughout the Jewish communities. After giving the matter some thought he saw that his words would not be acceptable to R' Mordechai. Because he could not decide what to do, he elected to keep the book in his possession until he found an honorable solution.

Every day R' Mordechai would come to Rabenu Yaakov's house, asking him for the approbation and Rabenu Yaakov would put him off with all kinds of excuses - lack of time, having difficulty concentrating, etc. R' Mordechai persevered, emphasizing that it was of the utmost importance to him that the book be printed as soon as possible, since he was an old man, who did not know when his time would come, and he wished to leave a written blessing after him. When R' Mordechai finally realized that Rabenu Yaakov had no intention of writing the approbation, he took his book and left the house very frustrated and disappointed.

When he had gone, the Rabbanit asked Rabenu Yaakov if he had informed R' Mordechai of his opinion of the book. He replied that he had returned the book without approval, but out of concern not to embarrass him, had not told him his misgivings about the book. "Regarding the book itself, do not worry, for not only will it not reach the printing press or be presented to the public; it will not even remain in the keeping of R' Mordechai. Tonight it will catch fire and be destroyed from the world, for this is what I have decreed!"

The next day R' Mordechai came to Rabenu Yaakov's house in great sorrow. He related that late the previous night he had wished to correct something in his manuscript and had sat at the table to write by candlelight. He had carelessly knocked the candle with his elbow;

it had fallen on the book and set it on fire. The book was totally consumed. Rabenu Yaakov, seeing R' Mordechai's great pain, consoled him and explained that heaven was guarding him against his book seeing the light of day for there were many serious mistakes in his understanding of the truth. He encouraged him to express thanks to the A-lmighty for having saved him from such a stumbling block.



THE RIGHTEOUS DECREE AND HASHEM FULFILLS

"IT IS WRITTEN REGARDING THE RIGHTEOUS: 'AND YOU WILL MAKE A PLAN AND IT WILL SUCCEED FOR YOU' (Job 22:28)" (Shabbat 59b)

We will devote a separate chapter to those instances in which Rabenu Yaakov took staff in hand to smite those who refused to heed the laws of the Torah. While most stories about people who disregarded the rulings of the righteous were not preserved, what does remain, however, is the knowledge that the score of those who insult the Torah will be settled.

Our Sages teach that the verse: "And you will make a plan and it will succeed for you," (Iyov 22:28) refers to the *tzaddikim*. This is the source of the common expression:

"The righteous decree and the Holy One Blessed be He fulfills". The obvious reference is to the blessings given by the righteous to those who seek their aid. A deeper look at this verse, however, draws attention to the language; it does not say "The righteous *bless* and the Holy One Blessed be He fulfills", but rather "The righteous *decree*...." to teach us how powerful the *tzaddik* is – that even his decrees are fulfilled in the heavens.

The following is a collection of stories in which Rabenu Yaakov pronounced dire decrees on people who rejected Torah rulings and these decrees were confirmed from heaven.

"WHO CROWNS KINGS" ...

It is not easy for a Jew blatantly to disobey the ruling of a Jewish court headed by someone of Rabenu Yaakov's stature. Some might try to change the ruling somehow. Others will exert the political pressure

through government ministers in an attempt to force the Torah courts to concede. They are blinded to the fact that applying external pressure to sway a Torah ruling is tantamount to disobeying the ruling of the Torah. One minister paid a heavy price for interfering in a ruling of Rabenu Yaakov's – he exchanged his seat of power for a narrow bench in the royal jail. This story was told by Rabenu Yaakov's grandson, the Baba Sali, to one of the members of his illustrious family who then publicized it.

Two Jews who had a dispute once appeared in Rabenu Yaakov's court for a ruling. Rabenu Yaakov, in his position as head of the court, ruled in favor of one of the two litigants. R' Yehuda ben Tabai may have taught us "When the litigants stand before you, consider them both as guilty; but when they are dismissed from you, consider them both as innocent" (Avot 1:8), yet R' Yehuda ben Tabai immediately qualified this statement with the following condition "... provided they have accepted the judgment". In this case, the guilty party did not accept the judgment and went to the ruler of Tafilalet and informed him that there had been a distortion of justice, with the local Rav ruling against him because of a personal bias. The ruler was eventually persuaded – perhaps by means of bribery or flattery - to bring all his power to bear in nullifying the judgment.

This ruler was almost at the pinnacle of glory in his leadership, for he was the appointee to the Moroccan Royal Throne and these were his last days as ruler of the city. The written proclamation of his appointment was already in his pocket. Daily reports about the declining health of the present king promised that he would soon walk down the red carpet that would be rolled out before him as he ascended the throne. The ruler, unknowingly, by visiting Rabenu Yaakov, the Rav of the Jews of Tafilalet, placed this position in jeopardy.

He entered the tzaddik's room, and as soon as they had inquired after each other's welfare, the ruler immediately turned and asked



Rabenu Yaakov whether it was true that he had ruled in a particular way in the case in question, hinting that he would prefer a different outcome. Rabenu Yaakov, to whom the correctness of his ruling was as clear as day, explained to his honor that a judgment based on the laws of the holy Torah cannot be overruled. As opposed to other legal systems, the laws of the Torah do not allow for bending or altering the truth. The truth of our holy Torah makes no allowances for pragmatics or flexibility; its foundations are firmly grounded in *halacha*, leaving no room for intervention or change after a period of time, even under pressure from the ruler of a city.

At this, the ruler raised his voice and insulted Rabenu Yaakov. At the start of this outburst, Rabenu Yaakov ignored him and did not react at all. However, as the insults and words of hatred that spewed forth from the mouth of the angry ruler increased, Rabenu Yaakov became more serious, finally interrupting him:

"Since you have forcibly and brazenly involved yourself in the laws of our holy Torah, in your quest to alter judgment by making the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent - something which can never be – I decree in the name of our holy Torah that you will not become king of Morocco and your kingdom will be given by the Creator to someone better than you".

Upon hearing this, the ruler's anger was quickly transformed into a burst of laughter. He informed Rabenu Yaakov, between guffaws, that the moment he became king, the Rav would be the first to be put to death by royal decree as a rebel. However, if what Rabenu Yaakov predicted should come true, and he be ousted, then he would acknowledge that Rabenu Yaakov is a holy man of G-d. The ruler rose and left the house in anger without farewell. Rabenu Yaakov returned to his learning as if nothing had happened.

The ruler returned home to find at the entrance to his drawing room, a delegation led by ministers and other members of the ruling party

who had come to convey him to the capital city of Rabat to crown him immediately as king of Morocco, since the old king had just died. The ruler rejoiced at having been appointed to the loftiest position in the country. The Jew who had lost the case in Rabenu Yaakov's court rejoiced with him and invited his friends to an impromptu celebration. In his excitement, the Jew forgot that his festive meal in fact marked not only his imminent victory in the case, but also the decision of the king-to-be to kill Rabenu Yaakov. While that Jew was celebrating, some of Rabenu Yaakov's students informed him of the turn of events. They expressed their concern and suggested that Rabenu Yaakov should consider moving to a different residence until the king's anger subsided. Rabenu Yaakov calmed their fears in his typical pleasant manner: "You need not worry at all, for I have already decreed that he will not rule; and in heaven he has already been removed from his lofty position."

At that moment the royal carriage was on its way from Tafilalet to the capital city of Rabat, where throngs of people waited in the palace square for the coronation. Immediately on his arrival, the king-to-be mounted the central podium to be greeted by the cheers of the crowd. The atmosphere, however, changed immediately when a handful of rebels, sent by opponents within the royal house, who planned to seize power, burst into the coronation plaza and swiftly and forcefully seized power.

Within a short time, the would-be ruler's hands were bound in chains and he was put in jail. A different member of the royal family would now be the king of Morocco. The ruler of Tafilalet did not become king, nor did he merit returning to his former position as leader of the Tafilalet region.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS

Although Rabenu Yaakov's court obviously did not rule in capital cases, there were instances in which litigants refused to obey the

rulings of the Torah courts - and died as a result of Rabenu Yaakov's decree.

A major conflict had erupted after one Jew had built himself a butcher shop on land belonging to another Jew. The owner of the land went to *Beit Din* demanding that the butcher tear down his store and return the land on to which he had trespassed, yet the other adamantly refused, even after the court ruled that he must vacate the premises immediately. He even had the audacity to announce to the court that the store would soon be open for business. True to his word, he began selling meat to the general public.

The week the butcher shop opened, Rabenu Yaakov entered the store and asked the seller to obey the *Beit Din* and accept the Torah's ruling. The Jew not only turned a deaf ear to Rabenu Yaakov's words, but he dared to speak to Rabenu Yaakov in a brazen and aggressive manner.

When he raised his voice, remaining obdurate in his rebellious stance, Rabenu Yaakov stopped him in mid-sentence and said to him: "You should know that since you persist in your refusal to destroy the store as demanded by Torah law, the store will be destroyed on its own and will fall upon you".

As Rabenu Yaakov left the butcher shop, the ceiling collapsed upon the head of the butcher and the knife which he had been holding stabbed him in the stomach killing him. The entire city was in an uproar as the people saw how the hand of Hashem had smitten this rash man by stoning and by the sword simultaneously.

"ONE WHO CONCEALS HIS SINS WILL NOT SUCCEED, BUT HE WHO CONFESSES AND FORSAKES THEM WILL BE GRANTED MERCY" (Mishle 28:13)

The line of people that snaked out the door of Rabenu Yaakov's room was composed mainly of Jews who had come to receive his

blessing for salvation and mercy. The many troubles experienced by Jews everywhere worried him greatly and took up much of his time in whichever city he visited. In addition people with matters of litigation chose to present their claims in his room, wishing to hear his clear ruling. There were cases where Jews came to complain about the injustices that were done to them where they lacked the ability to protect themselves. In these cases Rabenu Yaakov came to their aid and succeeded in fostering peace and harmony between man and his fellow man.

The following story, from the city of Ohran in Algeria, also ended with the death of one of the litigants who refused to comply with Rabenu Yaakov's ruling. When the man finally decided to repent of his evil ways, it was too late; he was already standing at the threshold of the gates of death. This is how the Jews of Ohran told the story:

In this peaceful and serene Algerian city dwelt two wealthy people, both of prominent social standing in the Jewish community. There was no doubt as to how honorable they were, and had they not been so jealous of each other, they would have succeeded in benefiting from the blessed serenity that surrounded them. The only problem was that they each possessed two of the attributes that usher a person out of this world: envy and honor (see Pirke Avot 4:21). They were in constant competition with each other. Eventually, the *yetzer hara* of one of these wealthy individuals got the better of him and he fabricated a charge, claiming that the other owed him an astronomical sum of money. His aim was to separate his rival from his wealth and to place him many rungs below him on the economic ladder.

According to Algerian law a bill of sale was all that was needed in order to collect payment from another. The rulers themselves went even further, declaring that a record in the books stating that merchandise was transferred from the seller to the buyer was all that was needed to justify collecting the debt. Relying on this perverted law, the wealthy person sent a notice to his opponent to pay at once

for the entire amount of the merchandise described in the letter. Understandably, the merchant receiving the letter was astounded over the charge maliciously debited to his account. He responded that he had no intention of transferring even one worn out penny to his rival, since he had never had any business dealings with him and had no idea from what dark corner he had fabricated this transaction. He did not ignore the threat of court action in the letter and he knew very well the status of his own claim against that which was recorded in the ledger. However, he refused to respond to extortion.

Within a few days, he was called to the municipal courthouse to appear before the judge, who would rule on the evidence that was presented to him. His deliberation lasted only a few minutes and the decision was clear: the defendant had to pay the full amount. If the entire debt was not paid within three months, he would be placed behind bars, as befits one who has violated business laws and ignored his debts. Furthermore all his assets would be confiscated and put in the state treasury to be used to pay off his debt. It should be noted that the sum which figured in the lawsuit was far beyond the imagination of even the two of them combined. Even if the two wealthy competitors pooled all their assets, adding to it all the capital gains that could be realized in ten years, it would not come close to the amount stated in the lawsuit decided by the civil ruling requested by the claimant. The merchant's frustration was beyond description and he was severely depressed by his predicament.

While he was still immersed in his woes, Rabenu Yaakov, no stranger to the towns of Algeria, appeared in the city of Ohran. Faced with no other choice, the wealthy man took his place at the end of the very long line that had formed outside the tzaddik's room, hoping to hear some words of support and comfort. Rabenu Yaakov heard him out and realized that he was telling the truth. He sent him home, promising that he would speak to the other litigant and persuade him to acknowledge his flagrant dishonesty.

Rabenu Yaakov sent his assistant to invite the wealthy plaintiff to his lodgings, but he refused, giving all sorts of excuses. Rabenu Yaakov sent the assistant a second time, to warn the wealthy man to be cautious, for his very existence was hanging in the balance. When he heard the visiting Rabbi's unequivocal threat, the wealthy man hastened to his lodgings. As he entered the room, Rabenu Yaakov inquired whether he had heard correctly that he was demanding a large sum of money from the other Ohranian merchant. The man calmly confirmed all the details of the lawsuit. Rabenu Yaakov asked to examine his account book to see with his own eyes if he was telling the truth. The man, thinking that he could convince the Rav just as he had convinced the group of non-Jewish judges, hastened his steps and returned a short while later, his book of accounts in his hand. Rabenu Yaakov asked him to show him exactly where the transaction was recorded, for he did not understand the local language and could not read French. The wealthy man showed him the line containing the amount written in the lawsuit. The figure served as the basis for the court's obligating the other person to pay off the entire debt by the end of three months.

Rabenu Yaakov carefully examined the book and turned to the wealthy man saying: "These letters say it all; it is all a pack of lies and these things never happened! You have fabricated lies against your friend to the extent that you have attempted to take away both his wealth and his freedom".

The same illusions of honor that had brought the rich man to take the disgraceful step of bringing the lawsuit, made him unyielding in his obstinacy, refusing to submit to the words of the Rav. He continued to claim that all his words were the absolute truth and that not once had he entertained the notion of stealing from his fellow. If he had initially thought that he could convince everyone that his claim was justified, it quickly became clear that Rabenu Yaakov knew the truth from its source, and had no need for any claims that would be

presented to him. He turned to the wealthy man and spoke to him resolutely: "I am giving you a time limit of twenty-four hours. If by then you admit the truth and cancel this claim, you will merit longevity with wealth and everything good. However, if you persist in your refusal to recognize the truth and to admit it, within twenty-four hours the chronicle of your life on this earth will end, with this ugly episode as its final chapter.

The wealthy man, who did not know Rabenu Yaakov and had not heard of his greatness, left his lodgings totally unmoved and sure of his victory over the second merchant. He continued with his daily routine, ignoring the deadline that had been placed on his life. He did not consider for one moment whether there was any substance to the tzaddik's warning. At least, this was how he felt over the next twenty-two hours.

When the last two hours of the time which Rabenu Yaakov had allotted for him arrived, the man began to feel a strange sensation spreading throughout his body. He grew increasingly weaker and his eyesight dimmed. He did not need any doctor's opinion of his illness. He related the entire story to his wife, who was frightened at the sight of his wan face, which made him look as if he was no longer in this world. He sent her to Rabenu Yaakov, begging her to plead with him to remove the curse from her husband, whose feet were already standing at the gates of death.

When Rabenu Yaakov heard the woman's words, he hurried to the wealthy man's home and found him lying on his deathbed. He asked him: "Now do you acknowledge the truth?" When the wealthy man responded in the positive and began to plead for his life, Rabenu Yaakov instructed him to deploy his messengers and bookkeepers to bring the judge and lawyer to his bedside with all possible haste, in order to record his admission. Upon hearing of the critical condition of their "client" the two hurried to the wealthy man's home and

recorded his decision to cancel the suit, in the presence of reliable witnesses. They gave a document, citing their decision to cancel their previous ruling, to Rabenu Yaakov to pass on to the defendant.

After they had left the room, Rabenu Yaakov turned to the wealthy man, "Even though you have acknowledged the truth and retracted your libel against your fellow, a decree has already been issued and soon your life will come to an end. Had you recanted your words yesterday this terrible decree could have been averted. Now it is too late to change. Nevertheless, since you overcame your inclination and were willing to acknowledge the truth even though it caused you embarrassment, may this merit stand you in good stead to bring you into the gates of the Garden of Eden".

The clock completed its twenty-four hour cycle and the wealthy man's life came to a very sad end.

"BEWARE OF THEIR GLOWING COAL LEST YOU BE BURNT" (Avot 2:15)

"WHEN A YOUNG RABBINICAL STUDENT BECOMES HEATED IT IS THE TORAH THAT IS CAUSING HIM TO BECOME HEATED" (Taanit 4a)

Every youngster with even an elementary understanding takes notice when he is warned not to play with fire. The flame, with all of its positive characteristics, such as providing light and warmth, can be very unpleasant for those coming into physical contact with it. The fact that great care must be taken in the vicinity of fire is not subject to debate – it is obvious to everyone! Only people with weak minds, lacking even minimal common sense will jeopardize their lives by playing with fire and in the end they will pay a heavy price for endangering themselves.

One who knows how to value *tzaddikim* and who truly recognizes their "fire", understands that although they spread light and warmth to their surroundings, extreme caution must be taken to avoid coming too close, that is, feeling that we can relate to them with unseemly familiarity. Alongside the directive: "Warm yourself by the fire of the Sages," the *tanna* juxtaposed the warning: "Beware of their glowing coals lest you be burned". Dangerous games result in damage.

If we are instructed to accord ordinary people the honor they deserve and not to offend them, we must be all the more circumspect when speaking of the *tzaddik*, for the person who will ultimately suffer is the offender himself. People who lack this basic understanding have often found themselves hurt by the strictness of the *tzaddik* – the flame of the Torah!

Several people attempted to come too close to the shining beacon of light that was Rabenu Yaakov; in the end it was they who were scorched by his burning coals. This chapter will illustrate some of these incidents.

"HIS WIFE LOOKED" (Bereishit 19:26)

One must be extremely cautious to avoid affronting a *tzaddik* even to the slightest degree. Woe unto the person whose actions show contempt for the *tzaddik*. Even one who has no intention of insulting the *tzaddik* can find himself being punished very severely. R' Avraham ben Shoshan was able to testify to such an example; his grandmother, who did not show sufficient respect and understanding for the ways of Rabenu Yaakov, was burned by his coals.

The grandmother's home was one of the places where Rabenu Yaakov and his students would regularly congregate. While it was a great privilege to have the light of the generation stay in her home, she never had the opportunity to look at the countenance of the holy of holies, for the modest women of Tafilalet would hide from view whenever they detected the approach of Rabenu Yaakov's entourage. After he had passed, they would go out and kiss the path that the *tzaddik* had trodden. Even a woman who had the privilege of hosting Rabenu Yaakov knew that her presence would disturb her esteemed guest and she tried hard not to tarry in his vicinity.

One day, this woman desired just once to be able to gaze upon his holy countenance and she sought the appropriate moment. The opportunity arose one Friday when Rabenu Yaakov arrived at her house for *Mincha*. The parlor was arranged for prayers. Since the room was immense, it was divided down the middle by a wooden partition, creating a room within a room. The hostess was able to peer at Rabenu through the cracks in the partition, yet this was not enough for her.

When the people began reciting the silent *Shmone Esrei*, the woman tiptoed slowly and quietly into the other section of the room, to steal a glimpse of Rabenu Yaakov, while he stood with his eyes closed in the company of the holy Seraphim. Those present did not prevent her from entering, out of deference to their hostess and because they

realized that by the time Rabenu Yaakov ended his *Shmone Esrei*, she would no longer be present.

Upon concluding his *Shmone Esrei*, Rabenu Yaakov turned to the congregants and exclaimed: "There is a woman in this room!" Some of the people tried to cover up the matter and proclaimed: "There is no woman here," referring to the situation at that moment. Yet Rabenu Yaakov was adamant and repeated that a woman had been present in the room. While he was speaking, the oil lamp, which had been fixed to the ceiling, moved from its location and rested above Rabenu Yaakov's head, as if to testify that Rabenu Yaakov was speaking the absolute truth. There was no choice but to admit that their hostess had indeed entered the room while Rabenu Yaakov was praying the *Shmone Esrei*. Rabenu Yaakov responded very sorrowfully: "As long as I remain in this house, no harm will befall the woman, yet the moment I leave, she will receive her due punishment for having disturbed me during my prayer."

At the conclusion of the *tefillah*, Rabenu Yaakov left the house together with his students. The host accompanied his revered guest out the door. When he went back inside, he found his wife lying lifeless on the floor.

A GIFT THAT IS NOT WORTHY

On one of Rabenu Yaakov's sojourns in the city of Tangiers, a local woman came up to Rabenu Yaakov, beseeching him to bless her with children as she had been married for many years and as yet had not merited children. Rabenu Yaakov bestowed his blessing upon her, promising her that very soon she would give birth to a son. Overjoyed with the blessing, the woman ran home and took out a beautiful coat that had never been worn, from her wardrobe and brought it to Rabenu Yaakov in gratitude. A short while later the childless woman discovered that she was pregnant.

A few months later Rabenu Yaakov came across the beautiful garment and he decided to keep it for the upcoming *Shabbat*. Having immersed in the *mikveh* in honor of the *Shabbat*, he picked up the garment in order to don it. While putting it on, Rabenu Yaakov noticed that moths had eaten holes in the cloth. Rabenu Yaakov was in a quandary. On the one hand he did not want to put on his weekday clothing after having immersed for *Shabbat* (see Shulchan Aruch 262). On the other hand, he could not wear the clothing he had set aside for *Shabbat*, for it had been eaten away by moths.

A shadow darkened Rabenu Yaakov's face when he realized that it was the woman's great haste that was responsible for the blunder. It seems that in her great haste, the woman had not checked the coat carefully before giving it to Rabenu Yaakov as a gift. Had she checked it she would have discovered that over the long period of time it had been sitting in the closet it had been attacked by moths

At that very moment, in the far away city of Tangiers, the woman who owed her pregnancy to Rabenu Yaakov's blessing began to feel strong pains and a short while later she miscarried. Words cannot describe the sorrow she felt at having lost this great treasure. After a few days of weeping and mourning, she found out which city Rabenu Yaakov was staying in. She hurriedly made her way to that place seeking Rabenu Yaakov in order to express her deep pain to him. After she had described what had taken place, Rabenu Yaakov responded in astonishment: "Did I ask for payment for that blessing, that you brought me a coat that had been eaten away by moths?"

The woman realized that the coat, which had remained in her possession for such a long time, had been infested. She begged Rabenu Yaakov's forgiveness, explaining that she had no intention of giving the *tzaddik* something unfitting; it had never occurred to her to check the condition of her gift. Rabenu Yaakov accepted her words and forgave her and blessed her that very shortly thereafter she would have the privilege of cradling a child in her arms.

This story was recounted by R' Masud Sheetrit zt"l who was the grandson of that baby boy.

"EVEN IF YOU WERE TO WASH WITH NITER AND USE MUCH SOAP ... YOUR INIQUITY HAS BECOME A STAIN" (Yirmiyahu 2:22)

On his many travels throughout Morocco and the surrounding countries, Rabenu Yaakov would ride from place to place on a donkey, as was common in those days. As soon as he arrived at the inn, he would hand over his clothes to his host to be washed, fearing that lice from the donkey's body could have been caught up in the folds of his holy garb.

On one of his trips to the city of Fez, the owner of the inn took the holy clothes, intending to wash them. On going out to the courtyard of the house and finding her neighbor doing the family laundry, she asked her if she would like the privilege of also washing the clothes of Rabenu Yaakov, who had just arrived in their inn. The neighbor agreed and took the clothes from the hostess and began to wash them.

While she was handling the clothes she discovered a louse hidden between the folds of the clothing. The sensitive woman was so disgusted by the creature that she threw the clothes on the ground in disdain and temporarily taking leave of her senses, said something disparaging about the owner of the clothing – the visiting *tzaddik*.

At that very moment a spirit of foolishness entered into her and she began to scream out loud, violently throwing around any objects that happened to come her way. Within a few short moments she managed to spread havoc and destruction throughout her surroundings, as if she had gone out of her mind. Her neighbors, frightened by her condition, quickly took her to the grave of the righteous woman Lala Sulika ob"m who is buried in the city of Fez. The site was famous for salvation and healing, and many people derived comfort from praying

at the grave of this righteous woman, who had been killed sanctifying the Name of Hashem.

At the same time, the neighbors brought the incident to the attention of the visiting Rabbi – Rabenu Yaakov, and asked for his blessing that her sanity should be restored. Rabenu Yaakov responded, "You should all know that all this came about because she used a disparaging expression when washing my clothes ... did I even ask her to wash my clothes? She could have turned down the request of the hostess. Since she took upon herself to wash the clothes, how could she be so impudent as to open her mouth like that and to mock that which is holy?"

Those present heard his words and understood the direct connection between impinging on the honor of the *tzaddik* and the immediate punishment that afflicted the woman. In her name, they begged for forgiveness and after he forgave her in their presence, he sent the people to look for her by the grave of the righteous Lala Sulika ob"m – where they found her in perfect health.

"LIKE A DOG THAT RETURNS TO ITS VOMIT – SO IS A FOOL WHO REPEATS HIS FOOLISHNESS" (Mishle 26:11)

During a visit to Tunis, Rabenu Yaakov was hosted by one of the dignitaries of the city who had gone to great lengths to honor his guest. The entire family spent days and nights getting the house ready, cleaning and scrubbing, cooking and baking, all in preparation for the arrival of the leader of North African Jewry.

Whenever he traveled, it was Rabenu Yaakov's habit to dress in simple clothing, so that it was impossible to detect that he was a man of stature. When the hostess set eyes upon the guest in whose honor she had gone to so much toil and trouble, she was astonished as well as disappointed. She cried out to her husband, "Is this the guest for whom we prepared? Look at his clothes ... he resembles nothing more

than a dog!" The host yelled at his at his simple-minded wife for her foolish words and he arose to go to Rabenu Yaakov's room.

As he walked down the corridor of the house, the host suddenly heard a dog barking in his house. He searched high and low in order to discover how a dog had entered their home, but he could not find any animal. However, when he returned to his wife's room he saw that it was she who was barking like a dog. The man was terrified, understanding that his wife was being punished "measure for measure" for having spoken so brazenly about Rabenu Yaakov. He ran to beseech Rabenu Yaakov for mercy, apologizing that it was her simplemindedness that caused her to say such terrible things.

Rabenu Yaakov, in whom the attribute of mercy was deeply ingrained, and who was always concerned for the welfare of his brethren, took a cup of drink that had been standing on the table and bid the host give the remains to his wife to drink. This, Rabenu Yaakov said, would cure her. It happened that the moment the woman swallowed the drink, she returned to her normal self. She quickly ran to Rabenu Yaakov's room, falling at his feet and begging his forgiveness for having slighted the honor of his Torah.

"ALL THEIR WORDS ARE LIKE FIERY COALS" (Avot 2:10)

Rabenu Yaakov once went to a fabric store in the city of Tafilalet, and asked the owner to measure a piece of fabric in order to have a garment sewn from it. He requested the choicest fabric in his store or from his stockroom. The merchant, who was too lazy to check through the large stockroom, brought him a piece of material that he had on hand. It was of high quality, yet it could not compare to the quality of the fabric in the storeroom.

The merchant handed him the fabric declaring it to be the very best he had, yet Rabenu Yaakov responded that to the best of his knowledge, there was a finer quality fabric available in the store. The

merchant, who had thought that he was dealing with just "another customer", stubbornly reiterated that this indeed was the finest fabric he possessed.

As Rabenu Yaakov turned to leave the store he uttered the following parting words to the shopkeeper: "Go to the storeroom and look at the fire that has broken out among the best quality fabric that you keep there."

By the time the merchant had arrived in the storeroom there was nothing left to save and the fabric he had shown Rabenu Yaakov was now in fact the best fabric he possessed.

"WILL BEAR HIS INIQUITY"

During many of his travels, Rabenu Yaakov would not permit his whereabouts to be made public. At times he would travel to a certain place for a particular purpose and he would hide there in the home of one of his close disciples. Once, when he arrived at the city of Algiers, he was a guest at the home of one of his confidants and he asked that his arrival be kept secret, and that only a select few individuals be informed that he was visiting their city.

On that very day one of the important sages of the city had died and everyone had gathered to pay him their last respects. Two of Rabenu Yaakov's followers entered his holy chamber and suggested that due to this unusual circumstance perhaps it would be appropriate for Rabenu Yaakov to participate in the funeral and deliver some words of eulogy in the late Torah scholar's honor. Rabenu Yaakov responded in the affirmative to their suggestion and requested that they come to take him to the funeral.

When the prearranged time arrived, the two of them made their way to the lodgings of their Rabbi. On their way they met the head of the community and joyfully related to him the great privilege they felt at

accompanying Rabenu Yaakov who had agreed to participate in the funeral and was even willing to say a few words of eulogy. The head of the community, who was not aware of the greatness of the esteemed guest, and who did not properly appreciate this great and rare opportunity for the city, became angry with them, shouting that there are enough sages in their city and there is no need to import *Rabbanim* from the outside to deliver words of eulogy! He was piqued that they had not first sought his counsel, as head of the community, in deciding whether or not to permit outsiders to be present at the funeral. He then added a choice disparaging remark or two against Rabenu Yaakov, ending with the unequivocal instruction that they cancel Rabenu Yaakov's attendance at the funeral.

Understandably, Rabenu Yaakov's two disciples were now in a dilemma, being embarrassed to repeat the community leader's insulting words to Rabenu Yaakov. They decided to hide from him the true reason for not taking him to the funeral, giving the excuse that the location of the funeral was very far from the inn and they did not wish to trouble him. Rabenu Yaakov, from whom nothing could be hidden, told them that he was well aware that it was the leader of the community who was preventing his participation. Since his only wish had been to honor the soul of the departed, the leader of the community who was denying the deceased this honor would "bear his iniquity".

The two disciples emerged from the inn very gloomy. They had desired to bring honor to their city and they ended up ruining it by "bringing a bad report to their father Yaakov." (see Bereishit 37:2). They could not undo what had already happened, so they began to walk towards the funeral home, where all of the residents of the city had gathered to pay their last respects to the esteemed departed. On the way they passed the home of the community leader where they noticed a large knot of agitated people. As they came closer, they were told of the sudden passing of the community leader, who had not appeared

the least bit sick. Upon noting the time, they realized that this sad occurrence had taken place precisely at the moment in which Rabenu Yaakov sealed his decree by saying "He will bear his iniquity". The two disciples entered the home of the community leader and related to the children of the departed all that had unfolded in chronological order.

The sons, being their father's children, on hearing what had occurred, were filled with anger, and they decided to go up to Rabenu Yaakov's room to kill him to avenge their father's blood. Paying no attention to whispered words of appeasement, they girded their weapons and got ready to go and carry out their depraved act.

When they arrived at the inn, the host saw them approaching, with murder in their eyes. Unaware of all that had taken place, he went outside to find out about this crazed spectacle that he saw before his eyes. On learning of the heinous murder plot, he hurried to lock and bolt the door and entered the chamber of his esteemed guest in order to confer with him on how to preempt this terrible threat. Rabenu Yaakov responded: "Are you afraid of them? On the contrary, let them enter and show what is in their hearts!" On speaking thus, Rabenu Yaakov arose and opened the door wide. He stood in front of the house, exposed to any attempts to harm him.

Rabenu Yaakov shouted out to the sons: "Get away from here, you cursed people!" But they continued rushing towards him, with clubs in their hands and profanity on their lips. When they were but a few steps away from him, Rabenu Yaakov warned them "Know that if you do not leave immediately, you will be consumed by fire!" The words had barely left his holy mouth when fire emerged from the ground threatening to burn them alive. The burning flame scared away the attackers and Rabenu Yaakov's name was sanctified throughout the city.

"HE PEERED AND HE WAS HARMED" (CHAGIGA 14B)"

In the house opposite Rabenu Yaakov's lived a Jew whose window overlooked Rabenu Yaakov's inner chamber. From time to time the neighbor would peer inside and be privy to incredible sights and revelations, such as a great light in the room and many people dressed in glory and grandeur. Naively, the neighbor thought that Rabenu Yaakov was not aware that he was prying into his room. Of course, nothing was hidden from Rabenu Yaakov's eyes.

One day, Rabenu Yaakov summoned his neighbor and warned him not to dare look into his chamber, for it could cost him his eyesight. If he were not wise enough to prevent his eyes from seeing into places where they had no business looking, they would cease to see altogether.

For several weeks the neighbor controlled himself. One night at around midnight, he heard loud voices emanating from the home of Rabenu Yaakov and his curiosity was aroused. In a moment of weakness, his desire overcame his reason and he stood behind the shades and peered once more into Rabenu Yaakov's room – one final time.

As soon as his gaze fell on the room, his world darkened and he was blinded in both eyes. Early the next morning when he realized what evil had befallen him, he asked his family to escort him to Rabenu Yaakov's home. There he fell at Rabenu Yaakov's feet, begging his forgiveness. He beseeched him to pray on his behalf that his eyes, whose light had become darkened, be healed. Rabenu Yaakov said to him: "But I warned you clearly; why did you not heed my warning? Now what should I do?" The man continued to plead for his life, promising that he would not pry again. Rabenu Yaakov, seeing that the man wholeheartedly regretted the matter, took pity on him. He passed his holy hands over the neighbor's eyes and the man's sight was restored as before.

"WE HAVE A TRADITION: A LION DOES NOT ATTACK A PAIR OF PEOPLE" (*Shabbat* 151b)

Although their utterances are like those of a Seraph and all their words are like fiery coals, nobody should conclude mistakenly that the *tzaddikim* bring harm upon those who provoke them and or who belittle their honor. It is not the way of the righteous to harm but rather to bring good to the Jewish people. If someone is harmed for having slighted the honor of the *tzaddik*, it is a punishment from heaven for having insulted the angels of G-d. Rabenu Yaakov, in fact testified about himself: "It is not my manner to curse anyone, nor do I want anyone to be harmed by me." This is illustrated by the following incident related by his great-grandson, R' Meir. In this incident the blasphemers and revilers were punished when Rabenu Yaakov simply answered "Amen" to a curse uttered by a wise man, who was defending his honor.

When Rabenu Yaakov visited in the city of Sifro, just a short distance from Fez, all the Torah scholars of the city eagerly awaited his arrival, coming out to greet him as he entered the gates. Upon witnessing the dignitaries going out, all the residents of the city left whatever they were doing and joined in the procession in honor of the esteemed guest. Among those waiting was a so-called "Torah scholar" who in actuality was "not as he appeared on the outside" (see Brachot 28a).

