



Paper, Pastries, and Payback

“Where is that last suitcase? We have all the others, but there is still one missing.”

The Rebbe Rashab had just arrived by train to Petersburg and when his attendants went to pick up his baggage they noticed that there was one bag unaccounted for. They searched and searched, but it was as if the earth had swallowed it. The Chassidim, and notably among them Reb Shmuel Michel Treinen, scoured every corner, office, and cubicle, but their efforts were fruitless.

The suitcase contained very precious manuscripts and its disappearance was a source of pain to the Rebbe.

A few days later, Reb Avraham Elya Gourarie, the son of Reb Shmuel Gourarie, came to see the Rebbe in Petersburg.

This young man had gotten married some time

before and had been given a dowry of ten thousand rubles, which was a staggering sum of money. He started a business, but things did not go well; he lost most of his money and was left with only one thousand rubles. In addition to the obvious financial hardships, this situation was also affecting his *shalom bayis* in a terrible way.

So when he heard that the Rebbe was in Petersburg, he decided to make the journey and ask for a *bracha*.

The moment he walked into the Rebbe’s room, even before he could say a word, the Rebbe Rashab exclaimed, “Very good! Avraham Elya will bring me my suitcase from the train station.” The Rebbe Rashab handed over the ticket he would need to claim the bag and Reb Avraham Elya hurried off to the station.

As he went to fulfil the Rebbe’s request, he was completely unaware of the drama already surrounding this elusive piece of baggage.

The station was completely quiet when he arrived; there were no trains coming or going. Reb Avraham Elya was a bit surprised, because after all he was supposed to be picking up a suitcase that was supposedly on one of the trains.

He figured he would wait for some clue. In the meantime he decided to have something to drink at one of the cafés. Sitting at an empty table, he removed a fancy pack of cigarettes from his pocket, and took one out.

At that point, he noticed that a non-Jew had been observing his actions, so he turned to him and asked, “Do you smoke?”

“Yes,” the man replied, and Reb Avraham Elya offered him a cigarette.

As he took a cigarette from the pack, the man asked, “What are you doing in the train station when not a single train is scheduled to arrive or depart?”

“Well,” replied Reb Avraham Elya, “there is a righteous man in town by the name of Rabbi Schneersohn and I have come to collect his suitcase.”

“Hmm, interesting indeed. I am the manager of the baggage lockers. Show me your ticket,” the man said.

After taking the ticket, the manager ordered his workers to go and bring the suitcase. After a few minutes of searching they returned empty handed.

“Search even harder and bring me that suitcase!” he yelled.

לזכות
הרה"ת ר' יעקב קאפל
וזוגתו מרת לאה נעמי שיחיו
גאלדבערג
לרגל יום נישואיהם החמישים
ח"י כסלו ה'תשע"ח

The workers quickly began emptying the entire room of all its contents, and, lo and behold, in a far corner, buried under a large bundle, they found the bag.

Reb Avraham Elya thanked the manager and hurried to deliver it to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe Rashab was very happy and said, "Avraham Elya, I am indebted to you for this."

Following this he went into *yechidus* and poured out his heart to the Rebbe, telling him his financial situation and the deteriorating situation at home.

"How much money do you have left?" asked the Rebbe.

"One thousand rubles," he replied.

"Travel to Korets and Hashem will send a good livelihood your way. Don't forget to take some food for your journey."

He returned home and repeated the Rebbe's words to his wife. She prepared some food, which he packed in a bag along with his tallis and tefillin, and headed out to Korets.

It was a very hot day, so Reb Avraham Elya decided to take a dip in the river

and refresh himself. When he emerged from the water, he sat down to rest. He took the tasty pastries that his wife had prepared and began to eat.

Throughout this whole time, another individual sat and watched his every move. The smell of the tasty goods tempted him as well. Reb Avraham Elya offered this stranger something to eat, and the two sat and spoke.

In the middle of the conversation he asked Reb Avraham Elya where he had come from and what he was doing there. Reb Avraham Elya related the whole story, including the Rebbe's *bracha*. "But I don't know what to do going forward," he concluded.

The man listened carefully and then said, "I think I can be of help to you. Let's meet here tomorrow at the same time. But," he ended with a smile, "don't forget to bring some of those delectable pastries with you."

The next day they met up and a third individual joined them. This man had a wagonload of cigarette paper that he was willing to sell for one thousand rubles. Reb Avraham Elya agreed

to the deal and bought the paper. He sent the wagon with the merchandise directly to Kremenchug, which was full of cigarette production plants.

When he arrived in Kremenchug, he went to the factory of Reb Tzvi Gourarie and offered him the paper.

"How much do you want for all of it?" asked Reb Tzvi.

"Ten thousand rubles; the exact amount that I lost."

"Take two thousand," he countered, "double what you paid for it."

Reb Avraham Elya held his ground. When Reb Tzvi saw that he wasn't budging, he offered three thousand. But Reb Avraham Elya refused.

"Take four thousand rubles."

"I am not looking to make a profit," explained Reb Avraham Elya, "I am looking to replenish the ten thousand that I lost." And with that he left the factory to find other buyers. But as the day wore on, the highest offer he got was only five thousand rubles.

In the meantime, Reb Tzvi had a brilliant idea. "Why don't I go to Korets and buy a wagonload of

paper for one thousand rubles?"

Reb Tzvi quickly made the trip and sought out the merchant. When he found him, however, the merchant explained that he had no more paper to sell and he had only sold the paper to Reb Avraham Elya as a favor to help the desperate man.

Reb Tzvi went to another location in town to try and buy some paper. He quickly found out that there was a shortage of paper across the whole industry. He then decided to send an urgent letter to Reb Avraham in Kremenchug, asking him not to sell his merchandise to anyone else and telling him that he was prepared to pay the full price.

Reb Avraham was overjoyed as he counted out the full sum of money he had just received; his entire loss had now been repaid.

He traveled to the Rebbe Rashab to let him know the good news. He also asked the Rebbe how he should go forward in business.

To that, the Rebbe replied, "Avraham Elya, I have already paid back the debt." **T**

(Adapted from *Prineiv HaKesser* vol. 1, p. 71)