As the crowd gathered, all eyes turned towards the road leading to Sifro from Fez. A non-Jewish resident of the city who passed by this large assembly, approached the hypocritical scholar and asked him whose arrival the crowd was awaiting. The man responded: "We are awaiting the lion that will come and devour everything". He explained what he meant. – "Very soon Rabenu Yaakov will arrive in town and take away everyone's money by asking for a substantial donation for his Yeshiva or some other charitable cause that he is collecting for on his travels from city to city." When he saw that his statement did not meet with enthusiasm, the "scholar" walked away.

Rabenu Yaakov's carriage was sighted from a distance; at any moment it would pass in the city of Fez. The Rav of the city and head of the *Beit Din*, HaRav HaGaon R' Avner Tzorfati, went out to see if all of the city's residents were in attendance or if some had left due to the long wait. There he was informed of how the man had spoken and that he had left the area. The Rav was incensed that someone had spoken such despicable words about the holy Rav Yaakov, noting that such things would not be tolerated. He decided to ask Rabenu Yaakov to curse the Jew and the non-Jew who had accompanied him.

After the city residents had given a grand welcome to their esteemed guest, R' Avner Tzorfati asked Rabenu Yaakov to curse the man, for this was typical of his behavior, giving the outward appearance of being a Torah scholar and yet denigrating that which is so dear and so holy. Rabenu Yaakov refused, claiming that it was not his manner to curse anyone and he did not wish any harm to befall another on his account. After the Rav of the city continued to pressure Rabenu and to speak to his heart, Rabenu acquiesced by saying that in the Rav's honor he was willing to answer "Amen" to the Rav's curse. R' Avner responded, "May it be the will of Hashem that just as he brazenly announced that the lion will come and devour everything, may a lion come and devour him". Rabenu answered "Amen" and they continued on their way into the city.

Only a few hours later word spread that a hungry lion had suddenly appeared at the gates of the city and devoured that Jew and the non-Jew who accompanied him and then immediately fled from the city.

"THEN ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH WILL SEE THAT THE NAME OF HASHEM IS PROCLAIMED OVER YOU"

(Devarim 28:10)

"SIGNS AND WONDERS ON THE LAND OF THE OFFSPRING OF HAM"

Word of Rabenu Yaakov's greatness extended well beyond the walls of the *Malach* in Tafilalet, even beyond the Jewish villages of North Africa where Rabenu Yaakov was a frequent visitor. Even the gentiles in Rabenu Yaakov's vicinity or in any place where he remained for an extended period of time, knew better than to test his power. When the Arabs attempted to cause trouble for the local Jewish population, Rabenu Yaakov would speak to them in language they understood, "With a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with signs and with clear wonders" (see Devarim 4:34), until "the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them" (Esther 8:17) and they trembled in great fear.

They not only feared his miracles, in which the anger and wrath they had intended to use against the Jewish people was turned against them, they also greatly honored his word and followed his rulings. Historians point out that the Arabs referred to Rabenu Yaakov as "*Elchazan el Kabir*" which means "the great Rabbi."

There were several incidents where disputes involving rival Moslem gangs who had a long history of avenging their members' blood, erupted in violence and were instantly resolved when Rabenu Yaakov was called upon to mediate. Rabenu Yaakov's name was well-known. However, we must remember that these were people who could sometimes turn their backs even on those who had acted kindly towards them and would not hesitate to obliterate them off the face of the earth. It was with this type of people that Rabenu Yaakov was

forced to contend and to prove he could save his nation and free them from their evil schemes.

If we wish to find a source for these incidents in Rabenu Yaakov's writings, there is nothing more fitting than the following citation from *Pituchei Chotam* which reflects our title and beginning of this chapter. In his commentary to *Parshat* Noach, Rabenu Yaakov wrote that when a person learns Torah, the *klipot* and demons lose their ability to rule over him, as if he is holding a sword which slashes through them. He qualified his words, however, maintaining that this applies only to one who is involved in Torah learning for its own sake (*lishma*) and who guards his tongue from all slander, thus rising to great heights. (*Pituchei Chotam Parshat Bo*).

"ILLUSORY IS THE HORSE FOR SALVATION; DESPITE ITS GREAT STRENGTH IT PROVIDES NO ESCAPE"

(*Tehillim* 33:17)

Our Sages have told us, "[If there are] paupers of your city and paupers of another city, paupers of your city take precedence." (*Baba Metzia* 71a). Rabenu Yaakov's first concern was therefore primarily for the residents of his own city of Tafilalet, that they should live in peace and tranquility without any troubles from their Gentile neighbors, as was only too common. The city of Tafilalet was under the rule of the Sheikh El-Islam who at the outset of his reign was true to the tradition of his forefathers and teachers and, to put it mildly, harbored no special love for the Jewish people. He would have loved nothing more than for all the Jewish *Malachim* in his province to be desolate of man.

As did his colleagues, the Sheikh from time to time would ride his horse around the marketplaces of the city to get a breath of fresh air and to see what was happening. When people would spy his horse approaching in the distance, they would stand erect and bow down in his honor. The Jews of the city who, understandably, had no desire to accord any honor to that non-Jew, did their best to be off the streets during the times designated for this spectacle.

One day, the Sheikh, followed by his bodyguards, rode his horse towards the mosque intending to pour out his prayer before "sticks and stones." At that moment, Rabenu Yaakov was sitting outside a store owned by one of his disciples. Upon spotting the approaching Sheikh, Rabenu Yaakov got up and entered the store to avoid having to stand up in his honor.

When the Sheikh and his entourage arrived at the store, the horses froze in their tracks unable to proceed. All the shouts and beatings showered on them were to no avail. Had the horses been able to speak they certainly would have asked, "Why did you hit me three hundred times?" The local Jewish populace, who had been observing the events through peepholes and cracks, now hurried out to the street to see what would happen next. The tumult infuriated the Sheikh, he did not know how to emerge from this mess and he sought a way to salvage his dignity from the commotion.

One of the Jewish youths approached him saying, "There is a holy man in our midst — he is our chief and our crown Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira. He is now in this store, it is obvious that the horses have ceased to move out of awe for him."

Left with no choice and no other logical explanation for this phenomenon, the Sheikh dismounted his horse and turned towards the Jewish store to see just who this Rabbi Abichazira was, in whose honor the horses had stopped. Upon entering, he recognized Rabenu Yaakov as the same man who had been seated by the entrance and had gone inside to avoid the Sheikh. He asked him, "Why did you hide in the store rather than stand up and bow in my honor as does the rest of the nation?"

With great confidence, Rabenu Yaakov responded, "I bow down only to the King of the World, not to any human being, for Hashem 'gives sovereignty to kings but retains kingship!'"

When he saw the holiness and great authority of the Rabbi of the Jews, the Sheikh's anger subsided and he agreed to absolve Rabenu Yaakov forever of the obligation to bow in his honor. He then asked Rabenu Yaakov if he would free his horses, which were now acting as "double agents" — pretending to serve the Sheikh, while in reality acting as messengers against the Sheikh at the Jewish Rabbi's behest.

Rabenu Yaakov answered "I will do as you wish on one condition — that you swear to me that you will not harm the shop owner or any other Jew of Tafilalet. Only then will I go outside. When I return to my seat on the stone, your horses will be freed from their detention and you can proceed in peace." The Sheikh did as Rabenu Yaakov had requested and swore on all that was dear to him, that from that day on he would treat the Jews with proper respect. Needless to say, Rabenu Yaakov's words came true and the horses continued on their way as if nothing had been amiss.

The fearful impression that this incident left on the Sheikh did not fade quickly. For many years the Jews of Tafilalet were able to live in tranquility with no decrees or evil being planned against them, as *Chazal* tell us "Good for the righteous one and good for his neighbors" (*Sukkah* 56b).

This is not the end of this story, for Rabenu Yaakov continued to perform miracle upon miracle, as you will soon see ...

"MAY FEAR AND TERROR BEFALL THEM" (*Shmot* 15:16)

Generally speaking, laws enacted by rulers apply equally to all citizens; improving the lot of any individual generally means better days ahead for the entire nation. When it came to the Jews, however, "Hatred disrupted the correct order of things" (*Rashi*, Bamidbar 22:21), not to mention that the masses desired to drive the Jews from their land. Although, they knew that they would not be able to accomplish their goal so easily, for Sheikh el Islam had so much respect for the

Jews that he even allowed their Rabbi to remain seated while he passed by the gates of the city, this did not stop them from plotting evil against the Jews living in their vicinity.

Following lengthy meetings and consultations, the non-Jews of Tafilalet came to the conclusion that they themselves were powerless, for they were under the rule of the Sheikh who was protecting the Jews. They therefore decided to bring their situation to the ears of sympathetic Philistines who were not under the rule of Sheikh el-Islam, to allow them, with their great hatred, to carry out "justice" against the Jewish nation.

The arrival of the Philistines in Tafilalet instilled fear not only in the local Jewish population but in Sheikh el-Islam as well. The Philistines, with their great loathing for the Jews, would no longer permit the Sheikh to be loyal to both causes. As far as they were concerned anyone who was good to the Jews had the same status as the Jews themselves. When the Sheikh heard that the Philistines were on their way to Tafilalet, he mobilized his army to bar their entry and turn them away from the city.

The Sheikh's soldiers were weaker and fewer in number than their Philistine counterparts. They were cowardly and negligent, finally abandoning their guard posts at the outskirts of the city and fleeing to places of refuge. Within a very short period of time, the Philistines took up positions at the gates of the city and stood ready to enter the *Malach*. The non-Jews of Tafilalet felt a sense of fear at the arrival of the Philistines but only on the surface, for in their hearts they rejoiced at the prospect of their work being performed by others.

The Jews who had been living in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility under the great benevolence of the Sheikh were now faced with an attacking band of angry Philistines. In previous times of danger they had gathered in the synagogue to cry out in prayer to their Father in Heaven, but this was no longer an option, as anyone knew

that any Jew found on the streets of Tafilalet could perish without even the benefit of a trial. When the time came for *Mincha*, all the Jews took their *siddurim* and made ready for prayer, each in his own home.

Rabenu Yaakov, unlike the members of his flock, feared nothing and at the approach of the *Mincha* hour walked to the synagogue as usual. Arriving at an empty synagogue, he sent his son Rabenu Aharon to gather people for *Mincha*. "But the sword has already emerged from its sheath, and the Philistines are waiting to enter the *Malach* at any moment; how can I go out in order to gather a *minyan*?" wondered Rabenu Aharon, surprised at his holy father's request.

Rabenu Yaakov, who was pained to hear such a question from his son, lamented to him: "My son R' Aharon, in whom I have full confidence, is this what you ask? Are you afraid? Do you not have faith?"

Rabenu Aharon, accustomed to rebuke, accepted his father's words with love and went out willingly to fulfill his task of gathering a *minyan* for prayer. With great difficulty he managed to persuade eight Jews to come to the synagogue. It was only due to their faith in Rabenu Yaakov's power that they agreed to go out of their front doors and enter the lion's den.

Minchah was characterized by intense concentration, following *Chazal*'s words "A person should be extra cautious with the prayer of *Minchah*" (*Brachot* 6b). Rabenu Yaakov's prayer was very lengthy as usual which instilled confidence in the fearful Jews around him. After prayers, he sat down to his customary learning period between *Mincha* and *Maariv* – bridging day and night. The other Jews in this small *minyan*, however, waited breathlessly for the conclusion of *Maariv* to run home to their wives and children, who were by now sick with worry.

At the conclusion of *Maariv*, Rabenu Yaakov ordered the people to disperse to their homes, reassuring them that they had nothing to fear

and that with Hashem's help no evil would befall them. Rabenu Yaakov himself remained in the synagogue and continued to learn. One of those in the *minyan*, a member of Rabenu Yaakov's entourage, was overcome with curiosity to see just how the *tzaddik* planned to spend the coming night. He hid in a corner, confident in Rabenu Yaakov's promise that no harm would befall them.

After learning for half an hour, Rabenu Yaakov rose from his seat. The self-appointed spy was on the alert in his "lookout post," waiting to see what would happen. Rabenu Yaakov spread his hands towards the heavens and proclaimed out loud "Master of the Universe, am I not worthy of protecting the Jews of the city?" With this short prayer, Rabenu Yaakov returned to his seat and resumed his learning.

Not many moments passed before Rabenu Yaakov sensed the assistant's presence. He called him and dispatched him to the palace with instructions to the Sheikh not to fear the barbaric Philistines descending on the city, for his army would overpower their soldiers. The assistant queried whether it was appropriate to go now during this time of danger. Rabenu Yaakov ignored the question and went back to his learning. The man understood that he had nothing to fear while carrying out this *mitzvah* mission.

When the assistant arrived at the palace of Sheikh el-Islam, he found that most of the ruler's men were in hiding, for fear of what the Philistines would do to them. Even when he told them of Rabenu Yaakov's promise, they did not believe him, convinced that a minority cannot defeat multitudes rising up against them. Just a few of the soldiers relied on the power of Rabenu Yaakov's promise that no evil would befall them. Their faith was vindicated, when they merited witnessing the great miracle that would unfold before their very eyes.

The assistant, wishing to be close to his great master, made his way back to the synagogue. On the way he passed a royal caravan of Sheikh el-Islam's army officers, who had been sent by the Sheikh to



inform Rabenu Yaakov that the danger had passed. When they thanked him for the great miracle he had performed in rescuing the Jewish people and their allies, Rabenu Yaakov feigned ignorance, and asked precisely what had taken place at the outskirts of the city.

The officers reported that their people had found the city swarming with soldiers, but before they had had a chance to assess the legions descending on their city, the fear of G-d entered the Philistines and they fled for their lives. The Sheikh's people pursued them, killing them left and right.

Wishing to diminish the magnitude of the miracle, Rabenu Yaakov responded, "You are such great warriors that you can sow fear in the hearts of the enemy. They were certain that if you would go out against them, they would quickly perish."

"THEY WITH THEIR CHARIOTS, AND THEY WITH THEIR HORSES, BUT WE CALL OUT IN THE NAME OF HASHEM" (*Tehillim* 20:8)

Word spread of Rabenu Yaakov's wonders and miracles until most of the gentiles feared the mere mention of his name. The Moslem sages, aware of his increasing influence and fearing that the loyalty of the masses was decreasing by the moment, spent many long hours formulating trumped-up libel charges against the Jewish people and their uncontested leader.

To their great sorrow and frustration, they discovered that their followers were less than willing to believe libel against Rabenu Yaakov and his people. They claimed that Jewish people would place money in their graves to bribe the guards of the Garden of Eden to allow "heretics" to enter, since Moslems were taught that it was reserved for those who sanctify the name of Mohammed. This accusation only enticed a handful of money-hungry Moslems to break into Jewish burial caves. When the plunderers returned empty-handed,

the Moslem sages would explain that the guards in Gan Eden had already taken their full compensation and left nothing behind. This did not impress the masses and the libel was immediately removed from the public agenda. Realizing that the hearts of the ignorant masses could not be swayed from their belief in Rabenu Yaakov's power, the Moslem leaders resolved to torment him personally. In order to avoid interference from the Sheikh and his army who patrolled every corner, they decided to invite him to a religious debate. If that failed, it would be much easier to indict him in private for degrading their prophet, and condemn him to death.

One day, when Rabenu Yaakov passed the gate of the *Pekha*, the assembly place of the Moslem sages, they invited him to come up to speak with them. They quickly turned the discussion into a religious debate, intertwining their arguments with words of hatred and absurd libels against the Torah and the Jewish nation. Rabenu Yaakov, who found the entire gathering nauseating, mocked them asking cynically, "How can you have the audacity to malign the Jewish people, when your prophet Mohammed said that he will rule over them in the Next World and whoever causes them pain will not be cleansed of his sin?" They brazenly answered that the true Jews no longer exist, citing the folk tale of a "gardener" who hanged all of the male Jews and left behind only the females. They embellished the libel, saying that the gardener ordered the women to visit their husbands' graves so that they could impregnate them. "Therefore you are only the children of corpses, and what connection do you have to the Jewish people who serve our master Mohammed?" Rabenu Yaakov answered, "Better children of a dead lion than children of a living dog" (based on *Kohelet* 9:4). They gritted their teeth and continued with their empty arguments.

Rabenu Yaakov regretted the time he was wasting on these brazen fools that could have been spent learning Torah. He immediately got up to leave for the *beit midrash*, saying "I cannot remain with you, for the queen is waiting for me at home." The sages of the *Pekha*

wondered at Rabenu Yaakov's mysterious connection with the queen. Rabenu explained tersely, "That queen — Torah is her name!" and walked out of the gates of the *Pekha* without even bidding them farewell.

When their expectations of winning him over with religious arguments failed, they went on to charge him with libel. They wrote a long hate-filled letter claiming that while visiting the *Pekha*, the Jewish sage had vilified their prophet Mohammed and the teachings he had given over to his millions of followers. They signed their testimony before the Kadi, and sent the epistle straight to the Sultan. A delegation of three eloquent men from the *Pekha* mounted mighty steeds en route to the Sultan's palace in Fez.

They had barely left the city, when the Muslims already began celebrating, convinced that victory was theirs. The Jews of Tafilalet, who had heard the rumors from their non-Jewish neighbors, were beside themselves with worry. A great assembly gathered at the entrance to Rabenu Yaakov's house, wailing and sobbing. Rabenu Yaakov, hearing their distress, came out to speak to their hearts and to try to calm them. He said to them, "Why are you shaking and shedding tears for nothing? Fez is very far away and the couriers have yet to return from the Sultan's palace. Go back to work, everyone, and remove all worry from your hearts, for no harm will befall you."

Even the heads of the community, who suggested asking Sheikh el-Islam for protection, were rebuffed in anger and asked to say no more about the subject.

A few days later, word circulated around the city that the couriers were on their way back from Fez, carrying a death decree signed by the Sultan. The decree commanded the people of Tafilalet to bring him Rabenu Yaakov's head, for having degraded the word of their prophet as spoken by the sages of the *Pekha*. Flowers now decorated the

windows of Moslem homes, while an atmosphere of fear was rapidly pervading the Jewish homes.

The Jews of the city once again gathered in front of Rabenu Yaakov's home, their cries reaching the windows of the room where he sat learning Torah. Rabenu Yaakov sent his eldest son Rabenu Masud to speak to the crowd and ask them to return to business as usual, for the couriers were still three hours away from the city and the time had not yet come to worry about the tidings they were bringing. The people turned away from the courtyard and dispersed to the synagogues, their eyes turning towards the open Torah Arks.

Immediately the sound of horses was heard from the street. The Jews held their breath, while those near the windows moved closer to see what was taking place. Some gazed from the windows of the synagogues; others stole glances from the windows of their homes, while nearby the Moslems rejoiced in their decorated porches.

Immediately their anticipation was replaced by shock. Before their eyes appeared one of the couriers who passed by them, quickly galloping down the road. Two riderless horses skipped wildly after him, kicking up stones on all sides. In a panic, the courier drove his horse on until it arrived in the courtyard of the *Pekha*. He fell from his horse in great distress and related all that had happened to them on the way.

"On our way from Fez to our city of Tafilalet," explained the courier, "we held the ruling written by the judges of the palace and signed by his honor the Sultan in our hands. As we passed under the city wall, the stone archway above the gate collapsed and killed the two couriers who were with me. I am the sole survivor; I have galloped with all my might to summon your help."

The people of the *Pekha* hastened towards the gates of the city, where they discovered the mutilated bodies of the two couriers. In the

hand of one of them they found the decree, ruined by the warm blood of that murderer of innocent people.

The Jews wiped away their tears, put on festive clothing and went up en masse to the courtyard of Rabenu Yaakov's home to rejoice with him over the miracle that Hashem performed at the hand of His prophet. He, with the humility which was a part of his greatness, answered them, "You now see how great is the power of your prayer, and how effective is the charity you have given to the poor these last few hours. Hashem, as a result, has shown you a miracle and a sign which is visible before your very eyes."

From that day, the sages of the *Pekha* also joined the supporters of Rabenu Yaakov. While it was not out of great love for him, but rather out of fear, no longer did they "speak up spuriously against him" (Devarim 19:16).

"WITH US OR WITH OUR ENEMIES" (see *Yehoshua* 5:13)

These stories illustrate Rabenu Yaakov's success in confronting the wickedness of the masses. No further testimony is needed to confirm his ability to foil the dastardly attacks of non-Jewish individuals. However, to increase the level of *emunat chachamim* we have decided to relate a few more incidents. The following two stories can both serve to teach us of Rabenu Yaakov's ability to overpower even armed bandits, whose desire for money eventually led to lust for murder.

Rabenu Yaakov's concern for the needy of Tafilalet as well as for the Abir Yaakov Yeshiva played an integral role in all of his actions. His dedication to collecting these funds was well known throughout the land. Those in his shadow were able to accurately describe him using R' Elazar ben Azaria's words to R' Eliezer, "You are better for the Jewish nation more than a father and mother" (*Sanhedrin* 101a). Knowing that "If there is no flour there is no Torah," (*Avot* 3:17) he made sure to provide them with all that they lacked, in order to realize his goal of seeing him toil diligently in their learning out of pure joy.

Of course, "A handful of food does not satisfy a lion" (*Brachot* 3b); the little that could be collected from the city of Tafilalet was not able to satisfy the many yeshivah students. Therefore from time to time, when his pocket would become depleted, Rabenu Yaakov would have to go out to villages near and far in order to give the generous villagers the privilege of joining the "Zevuluns" of the holy yeshivah. A look at the insides of the homes of the donors would reveal that the yeshivah's supporters included those who barely had any money themselves.

Rabenu Yaakov's arrival promoted an atmosphere of joy and gladness for the Jews in every province and every city. They would celebrate the arrival of their glorious guest with a festive meal and celebration, feeling privileged to host the holy man in all his grandeur and at being able to do his will, helping to provide for Torah scholars with a generous hand and a willing soul. They were aware that Rabenu Yaakov was the faithful officer who would ensure that the "principle will remain intact for them in the World to Come, while they enjoy the fruits in This World" (based on *Shabbat* 127a).

The incident we are about to describe has been passed down through the generations and was told by Rabenu Yaakov's great-grandson R' Avraham Abichazira (the son of the Baba Chaki, and son-in-law of the Baba Sali). This is what happened:

On one of Rabenu Yaakov's travels, while he was riding his donkey in a caravan together with a number of his people as well as some Arabs from Tafilalet, a gang of armed bandits lay in wait for them in a cave beside the road. They would cold-bloodedly ambush innocent wayfarers who were simply going about their daily business. There is no need to state the obvious — from a trap like that no one ever returned. The bandits were ready for their prey — Rabenu Yaakov and the considerable sum of money he had amassed for the poor students of his city. As the convoy approached the bandits' hideout, one of the Arab travelers became aware of them, but they were already too close,

and the narrow path made it impossible to turn back to flee in the direction from which they had came. In fear and desperation, the Arab called out, "Where have we come to?"

Rabenu Yaakov whose heart had complete confidence in Hashem, calmed his companions, saying, "You have nothing to fear at all, for we have arrived here on a *mitzvah* mission and no one can harm us."

Rabenu Yaakov's entourage, who were already aware of his control over the worlds above and below, and knew that inanimate objects and vegetation as well as the living kingdom would follow his wishes as if they were able to speak and appreciate his supreme level, waited anxiously to see what would be the lot of the bandits.

The wagon driver was instructed to drive on; the bloodthirsty bandits rushed towards them pointing their guns at Rabenu Yaakov and his entourage. They demanded with hair-raising threats that they get off their wagons and hand over all of their belongings. Unlike Rabenu Yaakov, the rest of the convoy had already begun to murmur *Viduy*.

Rabenu Yaakov alighted with confidence from the wagon and approached the surprised bandits. He raised his hand and asked, "Are you with us or with our enemies?"

His companions were doubly afraid. Was the answer to Rabenu Yaakov's question not clear before it was even asked? Asking a bandit pointing a gun at you if he is 'with you' suggests a lack of even elementary understanding. Even "an accurate reply" to "questions with no relevance" (see *Avot* 5:7) would be enough to spark these despicable people's anger against them.

A moment later the mystery was solved and they understood that Rabenu Yaakov's question was not meant as an interrogation but rather as a means of action, for "a wise man's question is an answer and a

half." Rabenu Yaakov's question left the bandits as immobile as statues with guns stuck in their hands. Their voices could be heard but their bodies failed to move – it looked as if the local residents had placed them as scarecrows to guard against animals.

When the paralyzed robbers realized their fate, they raised their voices, crying to Rabenu Yaakov to forgive them for their evil plans and pleading that he should pray that they regain their faculties. Rabenu Yaakov grasped this opportunity on behalf of all the local Jews who were constantly exploited by these corrupt bandits. He agreed to heal them on the condition that they not return to their folly (see *Shabbat* 31b) and they no longer inflict harm on anyone.

When they promised to repent from their evil ways and to desist from robbery, they were returned to their natural state. The latter miracle was greater than the former, for one cannot compare turning people into stones to turning stones into people. These erstwhile bandits, witnessing Rabenu Yaakov's holiness and being in awe of him, accompanied Rabenu Yaakov to his home, guarding him the entire way from wild animals as well as other wild people.

"See," said one of the gang members to his accomplice, "if we think we understand the ways of the *tzaddik* and the few words he says, we have not realized how profound they really are. The end of this story provides us with an answer to Rabenu Yaakov's question, "Are you with us or with our enemies?" for heaven provided these bandits for Rabenu Yaakov's journey, so that they would fear Rabenu Yaakov and protect him for the remainder of the road. Although the bandits as well as Rabenu Yaakov's entourage understood quite clearly that they were "with the enemy," Rabenu Yaakov knew that they were "with us."

"THE WANTON SINNERS YOU DROWNED"

In all probability on almost every one of Rabenu Yaakov's journeys he would meet up with one or another group of bandits who conspired

to inflict harm upon him. The end result was always the opposite - he would instill fear of the weak Jews into these brave armed bandits. The following incident also took place at one of the crossroads when there was a confrontation between Rabenu Yaakov and a group of armed robbers who anticipated the privilege of "eating from the table of the Most High" (see *Beitzah* 21a).

This incident took place at the end of a very successful fundraising trip to a faraway land, where Rabenu's Yaakov's efforts were clearly accompanied by great Divine assistance. On this excursion, Rabenu Yaakov returned with enough funds to sustain the yeshivah for a very lengthy period of time. He hired an Arab escort for the trip to lead the donkey and to see to all his needs during the journey. It appears that this non-Jew chosen by Rabenu Yaakov must have done some good deed whose merit stood by him, just as the great merit of Esav for honoring his father protected him from anyone rising up against him (see *Bereishit Rabbah* chapter 1). Presumably as a reward for his good deed, he had the privilege of serving Rabenu Yaakov and being able to witness all the miracles he brought about.

After spending time at one of their rest stops, Rabenu Yaakov summoned the Arab in charge of his donkey and informed him that he wished to return quickly to his home in Tafilalet. Given that Rabenu Yaakov's time was very precious and every minute was accounted for, he expressed his desire to travel via a shorter route.

The Arab gasped, as he raised his eyebrows in amazement, as well as fright. Before the Arab even had the chance to express his feelings, Rabenu calmed his fears by telling him that he was familiar with the road and that it was indeed a good route to travel. However, the Arab had good reason to be afraid of bandits, for he knew very well of whom he was speaking — these hoodlums were his neighbors, who inspired terror in all who came in contact with them.

The Arab, assuming that even Rabenu Yaakov would agree that wisdom comes with experience, tried his utmost to convince him with

words that would strike terror in the breast of any mortal, even the strongest. He warned him that the road was fraught with danger and impossible to travel on without meeting gangs of bandits who would seize all one's belongings. Furthermore, once they had taken a man's money, they would also take his life - just in case "his money is more precious to him than his body." (see *Brachot* 61b). He added that every man and woman knew to keep away from this route, the exception being once a week when a large convoy gathered there and a few other people then worked up the courage to join it. Even then, the bandits were not to be deterred and more than once they attacked even the guarded convoy and robbed the people of their possessions, at times harming those who rose up to defend themselves. How could it even enter the mind of the *tzaddik* to choose this particular route? The Arab rested his case.

Rabenu's Yaakov's holy decision was not about to be affected by the Arab's entreaties. "This is the road we are taking! I have hired you and it is your obligation to go with me any place that I wish and on any route that I desire. You have no right to delay my arrival with your roundabout routes (see *Rashi* to *Bereishit* 19:2). If you fear that perhaps the Jews of Tafilalet will accuse you of sending me down a dangerous road with disregard for my life, I will sign in the presence of two reliable witnesses that it was according to my instructions that we went this way and the responsibility is mine alone."

Given no choice and thinking of the compensation for his troubles that was at stake, the Arab was forced to rely on Rabenu Yaakov's signature. He set out on the road, trembling with fear; the chattering of his teeth could be heard even above the donkey's hoofbeats. It would be superfluous to point out that Rabenu Yaakov continued to sit tranquilly as if he were merely taking a stroll near his house. This was hardly surprising for the events that were about to unfold were as clear to him as if they had already taken place.

Simultaneously, while Rabenu Yaakov was busy with "things that

stand at the pinnacle of the world" (*Brachot* 6b) – and collecting for charity which is "the equivalent of all the other commandments combined" (see *Baba Batra* 9a), the forest bandits were organizing themselves and taking up their positions, eagerly anticipating Rabenu Yaakov's arrival. Their spies had informed them that Rabenu Yaakov's trip was longer than usual and they should therefore expect a greater amount of plunder. They soon spotted the donkey led by their fellow-Arab slowly approaching. Their contemptible hearts were filled with joy, while their fingertips prickled with greed, and their bursts of laughter and cheers of triumph reached the ears of Rabenu Yaakov and his escort.

These sounds did not ruffle Rabenu Yaakov's tranquility; he did not so much as lift his eyes from the book he had been reading from the outset of their journey. His Arab companion, on the other hand, was so terrified that his flesh crept and his limbs felt frozen. He knew precisely what was happening and he understood the implication of the impending meeting. With great difficulty, he managed to utter a few words weakly protesting to Rabenu Yaakov, "I warned you against traveling this road, and as I predicted, they are now coming after us ready to eat us up alive."

Since Rabenu Yaakov refused to budge and totally disregarded their fast-approaching end, the Arab abandoned the donkey and fled into the thick of the forest, there to hide behind a thick tree trunk, waiting to see the fate of his passenger. Moments later, forty armed bandits surrounded the donkey with threatening expressions and eyes shooting streaks of fire.

Rabenu Yaakov continued sitting calmly on the donkey, as if nothing was happening. As if these people were doing nothing more than seeking his counsel, he lifted his eyes from the book saying, "What can I do for you?"

Their response was not long in coming, and they responded, "All of your money, immediately!"

Rabenu Yaakov's money did not satisfy the robbers. They demanded his life as well, saying, "It would not be proper for us to take all your money and then leave you alive... how would you be able to manage in life when penniless... let us first take your life and then your money!"

Rabenu Yaakov did not flinch even from this threat and answered them in his own tranquil manner, "Here I am before you, do with me as you please."

Rabenu Yaakov's tranquility did not daunt the bandits; in unison they pointed their guns at him. Surely forty bullets would be able to finish off even the Rabbi of the Jews. But in the few seconds they took to aim their guns, the ground in the forest suddenly changed into wet clay. The forty bandits immediately sank up to their waists in earth while the upper portions of their bodies became totally immobile.

Rabenu Yaakov ignored their desperate situation and resumed his journey, praising Hashem for the miracle that had just occurred. The frightened Arab, who had been watching, emerged from his hiding place and ran towards the bandits to observe this great wonder from closer quarters. His heart quivered when he saw that they were indeed none other than his neighbors. He forgot about what his lot would have been had they ensnared him in their trap, and attempted to rouse them. Needless to say his efforts were fruitless. Seeing that he was powerless to help them, he ran after Rabenu Yaakov, who was already quite a distance away, to ask him to intercede on their behalf. Rabenu Yaakov reprimanded him for having fled and for not having believed his words that there was nothing to fear. When he bemoaned the plight of the bandits, Rabenu responded that it would be better for everyone that those gangsters remain there forever as a "monument to the fallen" to deter other bandits from this wicked crime of robbing wayfarers.

The citizens of Tafilalet came out in large numbers to welcome Rabenu Yaakov on his return, unaware of what he had gone through on his return journey. In his great humility, he saw no need to talk

about the miracle. That being the case, everyone then went back to his daily business.

After two or three days during which the bandits failed to return to their homes, their families, knowing their plan to ambush and rob Rabenu Yaakov, began to worry. Here was Rabenu Yaakov, already back for a number of days and there was still no sign of their family members. The brazen non-Jews shamelessly sent a messenger to Rabenu Yaakov to clarify if perhaps he had met a group of bandits on the way. Rabenu Yaakov, with a simple "I do not know," managed to evade their many questions.

The messenger realizing that Rabenu Yaakov was hiding information from them, decided to go to the home of the Arab escort to discover what Rabenu Yaakov was concealing from them. The Arab, who until this point had attempted to ignore the facts, now realized that he could do nothing to prevent the secret from being revealed. He related to them every last detail of the incident. He then told them that that they should waste no time in returning to Rabenu Yaakov to ask forgiveness, for very soon, if it was not already too late, the prospects of seeing their family members alive would be nil.

When they came to the conclusion that they had no choice, they sent a delegation to the Rabbi of the Jews to beg his forgiveness for having attempted to harm him. Rabenu Yaakov, fearing that if he did not heal these scoundrels, the non-Jews would be liable to take terrible revenge their Jewish neighbors, responded that the robbers would be restored to full health, if they promised to stop attacking and robbing innocent people.

The messengers hurried to the forest to the place where their fossilized relatives were buried alive. They spoke to their hearts, trying to convince them to desist from plundering and looting, yet it soon became clear to them that they were speaking only to themselves. They were at a loss as to what to do next, until one of them approached the bandits who were sticking forth from the ground clutching their guns.

With a tremendous roar, he shouted into their ears, "From this day on will you agree to leave your evil ways of robbing and looting?" The bandits all nodded their heads in the affirmative, and suddenly they felt the release of the tight grip of the earth. With the help of their relatives whom they clung to for support, they got to their feet and left the forest never to return.

A STONE SUFFICIENT TO CAUSE DEATH

Fear can dilute the effects of strong wine, but it cannot dilute evil; this becomes clear from the heinous plots of the gentiles. They may have trembled at the thought of harming Rabenu Yaakov personally, yet they tried at all costs to disturb his peace and calm, even enlisting their children for this purpose. Rabenu Yaakov showed them that they were not too young to be punished. The following incident told by the Baba Sali is testimony to this fact:

On one of his visits to the city of Timosnat, Rabenu Yaakov was a guest in the home of a dignitary in the community. There he remained in seclusion most of the hours of the day immersed in learning Torah in a small room, tailor-made for his needs. The Jew-haters who lived in the neighborhood where he was lodging, searched for and found ways to express their hatred, which had been repressed due to their immense fear. They sent wild youngsters with stones in their hands outside Rabenu Yaakov's window in order to disturb the esteemed guest. They directed them to pretend to be playing ball games with the stones, so that they would not be seen for the wild youth that they truly were.

They began throwing stones into the room, and the floor quickly became full of them. Rabenu Yaakov summoned his host and asked him to go and see who was disturbing him from his learning. The host returned and explained that children were involved, but he beseeched Rabenu Yaakov not to punish them, for he feared the revenge of their parents who already had enough hatred for the Jews. Rabenu Yaakov agreed and requested that he seal the window opening.

The children outside saw the window being slammed. Loud shrieks of joy penetrated the room, as they shouted to one another that they would now break the window and harm the owner whom they hated so much. Their laughter however did not last very long, for the stones they threw flew back at them, hitting them on the head. Some of the braver children attempted to fling the stones and then flee to the side, only to find that the stones pursued them, causing them injury.

The cheers were quickly transformed into cries of pain, which reached the windows of their parents' homes. The enraged parents emerged from their homes armed with large building bricks from their storerooms. With all their might they attempted to break the window, yet they were shocked to see that these large bricks as well bounced back to them, and the larger the rocks, the greater the wounds inflicted.

Seeing what was happening, they were seized with terror. They entered the house begging Rabenu Yaakov's forgiveness, fearing for their lives and not knowing what other punishment was in store for them for their wild and repulsive behavior. The parents even attempted to excuse their children, attributing it to childish pranks. Rabenu Yaakov, however, did not accept their excuses and rebuked them for lying. Was it not the parents who put their children up to these pranks and who even armed them with stones?

They were very embarrassed as they realized that Rabenu Yaakov's perceptive eyes had penetrated into the recesses of their hearts. They admitted the truth and begged his forgiveness, swearing that they would no longer dare to harm the Jewish people and that only peace and tranquility would reign in their neighborhood.

From that day on, the residents of Timosnat, young and old, greatly feared the Jewish people and their revered Rabbi.

"THE MURDER VICTIM CAME ON HIS OWN FEET"

(*Baba Kama* 74b)

The wickedness of the peoples of the land and their all-consuming

hatred for anyone and anything Jewish sometimes drove them to act in ways totally beyond limits. Even the well-mannered among them could undergo a total metamorphosis and act like veteran criminals, so long as they found some pretext to trump up libels against the Jews, and to bring catastrophe down upon them. If not for the great merit of Rabenu Yaakov, the Jewish people of Morocco would have been eaten up alive by their non-Jewish neighbors. Even the non-Jews saw that the Name of Hashem was proclaimed over him, and they were in awe of him when he revealed the might of his hand. With signs and miracles he removed their sinister plans and thwarted the counsel of evil.

The following story was heard from his great-great grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira *shlit"a,* who heard it from his holy ancestors, who carried the name of Rabenu Yaakov, and the great wonders he performed, constantly on their lips.

One of the Moroccan cities was home to a great number of Jews. Their flourishing growth was like a thorn in the eyes of their non-Jewish neighbors to the extent that they were blamed for anything bad that happened and there was constant incitement against them. One of the greatest enemies of the Jews in that city took advantage of this situation to kill a gentile youth and fabricate libels against the Jewish community, charging that they had killed him. There was no concrete evidence, but then again, the courts never asked for any.

As with any crime for which there was no evidence, the Jews were to blame and when there was no proof as to whom among them was the murderer, they were all considered murderers.

The Jewish community hastily made their way to Tafilalet in order to beg Rabenu Yaakov to awaken mercy for their community and he accompanied them back to their city. Some of those who went assumed that the purpose of his returning with them was in order to be with his flock during their times of need; others thought that he came to speak to and to appease the local authorities. How surprised

they would be to find that they would now be given clear and unequivocal proof - testimony from the murder scene which would uncover the murderer himself!

Rabenu Yaakov met the rulers of the city, asking that a public trial be carried out in the presence of all the residents of the city, with the body of the murdered youth displayed in the center. All the citizens assembled in the main plaza, in the middle of which lay a stretcher containing the lifeless body. Sounds of agitation among the residents were quickly silenced by the leaders of the city, who greatly feared and respected the leader of the Jewish community of Morocco.

Rabenu Yaakov approached the stretcher and instructed the young man to arise from his bed and describe all that had happened to him. There was a collective gasp when they began to see movement under the blanket. Their shock increased further as they saw the young man get up and point his finger at the lowly murderer. The youth went on to describe how this smooth-talker lured him into a trap and then took his life, although he had been totally innocent of any wrong.

Before the young man could even finish speaking, and shock was replaced with gasps of amazement and calls to arrest the murderer, the father of the dead boy approached Rabenu Yaakov and begged him to keep his son alive. Rabenu Yaakov, who only performed miracles in order to save the lives of Jewish brethren in definite danger, responded, "I cannot leave him alive in this world for even one extra moment ... in order to reveal the truth I was forced to give him life. This is the only purpose to his being here; once that purpose has been completed, his body will return to the way it was."

The moment the young man concluded his incredible testimony, he collapsed in his place and died.

"THE PASSING OF *REBBI*" (Ketubot 103b)

THE DREAM THAT NEVER MATERIALIZED

Rabenu Yaakov always remembered the Torah he had learnt in his youth in his father's home in Tafilalet with that visiting sage from *Eretz Yisrael*. All his life he longed to dwell in the Land of our forefathers, to walk on its earth, and to learn Torah in the Land where the "air makes one wise" (see Baba Batra 158b). He spoke of this dream on five separate occasions, and even began the process of making the dream a reality. Each time he set out to do so, the leaders of the Moroccan community begged him not to forsake his flock.

In the beginning of the year 5640 [1880], Rabenu Yaakov once again expressed his desire to make the journey to *Eretz Yisrael*. As previously, the leaders of the various communities as well as their Sages attempted all means of dissuasion, yet Rabenu Yaakov would not heed any of their arguments. This time he was firmly resolved that the time had finally come to move. He told some of his close confidants: "I dreamt that I was in *Eretz Yisrael*; the time has therefore come to realize my lifelong dream of living in the Land of our forefathers".

Seeing that he could not be swayed, they let him pursue his dream and no longer broached the subject. Instead, the Jewish community of Morocco began preparing for the eventual moment when they would have to part from their beloved Rav who had now been their leader for close to sixty years – from the day of his father's passing when he was only sixteen years of age until now when he had just turned seventy-four.

Even the most gifted writer would not be able to describe these moments of parting from their devoted Rav who had bestowed blessing and grandeur upon the members of his community. He had been able to make the sun shine for them even in the darkest nights, causing

them to forget the trials and tribulations of the exile and allowing them to live with a sense of peace and tranquility among the gentiles who permitted them to devote themselves to serving their Creator. The entire community of Tafilalet as well as members of many other Moroccan Jewish communities, who received word of this impending journey, joined the long convoy accompanying his noble retinue. Rabenu Yaakov graciously greeted them all and parted from them with immense love as he set out for *Eretz Yisrael*. The people sincerely shared Rabenu Yaakov's joy at having the privilege of making his lifelong dream a reality, and he too felt the pain of separation. In the words of the Ramban, "It is difficult for a person to leave his home, where his friends and loved ones reside; how much more so when the land we are speaking of is his birthplace, and how much more so when his entire family remains there." (Parshat Lech Lecha)

We hear from his great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichzaira that the journey from Morocco to Egypt extended for over a year and a half, because in every town Rabenu Yaakov entered, the entire local population would come out to greet him and accompany him for a long stretch of road. Being the merciful father and devoted leader that he was, every city became a way station on the road where he would stop and bestow his blessings upon its inhabitants.

R' David added that he heard from his grandfather, Rabenu Yaakov's grandson the Baba Sali, that at every one of his stops, the wealthy people of that city would greet him and empty out their thick wallets to help finance Rabenu Yaakov's journey. Even while on the road, with an uncertain future, he kept to his age-old custom of giving all of his money to the poor and destitute. In this manner the poor of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunis received handsome support from Rabenu Yaakov who would not allow any charity money to remain in his possession for even a single night. As Rava tells us: "In the case of charity, one is required to give it immediately ... because there are poor people before us who need charity immediately" (*Rosh Hashana* 6a).

Divine Providence, however, had other plans and Rabenu Yaakov never realized his dream of settling in the Land of Israel.

CONCLUDING ALL THE *TIKKUNIM*

The convoy passed through Egypt on its way to *Eretz Yisrael*. With *Shabbat* fast approaching, they paused in their journey to spend *Shabbat* with the local population. The initial plan was to continue on their journey immediately after *Shabbat*. Rabenu Yaakov spent *Shabbat* in the city of Dimanhor close to Alexandria. He stayed at the home of one of the city dignitaries, Mr. Moshe Sarusi, who greatly cherished the opportunity of hosting the guiding light of North African Jewry.

It happened during the evening meal of *Shabbat Parshat "Vayechi Yaakov*," "and Yaakov lived" [His great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira points out that in the words "*vayechi Yaakov b'eretz*" "Yaakov lived in the land" we find an allusion to the name Yaakov Abichazira.] When Rabenu Yaakov raised his cup to recite the *Kiddush*, one of the *Shabbat* candles which were on the table suddenly went out, for no apparent reason. The expression in Rabenu Yaakov's eyes, as usual, expressed that he understood precisely why this had happened. The curious people with him did not have to wait long for his explanation, which to their incredible amazement was: "Good, the soul will now return to the place from where it was hewn".

The hearts of those present began to race upon hearing what had just been said, yet they allayed their fears by convincing themselves that "As usual, Rabenu Yaakov is involved in *tikkunim* for souls, something we ordinary people cannot begin to understand".

On Sunday Rabenu Yaakov fell ill and was confined to bed. His host, Mr. Sarusi, tried his best to ease his pain and summoned the best doctors, who made great attempts to stabilize his condition with various medicines. During the course of a week, his condition only

worsened until on Thursday it seemed very clear that his soul was about to depart his holy body. The doctor who examined him on Thursday left the room with a very grave expression on his face, whispering to the host that he did not see any possibility of healing the *tzaddik*, as all signs pointed to the fact that he was about to depart that very night for his eternal resting place.

After the doctor had left, Rabenu Yaakov summoned his host, asking what the doctor had said. At first Mr. Sarusi refused to divulge any information. When, however, the *tzaddik* decreed upon him that he must tell, he was forced to convey the doctor's assessment and gloomy forecast. When Rabenu Yaakov heard this, his response was: "I must live until after *Shabbat*, for there are *tikkunim* that I must take care of this *Shabbat*".

He, whose days were all devoted to lofty *tikkunim* and all his life was characterized by the spirit of the words of the Ar"I z"l that today's *tikkun* cannot be compared to yesterday's or tomorrow's, knew with his great stature how to focus on the *tikkun* of that particular day, and he longed to take care of the required *tikkunim*. In spite of the clear predictions of the doctor, he freed himself from the shackles of prison and allocated himself a few more days.

On Friday morning, the doctor arrived at the Sarusi household, having left his bag of medicines and instruments at home, being thoroughly convinced that he would have no use for any of it. Instead the doctor was holding the required "death certificate" in his hand, for no burial was permitted until this document was issued. Even had the doctor known until this point that a person is not declared dead until a death certificate is issued, the time had come for him to learn that even an official death certificate does not necessarily imply that the person is no longer alive.

The doctor was very surprised to find that not only was Rabenu Yaakov still alive, but that he was deeply involved in his holy pursuits.

He realized now that he was dealing with a person whose very nature was so sanctified that he was able to dominate it completely. It appears that one who lives his entire life in purity knows precisely when he is going to die. With an obvious feeling of discomfort, the doctor hid the death certificate in his jacket pocket, and begged Rabenu Yaakov's forgiveness.

No-one among us has any idea what height the *tikkunim* of Rabenu Yaakov reached during his life on this earth. We certainly cannot begin to hope to understand the very lofty *tikkunim* of that last *Shabbat*. Suffice it to point out that these *tikkunim* caused the angels to stop at the entrance to the *Aron HaKodesh* and give him a few more days of life.

"THE ANGELS HAVE VANQUISHED THE RrighteOUS ONES AND THE HOLY ARK IS CAPTURED" (Ketubot 104a)

After the *Shabbat* had ended, Rabenu Yaakov's health seemed to have improved. People's hearts began to beat a little stronger as they clung to a covert hope that he was on the road to recovery and would soon regain his full strength. This hope was supported by the fact that on Sunday morning, Rabenu Yaakov ordered the doors of the house opened so that he could receive people seeking his blessing.

As this was the first opportunity for the city of Dimanhor to host the light of the nation, most of the local population had never been face-to-face with him or merited his blessing. He had arrived in their city not long before the start of the *Shabbat* and immediately fell ill. Now that the gates were opened a great stream of people began flowing to Mr. Sarusi's house, each desiring Rabenu Yaakov's prayers for his blessing and salvation. It never entered their minds that his influence and power were destined to remain with them in the city of Dimanhor.

When the assistants observed the large numbers waiting by the entrance to the house, they saw no choice but to admit people in

groups in order that the queue moves at a quicker pace. One of the groups comprised the leading merchants of Dimanhor who wished to be blessed with success. Upon completing his blessing, Rabenu Yaakov said to them: "Today you will not go to the marketplace". If the merchants did not understand what Rabenu Yaakov was alluding to, it would take only a few hours for them to realize the difficult and painful intent behind his remark.

When the crowd receiving the *tzaddik*'s final blessings had dispersed, Rabenu Yaakov summoned two of his faithful disciples and instructed them in the same manner as *Rebbi* had instructed his disciples prior to his death: "Yoseph, Chofni, and Shimon haEfrati have served me during my lifetime and they will serve me after my death" (see Ketubot 103a). The disciples undertook to make the arrangements for the *tahara* and the burial, in spite of the fact that he told them that not long after his funeral, they too would leave this world. He then read the entire *Shir HaShirim* in a melodious fashion and recited the traditional *viduy* confession. Then the two disciples asked him whether he wished to be buried in Dimanhor or whether they should transport him elsewhere. He responded that if the city had a Jewish cemetery then it was his wish to be buried here. Upon completing his instructions, he parted from his disciples with a great feeling of love, recited the *Shma*, and gave over his soul to the Master of All Souls. It was the 20th of Tevet 5640 [1880].

RABENU YAAKOV PERFORMS HIS OWN *TAHARA*

The moment his pure soul departed for the heavens, the terrible cries, which arose in the room where his holy body lay, grew stronger and stronger. The tragic news quickly spread to all the Jewish homes in Dimanhor. They had only just merited seeing his holy countenance as they sought his blessing, and now they were summoned once again. The house had gone from being a source of light illuminating the entire city of Dimanhor to being a source of mourning and sorrow.

The two disciples now approached the body, which had been sanctified with self-denial for seventy four years, all of them equal for good, for holiness, and for purity. Following Rabenu Yaakov's clear instructions, these two disciples alone were to perform the *tahara*. At first they were unsure how they would be able to hold his holy body for fear that perhaps it would fall during the immersion. They hoped that with great effort they would succeed in this holy mission, that very few merit performing. To their great astonishment, when the time came for the immersion, Rabenu Yaakov sat up, as one who is very much alive, until the process was complete.

The two disciples related this miracle to the local sages waiting outside the immersion room. The Egyptian Rabbis, who were not accustomed to Rabenu Yaakov's miraculous ways and had not seen this with their own eyes, had difficulty believing what they were hearing. When the disciples noted that the sages doubted their testimony, they girded themselves with the strength to approach the bed and ask that their words be verified. To the great astonishment of all, Rabenu Yaakov arose and sat on the bed! His repeat performance certainly testified to the authenticity of the disciples' testimony.

"They saw and were indeed astounded" (Tehillim 48:6); they became very frightened when they saw the greatness of the *tzaddik* and felt it a privilege that he died in their city. In order for their words to be believed even in the distant future, all of the *Rabbanim* of Egypt signed a letter confirming all that had taken place.[101]

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101. This we heard from his great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, who saw a copy of this letter, which was in the possession of his father Rabenu Meir. One day this certificate was deceitfully taken from him and is now in the archives of the Ben Zvi institute in Jerusalem. It is worth taking note of the words of the great sage HaRav Obadiah Hadaya zt"l in his book "Yaskil Avdi" (section Yoreh Deah chapter 24) "We have a tradition regarding many great Sages and righteous people, that after they were lowered into the *mikveh*, they would immerse themselves".

HIS FINAL JOURNEY

While the disciples were still busy with his *tahara*, and the Torah scholars began preparing the long list of eulogies that would express only the minutest amount of their feeling of great loss, tens of thousands of people began swarming to the place where the funeral was to take place. Not only did the Jews of Egypt close their businesses in order to accompany the *tzaddik* of the generation, but also Jews from the neighboring countries who had received bitter news via telegrams that had been sent to all the western countries.

Heading the gathering were the people of Dimanhor and nearby Alexandria, who had had the privilege of being close to the *tzaddik* when he departed this world. A dispute broke out between the populations of the two cities. The people of Dimanhor claimed that they had the right to Rabenu's burial place for he had died in their city. The people of Alexandria, on the other hand, argued that their city was larger and full of Torah scholars. They claimed that it would be a greater honor for Rabenu Yaakov to be buried in their city; the sounds of Torah reverberate from its windows and many Torah giants of past generations are buried in its cemetery in contrast with burial in a city comprised mainly of merchants and simple working people.

His two disciples whom had been told explicitly of his wish to be buried in Dimanhor were not present at that time. The differing views became a great dispute until some residents of Alexandria tried to take the coffin by force and place it on a wagon to take it to Alexandria.

To everyone's great surprise, when the people of Alexandria placed the casket on their wagon, angry and furious rains began to fall. The people of Dimanhor took advantage of the confusion and confiscated the casket from the Alexandria-bound wagon and placed it in a wagon destined for the local cemetery. Amazingly, the moment the casket was placed on the wagon en route to the Dimanhor cemetery, the rains ceased. Some of the people of Alexandria, who paid no attention to

this clear miracle, took advantage of the sudden calm and made another attempt to take the casket. Once again, heavy rains fell; this miracle repeated itself five times. Finally everyone realized that it had been determined in Heaven that Rabenu Yaakov's burial place was destined to be in the city of Dimanhor.

During the funeral procession, word of what had taken place spread among the massive crowd that had gathered to escort Rabenu Yaakov. Among those who heard were the two disciples, who then hurried to inform the heads of both communities that the great *tzaddik* himself had directed them to bury him in Dimanhor.

The day that the incredible life of the *tzaddik*, Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira, came to a close, was a day that the people of Dimanhor will always remember. From that day until the present, the grave of that great *tzaddik* lies in their midst. The site is well known as an auspicious place for providing salvation and comfort.



Inscription on the Abir Yaakov's tombstone

His great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a tells us that his grandfather the Baba Sali told him that the particular site for Rabenu Yaakov's burial was chosen because it was dug opposite a place of idol worship known as Noamon. The *tzaddik* was buried there in order to negate Noamon's power to incite and inflict harm. It was for this reason that any attempt by the Egyptian authorities to move the remains of Rabenu Yaakov to *Eretz Yisrael* was met with fierce opposition from the Baba Sali.

Furthermore, whenever the Egyptian government voices disapproval of the disturbances the gravesite in Dimanhor causes them and they try to have it moved, something always happens to thwart their plans.

TIBERIAS – "*SHETOVA REIYATA* (WHOSE APPEARANCE WAS PLEASANT)" (Megilla 6a)

The following story, which took place the day Rabenu Yaakov left this world, has become part of family tradition. According to this tradition, Rabenu Yaakov was buried in Tiberias by celestial angels, as the following story relates:

In the city of Tiberias there lived a wise sage, a very pious individual who was totally absorbed in the performance of *mitzvot*. He had never seen Rabenu Yaakov but had heard of him from a close friend who came to *Eretz Yisrael* from Morocco, where he had been a member of Rabenu Yaakov's close staff. The friend often described the great miracles, and the name of Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira was constantly on his lips. The sage yearned to meet the great *tzaddik* from Morocco but never had the opportunity to do so.

On that fateful day, 20 Tevet 5640, an angel appeared in the guise of his friend and informed him that a great man in Israel had fallen – that same Rabenu Yaakov Abichazira whom they always spoke of, had passed away on his way to *Eretz Yisrael*. Angels had now come and they had dug a burial plot for him in the cemetery of Tiberias, so that

the *tzaddik*'s remains could be brought there from Dimanhor. He requested that the sage organize a quorum of G-d fearing individuals to stand by the grave until the burial was completed. The Tiberian sage wanted to ask his friend why he did not join them, and how it was that he had the privilege of having this heavenly secret revealed to him. Before he had the chance to even open his mouth, the friend disappeared from before his eyes.

The sage gathered a *minyan* of Torah scholars and went to the cemetery. As they arrived, they noticed a grave being dug. They searched high and low for the gravediggers yet not a single person was to be found in the vicinity of the grave. Mounds of dirt were piling up near the open grave, yet there was no one holding any digging tools. When the digging was finished, they observed a wrapped body being placed in the grave and the entire mound of dirt that was piled on the side was then thrown back into the grave to cover the body. The sage began to eulogize the *tzaddik*, using his knowledge of the great miracles that he had heard from his friend. He continued in this manner throughout the night. He finally returned home to rest and to quiet his teeming brain that was busy with the incredible and mysterious happenings of the previous night. As there was still time until *vatikin*, he thought that he would take advantage of it to sleep a little.

As dawn rose over the face of the land, his friend arrived to accompany him to the synagogue, reminding him that he must hurry otherwise they would be late. The sage looked at his escort very surprised: "Do you not know where I have been the entire night? Why! I was busy doing everything you requested of me!" The friend was astonished having no idea what the man was speaking about. It was then that they both realized that an angel had been sent to inform him of the heavenly burial that had taken place in the cemetery in the city.

Those who know the history of Tiberias know that this was not the first instance of the body of a *tzaddik* being buried in their city. The

marvel was that another *tzaddik* buried in the city also died in Egypt on the 20th of Tevet! The body was then transported by donkey to Tiberias to be buried the following day in a public funeral. This *tzaddik* was none other than the Rambam. During the night, the donkey suddenly began to run ahead quickly on its own, arriving with incredible speed in the city of Tiberias and stopping close to the graves of the *tannaim*. The Jewish community of Tiberias understood that the heavens had directed the donkey's steps of in order that the Rambam be buried in their city. They dug a grave for him on that very spot.

Rabenu Yaakov's great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira adds another testimony that he heard from his grandfather the Baba Sali. During his first visit to *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5681 [1920-21], he arrived at the holy grave of the *tanna* R' Shimon bar Yochai in Miron and when the elderly caretaker heard that he was the grandson of the Abir Yaakov, he hurried to tell him of an incident that had happened to him. This is his story:

On the night of the passing of the Abir Yaakov – 20 Tevet 5640, the caretaker heard a voice in his dream summoning him to hasten and open the burial cave of R' Shimon bar Yochai, for the Rav of the Jewish community of Morocco was being brought to be buried in Miron. In great astonishment at this vision, the caretaker hurried to open the gates of the cave and right before his eyes he saw the following spectacle: a grave was being dug near the place where R' Shimon bar Yochai was buried – but there was no person anywhere near where the digging was taking place.

When he understood that the gravediggers were able to enter the cave without his keys, the assistant realized that heaven had sent him to be present as a witness in order that in days to come he would testify to this spectacle which he saw with his own eyes.

EFFECTING SALVATION THROUGHOUT THE LAND

THE PEAK OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Jewish community of Dimanhor knew how to value the privilege of having the great *tzaddik* buried in their midst. They honored the holy burial site in the best way possible, by building a beautiful edifice around it and by appointing caretakers to ensure that it was always respected. After the Abir Yaakov's passing, the Egyptian Jewish community merited what the Moroccan Jews had experienced in his lifetime – his grave became a source of wonders and salvation. Sick people for whom the doctors had given up hope suddenly regained their full strength. Cripples who no longer even dreamed of walking suddenly rose from their chairs and walked on their own two feet. Couples, whose wellspring of tears had dried up from their entreaties for children, proudly held babies in their arms. Torah scholars and *Kabbalists* suddenly had new fountains of wisdom and understanding open up for them.

Even non-Jews streamed to the *tzaddik's* grave hoping for mercy and deliverance; their greatest dignitaries found salvation there. During one of the Baba Chaki's visits to Dimanhor, he met the vizier (Interior Minister) of King Fuad, who had arrived there with his entire family to prostrate himself before the holy grave. He learned that the Vazir had been childless for many years and the doctors could not help him. When he heard from the Jewish Treasury Minister that many childless women had become pregnant after praying at the grave of Rabenu Yaakov, the Vazir and his wife decided to travel to the grave and pray for salvation. A year later they were blessed with a child. It became their custom to come to the grave and pray and light candles in honor of the Abir Yaakov. They also resolved to be good to the Egyptian Jews.

In another incident the Baba Chaki received information regarding an Arab living in Gaza whose name was Yaakov Abichazira. The man was very well respected in the city of Gaza, always surrounded by a large clan of his descendants. During that period after Gaza's capture during the Six Day War, no one feared traveling to the Gaza Strip to speak with the local residents. The Baba Chaki therefore decided to make the trip.

When he arrived in Gaza, he asked the local residents about an Arab bearing the holy name of the Abir Yaakov. He located the man who agreed to host the Jew who was introduced to him as Rabbi of the cities of Lod and Ramla.

"**What** is your name?" The Baba Chaki asked the elderly Arab.

"**Yaakov** Abichazira" – the man responded. It was clear from his manner that he was aware that his response would raise eyebrows.

"**Was** your father's family referred to by the name Abichazira?" The guest queried.

"**No,** my father was not Abichazira", answered the Arab with a smile. He then agreed to explain how he came by that name.

"**My** parents were married for many years without children", the Arab related. "Their pain and frustration grew with time, as the top doctors told them that nothing could be done and they would have to live out their lives without any children to succeed them. They then heard about the grave of the Jewish sage in Dimanhor, where people's prayers are answered and miracles are performed. With sincere faith, my parents packed their bags and made the trip from Gaza. When they arrived, they called a number of people they knew in Dimanhor to come and join them in prayer. They even put together a service in honor of this Jewish sage, recalling whatever they could of the Jewish customs they had come across in their lives. They vowed that if they would merit having a child, they would call him by the name of the *tzaddik*.

A year later I was born and my parents named me Yaakov Abichazira."

During his sojourn in the Land of Israel in the winter of 5683 [1922-23], Rabenu Yisrael the Baba Sali, grandson of the Abir Yaakov, traveled to Dimanhor to observe the anniversary of the passing of the *tzaddik* and went to pray at the grave with tens of thousands of others. He took the opportunity to mention the names of many of his friends from Morocco. He reported this to them in a letter.

"Hashem gave me the privilege of being at the grave of my holy grandfather the Abir Yaakov zt"l on the day of the anniversary of his passing. I have prayed and pleaded on your behalf, begging for mercy ... and that the A-lmighty bless you with all good. May Hashem gather in all our exiles from the four corners of the earth with the arrival of the *Moshiach*.

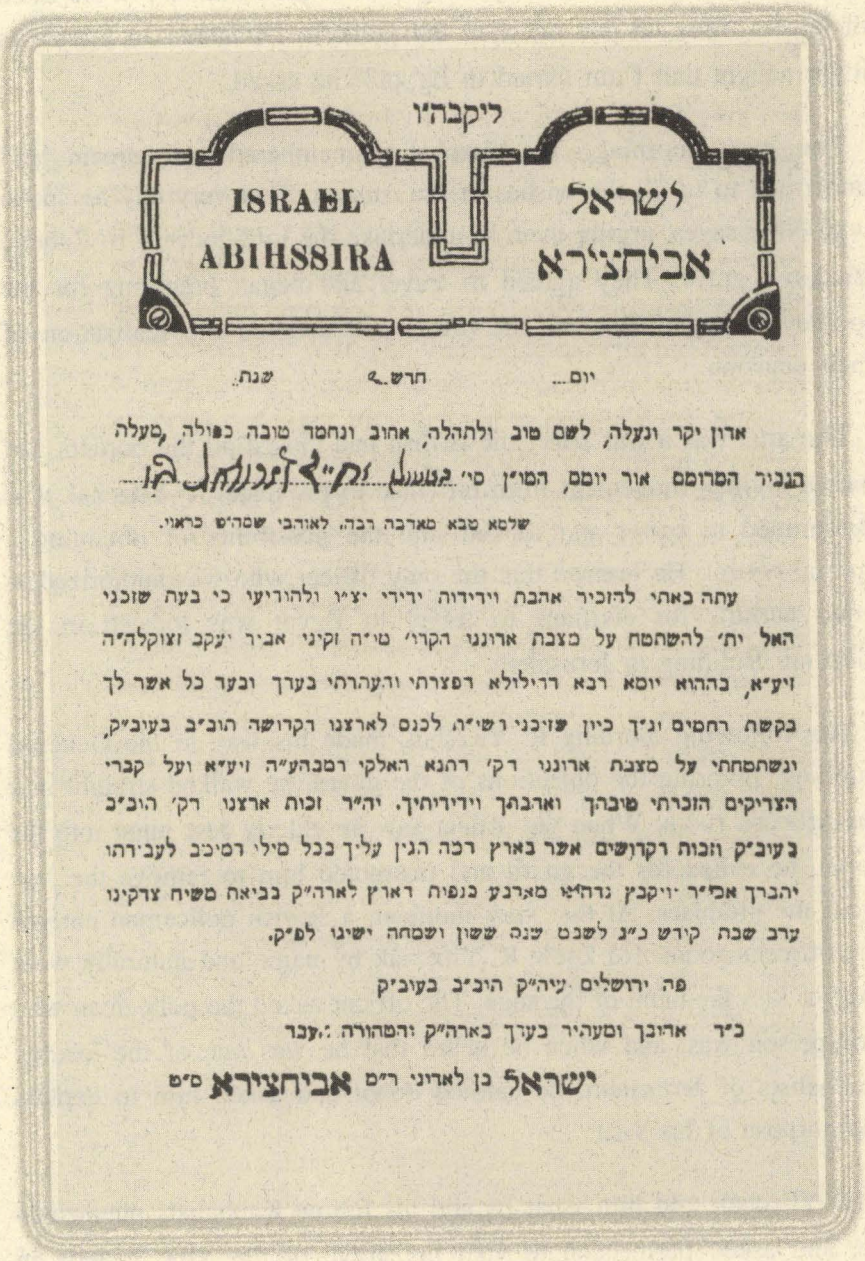
Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh, may it be built speedily in our days.

From one who loves you and is praying for you in the Holy Land, the servant Yisrael, son of Rabenu Masud Abichazira.

SANCTITY OF THE PLACE

This evidence of the sanctity of the place was reported by his grandson the Baba Sali in the name of one of the great sages of Jerusalem, R' Yitzchak Alfia, author of *Kuntres HaYechieli*. During the Second World War the Jewish settlement was in grave danger because the Germans were advancing towards Egypt. Rav Alfia gathered several Torah scholars to accompany him to the graves of the *tzaddikim* in the upper Galilee to awaken Divine mercy to bring about salvation and redemption for the residents of Zion.

As he lay on his bed one night after returning from prayer, Rabenu Yaakov appeared to him from the upper world. He asked him why he



ליקבהי"ו

ISRAEL ABIHSSIRA

ישראל אביחצי"רא

יום... חדש... שנת...

ארון יקר ונעלה, לשם טוב ולתהלה, אחוב ונחמד טובה כפולה, מעלה הנגיד הפרומם אור יומם, הסי' בעטעלן יח"י זצנותחל הו...

שלמא טבא מארבה רבה, לאוהבי שמה"ש כראוי.

עתה באתי להזכיר אהבת וידידות ידידי יצ"ו ולהוריעו כי בעת שזכני האל ית' להשתטח על מצבת ארונו הקדו' טי"ה וקיני אביר יעקב וצוקלה"ה זיע"א, בההוא יומא רבא דהילולא דפצרתי והערתי בערך ובער כל אשר לך בקשה רחמים וג"ך כיון שזיכני ר"ה, לכנס לארצנו הקדושה הוב"ב בעוב"ק, ונשתטחתי על מצבת ארונו דק' דהנא האלקי רמבהע"ה זיע"א ועל קברי הצדיקים הזכרתי שיבהך וארבהך וידידיותיך, יה"ר זכות ארצנו דק' הוב"ב בעוב"ק וזכות דקדושים אשר בארץ רבה הגין עליך בכל מילי דמיכב לעב"דתו יהברך אכי"ר ויקבץ נדחי"ו מארבע כנפות דארץ לארה"ק בביאה משיח צדקינו ערב שבת קודש כ"ג לשבט שנה ששון ושמחה ישיגו לפ"ק.

פה ירושלים עיה"ק הוב"ב בעוב"ק

כ"ד אריבך ומעהיר בערך בארה"ק והטהורה :.עבר

ישראל בן לאריני ר"ם אביחצירא ס"ם

A letter from the Baba Sali to his long-time attendant Rav Yichye Ezraval reporting that he had prayed for him at the Abir Yaakov's gravesite on the day of the anniversary of his passing.

was spending so much time by the graves of the *tzaddikim* in the Land of Israel. "Why do you not visit my grave in Dimanhor in Egypt? Is it for naught that I am buried in Egypt?" he asked.

The next morning, R' Yitzchak remembered the dream and undertook to fulfill the wishes of the *tzaddik*. That very day he spoke with other sages, urging them to undertake the long journey to Rabenu Yaakov's grave. They agreed to travel and began preparing for the journey. Many difficulties, however, still awaited the realization of their decision.

The area was a war zone; the British had closed all the borders and barred civilian movement from province to province. R' Yitzchak was determined to travel and looked into the possibility of obtaining a special permit. He learned that the only officer who was authorized to grant permits for civilians to travel to Egypt was located in the Generali Building in Jerusalem.

The following morning R' Yitzchak made his way to the Generali building. Ignoring the objections of the guard, he walked straight into the officer's room. When the officer saw an elderly Jew burst into his room, he called for the guard and instructed him to remove the Jew from the premises. At that very moment, a Jewish policeman entered the officer's room. He knew R' Yitzchak by name and naturally went over to kiss the hand of the sage. The officer asked the policeman who this person was, and when he heard that he was one of the leading Kabbalists of Jerusalem, he calmed down and asked him to explain the purpose of his visit.

R' Yitzchak told him what he and his fellow Kabbalists planned to do, and asked permission to visit the grave of the Abir Yaakov in Dimanhor, Egypt. The officer mocked him: "You think that your prayers are helping the war effort even one iota, while we are amassing forces on the front line?" R' Yitzchak who was not taken aback by this spiteful question, answered very firmly that prayers have far more effect

than any number of armored divisions. When the officer saw that the Jewish Rabbi held steadfastly to his belief, he gave him permission to join a military train making its way to Egypt the following morning.



The *Kabbalist* Rav Yitzchak Alfiya zt"l
author of *"Kuntres HaYechieli"*

Once in Egypt, R' Yitzchak went straight to Alexandria and requested that the Jewish community organize a *minyan* of Torah scholars who would join him in prayer at the holy grave in Dimanhor.

They entered the burial chamber full of emotion and began the customary learning in an atmosphere of great sanctity. R' Yitzchak Alfia suddenly noticed fire surrounding the grave, while the grave itself was unscathed. This incredible spectacle showed how holy the place was; and he was overjoyed to merit being there.

It was at the very moment that they started to pray that the great and famous battle of El-Almein began, in which the Germans suffered a major defeat and were forced to abandon their original plan of capturing the Middle East.

When R' Yitzchak returned to *Eretz Yisrael*, he was met at the

railway station by the British officer who saluted him saying, "Now I realize the greatness of your prayers and I understand that they have saved us from the German enemy."[102]

"THEY SHALL TAKE FOR THE CONTAMINATED PERSON ... SPRING WATER IN A VESSEL" (Bamidbar 19:17)

Just as he brought Jewish souls closer to their Father in Heaven during his lifetime by imbuing those in search of the Source of Living Water with a spirit of holiness, so too, his grave became a place where many lost souls found their way back to Judaism when they witnessed undeniable miracles. One well-known incident was witnessed by many trustworthy people who testified to its authenticity.

Two young men organized a trip to the Dimanhor vicinity. One of them was G-d-fearing and very meticulous in his observance of *mitzvot*. His friend, on the other hand, "forsook Hashem, the Source of Living Waters, to dig for himself cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold the water." (Yirmiyahu 2:13). On their travels they passed by the building which housed the holy grave of Rabenu Yaakov. The observant young man viewed their coming across this holy site as ordained from heaven and desired to stop there to pray. His friend not only refused to accompany him inside but would not even wait for him outside, claiming that he did not believe in the power of *tzaddikim*. He saw no purpose in visiting a place simply because someone is buried there.

The young man, who yearned to take advantage of this incredible opportunity, tried his best to convince his friend, who refused to change his mind. But he persisted until the other young man agreed saying: "If it can be demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the power of that *tzaddik* still exists in this world and that his glory hovers to this day, then I will be able to believe. I am not enticed by

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102. The Rishon LeZion (former Chief Rabbi) and great *Kabbalist*, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, testified about this incident, as he heard it directly from R' Yitzchak Alfia zt"l.



superstitions. For example, if I were to find water right here and now to quench my thirst, I would believe that it was the power of the *tzaddik* that caused this to happen."

The young man who strongly believed in Rabenu Yaakov's abilities immediately entered the building with an empty bottle that he had with him. He placed the closed bottle by the holy grave and prayed: "O Rabenu Yaakov! Today let your great wonders become known to all, let even the fools among us believe that your influence and power remains with us to this day." He went outside to his friend. Together they opened the bottle which was filled to the brim with clear, pure water!

These waters not only quenched the young man's thirst but also awakened within him a great thirst to return to his roots. A very short time later, he left his wrongful ways and began to observe all the *mitzvot*.

"SHE ARISES WHILE IT IS STILL NIGHT" (Mishle 31:15)

On one occasion his grandson R' Yitzchak Abichazira, the Baba Chaki, arrived in Dimanhor and prostrated himself before the grave of his esteemed grandfather. Afterwards he passed through the city of Cairo on his way home to Ramle in *Eretz Yisrael*, where he served as Rabbi of that city.

One of the wealthy dignitaries of the Cairo Jewish community, hearing that Rabenu Yaakov's grandson was in the city, came to greet him, insisting that he visit his home and dine with him. The Baba Chaki attempted to explain to him that he had to hurry for he wished to arrive home the same day. The man, however, persisted, finally relating an incident which won over the Baba Chaki to accede to his request to visit his home. This is the story of the Jew from Cairo.

"**Many** years ago my wife had a debilitating illness. The doctors had given up all hope, saying that in all of their years of practicing

medicine they have never been able to produce miracles. My wife's condition deteriorated before my eyes and suffered terribly. Anyone who saw her would leave with a broken heart from witnessing her pain.

My relatives and friends were always nearby lending a supporting hand. One helped by sitting next to her bed and feeding her, another prepared meals for the rest of the family, allowing us to function even when the mainstay of the home was confined to bed. The one who helped me the most, however, was a close friend who suggested that I take her to the grave of your holy grandfather. He sketched a map for me and told me that it was customary among the Jews of Dimanhor that they would bring a person in need of salvation to the room in which the Abir Yaakov is buried and have him remain there the entire night. 'In the morning you will see salvation,' my friend told me.

I followed his instructions and rented a comfortable wagon in which I carefully laid my wife and set out, accompanied by a number of relatives. We brought her to the holy gravesite and prayed on her behalf. Afterwards we left her in the room and locked the door. We ourselves spent the night in the adjoining room in prayer and supplication to the Healer of all Flesh that He grant her a complete recovery in the merit of Rabenu Yaakov.

In the middle of the night, my wife began banging on the door, asking us to open it for her. We, supposing that it was very difficult for her to remain there alone, refused to open up. We saw no choice but to harden our hearts to prevent her from leaving in the middle of the night and missing the great *segula*. Her desperate cries continued until the morning. We opened the door to find her standing on her own two feet, her face shining, as if she had never suffered in her life.

Before our astounded eyes, she began to tell her incredible story:

"In the middle of the night I heard a voice calling out from the grave, 'Arise! Arise!' I was quite frightened by this cry. I had no idea where it came from and who was asking me to stand on my feet at a

time when I could not even move them. When the cry came again and again, I responded that not only am I unable to get up but I cannot even move my feet. The voice commanded me to touch the grave and then stand on my feet. I did as I was told, and to my great surprise, all of my pain and suffering were suddenly gone and I could stand up easily. Shaking with emotion, I called out to you to open the door, but for some reason you refused and you left me here until the morning."

When the Baba Chaki heard the story he responded, "Since you merited such a miraculous revelation at the grave of my grandfather, I have no choice but to come to your home." The Baba Chaki arrived at the man's house where a great elaborate meal was served in his honor and in honor of his grandfather who brought about salvation throughout the land where he was buried.

ACT OF THE NEEDLE

There was a custom among the Egyptian Jewish community that when they visited the grave of the Abir Yaakov, they would take with them foods that remained fresh for a very long time. They would leave the food upon the grave of the *tzaddik* and they would then relate to the food as if it had some sort of *segula* powers. They generally took with them drinks such as water, wine, or oil which do not spoil. Much salvation was seen from this food and drink – being a combination of the power of the *tzaddik* and the proven power of simple faith.

A certain Egyptian Jew used to keep in his home one such flask of oil that had been placed by the grave, in the hope that it would save him if any trouble befell him. One day a great noise and commotion arose from the adjacent courtyard. On looking out the window he saw a large knot of frightened people in the midst of which stood his non-Jewish neighbor sobbing desperately and holding her little girl. When the man emerged from his house to see what had happened they told him that the little girl had been busy playing with her toys on the floor when she had found a sewing needle. In the manner of small

children, she tried to taste it. She swallowed it and it entered her stomach. The doctors who were rushed to the house examined her but did not find the needle in the opening to her esophagus. It was therefore quite clear to them that the needle would puncture a hole in the intestines and become stuck there. The potential damage this could cause was irreversible, and they had no means of saving her.

When the man heard this he wondered what he could possibly do to help the poor woman when he suddenly remembered the flask of oil from the Abir Yaakov's grave in his house. He brought the *segula* oil and suggested to the distraught mother that her daughter should drink one spoonful of this oil. Perhaps she would be saved in the merit of the *tzaddik*. The mother fed the child the oil and only a few minutes passed when before the astounded eyes of all those present, the baby spat out the whole needle.

The name of Rabenu Yaakov and the G-d of Israel Who effects great wonders in the merit of the *tzaddikim* who follow His will was sanctified.

"'STAY HERE WITH THE DONKEY' – A PEOPLE WHICH IS LIKE THE DONKEY" (Kiddushin 68a)

As a result of this incident, that group of gentiles who were present now had great faith in the power of Rabenu Yaakov. Most of the non-Jews who came to his grave had incidentally heard about the special *segula* powers the place offered those who prayed there. Some were neighbors and friends of Egyptian Jews, who through this friendship were exposed to the awesome strength of Rabenu Yaakov, even years after his passing. Rabenu Yaakov's name also became known as a result of a tragedy that happened to one of them when he debased the holy grave for the most trivial of reasons.

An Arab passed by the Jewish cemetery in Dimanhor on his way to the center of the country. Rather than walking around it, he elected to use it as a shortcut. Approaching the holy grave of Rabenu Yaakov

on his donkey, he decided to have a rest inside the building, since they were both weary from the journey. The Arab unpacked some food from his bundle and wolfed it down. When he had finished gorging himself and had fed his donkey, he attempted to mount the donkey again, brazenly using the holy grave to give himself a leg up. At that moment his leg became totally paralyzed, while the donkey was stuck in its place as if it had just been nailed to the ground.

The Arab began to shout for help, but the place was isolated and so far from the main road that no-one heard his voice, and in any case, he was inside a closed building. Many long hours passed before someone in the cemetery heard the shouts and came to his aid. He tried to move the Arab and even enlisted the aid of some very strong men, to no avail. Word soon reached the home of the Egyptian ruler, who arrived with an entourage of ministers and advisers to view this amazing sight. The Arab meanwhile continued to shout...

The ruler, being a clever man, looked around to find some explanation for what was happening. Noticing that the building was in the heart of the Jewish cemetery, he concluded that one of the great *tzaddikim* of the Jewish people must be buried there. He dispatched a delegation to summon the Rabbi of the neighboring city of Alexandria. When the Rabbi arrived the ruler asked him to pray that the Arab be restored to health. The Jew did as he was asked and the Arab was healed, regaining full use of his leg.

From that day the name of the Abir Yaakov became sanctified among all the non-Jews of Egypt, who now recognized the great power of the place where he lay buried.

"THEIR HISS IS THE HISS OF A SERPENT" (Avot 2:15)

In another incident, a young Jewish girl tried to steal public donations from the grave of the Abir Yaakov, thereby belittling the holy place.

One day one of the wealthy members of the Egyptian community took his entire family to Dimanhor to pray by the grave of the Abir Yaakov for success in all his endeavors. In addition to his wife and children, one of the family's young maids joined them on the journey to the holy gravesite.

After praying at the grave, the maid noticed some gold coins that had been placed upon the grave as donations by Jewish visitors. The monies were to be collected by the appointed charity officer to be distributed to the poor. The maid's evil inclination got the better of her and in a moment of folly she took two of the coins and hid them in her pocket.

On their way home the wealthy man and his entourage stopped at a wayside inn to rest from the rigorous journey. When they were all settled in their own rooms, a sudden scream was heard coming from the room of the maid, who was found doubled over and writhing in pain. People saw that she was suffering terribly but were unable to locate the cause of her pain until they discovered two huge scorpions climbing all over her. They tried to catch and kill them, yet the moment their hands touched the scorpions, they disappeared, only to reappear a moment later elsewhere on the maid's body.

The wealthy man was roused from his slumber and told what was taking place in the next room. He came and viewed this spectacle with his own eyes. Trying to figure out what could be the cause of her great torment, the wealthy man suggested that perhaps she had sinned while at the holy grave and her suffering was a direct punishment for her wrongdoing. The maid admitted that she had been unable to overcome her evil inclination and had taken two gold coins from the grave of the *tzaddik*.

Now that her confession had made everything clear, the wealthy man decided to replace the stolen money. They arrived at the grave with the young girl still wailing and crying in pain. Her employer took two

coins of the same value from his pocket and was about to place them on the grave in place of the two stolen coins when the two scorpions left the body of the maid and fell on the holy grave, transformed into gold coins, identical to the rest of the coins on the grave.

The incident became public knowledge and from that time on, no-one ever dared lay a finger on the donations the Jews placed by the grave in honor of Rabenu Yaakov.



"THE RIGHTEOUS ARE GREATER IN THEIR DEATHS THAN IN THEIR LIFETIMES" (Chullin 7b)

"YAAKOV AVINU DID NOT DIE" (Taanit 5b)

While his grave in Dimanhor had become the peak of the mountain and a magnet which drew those seeking salvation and those in search of holiness and purity, Rabenu Yaakov's power continued to be revealed throughout the land as blessings he had uttered decades earlier continued to bear fruit. He even revealed himself from the upper world to his family members at times when they were in need of salvation and mercy.

Had we simply followed the chronology of events, it is possible that the following story would appear at the end of the chapter, for it took place in Ashdod in *Eretz Yisrael* many years after Rabenu Yaakov had departed this earth.

Rabenu Yaakov had a grandson named R' Yitzchak Sheetrit. He in turn had a righteous daughter who together with a G-d fearing young man from the Ben Gigi family, built a home in the city of Ashdod. The following incident, which took place in her home, was reported to us by the great-granddaughter.

When their eldest daughter was approximately three years old she was playing on the porch. Being only a small child she got into mischief and climbed up on the wall surrounding the porch. For a moment she lost her grip and fell from the porch on the third floor all the way down to the yard. When her mother realized that she was not responding to her calls, she went out on to the porch and to her great shock she found her daughter lying in the yard. Since the front door of the house was still locked, the only logical conclusion was that she had fallen from a height of three stories all the way down to the ground.

The woman hurried to the yard to see if she would still be able to save the life of her eldest daughter. To her great surprise the child was lying on the ground with her eyes open showing no signs of injury. When she asked the child how she felt, the innocent reply was that, when she fell from the porch, her grandfather R' Yitzchak Sheetrit appeared, accompanied by her great-grandfather Rabenu Yaakov and they caught her in the midst of her fall before she could hit the ground.

The family members gave thanks for the great miracle that occurred in their home, realizing even more the immense power of the Abir Yaakov - even after his death he continued to protect the living.

"THE MERIT OF THE FOREFATHERS CONFERS GRACE" (*Shabbat* 55a)

Rabenu Yaakov's grandchildren who continued in his path and valued his great abilities and all the miracles he performed, never ceased mentioning his name. They would often credit miracles that openly took place in their homes to his power. In one incident the Baba Sali "invited" the Abir Yaakov to solve a problem that was presented to him. This story was told by the person actually involved, Pircha Amsalem, who had the privilege of working in Rabenu Yaakov's house, witnessing with her own eyes many of the miracles which took place in his holy residence[103]: In spite of the fact that she

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103. Anyone wishing to know just how great a privilege it was to serve in the home of the Abir Yaakov need only look into the following story related by the Baba Sali:

One of the servants in Rabenu Yaakov's home was accustomed to welcome the many guests who would arrive at his holy abode – she excelled in this work. One day while preparing a cup of coffee she looked towards the room from a distance and noticed three distinguished looking guests sitting with him. Upon seeing this, she prepared four cups of coffee and sent them via a male servant to Rabenu Yaakov's room. When the servant opened the door he saw Rabenu Yaakov sitting alone in the room with no one else there with him. The Abir Yaakov asked him why he had brought four cups to which the servant responded that the woman who works in the kitchen had told him that there were three guests in the *tzaddik*'s room. Rabenu Yaakov replied

worked in his house for so many years, she had never approached him, for Rabenu Yaakov was especially strict not only to avoid looking at women but that they should not look at him either. This extra degree of separation and purity in which he acted towards women included those who were members of his household and relatives. The maid Pircha therefore spent most of her time with the pots and pans or near the basin and cleaning materials. She was never permitted to enter the room of the Abir Yaakov. She worked together with her sister Esther Amsalem, also employed in Rabenu Yaakov's household.

One day, Pircha Amsalem asked Rabenu Masud, the Abir Yaakov's eldest son, if he could gain entrance to the *tzaddik*'s room for herself and her sister so that they may be blessed and that they may hear the blessing with their own ears. Rabenu Masud acceded to their request and then turned to his father and told him that the two women standing by the entrance to the room were two very devoted workers who had a great share in the smooth running of the house and they desired his blessing. Rabenu Yaakov gave them a very warm blessing, he then turned to Pircha saying "may it be the will of Hashem that the light of your eyes never ceases until you die". They both left the room elated and returned joyously to their work.

Many years passed and Rabenu Yaakov had long left this world. The servants by then had established their own homes, but there was always a place reserved for them among the illustrious family. When Pircha Amsalem was well into her eighties, she fell ill and soon was totally blind. She who had always remembered those moments spent in the Abir Yaakov's room while the blessing he bestowed upon her

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in astonishment: "The servant spotted the three guests who were with me? If so, then she merited seeing something very great!" ... He refused to reveal who those three people were who were visible only to the meritorious and not to the average person. We can learn from this incident what a great privilege it was to serve in Rabenu Yaakov's home.

was firmly etched in her heart, approached his grandson the Baba Sali and related to him the entire incident from beginning to end.

The Baba Sali responded: "Tonight, before you go to sleep, you must ask my grandfather, the Abir Yaakov, to come to you in a dream. When he appears, ask him what happened to the power behind that blessing". She did as he instructed her and before she got into her bed, she asked the Abir Yaakov to reveal himself to her. He appeared to her in a dream and he asked her what her wish was. She told him that she had lost her eyesight and reminded him that he had said that until the day she dies her eyesight would never fail. Rabenu Yaakov passed his hand over her eyes and said: "You are now healthy".

Early the next morning the woman knocked on the door of the Baba Sali and told him all about the dream joyously informing him that her eyesight was now restored.

"ITS PLANT NEVER WITHERS" (Tehillim 1:3)

People used to keep the image of the *tzaddik* constantly on their minds as a form of *chizuk* - to strengthen or sustain them. Whenever they were in need of some sort of salvation, they would pray and beseech Hashem to remember them in the merit of the Abir Yaakov. Each year on the 20th of Tevet, memorial dinners marking the anniversary of his passing were organized in all the eastern countries with thousands participating and being strengthened in their absolute faith in the Sages.

One of those who regularly hosted a gathering to honor the memory of the Abir Yaakov, and to hold on to his powers, was the minister Shlomo Amsalem, one of the dignitaries of the city of Telemesan referred to by all as *El Ashir* – the wealthy one. He would spend large amounts of his own money for this occasion and whenever he would pray he would mention Rabenu Yaakov's name as a special merit.



One day, when he was eighty years old, he became very ill and his leg was totally paralyzed. The best of the doctors were summoned, yet they all came to the conclusion that there was nothing they could do to help him. As days passed, his illness became more severe, threatening to spread to other parts of his body and putting his life in danger. Three eminent doctors who examined him decided together that there was no choice but to amputate his leg in order to save his life.

That night before retiring, in great desperation and sadness the man cried out loudly: "G-d of Rabenu Yaakov answer me!" The terrible pains as well as the doctors' gloomy forecast would not let him sleep. While the rest of the household slept, Mr. Amsalem tossed and turned in his bed unable to catch even a wink of sleep.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the Abir Yaakov appeared before him. His open eyes clearly saw the *tzaddik* in whose power he had believed his entire life. The sick man told him of all his pain and anguish, and described how the suffering had enveloped him. Rabenu Yaakov approached a fig tree that was growing by the entrance to the house and broke off a leaf from one of its branches. He handed the leaf to the patient and told him to place this leaf on the site of his pain and to go to sleep. The man did as the *tzaddik* told him and placed the leaf on the main locus of the pain and went to sleep, being totally convinced that the G-d of Yaakov would not renounce all the kindness He had shown him until now.

Morning arrived and the honorable minister summoned his household, his heart racing from the great miracle he had just experienced – his ailing leg was now blooming with health as if it had never known any illness. The doctors, who only yesterday declared that the leg had to be amputated, were summoned once again in order that they ascertain in no uncertain terms that when medicine has no solution, hope still remains for those who cling to the power of that esteemed *tzaddik* who is no longer in this world.

"MY FOOT IS SET ON THE STRAIGHT PATH, IN ASSEMBLIES I WILL BLESS THEM" (Tehillim 26:12)

A similar incident happened to the Abir Yaakov's granddaughter Mrs. Simcha Chazan, daughter of his son R' Masud when she was but a young girl. Her legs were afflicted by an ailment that the doctors were unable to cure. A man from Yerushalayim who happened to be visiting their home had knowledge of *segula* properties of various medications and he attempted to help her. But this too did not improve her sorry state. With broken hearts, the family members came to terms with their tragedy and reconciled themselves to their daughter's illness and to the fact that would never be able to walk.

One day all the members of the family went forth onto the street to honor the king of Morocco who was about to drive by the streets of Tafilalet in his chariot. The proclamation inviting the inhabitants of the city to stand at the sides of the road and to cheer the royal entourage included a clear threat to anyone who was elsewhere at that time. It goes without saying that the entire family of Rabenu Masud, who was Chief Rabbi of the city, went out to the main boulevard leaving behind only the crippled daughter.

Alone at home, the young girl felt even worse, that her limitations were such that even when faced with such a threat, they had no choice but to leave her at home. With tears streaming down her cheeks she prayed to the Healer of all Flesh that He should have compassion on her desperate situation and that in the merit of her holy ancestors who walked closely with Hashem and lived righteous lives He would heal her suffering. Finally, totally spent from weeping she fell asleep.

In the midst of her sleep, the young girl heard a voice calling out to her. Before her eyes she saw a distinguished looking old man carrying a stick in his hand. He beckoned to her saying: "I am your grandfather – father of your father. I have heard your cries, for your anguish has reached my place in the upper world and I have come to

heal you. Hold on to my stick and arise from your bed". The young girl held on to the stick and stood on the ground. When she awoke she found herself standing on her own two feet.

A few moments later the royal ceremony in the streets of Tafilalet came to a close. The family, who rushed home in order not to leave the sick girl home alone for too long, were astounded to find her walking around as if she had never known any pain. While they were going forth to gaze at the face of a king of flesh and blood, she had merited the revelation of a king from the upper worlds, as it says: "Who are the kings? – the Rabbis" (see Gittin 62a).



"WRITE THIS AS A REMEMBRANCE IN THE BOOK" (Shmot 17:14)

THE WRITTEN TORAH

All his life Rabenu Yaakov had devoted every waking moment to study of Hashem's Torah with great toil and diligence. His books covering all areas of the Torah were the fruits of many years of labor and were his legacy that he passed down to future generations. Although the books were published only after his passing, the *batei midrash* of *Eretz Yisrael* and the Jewish community of Morocco warmly welcomed them and his Torah then began to spread and became known throughout the land.

From Rabenu Yaakov's books we can perceive his incredible genius in all areas of the Torah, his profound understanding of its secrets, and much more. In fulfillment of the words of *Chazal*: "One who gives a gift does so generously" (Baba Batra 53a), the Abir Yaakov's words of wisdom are presented in a comprehensible, sharp, and captivating style. It is rare to find other works of this nature whose thoughts and insights are presented in such an attractive manner.

His great-great-grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira relates that Rabenu Yaakov would dictate his thoughts to his faithful students who would record them precisely as he said them. Although this was his general practice, there were times when he deviated from this and recorded his insights himself.

The twelve books of his which remain with us have all been published. They encompass many areas of the Torah – commentary on the Torah using the four methods of derivation known as *pardes*; enlivening homily intended to awaken the hearts of the nation to repent and to better serve Hashem; *halachic* responsa, and very deep insights into *kabbalah*. He wrote other books which unfortunately became lost in one way or another. We mentioned earlier (see chapter "In the Inner

Chambers of the King"), that his commentary to the book "*Etz Chaim*" written by Rav Chaim Vital, was burned the moment he finished writing it. Initially this upset him greatly, until it was revealed to him from Heaven that this world is not worthy of its revelation and that the book has a special place reserved for it in Heaven. A unique orderly commentary on *Shas* was also lost. Similarly, the awesome work "*Shabbat Kodesh*" was in the hands of his son when he left for *Eretz Yisrael* to have it published, yet it mysteriously disappeared during the journey.

"A THIEF WHO CONFESSES IS NOT LIABLE"

(see Baba Kamma 64b)

The manuscripts of his books were almost always in his possession. When traveling for lengthy periods of time, these writings, which were very precious to him, were among the belongings he would pack for the journey. The following story, which took place during one of those journeys, sheds light on two areas – on how the Heavens safeguarded the manuscripts and on the Abir Yaakov's attitude towards having his works published and distributed. In the interest of presenting the story in its original manner, let us first describe the setting in which this story was told and passed down to our generation:

During the Baba Sali's first trip to *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5682 [1921-22] he visited the city of Tiberias[104]. There he met the Sages of the city to ask their approval for the publication of the works of his late saintly brother Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu.* They met at the

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104. It is worthwhile knowing the circumstances surrounding the Baba Sali's visit to Tiberias. It arose out of his meeting with the holy sage, R' Shlomo Alfandri in Jerusalem. Towards the end of their conversation, R' Shlomo asked the Baba Sali to bless him. We must remember that this holy sage was one hundred and seven years old while the Baba Sali was not yet 32. When the Baba Sali hesitated to fulfill the wish of this elderly sage, R' Shlomo said to him "David HaMelech said in Tehillim, 'Behold for so is blessed the man who fears Hashem' (Tehillim 128:4). In addition, our Sages comment on the verse 'One with a good eye will be blessed' (Mishle 22:9) - "Do not read it as 'will be blessed', but rather 'will bless'" (Sotah 38b). "Who is the one who is

home of the great sage R' Chaim Iluz, who was born in Tafilalet and who in his youth had had the privilege of viewing the holy countenance of Rabenu Yaakov. During the course of that meeting, the conversation turned to the subject of the Abir Yaakov and his sterling conduct. It was then that R' Chaim related the following story:

When he was twenty-six years old, R' Chaim was sent by the *Kollel* in Tiberias on a fundraising mission to the North African Jewish communities. In every city, when word got around that an emissary from the Land of Israel had arrived, people would come out in droves to welcome him and show him honor. A greeting such as this greatly encouraged the messenger, who was far away from his family, and helped him with his mission.

One of R' Chaim's stops was the city of Shkura. To his great disappointment, not only did very few of the local populace come out to greet him, but even those who did were mostly the simplest of people. The dignitaries of the city were not particularly interested in greeting the messenger sent from *Eretz Yisrael* by the Sages of Tiberias. Given his youth and determination, he became very angry and he uttered some curses. The local citizens, shocked by his manner, ran to the sage of the town, R' Masud Amara who in addition to being a great scholar, was well versed in *Kabbalah*. They told him what had

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worthy of blessing others? It must be a 'man who fears Hashem'. You are the most G-d fearing man in our generation and thus I wish that you bestow your blessing upon me ..."

Left with no choice, the Baba Sali was forced to overpower his humility and to reveal his greatness as he stood up to bless the holy sage. When word of this event spread throughout Yerushalayim – the Baba Sali fled from Yerushalayim and hid in Tiberias, to avoid the great flood of people that would converge on his house.

At that same meeting, the venerable sage, HaRav Shlomo Alfandri, asked the Baba Sali to find him a wife from the women of Morocco. The Baba Sail returned to Tafilalt and after a number of years thought of suggesting one of the great-granddaughters of the Abir Yaakov whom he deemed worthy. He sent the elderly sage a letter informing him of this. R' Shlomo, however, had passed away in the year 5690 [1929/30] at the age of one hundred and fifteen.

happened and asked him to pray on their behalf that no harm befall them as a result of the curse from the visitor from *Eretz Yisrael.*

When they finished telling their story, R' Masud Amara asked his assistant to bring R' Chaim to his home to discuss the matter further. Realizing that the young man was hot-tempered and very determined, the elderly Rabbi asked that they begin by apologizing in his name for not coming out to meet him, but in the last few years he had been having trouble with his legs and was not able to walk.

The Rav's assistant made many attempts at appeasement before he finally persuaded R' Chaim to accompany him to the Rav's home. The moment he crossed the threshold and beheld the Rav's shining face, R' Chaim was filled with awe and he approached the Rav with trepidation. The sage motioned him to sit and asked him whether he ever had the privilege of meeting the Abir Yaakov. R' Chaim answered him that, having been born in Tafilalet, as a child he had the privilege of seeing his countenance. R' Masud Amara responded: "First listen carefully to the following story that took place before my very eyes; then we will speak about you".

"One day when I entered the synagogue I noticed two poor people standing by the door, dressed very simply and holding meager bundles. I extended my hand in greeting and asked them from whence they came. The two responded that they came from the city of Tafilalet. When I inquired as to whether or not they knew the Rav of their city, R' Yaakov Abichazira, the pride of Moroccan Jewry and the leader of its community, one of them smiled and revealed to me that the other "poor" man was none other than Rabenu Yaakov, whom he was accompanying on his travels to gather funds for the Yeshiva and to assist those in need.

"Understandably, as word spread, the entire city bristled with excitement. The community leaders and benefactors vied with each other to host the great *tzaddik* whose name was already known

throughout the land. Rabenu Yaakov, for whom the local *gabbai* had already made arrangements at the home of a simple Jew, would not change his place of lodging and went with his host, accompanied by all the Sages of the city. Tables were set, pantries were opened, and all sorts of foods and delicacies were piled on the table that day for the lavish banquet that the Jews of Shkura set out in honor of their distinguished guest.

"The banquet concluded very late at night and the entire crowd dispersed, to their homes. The family went to bed and Rabenu Yaakov made his way to the room set aside for him. In the middle of the night, Jewish thieves broke into the home of the host and took the belongings of their distinguished guest. One of the bags contained a large sum of money for charity, which the Abir Yaakov had collected by going from city to city and village to village. The second case contained his *tallit* and *tefillin* as well as the manuscripts of his sacred works. In the early morning, Rabenu Yaakov discovered the theft as he was preparing for his prayers. His great anguish was soon felt beyond the walls of the house, and the entire city was in an uproar over the despicable act that had taken place in their midst. While an emergency appeal was immediately initiated by a number of industrious townspeople in an effort to recoup all the charity funds that had been stolen the night before, the pain of the loss of the manuscripts was too much to be borne.

"When the community leaders came to discuss this painful incident with Rabenu Yaakov, he told them not to worry so much about the stolen books. He saw the loss as a fulfillment of a prayer he had offered to the Creator of the Universe: "I request of Hashem that if the books I have written are worthy and good then let them remain with me, if not let them be lost". Now that the books were in fact lost, he viewed this as a sign from heaven that the books were not worthy of being accepted. They therefore had passed into the hands of the evil robbers.

"While he was conversing with the heads of the community, four notorious robbers of Shkura burst into the room, prostrated themselves before Rabenu Yaakov, and begged his forgiveness for having allowed their evil inclinations to get the better of them and stealing the holy guest's bags. They explained that from the moment they had had to earn their own living, they had chosen to become experts in this lucrative profession, citing their unique way of viewing *Chazal*'s description of money "Why is it called *zuzim* (the monetary currency of the time)? Because it moves (*zazim*) from one person to another!" (Bamidbar Rabba 27) The previous evening, they continued, while the townspeople were busy welcoming their distinguished guest, they had scouted out the alleyways and possible weak points to see where it would be easiest to enter the house without causing any damage and without any harm befalling them. It was very late into the night when they managed to break into the house and to take the bundle, which they assumed contained a great fortune.

"After leaving the house and making their way towards their lair in order to count the money and to organize it neatly in their wallets, they arrived at a stream that crosses through the city. The water in the stream is not more than twenty centimeters deep and the local populace would cross it with minimal effort. And they, who regularly passed that way, did not consider this stream to be difficult to cross. That night, however, as soon as they dipped their feet into the water, it became very turbulent, rising up to their necks and threatening to drown them. With great effort they managed to retreat to the river's banks and suddenly, before their very eyes, the river calmed down. They tried a second time to ford the river but once again the waters raged and the large waves threatened to drown them. After several futile attempts, they came up with the idea of leaving the stolen bag behind and crossing without it. To their great surprise, this time the waters did not rage. They now understood that their troubles were the punishment for having the audacity to misappropriate the *tzaddik*'s belongings. They were now returning with both the stolen property and an apology.

"The Abir Yaakov told them that he would only forgive them if they would take upon themselves to repent completely and to set aside time daily for Torah study. Under no circumstances were they ever to take money that belonged to others. He encouraged them, as a way of making amends for their evil ways, to support *Talmidei Chachamim* and to open their homes to Torah scholars. The robbers expressed complete regret and the desire to fulfill the words of Rabenu Yaakov, but they expressed regret that they had no money to support any Torah scholars, for they generally spent all that they earned from their profession of thievery. Rabenu gave them a gold *dinar* and told them: "If you fulfill my directive, this *dinar* will be blessed and from it you will amass great wealth that will remain with you and your descendants always."

R' Masud Amara concluded: "Even today the grandchildren of these robbers are people of great wealth." He then turned to R' Chaim Iluz: "If a man as holy as the Abir Yaakov was robbed on his arrival in our city, yet did not get angry at the robbers and certainly did not curse them, you, who are just a young scholar must learn from the ways of the *tzaddik* and forgo your own honor."

It was only many years later, just a few months before his passing, that the Baba Sali told this incident to those close to him. At that time the Baba Sali revealed to his family that when he returned to *Eretz Yisrael* in 5724 [1963/4] after a long absence, he discovered that his manuscripts covering all areas of the Torah, which were worth more to him than all the gold in the world, had disappeared.

After he finished telling the story, the Baba Sali added, "I know who took my writings and I know where they are. I can even point to the house, to the closet, and even to the corner of the closet where the writings are hidden. However, I do not wish to embarrass that person ... if these books are worthy and it is agreed in Heaven that these writings be publicized and that my insights be spoken about in the *beit midrash*, then this person will return them of his own free will".

APPROVAL FROM HEAVEN

To return to Rabenu Yaakov, he did not take even these events as clear testimony that the heavens approved the publishing of his books. His sons, who understood the value of his holy writings, wished to glorify the Torah by making them known among those who learn it. They persistently pleaded with their father to have his writings printed, yet he steadfastly refused.

His eldest son, Rabenu Masud relates in his introduction to Rabenu Yaakov's works that he once asked his permission to print the books. He describes his father's response as follows: "Listen my son! Bend your ears, listen to my words, and heed what I am about to tell you. My purpose in serving Hashem is not, G-d forbid, to make a name for myself. My only interest is to raise His Divine Spirit. Would that I could know whether my writing is accepted by His Glorious Kingdom". Rabenu Masud concluded the words of his father: "The best thing is for someone to write and walk humbly with his G-d. Only if, after his death, his works are accepted, then Hashem will agree to allow someone to be appointed to carry out this task."

For those who did not understand what Rabenu Masud was referring to, let us quote the explanation of his son the Baba Sali, who related what he had heard from his father when he asked Rabenu Yaakov if he could publish his works. The Abir Yaakov instructed him not to have the books published until after he had left this world, telling him that when he arrived in the Next World, he would see whether his books were accepted by the King of kings. If they were, he would come to Rabenu Masud in a dream and instruct him to publish the books and distribute them.

So it was that after his death, he revealed himself to his son, Rabenu Masud, and told him that he must hurry and publish his books, for they had been accepted by Hashem.

Only then, did his children begin the task of publishing his books.

SACRED WORK

One of the driving forces behind publishing the books was the Rabbi of Fez, the great Rav Avner Tzorfati zt"l, who knew the Abir Yaakov very well during his lifetime. On occasion the two would meet and enjoy discussing words of Torah and *kabbalah*. He was very much aware of Rabenu Yaakov's great worth and felt that it was the task of his generation to reveal to the world the light of Torah hidden in his writings. When Rabenu Yaakov's second son Rabenu Aharon visited Fez, the Rav spoke to him very adamantly about the importance of having the books published.

Rabenu Aharon hurried to his father's home in Tafilalet, where he found his father's writings and began work on having them published. He had no means of financing this major project so he saw no choice but to knock on the doors of supporters and to awaken their hearts to donate to this important cause. The other brothers too, headed by the eldest, R' Masud, united forces and worked on organizing the writings and raising the funds required to have them published.

Many pledges were given to Rabenu Masud, who promised salvation to the many people who volunteered to assist in this holy task. The response was so overwhelming that they were able to collect much more than the required funding. In his introduction, Rabenu Masud elaborated on his promise of salvation for all those assisting in this holy task, mentioning the names of several of the major donors and blessing them with mercy and salvation. He mentioned the Jewish community of Pigig, who were especially generous in this endeavor. Rabenu Masud wrote about them: "May Hashem reward their deed and may payment be in full from Hashem, nullifying any evil planned against them. Their righteousness shall endure forever. May Hashem bring them salvation and let each one be rewarded with what he needs, and may the words of our Sages be fulfilled: 'Borrow from me and I will repay you.' (Beitza 15b)"

When the fundraising was complete, the Abir Yaakov's sons made their way to *Eretz Yisrael* and settled there, devoting every possible moment to publishing the books. They had a hidden motive for doing this in that they wanted the books published only in the Land of Israel. Their sons and descendants also insisted on having the books published only in the Holy Land. Even the Baba Sali, when he began work on publishing the works of his brother Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu,* would do so only in the Land of Israel, crowning the books with the enthusiastic approbations of the Sages of *Eretz Yisrael.*

"THEY SHALL TEACH YOUR ORDINANCES TO YAAKOV" (Devarim 33:10)

En route to *Eretz Yisrael* in his efforts to have his father's books published, Rabenu Aharon made his way to the Abir Yaakov's grave in Dimanhor, Egypt. On the day of the anniversary of his passing, 20 Tevet 5681 [6th January 1921], he prostrated himself at the graveside and prayed from the depths of his heart to merit being able to settle in the holy city of Yerushalayim and to complete editing and publishing the books, so that they may see the light of day and cause their light to shine upon the nation.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Rabenu Aharon approached the home of one of the leading Sages of Jerusalem to ask for his approbation for the books. Deep in his heart he was hoping that this approbation would not only encourage people to purchase the books, thereby bringing blessing to their homes, but would also convince the other *Rabbanim* to join in giving their approbation for the publication of the Torah of the Rabbi of all the North African communities. Among his father's manuscripts that Rabenu Aharon brought with him, were responsa entitled "They Shall Teach your Ordinances to Yaakov". Rabenu Aharon wished for the great sage to peruse the responsa in order to see for himself the greatness of their author.

Upon leafing through the pages, the sage noticed that in one of the questions, the Abir Yaakov disagreed with one of the leading *halachic*



authorities of the previous generation. He summoned Rabenu Aharon and explained that he was unable to give his approval for the book's publication. The sage added that because of that particular ruling he would do his utmost to ensure that the other *Rabbanim* too should not lend their approval to publication of the books. He acknowledged that had it not been for that particular responsum, he would have given his approval. The fact that the response clearly contradicted the opinion of the leading *halachic* authority led him to change his mind and express his opposition to the publishing of the books in no uncertain terms.

Rabenu Aharon left him very disappointed and returned to his lodgings. Upon arriving at his host's, he was clearly very despondent. The hostess, seeing his worried expression, asked what was troubling him. Rabenu Aharon related to her in great detail all that had taken place in the home of the sage. The woman, who was very righteous and well aware of Rabenu Yaakov's greatness, calmed him with words of comfort. She insisted that he had nothing to worry about because his father was a holy man and would surely assist his son from heaven. She told him to desist from going out to ask for further approbations. "That Rabbi will come on his own to grant his approval", she said.

That night, Rabenu Yaakov came to the Rav in a dream and spoke to him as follows: "Why did you cause my son such pain when he came to you to ask for approbation for my book? Did you examine either me or that earlier authority to determine which of us had truly plumbed the depths of the Torah? You should know that because of all the Torah knowledge you have amassed, no harm will befall you. My manner has always been to bring good to the Jewish people wherever they may be. You had better, however, go to my son tomorrow and take back all that you have said today". The sage woke up from his dream, dripping with sweat and unable to fall asleep again.

When dawn broke, the sage summoned some of his disciples and asked that they bring Rabenu Aharon to him, for he wished to give

his enthusiastic approbation for his father's books. The students searched for a long time, as they had never met Rabenu Aharon and could not describe him. Eventually, they found him at the house of his host and invited him to accompany them to the Rav. When he arrived at the courtyard of the Rav's home, the sage came out towards him, begging his forgiveness, explaining that he had not realized what a great man his father had been.

That same day, the Rav convened his entire rabbinical court and wrote an enthusiastic letter of approval for the publishing of Rabenu Yaakov's books. Even the Sages of the city of Hebron and of Tiberias attached their approvals to the approbation of the great rabbinical court of Jerusalem, and in fact these are the approbations that grace Rabenu Yaakov's books.

These books, written with *Ruach HaKodesh* - Divine Spirit, are still available for all those wishing to satisfy a yearning thirsty soul and wishing to smell the fragrance of the Abir Yaakov's Torah. The books are filled cover to cover with lofty ideas bringing a holiness and fear of G-d to those who study them.

A handwritten responsa written by the Abir Yaakov



"THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF YAAKOV"

INTRODUCTION – THE GENERATIONS OF YAAKOV

The sudden passing of the Abir Yaakov left a vacuum in the lives of the Jewish community in Tafilalet. It was not only they who felt his loss, for our Sages have taught us: "When a righteous person is lost, he is lost to his generation" (Megilla 15a). The entire Jewish community of Morocco as well as the neighboring North African countries felt bereft by the passing of the *tzaddik*, the captain of their ship. Their leader was not only gone, but buried in a faraway land.

All eyes now turned towards his four sons, first and foremost to the eldest son Rabenu Masud, to take up the reins and fill this void. The four sons, however, had never seen themselves as saplings in their own right in the orchard of the generations, but only as branches sprouting from the great tree that was their father, with the desire that his glory and strength would continue to shade the community. All the sons took this task upon themselves equally, each one doing his share in creating a sense of continuity.

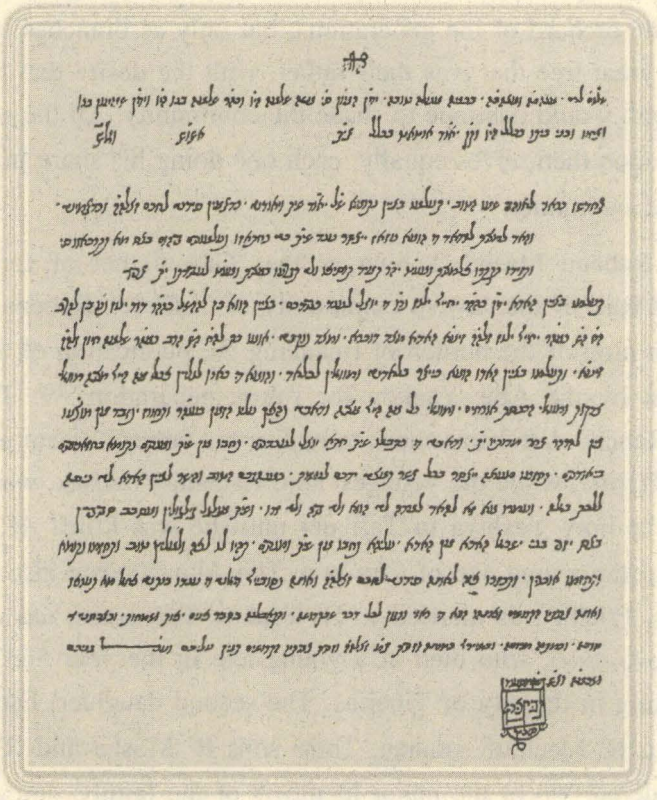
While Rabenu Masud, known as the "Grandfather of Law," was appointed Rav of the Jewish community of Tafilalet, Rabenu Aharon took upon himself the burden of financing the publication of the many books left by the Abir Yaakov for future generations.[105] The third brother, Rabenu Avraham, chose to realize his father's dream and settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, while the youngest son, Rabenu Yitzchak, was chosen to head the holy Yeshiva in Tafilalet until he was killed *Al Kiddush Hashem* at the young age of fifty-two. The Abir Yaakov also had two daughters. Pricha was married to R' Yaakov Turgeman, (the son of the Abir Yaakov's sister), who died at a young age in the year 5633 [1873] after settling in the city of Tiberias. The second daughter, Esther, was married to R' Machluf Adahan. Their sons R' Moshe and R' Yichye are considered two of the major members of the family, and a special

105. We elaborated on this in the previous chapter.

place is reserved for them in the history of the leadership of the Jewish community of Tafilalet.

Despite the fact that we know very little about their lives, the Sages of Morocco testified that all four sons were holy men who separated themselves from the excesses of this world. They were devoted to Torah and their integrity was obvious in their dealings with other people.

In order to retain the historical sequence of the annals of this illustrious family we will present in this chapter the few isolated stories, mainly about Rabenu Masud, that have been preserved.



A rare letter bearing the handwriting of Rabenu Masud

THE SON FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FATHER

THE ORAL TORAH

After fathering two daughters, the Abir Yaakov prayed to Hashem for a son who would continue his legacy. The first of his four holy sons, Rabenu Masud, was nicknamed by his youngest brother "the Ark of the Torah," since words of Torah were constantly on his lips, from the early days of his youth until he reached a ripe old age. In the enthusiastic approbation that the Sages of Jerusalem wrote for the Abir Yaakov's *Elef Bina*, a few words of praise were recorded for the sons involved in the publishing of the books. The following was written about Rabenu Masud:

"**These** sons of Yaakov were people of stature, pleasant in their ways, scholars, of sterling character, with infinite wisdom and understanding. The eldest son was lofty in character, vast in knowledge, and possessed great fear of Hashem."

His Torah insights were never published, apparently because of his preoccupation with leading his community. He had already assumed many of these duties during his father's lifetime because Rabenu Yaakov spent much time traveling to other communities in North Africa. He played an even greater role following his father's passing when he took over the leadership of the community and was appointed to head the courts of Tafilalet and the vicinity.

R' Moshe Turgeman, the Baba Si, who was considered one of the most important confidants of the Abichazira family, wrote the following about Rabenu Masud in his introduction to the book *Petach HaOhel* written by Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu*:

"**His** holy firstborn son is strong like a lion, champion in Torah, a king, the son of kings, presiding over all the courts in the city. Full

of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, he serves Hashem in truth and good faith. His sharpness and expertise encompass the Written Torah as well as *Mishna* and *Gemara*. The needs of Heaven were placed upon him, and he faithfully took up this burden, fulfilling all his tasks purely for Heaven's sake. It is for this reason that his brilliant insights, covering all the study methods of *pardes*, and his great overall knowledge as well as his brilliant depth of understanding were never recorded. His great involvement in the public good left him no time to put his thoughts into writing."

The little that does remain from the writings of Rabenu Masud are his *piyutim*, composed mostly in honor of the *Shabbat*. These brilliant and beautiful works, which can be found in the book *Yagel Yaakov*, held an honorable place at the *Shabbat* table of the Baba Sali and the extended family, as well as among many people of North African origin.

HIS FATHER AND RABBI WHO BROUGHT HIM INTO THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT WORLD

The relationship between Rabenu Masud and his father the Abir Yaakov was very close. An example of the total reverence Rabenu Masud had for his father is the fact that Rabenu Masud named his son, the Baba Sali, Yisrael, after his father, Yaakov. At the *Brit Milah*, he emphasized that he did not call his son by his father's exact name for fear that it may be considered even the slightest bit disrespectful. Once Rabenu Masud set the standard, the rest of his brothers followed suit and not one of the grandchildren carries the actual name Yaakov. Even among the great-grandchildren there is only one who carries the name of the Abir Yaakov.

In his early days, he learned Torah from his father under whose guidance he developed his wisdom and understanding. He once told his son the Baba Sali that after he felt that he had attained a certain level of expertise in the revealed part of the Torah, he asked his father



if he could help him gain entrance into the gates of the hidden Torah and guide him there as well. His father responded: "My dear son! The initial steps one takes in *Kabbalah* cannot be accomplished with a guide. Only after acquiring knowledge with great effort can one begin to hear *shiurim* and receive guidance from a Rav. Go, my son, and begin learning *Kabbalah* with great diligence, and only when I see that you have begun to acquire difficult concepts, will I begin to give you *shiurim* in the world of *Kabbalah.*

Rabenu Masud did as his father instructed him and put all his strength into his learning. One day, in his quest to understand the works of the Arizal, he approached his father with a very difficult question. The Abir Yaakov was very pleased with the question, for it showed the depth of his son's understanding. After he analyzed the question and properly explained what the Arizal was saying, he told his son: "From now on, we will study *Kabbalah* together on a regular basis." Father and son arranged to study *Kabbalah* at midnight — an auspicious time for learning and understanding the hidden part of the Torah.

His grandson, Rabenu Meir, related that the Abir Yaakov once had great difficulty understanding something in *Kabbalah.* However hard he tried to analyze it, he was unable to find a solution to this difficulty. In order to be able to concentrate on the question without disturbance, he locked the door and confined himself to his room for three days. During those three days he did not see a single person and did not eat or drink. The household members, who became aware of his sudden isolation, began to wonder why he had not appeared, but none of them — not even his sons — had the audacity to knock on his door, or even to touch the door handle.

On the third day, the Abir Yaakov came out of the room, his face shining. He summoned all his sons to participate in a festive *mitzvah* meal. Those present did not yet know the reason either for the confinement or for such great joy that warranted a festive meal on a

regular weekday. No one dared ask and they waited for him to reveal the great secret of the past three days. During the course of the meal, the Abir Yaakov turned to his son Rabenu Masud and asked him: "My son, why do you not ask me why I locked myself up in solitude for three whole days?" Rabenu Masud answered him with great reverence: "Who would have the audacity to ask our father regarding his actions? Does any one of us even attempt to understand?"

The Abir Yaakov related that during the course of his learning, a very difficult question had arisen on something written by the Arizal. Only after three days of solid concentration was he able to find a solution. When Rabenu Masud heard this, he asked his father what had eluded him. Only after he convinced his father that he would be able to understand the question did his father explain to him what it was that he found difficult.

Rabenu Masud went to his room and locked the door. Three hours later he emerged and came up to his father's room with a solution. The solution was none other than the answer it had taken his father three days and three nights uncover. The father was amazed at his firstborn son's clarity of understanding and how quickly he was able to grasp the concepts. Rabenu Masud, however, who viewed himself as a simple disciple thirstily drinking his Rav's words, replied:

"My holy father certainly remembers that all books, especially works of *Kabbalah*, are surrounded by external outer layers, which impede study and comprehension of the hidden Torah. My dear father, when he toiled to uncover the meaning of things, struggled with a hard outer layer that blocked the paths to understanding that section. Once father succeeded in resolving the difficulty, as a result of his hard work and concentration, the path was open once again to allow others to attain a clear understanding and to plumb the depths."

"HE WILL CHARGE HIS ANGELS FOR YOU" (Tehillim 91:11)

While his father was still alive, Rabenu Masud established a regular

learning session with one of his father's prime students, R' Shlomo Hayun zt"l. This arrangement was maintained for a very long period, during the course of which they developed a deep understanding of selected topics in all branches of the Torah, both hidden and revealed.

One day, upon returning from his learning, Rabenu Masud felt the presence of two great demons standing at the side of the road, attempting to inflict harm on passersby, and he was afraid to enter their vicinity. However, he quickly girded himself with courage from the spirit of his father and the belief in his holy father's prayers, which was with him constantly. He approached them and in his father's name demanded that they allow him to pass and not harm him in any way. When the demons heard him utter the name of the holy Abir Yaakov, they stepped aside and allowed Rabenu Masud to pass by in peace.

As he continued on his way, Rabenu Masud thought to himself, "I had the merit of my father, which empowered me to move those demons. The demons, however, are now waiting to harm other people passing by." Transforming thought into action, Rabenu Masud spun on his heel and returned to the same spot, saying to the demons: "I am not afraid of you at all. Now listen to me well: I instruct you to leave this place at once and if you do not, I will go to my father and ask him to totally remove you from all the worlds." Upon hearing Rabenu Masud's threat, they disappeared from the area.

When he returned home, he found his father waiting by the door. The Abir Yaakov greeted him with a father's blessing, congratulating him for having successfully warded off the demons. Because it was his father's powers that Rabenu Masud was using, Rabenu Yaakov was able to actually feel the entire battle against the demons while it was taking place.

THE RABBI'S ROBE

The power and strength of the Abir Yaakov was passed on to his children. The Baba Sali related this story:



From time to time the Abir Yaakov would distribute some of his belongings as a blessing as well as a token of remembrance to those close to him. One day, his eldest son, Rabenu Masud requested from him something he could keep as a souvenir. The Abir Yaakov approached the closet, took out an old robe that he had used many years before, and handed it to his son. When he sensed Rabenu Masud's disappointment at being given such an old article, he said to him: "My dear son, if you desire something new, I will give it to you. However, you should know that the item of clothing I have just given you is filled with blessing." Rabenu Masud listened to his father's words and took the old robe with great joy.

Many years later, a Jew arrived seeking the blessing of Rabenu Masud. He had been afflicted with a severe illness which the doctors had given up trying to cure. Rabenu Masud took the robe he had received from his holy father and gave it to the sick man, instructing him to wrap himself in it when he went to sleep.

The following morning, the man arose in perfect health, without any trace of his illness remaining.

A GOOD NOTE

Another incident related by the Baba Sali took place when the Abir Yaakov embarked on his final journey to *Eretz Yisrael*, a journey cut off in the middle by his sudden passing in Dimanhor, Egypt. He took leave of his family members, giving some of them mementos for protection and blessing.

One of his sons, who had not received anything, approached him as he was setting out and asked him if he could give him something for protection and blessing. The Abir Yaakov searched his belongings, took out a blank piece of paper, and gave it to his son, adding: "Perhaps one day you will be in need of a livelihood. This piece of

paper will help you earn a living in an honorable manner." The Abir Yaakov then embarked on the journey from which he never returned.

Later someone approached this son asking him to pray for a woman who had been in labor for several days and was now in grave danger. The son remembered the piece of paper and sent it to be placed upon the woman, thinking that perhaps the great merit of the Abir Yaakov would stand her in good stead and would save her during her time of danger. Within a short time, they came to inform him that the moment the piece of paper was placed upon her, she gave birth to a healthy son.

This incident became known throughout the city and from then on it became the local custom that every woman about to give birth would take this piece of paper to aid her in having an easy and painless delivery. The people of the town, realizing the power of the piece of paper, had tremendous gratitude and gave the son of the Abir Yaakov generous sums of money for making use of his piece of paper, earning him an honorable living as his father had promised.

MERCIFUL IN JUDGMENT

Following the passing of the Abir Yaakov, Rabenu Masud was nominated leader of the city. We do not know much about his leadership but from the testimony of his son the Baba Sali, it appears that he was very determined in his views and feared no-one. In addition, he would set aside a significant amount of his time to take care of the needs of the poor, making sure to fill their empty homes in a dignified manner, collecting funds and taking out loans for this purpose.

The Baba Sali was also known for his great efforts in the *mitzvah* of *tzdaka*, and would distribute huge sums to the poor, but he used to say, with great humility, that he did not come close to the level of his father. Rabenu Masud would go so far as to borrow money at interest

from non-Jews in order to give to the poor. He would take every step possible to improve their economic situation and to ease their daily burden.

Rabenu Masud was known as the "Grandfather of Law" because he conducted his court with a strong hand and was not afraid of anyone. It is important to note that his determination was not a result of hardness of heart, but rather of being meticulous to the utmost degree in all areas of *halacha* and their implementation.

BLESSINGS TO WITHSTAND THE SATAN

Even regarding the day-to-day leadership of the community, Rabenu Masud established very clear guidelines. In his public discourses, he emphasized the importance of educating children to a life of Torah and fear of Heaven. In private conversations with each member of the community, he discussed the individual's spiritual level and encouraged him to take more and more upon himself.

This period saw increasingly friendly trade relationship between Morocco and neighboring Algeria, characterized by an open-border policy. Many businessmen saw this as a way to increase their profits. Jewish merchants as well, who were involved in all areas of business, took advantage of these good times and made their way to Algeria every few weeks.

The Abir Yaakov, whose net was spread over the entire North African region, would describe Algeria as "the country where the Satan and his troops reside." To anyone embarking on the journey to Algeria he would stress that they must stand firm against the many trials they were about to endure, giving his word that whoever could withstand them would never be defeated by the Satan.

Rabenu Masud followed in his father's footsteps, requiring that all merchants traveling to Algeria swear not even to come near to places

of iniquity. This was at the beginning of French rule, when their corrupt culture had begun to spread throughout the land. A decline in values was felt even in the Jewish areas, mainly due to the influence of the "Alliance" schools belonging to the "כל ישראל חברים" — "All the People of Israel are Friends" organization. These schools became spiritual killing grounds. Anyone who did not agree to Rabenu Masud's terms did not receive his "Traveler's Blessing," and there was hardly anyone who dared embark on a journey without being accompanied by this blessing.

LET THE *SIDDUR* BEAR WITNESS

Innumerable stories abound regarding his holy work and genius. Unfortunately, there was no one available at the time to record these incidents for the benefit of future generations. Our main source of information is the few episodes recorded years later by the Baba Sali and his offspring. The following incident provides us with a taste of his holy conduct, which was beyond human comprehension:

One day, Rabenu Masud returned from one of his travels with a beautiful new *siddur*. His son, the Baba Sali, then a mere nine years old, looked through the *siddur* and was captivated by its bold and beautiful letters. He asked his father to allow him to pray from it. Rabenu Masud responded: "You should know, my son, that when I pray, my eyes do not budge from the *siddur* — I read every word of the prayers from inside the *siddur* without skipping a single letter. I fear that you will not use the *siddur* in the same way I do, and then the *siddur* will take me to task for having given it to someone who does not follow all my customs in prayer."

When the Baba Sali was persistent, promising to read every single letter inside the *siddur*, Rabenu Masud not only agreed to permit his son to use the *siddur*, but gave it to him as a gift. The Baba Sali used that *siddur* his entire his life, strictly adhering to his father's directive

even seventy and eighty years later. Members of the household testified that at times the Baba Sali would repeat parts of the prayer for fear that he may have inadvertently omitted a word.

A few days after Rabenu Masud gave this gift to his son, he said: "Well done! I asked the *siddur* today how you are praying from it and it answered me that it is very happy that I gave it to you as a gift, for you pray in it as you should, without omitting even a single word."

"HE GUARDS THE STEPS OF HIS DEVOUT ONES"

(Shmuel I 2:9)

When he took his leave from this world on the 12th of Iyar 5668 [13th May 1908], the entire community of Tafilalet escorted Rabenu Masud to his final resting place. The sight of tens of thousands of Jews silently accompanying their devoted leader of the past twenty-eight years created a feeling of jealousy among the gentiles.

In the book *Malchei D'Rabanan* it is recorded that the night following his burial, after the dispersal of the huge crowds, several non-Jews arrived at the cemetery, took his body out of the grave, and desecrated it. Morning arrived and the terrible act became known to the entire community, adding greatly to their grief.

The next day, Rabenu Masud revealed himself in a dream to his son Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu*, and told him not to be pained over what had taken place, for he was in need of a *tikkun*. He explained that among the people of the *Chevra Kadisha* who were involved in his *tahara* was someone who was guilty of a particular sin on that day. When that person touched Rabenu Masud's feet it caused his body to be defiled. The only way for him to have the defilement removed was to suffer such degradation.

The matter was checked into and every detail was found to be true.



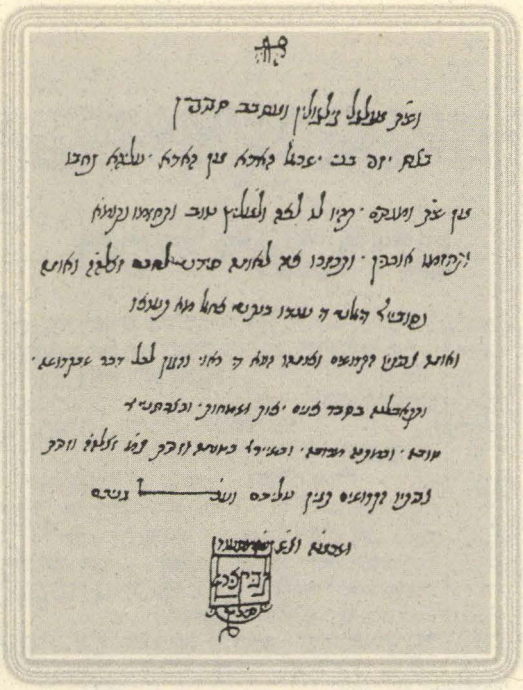
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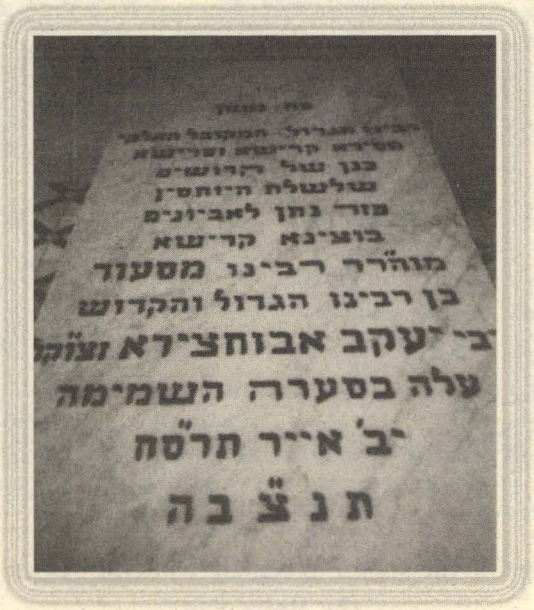
חס שער הסמים פרד"ס מלא מכל מוב אשר לא היה לעולמים -
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מאת כו **האדרא זוטא** למעלה רחם ופי
תפלות מלוקט **מהאבודרהם** זל"ל
ומחזור"ק למהר"ח הלנקאר ז"ל **והרד"ק**
ז"ל וכוונת התפלות ועתתק מס' **חסד"ל**
למהר"ח טוכייהנא זל"ל עפ"י **האר"י** זיע"א ופי' **קב**
ונק" על מסכת שבת הידות מוכן לפני כל חכם
לב להבין פירוש יבודקו ופי תפלה וידע להסיר לשולנו
אמנים ערומים - בכלל ברכה כל דיבים הרייבים לנו לקוחים
מקשר גודל לכמהר"ר **חיד"א** זל"ל ויותר מהמה מלוקטי
מספרים אחרים שהם ברכ"י מחב"ר
ופיו"כ זל"ה ומס"ך קח לך סמים - והלה מוסף סדר **תקון**
חצות לאה ותחל כהגן וכסורה להדריך עמנו מדי לילה
ללילה בעת קמים - ואחר הנ"ל עשיתי סדר **שועדים**
תרחמו לסופו עם כל כוונתיו אשר הם שם **חמד**
אלהים עשרים בקרוב לופן היותר נאה יאוכן ללולב
והקפות של כל יום והו"ר עם הקפו' ח' עברת לולב
הגדול כמהר"ר **חיד"א** זל"ל לדיק תמים - גם סדר **השוכ"א**
עם בקשה ברחמו לכל שבוע ושבוע מהרב הגו'
אשר הוכיח בכח ה' ולוחות **העיבור** בלופן היותר נאה
מחכמה גם לוח **הליקוט** לשנים יקשים
הימים - ומילה מכלהו שבחי שייתתיהר
בבתר תורה חי"ר מלוח הלוייתה ח' דרכו
החיוך והרמב"ם להיות מעורר
וכם לב בהעריכם לפניו בכל יום מקומים - גם תו
ימה עניים שבו"ת ומצ"ח וקברי הידועה מהבי"ר ך הכ
וסמכתי על הרוחה לותו מרחמו לסופו יכיר גדול וייהל
וזכות זה יזכו לבה להטוחה זו סילה - יהן שמו
ולו - יתן יחזור ויתן לכל חיים די עדו לאשר יחסר
הכנ' **אב"א** יס"ט בכמה"ר **מרדכי** זכ"ה

פה **ליוורנו** יע"א - שנת **ויהוה קרני** שה' לפק

The title page of the *siddur* given by Rabenu Masud to his son, the Baba Sali



A letter handwritten and signed by Rabenu Masud



The tombstone of Rabenu Masud

"BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IS THE DWELLING OF BROTHERS TOGETHER" (Tehillim 133:1)

"AARON YOUR BROTHER SHALL BE YOUR SPOKESMAN" (Shmot 7:1)

The Abir Yaakov's second son was Rabenu Aharon Abichazira. He became renowned mainly for the great efforts he put into editing and publishing his father's books (as we described in the chapter entitled "Write this as a Remembrance in the Book"). In addition, he worked side by side with his older brother Rabenu Masud in managing all the affairs of the community of Tafilalet. Besides all this, much of his time was also dedicated to traveling throughout the land collecting funds for the poor and needy. It is interesting to note that Rabenu Aharon, the one most involved in bringing his father's writings to publication, spent little time by his father's side. The great awe and reverence he felt whenever he would enter and leave his father's room prevented him from coming closer.

Most of us cannot begin to comprehend the fear and veneration the sons had for their saintly father, the Abir Yaakov. The following story illustrates how Rabenu Aharon's reverence for his father surpassed that of the other children:

Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira *shlit"a* relates to us that the privilege of lifting the *Kiddush* cup and placing it in his father's right hand belonged to Rabenu Aharon. This was his privilege from the days of his youth until the end of his father's life. Each time he lifted the cup, his hand would shake so much that most of the contents would spill out before it even reached the Abir Yaakov's hand.

A quick calculation will reveal that he served his father for thousands of *Shabbatot*, yet this feeling of fear never diminished.

Rabenu Aharon did not merit a long life. He left this world on 21 Elul 5661[5th September 1901] while traveling in the village of Tilwat in the Galava region, and it is there that he is buried.

During the summer of 5742 [1982], a man flew especially to *Eretz Yisrael* to the Baba Sali's home in order to testify regarding the following miraculous act, which took place at Rabenu Aharon's gravesite and which he himself witnessed.

In the village of Tilwat lived a wealthy non-Jewish farmer who owned many flocks of sheep. One day a very unusual plague broke out in one of the flocks, killing many animals. Veterinarians summoned from afar could not find the cause of the plague that continued to wreak havoc. In desperation, fearing that very soon the entire flock would die, the farmer sought the advice of the local sheikh. He brought a heavy wallet with him and placed it on the sheikh's table as "redemption money" for himself and his sheep.

The wicked sheikh, a known Jew-hater, used the man's frustration to humiliate the Jewish people. As if letting him in on a secret, he whispered to the farmer that a tried and tested method was to take a bone from a Jewish grave and burn it until nothing remained. The ashes should then be taken and sprinkled over the flock, resulting in an immediate end to the plague. The man accepted the sheikh's advice.

That same day before nightfall the man and his wife went to the small Jewish cemetery at the edge of the village in order to remove a bone from one of the graves. By the dim light of the setting sun, the man made his way between the graves and elected to remove a bone from the grave of Rabenu Aharon.

The moment they attempted to desecrate the grave, the hands of the man and his wife became stuck on the grave and they were unable to remove them!

In great shock, the two screamed for help; their cries tore the silence of the cemetery but nobody heard. Next morning, a search party arrived at the edge of the cemetery, and discovered the couple stuck to the grave. The man showed no signs of life, while his wife was unconscious and in critical condition. With great difficulty they managed to free the two from their bondage. The husband was buried in the non-Jewish cemetery across the way while the wife was hospitalized not expected to live.

When the Moroccan eyewitness arrived at the Baba Sali's home in *Eretz Yisrael* to tell him about the episode, he could not say whether she had recovered or succumbed, for her condition was still critical when he left Morocco.

"ONE WAS ABRAHAM AND HE INHERITED THE LAND" (Bereishit Rabba 30)

While three of the Abir Yaakov's four sons continued to lead the Jewish community of Tafilalet in Morocco, the third son, Rabenu Avraham, chose to settle in the Land of Israel. In the year 5633 [1873], at the age of 32, Rabenu Avraham asked his father's permission to move to the land of our forefathers, for which he yearned so greatly. Being well aware of his father's great longing for *Eretz Yisrael*, Rabenu Avraham decided to be the *chalutz* of the family and be the first one actually to make the journey, with the rest to follow. His father, however, as we know, never realized his dream of settling in *Eretz Yisrael*, for he departed from this world while en route to the Holy Land.

On arriving in the Land of Israel, Rabenu Avraham went to live in Tiberias, where HaGaon R' Eliyahu Iluz from Tafilalet had settled as a young man many years earlier.

As was his stance throughout his life, Rabenu Avraham refused to accept any rabbinical position, preferring to isolate himself and devote

all his time and energy with unbelievable diligence to Torah. Even though he held no formal position, his home became a haven for Torah scholars eager to see him and hear his words. Many travelers from North Africa were welcomed at his open door, as were the poor and needy in search of a meal.

In spite of his incredible humility and the great effort he made to conceal himself, his pious acts were known and spoken about by everyone. Furthermore, when the books of his father, the Abir Yaakov, were published, adorned with approbations and distributed throughout Jewish communities all over the world, Rabenu Avraham's name became even better-known, as many flocked to his home wishing to meet the son of the great *tzaddik*.

The following story recounts one of Rabenu Avraham's miracles:

One year, on the day before the anniversary of the passing of the saintly *tanna* R' Shimon bar Yochai, the members of the household were busy preparing a large celebration. That day, one of the most renowned scholars in Tafilalet, R' Yichye Lechayani zt"l[106] arrived in Rabenu Avraham's home. He had come from Morocco especially to participate in the events taking place at the holy grave of R' Shimon in Miron. He had broken his journey in Tiberias in order to meet Rabenu Avraham, whom he knew from having spent time in his father's home in Tafilalet.

Rabenu Avraham was overjoyed at the arrival of his guest who had brought regards from the Tafilalet branch of the family. They spent a great deal of time discussing happenings in Tafilalet. In the midst of their conversation, the guest rose and apologized for having to cut the

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106. For a long time R' Yichye Lechayani resided in Alexandria in Egypt, where he served as the scribe of the religious courts of the city. The Baba Sali stayed in his home, when he arrived in Egypt to visit the grave of his grandfather, the Abir Yaakov while en route to *Eretz Yisrael* in the year 5682[1921-22].

conversation short, as he had to hurry in order to reach Miron that evening for the anniversary of R'Shimon bar Yochai's passing, which was the main purpose of his trip to *Eretz Yisrael*. Rabenu Avraham tried hard to persuade him to remain in his home and to observe the occasion with the elders and sages of Tiberias, who were planning to arrive during the course of the night. R' Yichye, who had spent much time and money in order to be at the holy grave, refused. Even when Rabenu Avraham told him: "R' Shimon bar Yochai will be with us this evening," he was not swayed.

When they parted, Rabenu Avraham's face reflected his regret at his guest's decision. R' Yichye set out for Miron; on the road, he pondered Rabenu Avraham's unusual insistence that he remain in Tiberias. He began to feel guilty for having refused the son of the Abir Yaakov, and he slowed his pace until finally he stopped, turned around and made his way back to Tiberias.

It was late at night when R' Yichye arrived at Rabenu Avraham's home. Rabenu Avraham was filled with joy and immediately invited him to join the sages and *Kabbalists* seated around his table, studying the *Zohar*. At daybreak, they immersed themselves in the *mikveh* and prepared themselves for *Shacharit*. As soon as they had completed their prayers, bad news arrived from Miron: the great crowds and press of thousands trying to reach the grave had caused one of the walls around the grave to collapse. Many people were crushed to death while others were severely injured. This information shook the Jewish community of Tiberias, and shocked the guest from Tafilalet, who had intended to participate in the festivities, now so abruptly terminated.

While the guest was still in a state of shock, Rabenu Avraham told him: "You should realize that had you remained the night in Miron, you would have been counted among the victims. It was this that I tried to prevent from happening."

R' Yichye responded with a question: "Why did the Rav not explain this to me? It would have saved us all the arguing and the distress."

"I expected you to ask that," responded Rabenu Avraham, "but you must realize that a man does not have the right to reveal to others all that he is shown. Without permission, I was unable to inform you of this. I did, however, feel an obligation to try to talk you out of your trip in any way possible."

Rabenu Avraham departed this world in Tiberias on 11 Adar I 5673 [18th February 1912] and was buried in the local cemetery.

FOURTH IN HOLINESS

The youngest son of the Abir Yaakov was Rabenu Yitzchak. It is accepted among the Abichazira family that he was named for the Arizal, since his father discovered within him a spark of the soul of the Arizal. From his early youth, as he grew and acquired more Torah, the lad felt an attraction towards study of the hidden areas of the Torah, in spite of his father's known disapproval of his sons' entering the gates of inner wisdom too soon. However, given that his youngest son displayed an uncanny ability to study the hidden areas of the Torah, Rabenu Yaakov gave him the option of beginning at an earlier age. Over the next few years, Rabenu Yitzchak became known as such a great expert in this area that it was said of him that he was as fluent in *Etz Chaim* and *Shmone Shearim* as he was in the *Ashrei* prayer.

The great esteem in which his father held him can be seen from the following incident, which was transmitted by eyewitnesses:

The incident took place on the night after *Yom Kippur* 5628 [1872], when the people of Tafilalet, led by the Abir Yaakov, went out to bless the new moon. Thick clouds covered the skies and hid the moon from view, to the great surprise of all those present, who had never before seen such a phenomenon. After a long wait, the Abir Yaakov summoned his young son, who was a mere eight years old at the time, and asked him to order the moon to reveal itself.

The child hurried to fulfill the wish of his saintly father and gazed upward, ordering the moon to reveal itself. The entire congregation was amazed to see that within minutes all the clouds had dispersed, revealing the moon in all its glory. From that point on, people closely followed the development of the boy, realizing that he was destined for greatness.

From his youth, Rabenu Yitzchak used to seclude himself in his attic and study the holy Torah, being satisfied with little and spending much of his time involved in *tikkunim.* In spite of his almost total abstinence from this world, the family was surprised to discover his ability to drink. He would consume an incredible amount of *machya* (*araq*) daily, but the drink had no negative effects on him whatsoever. He had developed this habit as a youth when he would take a daily dose of *machya,* which he claimed helped him concentrate on his learning.

Many family members did not look favorably upon what they saw as his reckless consumption of alcohol and begged him to give up his habit. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Since all attempts at reasoning proved futile, they decided to wean him from the *machya* by force. They took away the ladder leading up to his attic in order to be able to monitor what entered and left the room and the amount of *machya* that he was consuming. When Rabenu Yitzchak became aware that his free access had been removed, he immediately realized what their motivation was and prayed to Hashem to supply him with what he lacked.

In the house next door to the Abir Yaakov lived a woman who was a great expert in producing *machya*, which she distilled from the finest of dates, grown in her own garden. Her *machya* had earned a reputation for superior quality, and its sale provided her with a comfortable living. It was precisely during those days that the batches of *machya* that she produced did not meet her usual high standards.

Surprised at her failure and praying to Hashem for future success, she vowed to set aside *machya* for Rabenu Yitzchak, the *tzaddik* who lived next door to her and who learned day and night, drinking large quantities of *machya* to fortify himself.

The next production of *machya* once again met her high standards. She immediately filled a pitcher and made her way towards the entrance to Rabenu Yitzchak's attic. To her great surprise, the access to his room had been removed and it seemed impossible for her to fulfill her vow. The woman began calling out Rabenu Yitzchak's name until finally her voice reached his inner chamber. Rabenu Yitzchak put his head out the window and asked his neighbor how he could be of assistance. When he heard her wish, he instructed her to place the drink on the windowsill of her attic, within his arm's reach. He added that if she really wished to continue producing high quality *machya* she must never forget to place a pitcher of the drink on her windowsill.

While family members continued to rejoice over their success in preventing the *machya* from reaching Rabenu Yitzchak, the woman continued to provide whatever he needed. Only at a much later date, when the woman ran out of pitchers and came to collect her empty containers from Rabenu Yitzchak's attic, did it become clear to all that Heaven had provided him with this large quantity of *machya*, and they had better not intervene further.

During the next few years, Rabenu Yitzchak's mastery over all areas of the Torah became well known. He assisted Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu* in running Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, spending much time fundraising throughout the land. Between travels he would sit in the *beit midrash* where many family members would come to learn from him, among them the Baba Sali, who always had fond memories of him and would often speak of him. Even when the Baba Sali took over as *Rosh Yeshiva*, he continued to spend much time with his beloved uncle and served him the way one serves a *talmid chacham*.



For five years the two of them set aside time nightly for in-depth learning, completing the entire *Shas* with the commentaries of *Rashi*, *Tosafot*, and the Maharsha. Years later, the Baba Sali would point out that among the things he learned from his uncle was not to tire while studying Torah. In spite of his busy schedule and leadership responsibilities, he never appeared weary while learning. The Baba Sali used to say: "I would become tired, while he managed not to, despite his being several years my senior."

Rabenu Yitzchak published works on all areas of the Torah, many of which became commonplace in the *beit midrash*. Among his books were *Elef Magen*, a commentary on *Psukim* of *Tanach* organized according to the order of the *Aleph-Bet*; *Lev Tahor* on *Midrashim*; *HaShabbat HaGadol* containing references to all the *mitzvot* — Rabbinic and Torah — alluded to in the word שבת; *Zevach Tzedek* discussing the laws of ritual slaughtering; *Shaarei Bina,* a commentary on *Shir HaShirim*; *Keter Torah* containing discussions on the *Drush* level; and *Sharvit HaZahav* containing deep *pilpulim* on topics in *Shas*.

One of his students who had lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, R' Yoseph Amsalem, related what he observed in Rabenu Yitzchak's *sukkah*:

Every night of the *Sukkot* festival he would conduct a great feast in honor of the *Ushpizin*. On the second night, the *Ushpizin* of Yitzchak Avinu, the joy and festivities would extend beyond that of the other nights.

During one of the feasts, after inviting the *Ushpizin* and washing his hands, Rabenu Yitzchak held the bread with both hands and was about to cut it. Yet he merely sat holding it, with a smile on his lips. This spectacle lasted some time, while those present could not understand the smile or the lengthy pause between washing his hands and cutting the bread. Only after several minutes did he slice the bread and begin to eat.

Those close to him expressed their astonishment at the long delay before he recited the blessing over the bread. Rabenu Yitzchak answered: "What could I do, when I was confronted with the sight of the seven *Ushpizin* entering our *Sukkah* with smiles on their faces, expressing satisfaction at our feast? I was unable to do anything else except smile with them. Only when they stopped smiling was I able to recite the blessing."

At times, Rabenu Yitzchak was forced to act strictly, as did the other family members, towards anyone who veered from the proper path. He feared no one and truth was all that mattered to him.

During one of his travels, he was a guest in the home of a Jew who conducted a lavish meal in his honor. Among the invited guests was the city's community leader. It was very late and the leader had not yet arrived, whereupon Rabenu Yitzchak ordered that the meal begin without him. The host, unable to disobey his guest, tried at first to explain that the community leader was an uncompromising individual who would not look kindly on this affront to his honor; it would have been better not to invite him than to invite him and begin without him. Rabenu Yitzchak would not give way and insisted that everyone wash their hands and take their seats at the table.

The leader arrived only as the meal was ending and was surprised to find his "subjects" showing a degree of independence by having eaten without him. Before the host even had a chance to utter the apology that was ready on his lips, Rabenu Yitzchak stood up, cursed the community leader with harsh and disparaging words, and ordered him to leave immediately. The leader, who was not accustomed to such public humiliation, turned around and left. Those present froze, frightened of the community leader's raging temper. Rabenu Yitzchak, however, continued eating as if nothing had happened.

The following day, the host expressed his sorrow for what had taken place the day before and asked for advice on how to appease the



leader. Rabenu Yitzchak responded: "I do not know what you are speaking about. There is no need to appease him, for not only did I not say anything disparaging to him, I did not even realize that he had entered the room. At the same moment as he entered, an angel of destruction came into the room; these words were the only way to chase him out — otherwise he would have disrupted our *mitzvah* feast. You must understand that when a person sins, he creates an evil angel which attempts to take revenge and harm him. Hashem, in His great compassion, does not permit the angel to harm the one who created him, for perhaps he will repent. If he does not repent, the angel will take revenge on him one day. It would therefore stand to reason that the head of the community had arrived at the festive meal from a place of sin and this angel of destruction accompanied him in the threatening manner that I saw."

Upon hearing Rabenu Yitzchak's words the host arose and went to the community leader's office in order to placate him over what had taken place the night before. As he began speaking, the leader interrupted him, saying: "You have no need to apologize for what Rabenu Yitzchak said. He is a holy man with eyes that see great distances. He had the power to detect that at that moment I deserved to be degraded. I have no complaints over your having begun without me."

Rabenu Yitzchak's incredible life came to an abrupt end during one of his travels on behalf of the Yeshiva.

As he approached the entrance to the town of Tolal, a group of bandits lay in wait for him at the roadside. They spent most of their time robbing travelers, caring only for money impervious to the terrible sin of taking their victims' lives.

Rabenu Yitzchak was accompanied on this journey not only by his faithful assistant, but by an armed bodyguard. The bodyguard fought with the bandits, who fled to the forest without the money. Tragically,

during the exchange of fire, Rabenu Yitzchak was shot and died on 14 Shevat 5672 [2nd January 1912], at the age of fifty-two. He was buried in the village outside which he had been murdered and his assistant brought the terrible news to the family in Tafilalet.

His son R' Abba zt"l, and his grandson R' Yitzchak, who lived in Haifa, took his place and they too became well-known for their miraculous conduct, with many coming to their homes seeking their advice and blessing.



ATERET ROSHENU

There are times when a person is considered "a *tzaddik* in his generation"; that means, only when compared with the other people of his generation. A higher level is when one's piety is measured entirely by objective standards and not compared with one's environment, carrying the accolade of *tzaddik* even beyond "his generation". The strength of such righteousness endures forever and is valued highly even when compared to the *tzaddikim* of generations gone by.

Thus, even among the illustrious Abichazira family, a family which produced generations of saintly people devoted to the ways of Hashem, a special place was held for this grandson of the Abir Yaakov – Rabenu David Abichazira, may Hashem avenge his blood. During his lifetime he was referred to as "Baba Du", and following his death *al Kiddush Hashem* he was given the appellation "Rabbi David *Ateret Roshenu*" - "Our Crowned Leader".

His brother's grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a points out that even in his lifetime, he was already referred to as *Ateret Roshenu*, because of his sterling character and lofty status, which were beyond human comprehension. In the writings of one of Rabenu Meir's close friends, we find these words: "Rabbi David *Ateret Roshenu* was the giant of the family ... In spite of the fact that he was not the eldest, all would yield to him because he was in fact the greatest of them all."

About someone who was considered the crown of *tzaddikim*, whose name people were afraid to even mention, we can understand that an attempt to sketch his character is not only brazen, but a clearly impossible mission. It is only in order to make the next generation aware of the glory of his esteemed leadership and his self-sacrifice to atone for and save the Jewish nation that we are obliged to brace ourselves, choosing our words with the utmost care, to devote a chapter to the glorious yet enigmatic life of Rabbi David – *Ateret*

Roshenu. We do this in the clear knowledge that the mystery remains many times greater than that which is revealed.



THIRD IN HOLINESS

"THE CROWN OF ELDERS IS GRANDCHILDREN"

(Mishle 17:6)

Some of the holiest people came from Tafilalet. When a new light began to shine with the birth of a son to the Abichazira family, the entire city would rejoice. Their joy was not only an expression of genuine happiness for the esteemed family which they all revered, but was also due to the knowledge that Hashem had now planted a new sapling in His orchard.

A great light was revealed in the home of the Abir Yaakov when his grandson, the son of his son Rabenu Masud, was born. The newborn child was named David. The hearts of the entire Jewish community filled with delight upon seeing a new link forged in the chain of this holy dynasty and for the holy grandfather who merited seeing a grandchild. In the years to come, the Abir Yaakov would be privileged to see his grandchildren involved in Torah study and performance of *mitzvot*.

David, the firstborn son of Rabenu Masud, was born in the year 5626 [1866] at the pinnacle of his grandfather's leadership. These were prosperous years for the Jewish community of Morocco, which was completely under the leadership of the Abir Yaakov. His house was the "peak of the mountain", that the entire community looked to for guidance and to hear the word of Hashem.

The young man was raised on the knees of his saintly grandfather. From the holy spirit that permeated that household, young David absorbed and mastered the ability to sit and learn diligently and to delve into all areas of the Torah. From a very tender age, all who saw him could discern that everything he did was consistent with the environment in which he was reared. During those years he loyally served his saintly grandfather from whom he learned very much as he

did from his father Rabenu Masud. If from his early days he was already known as "a cemented cistern that loses not a drop," (Avot 2:11), as he became older he acquired the accolade "a spring growing stronger and stronger" (ibid.) who is able to produce his own insights. He accomplished this with great diligence and many hours of toil.

Following the Abir Yaakov's passing in the year 5640 [1880], Rabenu Masud assumed leadership of the community and the Yeshiva. This meant that David, at the age of fourteen, went from being the leader's grandson to being the firstborn son of the Rav. Although this meant that his father's house bustled with life and that all communal matters were now discussed and decided upon there, he spent little time on those affairs because his heart and soul yearned for nothing more than Torah study. Days and nights he would spend in a corner of the *beit midrash* pursuing his learning, making the Torah his eternal acquisition. Whatever he acquired remained ingrained and neatly filed in his mind, as we noted: a "cemented cistern that loses not a drop."

During the years when his father Rabenu Masud led the Jewish community of Tafilalet, Rabenu David devoted all his energy to learning Torah and with great diligence he was able to conquer mountains. Together with this, he honored his father in a way that went far beyond what anyone would expect of a son.

The following incident recalled by his brother the Baba Sali is indicative of just how much honor he accorded his father.

One day a woman arrived in Netivot with her son, already a young man, seeking the counsel of the Baba Sali. When it was their turn to enter the room, the mother poured out her troubled heart to the *tzaddik*, bewailing the fact that her son did not honor his father and mother the way he should. She thought that perhaps the *tzaddik* could give him some encouragement and guidance in the proper way to lead his life and relate to his parents. The Baba Sali listened attentively to the

mother's request and responded quietly: "If I had a mother I would carry her on my shoulders and shout for joy".

This was enough to cause the young man to cover his face with his hands and to burst into bitter tears. He turned to his mother, begging her forgiveness for all the pain and anguish he had caused her over the years. The Baba Sali, however, had not finished. He placed the young man next to him and began telling stories from his youth, about how he and his brother had faithfully honored their father Rabenu Masud.

Rabenu Masud was once in terrible pain and he fretted about it to his sons. When Rabenu David heard his father complaining, he asked him: "My dear father, why do you complain so much?" When Rabenu Masud heard his son speak to him with a slight taint of criticism, he responded "Until this moment I had a diamond in my possession, a saintly son such as yourself ... I have now lost that diamond!"

Rabenu David, upon hearing his father's words, trembled with fear. He was so shaken that he took upon himself to leave his father's home for the period of an entire year during which time he secluded himself and would not speak to anyone, like a person ostracized by his community. At the end of the year of isolation, Rabenu David came to the home of the local ruler, a man who was very close to his father, and asked him if he would go to his father and beg forgiveness on his behalf for having spoken to him in such a disrespectful manner. The ruler, who had already heard of Rabenu David's seclusion and the reason behind it, hurried to the home of Rabenu Masud with the message from his son Rabenu David. Upon hearing the ruler's words, Rabenu Masud replied: "I always knew how great my holy son was – a true shining diamond whose value cannot be weighed in gold. Tell him that I forgive him and that he is welcome to return."

Meanwhile Rabenu David, trembling with fear, waited in the ruler's house, to hear his father's reaction. Upon receiving the message with

his father's words, he hurried to his father's home. He entered the house, crawling on his knees to where his father was seated. He approached his father with tears streaming ceaselessly down his cheeks, took a knife out from his robe and handed it to his father saying "Here father, I am ready to go to the slaughter if that is your wish ..." Upon hearing his son's words, Rabenu Masud rose from his seat, took him in his arms, and showered him with kisses in an amazing demonstration of love.

"And now", said the Baba Sali, concluding his story to the young man seated next to him, "you should be filled with joy at the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring your parents. Promise me that you will change your ways and honor your parents, and in exchange I will bless you with all good".

"WHO TAUGHT THE ORDER OF THE DAY" (Yoma 14b)

Rabenu David's busy day was accurately described by the great sage R' Machluf Fadida zt"l of Morocco, in his introduction to the book *Petach HaOhel*" as follows:

"His work was holy, sincere, with all of his intentions directed only towards our Father in Heaven ... this was his holy manner ... he had no connection to the vanities of this world. At a certain point he would eat, not to satiate himself, but in a spirit of holiness and purity and only for Heaven's sake; he would eat only what was necessary for survival. He recited his blessings as if he were counting precious pearls.

He would then arise like a lion and begin learning. He lit up the dark nights by devoting them only to learning. The Torah would never cease from his lips until he was finally overcome with sleep. His sleep was of a temporary nature with the intent only of garnering sufficient strength to serve the Creator.

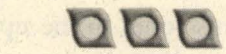
He would then arise with even greater strength. At midnight he would recite *Tikkun Chatzot* with tears and lamentations. After completing the *tikkun* he would study the works of the Rashb"I and then arrive at the *beit midrash* and continue learning until the morning hours.

He would then make his way to the synagogue in great fear and trepidation. He would enter his room in the upper chamber, where his "words drip[ped] flowing myrrh" (Shir HaShirim 5:13) like one of the Seraphim. He was a "pleasing composer of the songs of Israel" (Shmuel II 23:1) whose words were "sweeter than honey and drippings from the combs" (Tehillim 19:11). With great devotion and concentration: "stronger than a lion ('Ari')" (Shoftim 14:8), he would invoke the intentions and concentrations of the Ar"I. His awe and fear were so great that they caused his knees to tremble.

"Who has seen such as this, who has heard such as this" (Yeshayahu 66:8), "to behold the sweetness of Hashem" (Tehillim 27:4), "his bones" did not "shudder" (Iyov 4:15), without "trembling gripping his flesh" (Iyov 2:6). He would "serve Hashem truthfully and innocently taking shelter in the refuge of His Wings" (Tehillim 61:5). When he had finished, he was brought a small amount of food to eat. He would sanctify himself by refraining even from that which was permitted to him. How good was his portion, how good was his lot; he was able to conquer his desires, withdrawing his hand in the middle of eating. His levels of piety and separation were too great to describe in words. "Moshe was meritorious and influenced the masses, Moshe spoke correctly; (Note: this possibly refers to the *Gemara* in which Rava is referred to by Rav Safra as Moshe to denote that he is the leader of the generation) he would pursue charity and despised dishonestly obtained money; he was pious and his words were pious; he supported the *Rabbanim* with large sums. He would strengthen the weak by reaching deep into his pocket. Blessed is he who was sanctified by the heavens with great charm.

Words cannot describe it at all; the best I can do is to tell you: 'Go and see for yourself, his presence and fragrance is felt in all four corners'".

This praise, written by R' Machluf Fadida, is one of the shorter eulogies that were said and written about Rabenu David.



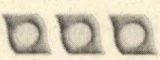
"SEEING IS GREATER THAN HEARING"

The following story, which took place when he was only thirty-seven years old, serves as testimony to Rabenu David's level of holiness.

The incident took place shortly after his younger brother, the Baba Sali, became *Bar Mitzvah* and decided to take upon himself *taanit hafsaka*, fasting from one *Shabbat* to the next.[107] He did not consult any of his family members and did not ask for anyone's permission. He kept these fasts secret, for it is better that self-imposed acts of separation from this world be carried out in private.

On Friday, towards the conclusion of the fast, he went to immerse himself in the *mikveh* in honor of the *Shabbat*. When he emerged from the *mikveh*, he met his older brother Rabenu David. With his crystal clear, deeply penetrating eyes, Rabenu David was able to discern that his younger brother was now completing a *taanit hafsaka*. He became very angry with him, maintaining that he was very young and had not yet sinned. He had no right to involve himself in such severe fasts; instead he should study Torah in peace and tranquility. He then instructed him not to take such fasts upon himself until he becomes an adult.

The Baba Sali tried to deny the matter, as if he did not know what his older brother was speaking about. Rabenu David, however, cut him off in mid-sentence, saying: "Do not argue with me ... when I look at you, I see everything".



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107. In the books of *Kabbalah*, *taanit hafsaka* is viewed as one of the greatest '*tikkunim*'. Although it involves fasting "only" from the conclusion of one Shabbat until the beginning of the next, one who undertakes this fast is considered as if he fasted 65,600 hours!

"A MAN OVER THE ASSEMBLY"

PATHS OF LEADERSHIP

The passing of his father Rabenu Masud in the year 5668 [1907-08] left the community orphaned, bereft of its loyal shepherd who had taken leadership upon himself, guiding his flock on the proper path. It was time for Rabenu David to accept the burden of command upon himself. Leadership to him was more than simply a title without obligations. Being the leader, in addition to shouldering the burdens of the entire community, meant undertaking demanding and time-consuming tasks, such as teaching in the Yeshiva established by the Abir Yaakov, judging and rendering the final decision in the more difficult cases in the Rabbinical courts of Tafilalet, and creating an atmosphere of peace among the litigants.

Following in the footsteps of his saintly ancestors, Rabenu David saw supporting the poor as an integral part of the obligation of the Rav of the community. He worked tirelessly to lighten their suffering and to assist them through difficult periods in their lives. He would provide them with monetary aid as well as encouraging and soothing words. A cousin with whom he was very close, R' Yichye Adahan (son of R' Machluf, the son-in-law of the Abir Yaakov) notes in his book *Ani LeDodi* that Rabenu David would interrupt his learning only for acts of chesed. These interruptions were essential because the community leaders were unable to manage without him. He would "guide the hand of those studying Torah, with many depending on him – Torah scholars, the poor and destitute, the miserable and poverty-stricken, the orphans and widows from nearby as well as from far away. He would attempt to provide them with their basic needs, even if this meant drawing from his own pocket. He would also encourage others to participate in this great *mitzvah* ... the entire nation came to him and he would provide."

Rabenu David would provide the poor with large sums of money, which he collected by going from house to house, from one wealthy

individual to another, asking them to donate to the community fund. At times he would come across someone who was too proud to be supported by the local charity. He would then lend from his own money, fully aware that he would never be repaid. His righteous sister Rabbanit Pricha related that, every *Erev Shabbat*, he would prepare *Shabbat* meals for the poor and would not permit his own *Shabbat* table to be set until he was certain that all of the poor had received their portions.

Rabenu David's own personal money was used not only to feed the poor, but when he discovered that a *mikveh* was not functioning properly, he would pay himself for its upkeep. The community leaders never discovered the source of these badly-needed funds.

The poor of *Eretz Yisrael* were constantly on his mind and he was always searching for ways to assist them in surviving the many hardships characteristic of life in the Holy Land. Even towards the end of his life, when war in Morocco prevented messengers from *Eretz Yisrael* from entering or leaving, he found ways of bypassing the usual routes to continue sending funds to the poor of *Eretz Yisrael*.

"LET THE ASSEMBLY OF HASHEM NOT BE LIKE SHEEP THAT HAVE NO SHEPHERD" (Bamidbar 27:17)

Less than a year after the passing of his father Rabenu Masud, Rabenu David already felt that the burden of leadership was too great for him to bear alone. It was not that he lacked the strength and he certainly did not wish to flee from his obligation as leader of the people. What was difficult for him was that he had been accustomed to a life of abstinence and isolation, with his service of Hashem being a private matter between himself and his Creator. He was now forced to come out of concealment and publicly involve himself in the needs of the community.

When he saw that he was unable to accustom himself to the publicity that accompanied his every move, Rabenu David decided to

relocate to the Land of Israel. There he hoped to serve his Creator clandestinely without being disturbed by the needs of the community or by anything outside the realm of the four cubits of *halacha*. He put his thoughts into action and began by traveling from the city of Tafilalet to the city of Betzar. The community felt his absence and when they became aware of his plan to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, delegations were sent to persuade him to return and not to forsake the people of his city.

Rabenu David acquiesced to the community's request to return to leading his flock, but he was adamant that this acceptance be conditional on other family members' assisting him in communal matters. In this way he could continue to serve Hashem in the manner he had been accustomed to until now. This would be in keeping with the teaching of *Chazal*: "Were it not for Yoav, David would not have been able to engage in the study of Torah" (Sanhedrin 49b).

Rabenu David was certain that serving his Creator through separation and isolation protected the people of the city from heavenly judgments better than any additional work he could take upon himself. Presumably this is what led to his decision. Rabenu David of course did not even mention the decrees that were destined to befall the community in the coming years. However he was very pained by what he knew would be very difficult times to come...

He asked his uncle Rabenu Yitzchak Abichazira (son of the Abir Yaakov) to take upon himself the handling of the Yeshiva's finances, in addition to his already heavy involvement in spreading Torah within the Yeshiva. His cousin, R' Eliyahu Abichazira, the son of Rabenu Aharon Abichazira, who served as *dayan* and *halachic* ruler in the community, was appointed as the liaison to the government authorities in all communal matters. Rabenu David returned to his attic, isolating himself like the pious people of generations earlier, studying his Torah and performing his sacred *tikkunim*. As much as he could, he separated himself from anything relating to this world.

With all this, those appointed to lead the community viewed themselves as subordinate to the leadership of Rabenu David. Whenever possible and only with his permission, they would enter his attic in order to bask in his learning and acquire Torah knowledge and understanding. One of those who felt especially close to him was his younger brother, the Baba Sali, who saw in him the lofty image of the true servant of G-d, utilizing all his strength and more in service of Hashem.

A short while later, Rabenu David appointed his younger brother as head of the Yeshiva and charged him with caring for all its needs. In spite of the Baba Sali's youth - he was only eighteen years of age - Rabenu David relied on him as if he were an experienced man of seventy. His great scholarship as well as his pious manner allowed him to run the Yeshiva with a firm hand. He was assisted by his esteemed uncle, Rabenu Yitzchak Abichazira, who as we mentioned, had taken upon himself the financial and practical running of the Yeshiva.

"FROM THE DAYS OF OUR FOREFATHERS YESHIVOT DID NOT DEPART FROM THEM" (Yoma 28b)

During those years the Yeshiva expanded, with many students filling its benches. Just as the streets of the *Malach* reverberated with the splendor of Rabenu David's leadership, so a sense of holiness permeated the Yeshiva. His presence was constantly felt there despite his being rarely seen by his students.

The story is told that, one *Shabbat*, he emerged from the isolation of his attic and entered the Yeshiva dining room, where students were dining with the *Rabbanim* and *Mashgichim* of the Yeshiva. Filled with awe and fear, the students rose from their seats, their eyes closely following the tall, erect figure of Rabenu David walking between the tables and scrutinizing all those around him with his discerning eyes. Rabenu David stopped by one of the students and asked him whether

he could enlighten him with some new insight he had learned that week. The student, overcome with emotion, was barely able to stammer a few broken sentences. When Rabenu David approached another student, this same spectacle repeated itself; no-one could fulfill *Chazal*'s interpretation of the *pasuk*: "'You shall teach them' (Devarim 6:7) - that the words of Torah should be sharply honed in your mouth, that if a man asks you something you will not stammer before answering him." (Kiddushin 30a). Rabenu David did not react but blessed them in a subdued manner and returned to his attic.

On Sunday morning, Rabenu David asked that the *Beit Din* be convened and invited the *Rabbanim* of the Yeshiva to appear before the judges. When the judges asked: "Who is the plaintiff?" and he answered: "I am," they were gripped with fear. When all of the staff of the Yeshiva were brought before the *Beit Din*, Rabenu David began by saying: "It says: 'Cursed be the one who carries out the mission of Hashem deceitfully' (Yirmiyahu 48:10). When I arrived unannounced to test the Yeshiva students, I did not find one among them who was able to share any insight with me or even quote me something as it is written. Now, can it be that among all the students, there is not even one who can justify the work of his educators? They are negligent in their task and are not carrying out the work of Hashem as is required. I ask the court to punish them with all the stringency of the law and may the punishment provide some atonement to save them from being categorized as 'cursed'."

At first, the astounded *Rabbanim* could not respond. Then they tried to claim that they were indeed investing all their energy in teaching, but the students simply became tongue-tied at the sight of Rabenu David. When the members of the court heard this claim, deliberations were postponed until a later date. They sent their most junior member to the Yeshiva to discuss Torah with the students. He returned to the court reporting that the level of learning displayed by the students was indeed insufficient. The judges then accepted Rabenu David's charge

that the *Rabbanim* be punished with *makat mardut* – lashes which should be administered as the judges saw fit.

The following *Shabbat*, when Rabenu David came once again to visit the Yeshiva during the *Shabbat* meal, a welcome change was apparent. Words of Torah were heard throughout the room: questions and answers, lively discussions of Abaye and Rava in all their glory, with their many insights delighting the participants.

This was Rabenu David's unique way of educating the younger generation. He saw the educators as the source, with all the credit for the fruits of their labor going to them, while at the same time failures were blamed directly upon their negligence and lack of effort.

"AND THEY FEARED TO APPROACH HIM" (Shmot 34:30)

Even family members, who worked by his side in leadership of the community and had many opportunities to consult him, had tremendous awe and reverence for him that did not diminish with the constancy of their encounters. When they were forced to enter his room and disturb his holy work, they did so with much trepidation, debating hundreds of times with themselves whether the matter which they wished to discuss warranted disturbing him.

The following story, heard from his brother's grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira Shlit"a, illustrates the tremendous influence he exerted even while secluded in his attic.

One day an envoy from the *Rabbanim* of *Eretz Yisrael* arrived in Risani on a fundraising mission for a prestigious *Kollel* that supported many poor people. In the generous manner typical of the Jewish community of Tafilalet, the people responded by opening their hearts and pockets, all wishing to have a share in this great *mitzvah*. The messenger, however, was not satisfied, and wished to meet Rabenu David in person and speak with him.

When he mentioned this to the Baba Sali, the response he received was that his holy brother was secluded in his room and he dared not disturb him. If the visitor desired to meet him and speak with him he must wait in the *beit midrash* until he opened his door. This could take days, weeks, or even months. The messenger accepted what the Baba Sali had told him. In spite of the great urgency of collecting for charity, which was the reason for his trip to Morocco, he found a place in the *beit midrash*, and began speaking to the others learning there. The local people immediately recognized the visitor's vast knowledge in all disciplines of the Torah. His visit to Yeshivat Abir Yaakov lengthened into several months. The money he had collected had already reached its required destination, but he refused to return home before he had the privilege of meeting Rabenu David.

The day finally arrived when Rabenu David emerged from his room and came to inspect those studying in the *beit midrash*. He walked around the tables looking at each and every person. The feeling of awe that permeated the *beit midrash* at that time cannot be described in words. Even the Baba Sali remained immobile in his seat, lifting his eyes with great difficulty to look at his holiness. It was only when he remembered the messenger, who had now been in Tafilalet for a few months, that he approached Rabenu David and told him about the esteemed guest. When Rabenu David heard of the visitor in the *beit midrash*, he instructed his brother to accord him the honor due to someone of his stature; then he retreated to his room.

The Baba Sali was greatly embarrassed by this. In discomfort he approached the messenger to relay to him what his holy brother had said – that he did not make an appointment to meet him but only instructed that they honor him. The messenger, who was a *talmid chacham* of great stature, no longer requested to meet with Rabenu David. "The short glimpse I had of him suffices ... for this alone it was worth coming here ... that alone justifies my one hundred and twenty years on this earth ..."

Even the envoy who knew how to observe truly righteous people, having come from the place where it was not uncommon to encounter *tzaddikim*, was impressed by the aura which enveloped Rabenu David: "...awesome over all who surrounded him." (Tehillim 89:8).

"THOSE OF MISGUIDED SPIRIT WILL ATTAIN UNDERSTANDING" (Yeshayahu 29:24)

Seclusion, isolation, and total abstinence from everything of this world kept Rabenu David out of the public eye and turned him into such a revered figure that community members feared even uttering his name. The fact that even family members would not disturb him with their affairs and hardly entered into his vicinity accounts for the fact that very few stories about him have been preserved. Those few stories that do exist have been passed down by his brother the Baba Sali. They were told not simply as stories, but to provide us with some important background and insight. The following story sheds much light on both holy brothers:

As he often did in different places, the Baba Sali traveled to the city of Ohran in Algeria to bring encouragement to the Jewish community. The residents of the city came out to greet him, headed by their *Rabbanim* and community leaders. After he heartened them with his words, he asked the Rabbis about the level of religious observance in the city in the areas of *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, *mikvaot*, *shechita*, and about the methods of education. One of those present reported that one of the Jewish residents of the city, a man named Masud, had begun keeping his business open on *Shabbat* as if it were a weekday. Some research revealed that the guilty party had originated in Tafilalet and had a strong connection with the Abichazira family.

The man was brought before the Baba Sali who rebuked him harshly for having publicly desecrated the *Shabbat*. The man defended himself, claiming that he was not in actual violation of Torah prohibitions, but all acts prohibited by the Torah were carried out by his non-Jewish

workers. Realizing that the man had no intention of heeding his words, the Baba Sali asked him:

"Do you remember the spirit that entered you?"

"Yes!" replied the man in fear and horror.

"I declare before everyone assembled here that just as we had the power to remove that spirit from your body, we also have the power to return it. You now have two possibilities before you: either you close your store beginning with this *Shabbat*, or we will return the spirit to your body".

"Baba Sali!" called the man with a trembling voice, "I promise you that beginning with this *Shabbat* my store will be locked and bolted. I will even observe a bit of *tosefet Shabbat* (extending the length of the *Shabbat* by beginning early and ending late)."

The Baba Sali then related to all the dignitaries present the story of the spirit that had entered Masud.

The story the miracle took place in the year 5677 [1916-17]. The French army had just captured Morocco and began to enlist many of the local residents of Tafilalet for their cause, one of them being Masud. During his army service, an evil spirit entered him and he began acting as if he were insane. Saliva drooled from his mouth and his speech became coarse and difficult to understand, with every move indicating an unbalanced individual.

The officers of his army unit, seeing how desperate his situation was, sent him off on "sick leave" to his parents' home in Tafilalet. The doctors summoned by the family were unable to find any cure, each of them reaching the diagnosis that an evil spirit had settled into his body, interfering with his every move. Left with no choice, his parents brought him to the *beit midrash* of Rabenu David, next to the attic

where he isolated himself, hoping that he could meet the youth and could perhaps effect a cure. Given that there was no possibility of disturbing Rabenu David who was secluded in his room, the family turned to the Baba Sali and asked him to visit Masud.

The Baba Sali, then about twenty-seven years old, began to sound the *shofar* and invoke the special prayers for removing the spirit from a body in order to speak to it. When the spirit responded and left the body, the Baba Sali asked him who he was and from where he received permission to enter the body of Masud. The spirit responded that his name was Yichye, and that he and his son Shlomo had entered Masud's body because Masud had spilled boiling water in the public domain and hurt them. The Baba Sali then asked the spirit: "Is it such a terrible thing to pour boiling water into the public domain. Is it not natural that someone wishing to pour away water does so in public areas?" The spirit responded that Masud should have spilled the water in a drain designated for this and not in places generally frequented by people - where evil spirits are found.

The Baba Sali then urged the spirit to leave Masud's body altogether and never to harm anyone else. The spirit responded that in honor of the Baba Sali, who was greatly respected in the heavens, it was willing to leave for a period of six months. The Baba Sali, however, insisted that the spirit leave entirely and go to the desert of spirits, never to return. It agreed to leave for an entire year in honor of the Abichazira family, the mere mention of whose name caused great commotion in the heavens. The spirit, however, was not willing to even enter into a discussion regarding leaving for any longer than a year.

During that entire time, Masud was lying on the ground, saliva dripping from his mouth, his body writhing awkwardly. The Baba Sali thought that perhaps if he would agree to the spirit's offer of not returning for a year, there would be sufficient time to perform some form of a *tikkun* for the soul of Masud. While he was still engrossed

in thought, the door to the attic opened and there stood Rabenu David. "Why have you gathered near my room and why are you disturbing me during my seclusion?" Rabenu David asked his brother. The Baba Sali related all that had happened to Masud, and the negotiations he was having with the spirit who was only prepared to leave for a period of one year.

Rabenu David approached Masud, kicking him lightly on his leg and saying to him: "Stand up Masud, stand up! The spirit will leave your body never to return". To everyone's astonishment, the young man got up and stood on his own feet, healthy as can be.

This is what the Baba Sali reminded Masud of when he strayed off the path and began desecrating the *Shabbat*. The Baba Sali warned him: "We have the ability to return the spirit to your body".

"DAVID KILLED THE EVIL INCLINATION" (Yerushalmi Brachot Perek 9)

"FOR SIX YEARS HIDDEN IN THE HOUSE OF HASHEM" (based on Melachim II 11:3)

Not only was Rabenu David involved in the decision to appoint his brother, the Baba Sali, as the new head of the Yeshiva, but the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rav Moshe Turgeman, the Baba Si ben Yoseph, student of Rabenu David and primary Rav of the Baba Sali, felt it fitting that the Baba Sali should take over the reins. These two saintly individuals had a joint reason for wanting to hand over the position to the Baba Sali; they were about to isolate themselves for the next few years in Rabenu David's attic in order to undergo *Tshuvat Hakanah.*

***Tshuvat** Hakanah*, is a high level *tikkun* found in the ancient work "*Sefer HaKanah*" written by the *tanna*, R' Nechuniah ben *Hakanah.* The book discusses most of the foundations of the hidden Torah in the form of mystical wisdom and esoteric concepts. Very few people were familiar with the book or capable of uncovering its holy secrets; only a privileged few had the ability to withstand the rigorous demands of the *Tshuvat Hakanah* described in it. The *tikkun* is based on the verse, "He shall work for six years; and in the seventh he shall go free, for no charge" (Shmot 21:2). Although the literal meaning of the verse refers to a Jewish slave, the *tikkun* interprets the verse to teach us that if a person "works" at purifying himself for six years by separating himself from anything relating to this world, then he will succeed in "becoming free"- from the bondage of his physical body thereby purifying himself. The body will no longer be able to exert any control over him and the evil inclination will then leave him for eternity. This is consistent with the saying of Rav Elazar ben Parta: "For the righteous, Hashem takes away their evil inclination and gives them a good inclination, as it is written, 'My heart has died within me'" (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 109:22). Our Sages have interpreted the

verse to mean that David HaMelech killed his evil inclination (see Yerushalmi Brachot Perek 9).

These two saintly people, together with R' Eliyahu HaKohen (father-in-law of Rabenu David)[108] went into complete seclusion in the attic for six years, emerging only to immerse themselves in the *mikveh*. They isolated themselves there, taking upon themselves fasts and other forms of affliction, while studying the hidden and revealed parts of the Torah day and night. The *tikkunim* they carried out were way beyond the comprehension of the ordinary person, and certainly no-one else could hope even to begin to uncover the depths of what they were doing. Their place of seclusion was adjacent to the synagogue with a small window connecting the two rooms, allowing them to participate in the communal prayer. At the end of the *Amidah*, the congregation would wait for a knock on the window signifying that these saintly individuals had concluded their prayer, and only then did the *shliach tzibur* begin his repetition.

Rabenu David secluded himself with his saintly father-in-law and his close friend from the beginning of the year 5669 [1908] until the end of 5674 [1914]. Communal affairs were handled without Rabenu David's slightest involvement. It is noteworthy that although the members of the Tafilalet community had no contact with Rabenu David and did not even inform him of what was taking place, they continued to view him as their Rabbi and longingly awaited his return to lead his flock.

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108. In the book "Malchei Rabanan" (page 22) we find a description of a miracle that took place during the burial of R' Eliyahu HaKohen. He was summoned on high in the afternoon of Erev Shabbat. Despite the distance from the city to the cemetery, it was decided that he be eulogized and buried before Shabbat. His son-in-law Rabenu David gave a lengthy eulogy. Even so, everyone managed to return home with plenty of time to spare. It is told that he later appeared to his son-in-law and thanked him for the eulogy.

"MOSHE AND DAVID – THEIR ENEMIES DID NOT GAIN CONTROL OF THEIR HANDIWORK" (Sotah 9a)

This is an appropriate place to devote a few lines to the unique personality of Rav Moshe Turgeman, who was not a member of the Abichzira family, but merited having his name mentioned in the same breath as theirs.

"A holy man of G-d (Melachim II 4:9)" – these were the words the Baba Sali used to describe the lofty image of his esteemed teacher and primary Rav. Extremely pious, he distanced himself totally from worldly matters. His piety reached levels not found even among the "pure-minded". He would never gaze upon a woman and was unable to recognize even his own wife. When he came of age he told his parents that, when searching for a wife for him, they should not look for beauty, for he could live even with the most unattractive of women. Amazed at his greatness and sanctity, the Baba Sali would cite the comment of our Sages on Avraham Avinu's words to Sarah: "Behold, now I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance" (Bereishit 12:11). Our Sages tell us: "He did not look even at his own wife" (Baba Batra 16a).

As proof of this, the Baba Sali told the following story which took place in the *beit midrash* of Tafilalet. It was the Baba Si's custom to address the Yeshiva students and the local community daily between *Mincha* and *Maariv*. Among the audience were righteous women who desired to hear words of Torah and to breathe in the fragrance of his words of *mussar*. One day, an emissary from "*Kollel* Beit E-l", HaGaon HaRav David Nigrin arrived in Tafilalet. He noticed that there were women in the *beit midrash*, and was very surprised that the Baba Si was not more careful not to speak in front of them. He reproached the *Rosh Yeshiva*, asking: "How can such a holy and pious person not be more careful to refrain from speaking before women?" The response he received caught him by surprise: "Women? The only people in my audience are the Yeshiva students!"



Rav Moshe Turgeman

It should be noted that the Baba Sali provided great support for his Rav. During the Baba Si's later years, the Baba Sali would make sure to visit him at least once a month, despite the fact that he lived in the city of Erfoud, some sixteen kilometers from the home of the Baba Si, who had returned to live in Risani. The Baba Sali would make this journey to Risani on foot, basing his action on the words of our Sages: "A person is obligated to visit his Rav, *baregel* (this refers to the festival but the literal meaning is 'on foot')" (*Rosh Hashana* 16b).

When the Baba Si ben Yoseph departed this world on 28 Kislev 5699 [21st December 1938] the Baba Sali declared a general cessation of labor, and tore his clothes until his heart was uncovered. He sat *shiva* as a son would for his father, and even observed mourning customs for the following twelve months.

This was Rabenu David's partner in *Tshuvat Hakanah*, the pinnacle of the life of abstinence that he led. However, Rabenu David's remarkably holy lifestyle did not end after those six years...

"SHUTS HIS EYES FROM SEEING" (Yeshayahu 33:15)

Rabenu David guarded his eyes so carefully that he would rarely leave his home. His *beit midrash* and study were inside his house. He even had a *mikveh* constructed for him so that he would not have to set foot in the "*Malach*", which was frequented by women. The many fasts he took upon himself meant that he did not recite blessings before and after eating, forcing him to find other ways to fulfill the daily requirement of "one hundred blessings". To accomplish this, he would often attend a *Brit Milah* and listen to the blessings being recited, counting them towards fulfilling his blessing requirement. Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira tells us that to arrive at the *Brit Milah*, he would refrain from walking along the street but would rather jump from one roof to another until arriving at his destination. When he reached the roof of the house where the *Brit* was held, he would carefully listen to the *brachot* from the window. While he was jumping

from roof to roof, announcements would be made asking that no woman leave her home until Rabenu David returned home.

As the years went by, Rabenu David began to pay a heavy price for protecting his eyes the way he did. While he was still young, his eyes became weaker until eventually he could not see. It was precisely during this period of time that his leading student and close friend Rav Moshe Turgeman also lost his eyesight. As we mentioned, he too guarded his eyes very strictly – far beyond what could be expected of an ordinary person. Rabenu David, however, was the beneficiary of a great miracle and after five years his eyesight was restored.

According to Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira's description, the miracle took place at a memorial feast to commemorate the passing of the holy *tanna* R' Meir *Baal HaNess*. Suddenly Rabenu David asked to have the book *Machsof HaLavan*, written by the Abir Yaakov brought to him. When the book was given to him, he concentrated on the appropriate *kavanot* and sight was immediately restored to one of his eyes. When the students observed this great miracle, they asked him to continue with his concentrations, hoping sight would then be restored in his other eye. Rabenu David declined, claiming that to be able to learn it is sufficient to have sight in one eye.

People testified that during his years of blindness, his diligence and the depth of his learning was no less than in other years.

"YOU SHALL NOT MAKE YOURSELF A CARVED IMAGE NOR ANY LIKENESS ..." (Shmot 20:4)

As we mentioned, Rabenu David had undertaken to move to *Eretz Yisrael*, only to return to Tafilalet. His reason for not completing his journey is quite amazing, as we heard from his brother's grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira:

Upon reaching the frontier between Morocco and Algeria, Rabenu David was asked to present his official papers, testifying to his country

of citizenship. Because he did not have a passport, Rabenu David was told to obtain one. However, on learning that a photograph was required, he firmly refused, even though this meant canceling his trip. He was prepared to forgo great things in order to adhere meticulously to the self-imposed safeguards through which he preserved his high level of sanctity and abstinence. When the Abir Yaakov had to travel overseas and was told that he had to have his picture taken in order to obtain a passport, he refused, explaining that he did not wish his picture to fall into the hands of the non-Jews at the border crossings. The Abir Yaakov, however, was well-known, and acquired a special permit to cross the border without a picture. Rabenu David, on the other hand, was forced to abandon his intention of moving to *Eretz Yisrael*, because of his refusal to be photographed.

And so Rabenu David returned to Morocco where he was eventually killed sanctifying Hashem's Name.

"THE TORAH IS ACQUIRED ... WITH LIMITED PLEASURE, WITH LIMITED SLEEP" (Avot 6:5)

Even if it were just to describe his normal activities, Rabenu David's holy conduct would be worthy of being recorded. Not only did he act with extreme piety, guarding himself by greatly distancing himself from this world, but he was exceedingly humble. He did not wish others to discover his pious acts, so he explained away his actions as the ordinary acts of an ordinary person, fulfilling the adage: "Wherever you find his greatness, is where you find his humility". The greater he grew the more humble he became.

A few of his acts he was unable to hide, at least from his family, and these became known after his death *al Kiddush Hashem*, from the testimonies of those who frequented his home. He worked very hard at keeping his conduct concealed from members of the community who had no idea of the lofty level of their Rav or what new peaks of piety he attained through his daily activity.

Even his fasts and afflictions, his restrictions on eating and drinking were not always known even to the close family members who prepared and sent his meals daily, while he would return the trays empty. Only a close confidant, who was instructed to take the food to a poor Torah scholar studying in the Yeshiva, was aware of the fact that he did not eat most of the food. Even on days when he did not fast, he would send a large portion of his food to the Torah scholar.

The truth was that, his family members could have discovered precisely which days he was fasting, if they wanted to, for on those days he was careful not to come in contact with people. Anything that needed to be done whether involving his family or relating to his role as leader of the community, was carried out only through his assistant. In those days, however, the family was unaware of this sign.

Most people, at the end of a fast, fill themselves up so much that it is as if they had not fasted at all. Rabenu David, however, was no ordinary person. His meals on days when he did not fast, and even his post-fast meals, were very meager – he ate only the minimum required for the soul to be sustained in its housing, the body. He would never eat meat, and even chicken, which could be found in the poorest of homes, was never seen on his table. It was not that he did not have the means to purchase the meat; after all, the poor who came knocking on his door would walk away very satisfied. Rabenu David, however, would not eat for pleasure but only to fulfill his basic needs. He therefore shunned meat. His cousin R' Yichye Adahan testified just how simple his meals were – mostly bread and a little of everything else.

Not only did he eat very little, but he would also set aside a very short time for meals. He never ate in the company of others, save the *Shabbat* evening meal, which was the only meal he would eat together with other family members and the only opportunity in the entire week for the Rabbanit to meet him.

When his nephew, Rabenu Meir, spoke about the greatness of Rabenu David, he always pointed out that he derived not the slightest degree of pleasure from this world. This was in spite of his being a man of great means, whose home lacked nothing.

If his dining room chair was used only once a week, his bed was never used at all. Like a "seasoned merchant" who knows all the tricks of the trade, Rabenu David would make use of all the "forty-eight ways in which the Torah is acquired" (see Avot 6:5), one of which was "limited sleep". He was never seen lying on a bed. When he wished to rest in order to gather strength, he would doze off in the Yeshiva. It would be superfluous to point out that never was he so overtaken with tiredness that he would still be asleep at midnight.

His brother's grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira, relates that when Rabenu David wished to take a short nap, he would request that his students wake him at a specific hour. Should they not succeed in waking him, he instructed them to prick him with long needles until he woke up. More than once, he was so tired that his students failed to wake him and they poked him so hard that he would bleed. Although exhausted, he would refuse to sleep any longer and was not concerned in the least about the undignified manner in which he was woken; he would do whatever was required of him to rise and serve his Creator.

"MANY TROUBLES AND DISTRESSES" (Devarim 31:17)

Rabenu David knew much suffering during his short lifetime on this earth. His agony, which sometimes appeared unbearable, constantly reached new levels. Each cause of pain could have broken the spirit of a lesser man, yet Rabenu David would strengthen himself like a lion and cloak himself in happiness. He was like that pious individual in the Talmud, who wears a smile on his face, even when his heart is mourning, anxiety is disturbing his sleep, and his troubles are mounting one on top of the other (see Chagiga 5a).

Rabenu David buried both his first and second wives as well as the seven sons who were born to them, leaving at the time of his death only his youngest son who passed away only a short while later. In addition, many illnesses plagued him throughout the years, such as that mentioned earlier in which he lost his eyesight.

As we mentioned, not only was his spirit not broken and his holy service of his Creator not at all diminished, but he was the one to offer words of consolation to the brokenhearted and encouragement to the depressed, healing their spirits and restoring them to full strength.

His nephew, Rabenu Meir, was asked by one of his sons, how Rabenu David managed to lead a life of such sanctity and abstinence, like that of an angel on earth. Rabenu Meir explained his elevated level as due to the constant suffering he underwent during his short lifetime. His acceptance of suffering with love was his rare "entrance ticket" to the gates of the holy sanctuaries.

"THE RESULT OF HUMILITY IS FEAR OF HASHEM" (Mishle 22:4)

"REMIND HIM OF THE DAY OF DEATH" (Brachot 5a)

Following his passing, a pitcher full of cinders was found in the drawer of his desk. No one could explain what it was for. Many years later, Rabenu David's loyal assistant revealed the secret behind the pitcher to R' Abba Abichazira, the son of Rabenu Yitzchak Abichazira and grandson of the Abir Yaakov:

Every morning before sitting down to learn, Rabenu David would lock the door behind him and hang the key on a hook beside the door. He did not want anyone to find out what he was doing, not even his devoted assistant, who had already witnessed many of his acts. In spite of his great loyalty, the assistant had a strong yearning to know precisely what his Rav was doing at that time. His faithfulness to his Rabbi and his desire to negate his personal desires for those of the *tzaddik*, precluded his peeking into the room even though the key was accessible and had he wished he could have reached in, taken the key, and opened the door.

Finally, one morning, whether it was because he finally gathered enough courage or because he could no longer control his curiosity, the assistant took the key and slowly opened the door. He could not believe the spectacle he saw before his eyes: Rabenu David was lying in a coffin completely covered in ashes!

The assistant remained quietly in the room for a moment, completely unnoticed. However, on his way out of the room, he was not careful to replace the key precisely on the hook. Rabenu David realized that someone had tampered with the key during his moments of seclusion.

Rabenu David summoned the assistant and asked him whether he had been in the room. When the man nodded his head and launched

into an unending series of apologies, Rabenu David warned him that, as long as he lived, he must never reveal what he had seen to anyone. He explained that this was his daily practice before learning in order to remind himself that he would eventually die, and to subdue any haughtiness or pride within him.

Whoever thought that his battle with haughtiness was limited to those few moments before he sat down to learn, was mistaken. Rabenu David was willing to pay a very high price to avoid being dragged into the trap of pride.

"CONCEALING HIS LEVEL" (Shir HaShirim 2:14)

His high spiritual level in service of Hashem was a secret between himself and his Creator. He would do whatever it took to hide his actions from others, sometimes paying a heavy price, such as giving up things in which he had invested much effort. The following story serves as a very good example of this:

Clearly Rabenu David did not undergo fasts and afflictions for no reason, but he generally kept the reasons to himself. As important as these fasts were to him, it was more important that they be hidden from the knowledge of others.

This story took place on the final Thursday of the weeks of *Shovavim*, a period in which he would take upon himself more fasts than usual. He was in the midst of a *taanit hafsaka*, fasting from the conclusion of one *Shabbat* until the beginning of the next, when he was invited to a *Brit Milah* by one of the dignitaries of Tafilalet. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Rabenu David was given the honor of reciting the blessings over a cup of wine. In keeping with his desire not to divulge his fast to anyone, he forced himself to recite the blessing and drink the wine. This was no easy task for him, for all the hard work he had invested in the *taanit hafsaka* was suddenly cut

short.[109] He could have declined the honor, saying that he did not drink wine in the middle of the week. He preferred, however, to avoid divulging even the most minor of his stringencies, even if this resulted in breaking his *taanit hafsaka* with all of its special qualities.



109. A similar story is told about the Baba Sali, who was in the midst of a long fast when an important *talmid chacham* came to visit him and food was set out on the table. The Baba Sali pressed the guest to recite the appropriate blessing and eat. The scholar, however, insisted that he could not partake before the Baba Sali. Seeing that he had no choice, he ate so that the guest could eat as well. The household members present, who were aware of his fast, could see signs of anguish on his face for the minute amount of food that he tasted; his secret however was not revealed.

"YOUR STATUTES WERE MUSIC TO ME"

(Tehillim 119:54)

The most gifted author, searching for superlatives, would fail to describe Rabenu David's remarkable diligence in learning. From his early youth, he became accustomed to secluding himself for most of the day to study the holy Torah. He devoted all of his resources to learning, and words of Torah were constantly on his lips. All of the revealed areas of the Torah were open to him, while he showed great mastery over the hidden parts as well. The entire Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi were very clearly organized in his mind, down to the final clarification of the *halacha*.

Even as a child, he had been very diligent in his Torah learning and regularly attended the Torah shiurim of his esteemed grandfather, the Abir Yaakov. He was also influenced greatly by his father Rabenu Masud, who knew how to value the great treasure that was his son. In addition to this, he was a "spring growing stronger and stronger" (Avot 2:11); not only would he "draw water and give to drink (learn and teach) from the Torah of his master to others" (Yoma 28b), but he also produced many original ideas.

It is told, that one night, while just a lad, he was sitting in his attic, learning with great diligence by the light of the oil lamp. As was his way, he fought off tiredness until he dozed off in spite of himself and laid his head on the table, knocking over the oil lamp, which set the tablecloth on fire.

Suddenly he dreamt that his grandfather, the Abir Yaakov, was waking him up, crying out: "Get up, my grandson, for you are in great danger!" He was so tired that he did not wake up; the Abir Yaakov picked him up in his arms, carrying him to safety and extinguishing the fire that had spread to his clothes.

"WRITE THIS AS A REMEMBRANCE IN THE BOOK"

(Shmot 17:14)

As we might expect, Rabenu David coined many novel insights into the Torah. He shared many of them with his students, but for reasons he never divulged, he refused to have most of them recorded in writing. In his introduction to the few books of Rabenu David which remain with us, R' Moshe Turgeman testified that they comprise but a minute proportion of the many insights that his students merited hearing from him.

In the three manuscripts that Rabenu David left for posterity, he revealed just a small portion of his great Torah accomplishments, insights that move the heart and sharpen the mind, testifying to his genius in the revealed and hidden parts of the Torah and his vast knowledge of all its realms.

His close friend and student, R' Moshe Turgeman, in his introduction, has strong words for anyone who attempts to interpret Rabenu David's words of Torah on their simple level, without taking into account the fact that they were written with great sanctity and that they contain allusions to the upper spheres.

There is no need to add that R' Moshe Turgeman did not exaggerate or give praise that was not completely accurate.

Rabenu David's three books are "*Petach HaOhel*" ("The Opening in the Tent") on the five books of the Torah, "*Sechel Tov*" ("Goodly Wisdom") on *midrash* and *mussar*, and "*Reisha VeSeifa*", ("Beginning and End") which explains the connection between the end of one *parsha* and the beginning of the next.

His works, organized with *sechel tov*, serve as a *petach haohel* – an opening through which we can peek – into the tent of his Torah. There is no doubt, however, that these are not just the *reisha veseifa*; the

beginning and end, for they are not sufficient to gauge the value and extent of his Torah insights.

R' Moshe Turgeman, who was among those closest to Rabenu David, concluded from having read "*Petach HaOhel*" that "he used the expression 'opening', that is 'beginning', because he had in mind to author many other lofty works of this sort, involving hidden parts of his beloved Torah."

His brother's grandson, Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira said regarding his great-uncle: "All his works are written with *ruach hakodesh* - Divine Spirit".



"A BURNT OFFERING"

"FROM THE PAINS OF MESSIAH SHALL WE BE SAVED"

From time immemorial, fighting among the nations of the world has been seen as a bad omen for the Jews. Jews have suffered both while battle rages as well as after victory has already been declared. During the course of the war each side would accuse the Jews of aiding and abetting the enemy, while later, the losing side would invariably blame its troubles on the Jews for allegedly supporting the enemy. The Jews, for their part, rather than favoring one country over another in their battle for a piece of land or source of water, would have preferred the nations not to fight at all. Jews living far away may tend to dismiss a conflict offhandedly, thinking "What do I care if a few non-Jews end up killing each other?" They fail to realize that the killing does not end there and invariably Jews are added to the list of victims as well. Even at the best of times the nations would exult at the idea of the Jewish nation's vanishing off the face of the earth; how much more so during wars and times of emergency, when they claim the "right" to carry out acts that would generally be deemed unacceptable. The earth of many countries is saturated with the blood of our holy martyrs, spilled "for the sake of national security". This of course is nothing more than an excuse for the world's venomous and eternal hatred for us.

Our Sages taught us, "If you see kingdoms fighting among each other – await the arrival of the Messiah" (Bereishit Rabba 42). The arrival of the Messiah, which we are still eagerly awaiting, will be preceded by painful and agonizing *chevlei Moshiach* (lit. – birth pangs of Moshiach) causing our Sages to declare: "May he come but may I not see him." (Sanhedrin 98b), as we pray weekly in the words of our *Shabbat zemirot* "from the pains of the Messiah may we be saved".

THE WAR BETWEEN FRANCE AND MOROCCO

When other countries began to wrestle over Morocco, the local

Jewish population knew they had cause for worry. The relative tranquility which had characterized the streets of the *Malach* until now was soon to give way to fear of the unknown. The fear would then be followed by pain and suffering under one harsh decree after another. *Chazal*'s warning was intended for any two warring kingdoms; how much more so when the fighting had a religious character, in this case a dispute between conquering Christians and rebel Moslems. When that happens, the war is not only about who is in control, but entails also a desire to chase out the "infidels" who have taken a stronghold in their land.

In the year 5677 [1916-17] the French army captured the center of Morocco. Moroccan soldiers and citizens gave their lives in the fierce battle for their land. The invading force, stronger, better trained and far outnumbering the local army, established rule in the land. Approximately one year later, the French army advanced and conquered the Tafilalet region without a fight. The occupation, however, was very short-lived. While the French were attempting to establish their rule in Tafilalet, zealously religious Arabs banded together under the wicked dictator, Moulay Muhammad Ben Kassem. He had declared himself a *Mushahid* – a direct descendant of Muhammad, and in the name of religion, he incited the masses to go into battle to purify their land from the infidels. After an intense struggle, the rebels drove the French from Tafilalet, and established their own capital in Risani, home to the Abichazira family led by Rabenu David. From their headquarters in Erfoud, some 16 kilometers from Risani, the French sent out airplanes to bomb the rebel centers. Civilian homes were often struck, leaving the residents buried under the rubble. Years later, the Baba Sali would describe how, in the absence of bomb shelters, the family would hide under the staircase with the *Shma* on their lips.

Ultimately the French retreated leaving the Moroccans to rule their homeland. When the former ruling family, attempted to return to the

seat of their throne, Moulay Muhammad, may his name be obliterated, attacked and cruelly killed them all. The evil despot kept the throne for himself, intending to base his rule on total tyranny. The victims, who would pay a heavy price, were to be the Jews of Tafilalet.

"A NEW KING ... NEW EDICTS" (Eruvin 53b)

Many new and strange decrees issued from the office of Moulay Muhammad, may his name be obliterated. Their goal was to root out any independence or personal opinions. R' Machluf Abichazira (son of R' Eliyahu, grandson of Rabenu Aharon and great-grandson of the Abir Yaakov), brings the example of the prohibition against taking snuff as one of their so-called "just decrees". "Tobacco was not created during the six days of creation and therefore must be the handiwork of the Satan," wrote Moulay Muhammad in his rationalization of the law, "clearly all are in favor of stamping out the Satan's influence on our daily lives. We must therefore refrain from indulging in every pleasure which he introduced into this world". Any discussion regarding whether or not the decrees were "reasonable" was strictly banned, and woe unto anyone who so much as voiced a dissenting view, for all walls had ears.

The yoke of Moulay Muhammad's rule fell heaviest on the Jewish community. Constant new prohibitions as well as the difficulties involved in traveling severely limited their ability to carry out the commerce from which most of them earned their living. Food became scarce and the list of poverty-stricken families supported by the community leaders grew too long to cope with. Attempts to negotiate with the heads of the rebel faction proved futile. Once a delegation of merchants was permitted to go out and carry out business deals on behalf of the community, but it was all a trap. Upon their return, rebel troops attacked them and robbed them of their money. It was a great miracle that they escaped with their lives. Their only hope was to flee Tafilalet to areas beyond the control of Moulay Muhammad. One of those who did manage to escape was the Baba Sali, who established

his new residence in Budniv. This, however, was only after the Tafilalet community had paid a very heavy price ...

A CAPTAIN IN STORMY WATERS

Just as the captain's expertise in guiding his ship can only be measured when waves and stormy waters threaten to sink the ship, Rabenu David's leadership during these violent times came through in all its glory. He was a merciful father to every member of his community, providing his flock with whatever they lacked. He enveloped them in warmth and mercy, comforting them that they should never despair for Hashem's salvation would soon arrive. He and his brothers, the Baba Sali and the Baba Chaki, discussed plans for easing the bitter suffering which the decrees imposed on the Jewish community.

It is amazing to discover that during those days, while the fires were licking at the doors of their homes and the ever-turning sword was brandished by Moulay Muhammad over the heads of the Jewish community leaders in Tafilalet, Rabenu David found time to concern himself with the plight of the poor of *Eretz Yisrael*. They too had economic difficulties, for the World War impeded the travel of the emissaries to the Diaspora. Rabenu David aided the fundraisers of *Kollelim* who needed to travel from *Eretz Yisrael* to Tafilalet to solicit funds. He appointed himself as their messenger, collecting funds and finding secret ways to transfer the money to its destination.

The bulk of his day, however, was devoted to prayer and *tikkunim* aimed at lifting the terrible decree from Moroccan Jews and bringing about their salvation. To his cousin and close friend, R' Yichye Adahan, he pointed out that the words: צום, קול, ממון meaning fasts, prayer, and charity have the total numerical value of 408 – equivalent to the value of the word זאת – meaning "this". The latter word alludes to the verse "זאת אשיב אל לבי על כן אוחיל" - "(**זאת**) this I bear

in mind, therefore I still hope" (Eicha 3:31). R' Yichye himself added that there is an allusion here to Rabenu David's involvement in those three areas: fasts, prayer, and charity. The numerical value of the sum of the first letters of each of the words: צום, קול, ממון adds up to 230 (90+100+40). The numerical value of the name David – דוד is 14 (4+6+4). Both these numbers carry the "minor *gematria*" value of 5[110].

Moulay Muhammad Ben Kassem tyrannized the Jews of Tafilalet. Many Jews were killed by or his men; heading the list was Rabenu David. Even had he not been killed, the suffering which Rabenu David underwent while alive would sufficiently justify the great punishment awaiting that evil dictator. Rabenu David took endless fasts upon himself in order to ease the pain of his brethren suffering under the harsh decrees of the dictator, may his name be obliterated. It was only when these fasts were accompanied by an unblemished sacrifice, however, that they succeeded in saving the Jewish nation ...

"MOSHE, YOU HAVE SPOKEN WELL" (*Shabbat* 101b)

R' Yichye Adahan had a brother named R' Moshe, a holy man who allowed only words of Torah to pass his lips. He and Rabenu David were very close since childhood, both of them being raised in the home of their holy grandfather the Abir Yaakov. They had drunk from the same spring whose waters continued to flow forth many years later. It was during *Pesach* 5679 [1919] while Moulay Muhammad was in power, that R' Moshe returned to Tafilalet after a lengthy stay in Algeria. He went immediately to the home of his cousin Rabenu David, and the two of them spent many hours in discussion. That same

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110. The "minor gematria" of a word is arrived at by adding the digits of its value as many times as needed to arrive at a single-digit value: in our case the "minor gematria" of the sum of the value of each of the first letters of צום, קול, ממון, 230 is 5 (2+3+0), while the "minor gematria of the name דוד whose value is 14 is also 5 (1+4).

night, R' Moshe took ill and became bedridden. His whole body became weak and he lost his eyesight. To the consternation of his family he was unable to get out of bed and needed their constant assistance.

Incredibly, at the very moment that he lost his physical sight, he gained a type of metaphysical vision. Not only could he identify anyone who entered the room, he could also relate the visitor's entire life history with great precision. At first the Jews of Tafilalet swarmed to see this great wonder, but when it became known that he was able to reveal all their sins, private as well as public, they became afraid and the flow of visitors ceased entirely. R' Moshe lay in his bed and, with the exception of family members, no one entered the room.

Word of R' Moshe's illness reached the ears of Rabenu David who hurried to visit him. Upon returning from R' Moshe's home, Rabenu David called his brother the Baba Sali and asked him to fulfill the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick. The Baba Sali hesitated, fearing that R' Moshe would expose his shame by enumerating his "sins". Rabenu David encouraged him to fulfill the *mitzvah*, insisting that he had nothing to be ashamed of.

When the Baba Sali entered the room, R' Moshe stopped speaking. When asked to explain his silence, R' Moshe answered "the Baba Sali is sanctified from his mother's womb, and I can say nothing about him". After a few more moments of silence, R' Moshe groaned and said: "There is no one left to atone for the generation except you and me!"

After parting from his sick cousin and returning to his learning, the Baba Sali began to wonder about the meaning of R' Moshe's words. He was now filled with foreboding. Perhaps it had been decreed that he and R' Moshe were about to leave this world. If he needed to atone for the generation by giving his life, then he was willing to do so for

the sake of the entire community. However, he had to begin preparing himself for the moment.

Having no peace of mind, he went up to Rabenu David's attic and told him what had happened. Rabenu David answered him: "Why must you take what he said so seriously ... To me he said that a wicked man will come and kill me in a cruel and unusual manner; in that way he and I will atone for the generation. Should I worry about this? You should know by the way, that his death will indeed atone for the generation while you will serve as atonement during your lifetime ... 'you will be granted additional length of days and years of life' (Mishle 3:2) in peacefulness, tranquility, and joy."

From that point on the Baba Sali truly began to worry. He had heard with his own ears that when it came to himself, Rabenu David simply dismissed what R' Moshe had said, while when it came to the Baba Sali he accepted what R' Moshe had said, but provided an alternative interpretation. He began to do *tikkunim* and to pray on behalf of his beloved brother and confidant, Rabenu David.

The decree, however, was not destined to be nullified.

"INSCRIBE US FOR LIFE"

The year 5680 [1919-20] was about to begin and the Jewish community of Tafilalet prepared themselves for the High Holydays – the Day of Judgment of *Rosh Hashana*, the Holy Day of *Yom Kippur*, and the days in between. Our Sages tell us that during these days the Divine Presence is there, listening even to the prayers of the individual – personal requests intertwined with the prayers of the community for "good tidings, salvations, and consolations." At this point, salvation appeared to be very far away, while the whisperings of sad tidings to come filled everyone with foreboding.

If the increasing oppression of the tyrant's rule weighed heavily on the shoulders of the simple folk, how much harder was it on their

leader, who spent his entire time in isolation with his Creator, working on *tikkunim*. The individuals who had seen him during the few days preceding *Rosh Hashana* were less frightened than the rest of the community, who were shocked at his appearance when they saw him in the synagogue with his face clouded with sadness. In past years, a glance at the calm expressed in his eyes gave them the confidence that indeed they would be inscribed in the Book of Life. Now his face no longer gave that encouragement, and their faces darkened with gloom as well. The fear of the Day of Judgment was no longer something they simply spoke of, but was something tangible that they were able to feel. Even *Sukkot*, the "Time of Happiness" which was always celebrated with joy, did not have the festive atmosphere of years gone by. Who could have dreamed what was awaiting them?

Immediately after the holidays, Moulay Muhammad imposed even worse decrees on the Jews. The latest ones were so cruel that "the later tribulations caused the earlier ones to be forgotten" (Brachot 13a), though the earlier ones too left behind scars which could not be erased from entire families in Tafilalet. Jews accused of treason and aiding the enemy were put to death with tremendous cruelty right in the center of the city, for all to see. The cries of despair of the victims and their relatives, and the horror stories emanating from the torture chambers filled their hearts with fear.

Rabenu David while still searching for ways to negotiate with the rebels, devoted the majority of his time to special praying for removal of the evil decrees, salvation, and a return to the feeling of tranquility to the homes and hearts of the people. During those days, his students discovered, he spent a great deal of time studying the topic of sanctifying Hashem's Name, deeply researching the meaning behind the tragic passing of the *tanna* R' Akiva ben Yoseph who allowed himself to be killed *al Kiddush Hashem*, with his soul departing as he uttered the word *Echad* (Hashem is One). Those who were aware of his conduct did not dare express their concern out loud, but among

themselves the students would whisper their fears that perhaps this was a sign of bad tidings on the horizon. Then Rabenu David was found in his attic studying the same topic while covered in sackcloth and ashes.

The decree was not long in coming.

"TO DESTROY TO SLAY AND TO EXTERMINATE"

(Esther 8:11)

When Moulay Muhammad realized that he was unable to break the spirit of the Jewish people as long as they were sustained by the supportive shelter of Rabenu David, he assembled his aides and advisors in an effort to devise a strategy to express his hatred. The unanimous hateful decree that emerged on that day was "to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate" all of the Jews living in the Tafilalet region – them, their wives, their sons, and daughters, for denying the prophecy of the prophet Muhammad and for their staunch refusal to join their ranks. Of course, the decree was rationalized by a totally fabricated picture of a conspiracy between the Jewish community and the French army to overthrow the Moulay Muhammad's rebel government.

Attempts at appeasement and pleas by the heads of the community were to no avail. Proof that the Jews were indeed loyal to the local governor did not move them. They tried bribing the leader and they even offered cash for the rebel cause. Nothing helped. The decree remained.

As his wickedness and cruelty grew in tandem with his hatred, the evil dictator raised the townspeople's level of anxiety by informing them that he was reserving for himself and for his army the right to carry out the decision of the "revolutionary counsel" without warning. Now the Jewish people knew full well that a tragedy was in store for them, yet they were kept unaware as to when it was going to be carried out and where it would come from.

During those twilight days, when dread numbed their senses, Rabenu David's words of encouragement and comfort were nothing more than a very weak ray of light, almost entirely absorbed by the darkness. Whenever possible, Rabenu David would implore the people to strengthen themselves through prayer, Torah learning, and improving their character. These days were truly "Days of Awe".

THE FINAL *SHABBAT*

It was the night of *Shabbat* 14 Kislev 5680 [5-6 November, 1919]. Jews of Tafilalet were sitting down to their *Shabbat* meal, yet their hearts were not in it. The future was clouded with uncertainty, the present was total darkness, and the past only served to bring about yearning for the good days that were almost forgotten. The clatter of dishes, usually unnoticed above the singing of *zemirot* at the *Shabbat* table, was accompanied by the sounds of pounding hearts with feelings of frustration and dread ... pain and fear gripped them utterly ...

All this and worse upheaval permeated the home of Rabenu David. Seeing him emerge from his room for his *Shabbat* meal wearing black weekday clothing added to the tension, yet no one dared to express his shock aloud. When not stealing puzzled glances, everyone kept his eyes on the ground. They were afraid to look at this strange and painful sight, as if avoiding looking at it would change the picture.

Rabenu David did not behave as usual on *Shabbat*. The *Shabbat* meal was over quickly. He hurried to finish it and retreated to his attic immediately after *Birkat HaMazon*. He took one of his closest students with him in order to have someone to learn with. As they entered the room, Rabenu David gave his student the book which had been lying on the table, "*Shaar HaKavanot*" "Gates of Intentions" of the Arizal, without a word. In answer to the student's query, he instructed him to open the book at random and read. The book opened to the section discussing *Kriyat Shma* and its hidden meanings and the two sat involved in this topic the entire night.

Morning arrived and the Jews of Tafilalet hurried to the synagogue. For some time now, they had begun arriving early at the synagogue, for sitting at home did nothing to improve the depressing atmosphere. In Rabenu David's *beit midrash* in Risani, people caught their breath as they saw their Rabbi entering the sanctuary dressed in his ordinary weekday clothing. In contrast with his customary angelic appearance on *Shabbat*, now his entire manner bespoke gloom and grief. Before the end of the prayer service, Rabenu David retreated to his room looking to neither left nor right, oblivious to the bewildered looks of all those present.

"IT IS A DECREE BEFORE ME" (Eicha Rabba, Ptichta 24)

Within a few hours the fate of the Jewish community of Risani in Tafilalet was in the balance. With tumultuous noise, hundreds of Moulay Muhammad's soldiers surrounded the *Malach*, barring anyone from entering or leaving. When the siege was complete, the command came for all the Jews to go at once to the center of Risani, where they were to be executed.

The sight of the soldiers in the streets of the *Malach* caused panic. Families gathered together before their final journey. They walked together with faltering steps, tears streaming down their faces. They attempted to whisper parting words to each other, but could not utter a sound.

As they passed the house of Rabenu David, the Rav came out to offer words of encouragement, telling them: "Even if a sharp sword rests upon a person's neck, he should not refrain from praying for mercy" (Brachot 10a). As his people gathered around him, he explained that he had been aware for a very long time of this decree to wipe out the Jews of Tafilalet. He told them that he had channeled all his strength and energy into nullifying the decree, by pleading with Hashem to take his life to atone for the community, so that the rest of the people be spared. Many who had stood still in shock until this

point, suddenly burst into tears, for they could not believe what they were hearing. Surely there was not a single person among them who would have been willing to give up their crowned leader in order to save even his whole family from the hangman's noose. However, the determination in Rabenu David's voice made it clear that he was telling them not only what he had requested from Hashem, but that the request had already been accepted.

"THEY WILL CUT DOWN YOUR CHOICE CEDARS"

(Yirmiyahu 22:7)

The wicked soldiers herded the Jewish community of Risani into the city square, to await the arrival of their leader Moulay Muhammad. The dictator, arriving at the scene surrounded by bodyguards and bearers, could not hide his pleasure at seeing so many Jewish families gathered at his orders. A sadistic smile spread across his satisfied lips. Noticing Rabenu David's absence from the group, the dictator changed his tone. He asked some of the leaders where their Rabbi was. They told him that no Jew dared disturb Rabenu David while he was learning, so he dispatched a delegation of soldiers with a young Jewish man to guide them, to bring him from his home. When they arrived, they found Rabenu David engrossed in learning the daily complement of eighteen chapters of *mishnayot* that he and his ancestors customarily studied. He completed his *mishnayot* with the words of R' Yehoshua ben Levi: "The Holy One Blessed is He will in the future cause every righteous one to inherit three hundred and ten worlds (Uktzin 3:12)".

Escorted by his loyal assistant R' Yichye Sali, he passed among the shaking and trembling members of the community on his way to the central square. His shoe fell off at which Rabenu David declared: "This is a sign that my departure from this world will atone for the Jewish people."

The saintly Rav was brought before the evil tyrant. All eyes turned towards them. When Moulay Muhammad observed the stately figure

of Rabenu David for the first time, the desire to destroy burned so fiercely in him that he was unable to contain his hatred and revulsion. Moulay Muhammad exploded in fierce anger: "Why do you write letters to those infidel apostate Christians, encouraging them to return to Tafilalet?" Rabenu David responded calmly in the manner of Torah scholars: "G-d forbid that I should do such a thing, sir"! Clearly the tyrant did not accept this answer, but Rabenu David's erect posture and serenely confident manner of speaking shook his equilibrium. Abruptly, he ordered that Rabenu David be put to death with two of the wealthy townspeople, R' Yitzchak ben Simchon and his son R' David.

The rebel soldiers seized Rabenu David, R' Yitzchak, and his son, and led them to the place of execution. The rest of the community could barely contain their flow of tears; every heart melted and there was not a person in the crowd who was not ready to give up his own life to save the life of their esteemed leader who was now being taken out to be executed. The cries of the people filled the streets: "Our holy Rav, let our candle be extinguished instead of yours!"

While Rabenu David was being taken to the killing grounds, an amazing thing happened. From Heaven, it entered the heads of some of Moulay Muhammad's advisors that since the Grand Rabbi of the Jews was equivalent in stature to the whole congregation, the decree to kill the entire nation should be rescinded. In addition, they suggested to their wicked leader, if they killed all the Jews they would lose the opportunity to levy monetary decrees against the Jewish people. The tyrant accepted their words and agreed to free the remaining members of the community from the ever-turning sword that was suspended above their heads. As Rabenu David had predicted, his death atoned for the Jews of Tafilalet. The evil tyrant agreed to free them in exchange for an appropriate tax to be paid from the community funds.

The hour chosen for Rabenu David to depart this world was the precise hour in which the three great shepherds, Yoseph HaTzaddik,

Moshe Rabenu, and King David left this world. Although the Jews were told to return to their homes, they found themselves as if rooted to the ground. The Jews watched with tortured eyes as Rabenu David's figure moved further and further away towards the edge of the square, the headquarters of Moulay Muhammad and the place designated for execution. The death chosen for Rabenu David by that evil tyrant was cruel and unusual. In the courtyard stood a cannon and the holy and pure body of Rabenu David was placed in its mouth. One lone shot was all it took for the saintly soul of Rabenu David to separate from his holy body. Jews, who observed the spectacle from the roofs of adjacent homes, absorbed this terrible and final picture with their own eyes.

The granddaughter of Rabenu David's uncle, Rabbanit Chana Chanini Zazi Adahan was among those who witnessed the terrible killing of Rabenu David. She testified that immediately after the sound of the cannon shot killing Rabenu David and the other two holy martyrs was heard, three doves pure as snow were seen emerging from the mouth of the cannon.

Within the next few minutes, the meaning of the shot reverberating from the cannon became known throughout the entire city. A thesaurus of suffering does not contain enough expressions to portray the depth of the pain of the Jews of Tafilalet, whose own lives had been saved, but who had been left orphaned by the terrible and cruel murder of their crowned leader. Rabenu David was the loving father who had carried them on his wings during his lifetime and whose death *al Kiddush Hashem* had spread over them wings of salvation. One of the townspeople unable to control his sorrow, burst angrily into the enclosure of the rebel soldiers. He was captured and killed. Immediately thereafter a clear directive was issued forbidding lamenting the death of Rabenu David; anyone caught crying or mourning would be put to death.

They were even forbidden to cry ...

"REJOICE WHEN THEY FIND THE GRAVE" (Iyov 3:21)

At the conclusion of the *Shabbat*, the heads of the community began deliberating how to bring the holy body of Rabenu David for burial. One of them, R' Eliyahu Abichazira, son of Rabenu Aharon Abichazira and cousin to Rabenu David, was dispatched to negotiate with Moulay Muhammad's aides about handing over the Rav's body. However, on his arrival at military headquarters, the watchman noticed that R' Eliyahu's eyes were red, indicating that he had been crying over the death of Rabenu David. He was immediately handcuffed and brought before the commanding officer to be sentenced to death for having violated the law of the land. Only after much persuasion did he agree to release R' Eliyahu without punishing him for the terrible "crime" he had committed.

The rebels at first refused to hand over Rabenu David's body. Their leader went so far as to claim that he was not really killed but that his body had gone straight to heaven. However, after a few days, during which large sums of money passed hands, Moulay Muhammad agreed to their request. Further large bribes were to be transferred to his treasury from whatever money the Jewish community still had in their possession. To everyone's amazement, in spite of the violent death he met, the saintly man's body was almost completely intact.

His brother's grandson Morenu Rabbi David Chai Abichazira tells us that the *tzaddik*'s body was completely intact with the exception of one area – the biceps muscle of the arm, the portion of the arm where the *tefillin* are laid (Eruvin 95b).

That very night Rabenu David appeared to his brother the Baba Sali in a dream, wherein he related that there was good reason why he had to suffer the pain of his biceps muscle being dislodged. One day while donning his *Tefillin* he had neglected to concentrate on one of the

kavanot. As a *tikkun*, the muscle was moved from the place where it was connected to the holy body.[111]

Despite their strong desire to do so, it was impossible for the Jews of Tafilalet to conduct a large funeral for their leader, for this would be in violation of the laws prohibiting eulogizing him and lamenting his loss. Even at the small and modest funeral that was held for him, spies were seen watching whether anyone was crying.

With dry eyes, but with hearts wrung with sorrow, the people brought their beloved leader Rabenu David to his eternal resting place. Eulogies were conducted in a private and secret manner.

Suspecting that the Arabs may scheme to demand back the body of the *tzaddik*, members of the *Chevra Kadisha*, in conjunction with the family's *Rabbanim*, devised a plan to avoid further misfortune. Surreptitiously two graves were dug, one beside the other. Rabenu David was to be buried in one of the graves while the other was to be left empty. The secret agents sent by Moulay Muhammad could not see exactly what the *Chevra Kadisha* were doing as they bent over to bury their crowned leader. The empty grave was decorated with an especially beautiful tombstone to give the appearance of being the true one.

Indeed, after a period of time, messengers of Moulay Muhammad arrived and demanded Rabenu David's body. The *Chevra Kadisha* opened the grave in their presence and showed them the empty grave.

It was now the turn of the Jewish people to remind them of the words of Moulay Muhammad: Rabenu David's body had been whisked straight to heaven!

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111. It is said that for the same kind of lapse, the Baba Sali refrained from eating meat for twenty years.

"TO FULFILL THE WILL OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN"

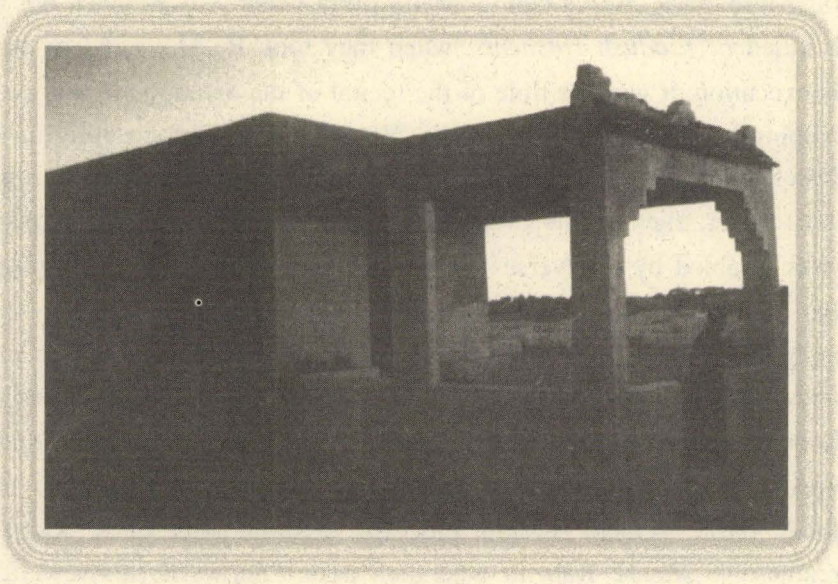
(Megilla 13b)

In one of his discussions on the death of his uncle *al Kiddush Hashem*, Rabenu Meir revealed something of his understanding of Rabenu David's veiled conduct. This is what he said:

"The *Gemara* in Massechet Brachot (61b) describes for us what was going through R' Akiva ben Yoseph's mind when he was taken out to be killed *al Kiddush Hashem*: "when they took R' Akiva out to face his execution, it was the time of the recital of the *Shma*, and they were combing his flesh with iron combs. Yet R' Akiva was accepting upon himself the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. His students said to him: 'Our teacher, even to this extent?' R' Akiva said to them: 'All my days I was troubled by this verse – 'with all your soul' – even if He takes your soul. I said to myself, 'When will the opportunity come to my hands that I may fulfill this verse?' And now that it has come to my hands, should I not fulfill it?" In a different place *Chazal* describe Hashem's revealing to Moshe Rabenu: "A great man who is destined to exist at the end of many generations, Akiva ben Yoseph is his name," (Menachot 29b). Hashem proceeds to show some of R' Akiva's greatness to Moshe Rabenu who then asks: "Show me his reward". "Hashem said to him, 'Turn around!' Moshe turned around and saw that people were weighing the flesh from R' Akiva's body in the butcher's meat market in order to sell it. Moshe said before Him: 'This is the Torah and this is its reward?' Hashem said to him: 'Quiet, thus has it arisen in the thoughts before Me'".

By combining both these *Gemaras*, Rabenu Meir explained that the same thought that crossed the mind of R' Akiva when he recited *Kriyat Shma*, his fervent desire to have the opportunity to fulfill that particular *mitzvah* – was the same thought that "crossed the mind" of the A-lmighty – in other words, his wishes broke through the heavens.

"**The** same may be said for my uncle *Ateret Roshenu*, continued Rabenu Meir. He yearned his entire life for this type of death and he merited receiving it for his wishes broke through to the heavens."



The resting place of Rabenu David *Ateret Roshenu*

A LAMENT FOR DAVID

"FOR THIS I WILL LAMENT AND WAIL" (Micha 1:8)

Although in Tafilalet people were not permitted to publicly eulogize or lament the great loss of the *tzaddik*, the bitter news of his gruesome execution evoked deep feelings of mourning in other Moroccan and North African cities where Rabenu David's name was well known during his lifetime. Sorrow and bereavement were felt on an individual as well as a public level, and there was not a single Jewish home in which his greatness was not discussed and in which his tragic death was not mourned.

Many eulogies were delivered and special lamentations were written commemorating the departure of Rabenu David for the upper worlds. These lamentations express not only the suffering and sadness that permeated the Moroccan Jewish community but also the high esteem in which the leading *Rabbanim* of Morocco held him. While he was eulogized by all the *tzaddikim* and Sages of Morocco, the greatest laments came from those closest to him: R' Moshe ben Yoseph Turgeman (the Baba Si), and R' Yichye Adahan, Rabenu David's cousin.

In the writings of the Baba Si we find:

"**In** his lifetime he had merit and he brought merit to others and with his prayers he saved many from death. ... He was the Holy Ark that was removed and departed this world at a very auspicious time — at the laying to rest of three pillars of the world. ... 'Woe to us for we have sinned.'[112] ... At the time when the decree was issued 'to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews, from young to old, children and women, in one day'[113] ... he provided atonement for

112. Eicha 5:16

113. Esther 3:31

himself and for his people and nation, with the power of his Torah and his holiness, as one of the ten martyrs. ... We are left orphaned. What can we say?"

When they came to inform R' Yichye Adahan about the passing of his beloved cousin, Rabenu David, his reaction was: "I have already known of this for a year. I was informed in a dream that this would befall him." During the year of mourning, R' Yichye Adahan took upon himself many mourning practices and spent many days writing lamentations for the passing of a *tzaddik*. He compiled the book *Ani LeDodi*, commemorating the life and eulogizing the death of Rabenu David and included these lengthy lamentations. The book bears the marks of grief and anguish that the terrible incident left on him.

HaGaon HaRav Masud HaKohen expressed his great pain in his own lamentation:

"For this we certainly weep and wail and throw ourselves to the ground. For this great man who is withering in the ground we groan and cry. 'Woe to a world that has lost its helmsman'[114] and the land is filled with darkness and fog."

"I AM DISTRESSED OVER YOU, MY BROTHER"

(Shmuel II 1:26)

The lamentation of the Baba Sali transcends all others in its beauty and the totality of its perfection. He refused to be comforted over the death of his brother, to whom he was bound with all his heart and whose hand never left his. While doing his utmost to extricate himself and his family from Tafilalet, the Baba Sali dipped his quill in the inkwell of tears and produced several lamentations in writing. Two of his lamentations have been preserved in their original handwriting.



114. Baba Batra 91a





ספר

אני לדודי

בו יסופר קצת ממקצת שבחי מרן מלכא חסידא קדישא ופרישא המקובל האלקי שלשלת יוחסין בנן של קדושים שמו נודע בשערים מפורשים ונדרשים מעשיו הטובים לנערים זקנים וישישים מזרק טהור בקשת ענותן שפל ברך האדמו"ר

כמוהר"ר **דוד אביחצירא** זלה"ה זיע"א

אשר פעל ועשה בנסתר ובנגלה זכה וזיכה את הרבים דבריו נשמעים כמסטרות נטועים לפני כל השומעים בטהרה ובקדושה לשם רם ונשא ' וחיבוריו היקרים מיוסדים על פי מוסרים בפרדס מיוסדים הלא המה שכ"ל טו"ב פת"ה האה"ל רישא ומיפא שפ"ר קדמי להחוייא ריש מלייא הוא אחד מבני עלייה ' וחובה עלי רמיא לספר המאורעות שאירעו בזמננו הקיפונו צרות מפה ומפה עד שנלקח ונהפס בעוננו ביום ש"ק י"ד לחדש כסלו שנת על הר ציון ששמים לפ"ק נער אני לכח זכותו וזכות אבותיו ינקום נקמתו לעיני עמו ועדתו ויקים שכינתו מעפר להשיבה לארצו ונחלתו בב"א :

נדפס פה כאואבלאנפא יע"א

שנת חקת עולם **לדרתיכ"ם** לפ"ק

בבית הדפוס המשובח של הארון **משה עמאר** יצ"ו

Title page of the first edition of *"Ani LeDodi"*

WHERE IS THE PLACE OF HIS GLORY?

IN THE COMPANY OF THE SEVEN SHEPHERDS

Seven years had passed from the time Rabenu David met his tragic end, atoning with his death for the entire community. The family, now headed by his brother, the Baba Sali, still grieved over his death, despite having left Risani some time earlier. The whole family had uprooted themselves from the Tafilalet region and after a short stay in Erfoud, they had finally settled in Budniv. The few Jews who remained in Risani were those who could not survive the rigorous hardships of travel and adjusting to a new environment. These same Jews, mainly the elderly, the women, and the children, were held prisoner by Moulay Muhammad who demanded a very high ransom for their release. Arriving in Budniv with the Baba Sali were his wife and son, Rabenu Meir, Rabenu David's widow and her daughters, his brother the Baba Chaki, his stepbrother R' Masud Sheetrit, the Baba Sidi, his cousin R' Yichye Adahan, and R' Moshe ben Yoseph Turgeman.

While all the others were making great strides in adapting themselves to their new surroundings and developing a routine, which included the reopening of Yeshivat Abir Yaakov, the Baba Sali remained in a state of mourning. He spent most of his days sitting in sackcloth, fasting and crying over the martyred death of his holy brother. During the week in which fell the anniversary the passing of Rabenu David, the Baba Sali would customarily take upon himself a *taanit hafsaka*, fasting from the conclusion of one *Shabbat* to the beginning of the next.

The following story took place in the year 5687, [1926] during the week of the anniversary of Rabenu David's passing. In the course of his sacred work, the Baba Sali became very tired and fell into a deep sleep in which he dreamed that he saw himself immersing in the

mikveh adjacent to the *beit midrash* of the Abir Yaakov in Tafilalet. As he emerged from the *mikveh* he had a Divine vision.

In the vision, the heavens opened up and a large candelabrum of fire descended, illuminated by special, otherworldly lights. A voice was heard proclaiming: "This is the soul of Avraham Avinu." A second candelabrum descended and the crier this time proclaimed: "This is the soul of Yitzchak Avinu." When the third one descended, the proclamation was: "This is the soul of Yaakov Avinu." The fourth one was proclaimed to be the soul of Moshe Rabenu, the fifth one that of Aharon HaKohen, the sixth one of Yoseph HaTzaddik, and the seventh one was the soul of David HaMelech." The souls of the seven shepherds that had descended from the heavens in the guise of dazzling fire were then swallowed up in the entrance to the *beit midrash* of the Abir Yaakov.

While the Baba Sali was still stunned by this awesome spectacle, an eighth candelabrum descended, and this time the crier proclaimed: "This is the soul of Rabenu David Abichazira." When the Baba Sali heard the name of his holy brother, Rabenu David come down, from the heavens, he gathered up the courage to stand by the opening of the *beit midrash* to meet him.

He found his brother standing there before him as if he were alive. He attempted to accompany him into the *beit midrash*, where the souls of the seven shepherds of our nation had gathered. Rabenu David prevented him from entering, saying: "You cannot enter with me here because you are still in the world of the living. We have arrived from the World of Truth and this is the entrance to the lower *Gan Eden*. I have arrived here together with our holy ancestors to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* in order to awaken heavenly mercy for the Divine Presence which is currently in exile together with the Congregation of Israel. You may not enter here, but I will permit you to sit by the entrance and recite *Tikkun Chatzot* with us."

Before entering the *beit midrash*, he added: "You should know, my dear brother that it causes me endless pain that you continue to mourn my passing and the manner in which I left the world. The suffering I felt when I was taken from the world lasted no more than a second. I was immediately brought to the Upper Worlds, to a place I cannot begin to describe in its greatness and the immense pleasure I feel. As an indication of the level I have reached, you may notice that I was the only one permitted to join the seven shepherds in the lower *Gan Eden* to recite *Tikkun Chatzot*. If you wish to bring me any pleasure and satisfaction, you must cease these mourning practices immediately!"

The Baba Sali kissed Rabenu David's hand as he hurriedly left him, making his way into the *beit midrash*. The Baba Sali sat outside alone, reciting *Tikkun Chatzot* along with them. He awoke with every detail of the dream still vivid in his mind.

After the *Shacharit* prayers, the Baba Sali transformed his mourning into rejoicing, after undergoing an annulling of vows for the mourning practices he had taken upon himself. He related the contents of the dream to his righteous friends and they declared that day to be one of feasting and celebration in honor of Rabenu David's soul, which had ascended with the "crown of a good name." From that day until the final year of the Baba Sali's life, some fifty-five years later, a great feast was held each year on the 14th of Kislev. The day was spent reminiscing about Rabenu David, with a multitude of stories regarding his sacred work and his extreme level of holiness.

During the course of time, many of those who were close to the Baba Sali heard this story. He would generally conclude his remarks by saying: "Rabenu David, *Ateret Roshenu* merits being in the shadow of R' Akiva and his colleagues, for he too was killed sanctifying Hashem's Name!"

His son Rabenu Meir would also hold a feast on the anniversary of the passing of his uncle, Rabenu David. In the final year of Rabenu

Meir's life, while dining with a number of pious individuals on that day, his expression suddenly changed and he began to tremble and shout with fear. For a moment they feared that something terrible had happened to him and they summoned his son. However, almost immediately he calmed down and his face cleared. He apologized: "On this day, the anniversary of his passing, it is as if I am standing here before him." He had actually felt Rabenu David's presence.

Rabenu Meir then explained to his guests that Rabenu David had merited reaching such a high place because he sacrificed himself, allowing himself to be killed, to sanctify Hashem's Name, thus saving an entire community from destruction.

The book *Malchei Rabbanan* cites what the author heard from "a sage from the holy city of Tiberias, a G-d-fearing individual whose word can be relied upon, by the name of R' David Sheetrit." He told them that following his passing, Rabenu David appeared to him in a dream, saying: "My father did not manage to do a *tikkun* for the soul of Adam HaRishon but I managed to."

"JUST AS HE IS ALIVE, SO HIS CHILDREN ARE ALIVE" (see Taanit 5b)

If his lifestyle and his conduct, like all of his lofty accomplishments in this lowly, murky world, were above and beyond anything we could possibly imagine, then there is no doubt that whatever he achieved in his proper place in the upper Sanctuary is far beyond the comprehension of an ordinary mortal, whose body covers the soul inside it — a soul which, unfortunately, is stained with sins. If the Baba Sali merited perceiving what he did, seeing the glory of Rabenu David's image as if he were alive, and witnessing his great privilege of joining the seven shepherds for *Tikkun Chatzot*, this is because he too, reached awesome heights.

In the days after Rabenu David's passing, some individuals who had remained in Tafilalet and who were intimately involved with the

family, merited having Rabenu David bid them farewell from his place in heaven. The following incident was described by Chana Chanini Zavi, daughter of R' Yichye Adahan.

Some time after his passing, Rabenu David appeared to his aunt, Mrs. Esther Adahan — sister of his father, daughter of the Abir Yaakov, and mother of R' Yichye Adahan — in a dream. He scolded her for having opened up the room in the Yeshiva that he had used for learning as well as the reception room adjacent to it. Rabbanit Esther was very taken aback, not knowing how to respond, for in truth, following his passing, she had permitted the rooms to be opened for public use.

Rabenu David continued: "This causes me great pain for I wish to come and learn with my eight sons in the Yeshiva[115] and I do not want strangers using my room. What is more, when they opened the reception room they no longer placed water there for washing hands, as they used to do for me during my lifetime."

The very next day, Rabbanit Esther locked the rooms and forbade anyone to enter. She washed the floor and cleaned the room as if preparing it for the arrival of an important guest. She also placed water there for washing the hands.

Incredibly, every day, they would hear the sounds of Torah study emanating from the closed room. Similarly, every morning they would have to replace the water for washing hands, for miraculously the water that had been placed there the night before was used. This miracle gave strength to those who remained behind in Risani, who saw that their "crowned leader" did not forsake them: "Just as there he was serving, so too here he was serving" (Sotah 13b, referring to Moshe Rabenu).

115. As mentioned, Rabenu David lost eight children during his lifetime.