



The Scholar and Savior

“I know your greatest wish is to be blessed with a son,” said Reb Mordechai Yaffe to his disciple Reb Yisroel Yosef. “Indeed, you will be blessed with one, but promise me that you will begin to take interest in studying Kabbalah and that when your son reaches the age of twenty he will do so as well.”

These were the final words Reb Yisroel Yosef heard from his master and teacher.

For years he had begged Reb Mordechai for a blessing for healthy children, and each time he had responded with encouraging words. Sadly, however, his babies always died shortly after birth. Now he had finally give him some hope.

A short while later, Reb Mordechai passed away at the age of eighty-two.

All of his disciples dispersed to different cities

and Reb Yisroel Yosef settled in Zamoshtch. Once there, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the study of Kabbalah and, sure enough, a year later his wife gave birth to a healthy boy whom they named Yoel.

The boy was bright, healthy, and strong, and completely engrossed in his learning. In due time he married, and at the age of twenty he was now eligible to begin learning Kabbalah.

“To whom should he be sent?”

This was the question that Reb Yisroel Yosef asked himself over and over again. He was so plagued by this dilemma that he began fasting and praying for guidance in making this decision. “I am certainly not a proficient Kabbalist,” he determined to himself. “And my Rebbe, Reb Mordechai, insisted that my son study under an adept Kabbalist.”

As he continued to battle with this decision, he had a dream in which his Rebbe appeared to him and said, “Don’t be so bothered by this, send him to Prague to learn with Reb Eliyahu Baal Shem.”

He woke up and a sense of pure relief washed over him. He summoned his son, and shared the details with him; Yoel happily agreed.

Yoel was in fact delighted; he had just returned from a five year study stint in Brisk under the tutelage of Reb Yoel Sirkes, better known as the Bach.

Reb Yoel Sirkes was acclaimed far and wide as a great scholar and his students were well known as great scholars and brilliant minds in the area of Talmud study. The younger Reb Yoel was no exception and he came home decorated with the greatest accolades.

Reb Yoel knew that his teacher, Reb Yoel Sirkes was a Kabbalist and would secretly teach Kabbalah. However, during the time he was there he was unmarried and under the age of twenty. Both of these precluded him from being able to join those clandestine lessons.

Now he was married and over twenty so he was delighted when his father let him know that he would begin studying the secrets of the Torah.

In Prague

Reb Eliyahu was already an old man and his *yeshiva* was conducted in large part by his principal disciples, who would guide and educate the younger and newer students.

Reb Eliyahu himself spent his time learning in solitude day and night despite his old age. He would seclude himself in a

לזכות
 ר' משה חיים בן פנינה פערל שיחי'
 גיפּען
 לרפואה שלימה וקרובה
 בכל רמ"ח איבריו ושס"ה גידיו
 נדפס ע"י בתו וחתנו
 הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאיר
 וזוגתו מרת לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו
 שפאלטר



room in the *beis midrash* so he could learn undisturbed.

However, when Reb Yoel arrived Reb Eliyahu personally greeted the young man and took it upon himself to personally learn and educate him.

Reb Yoel spent five years at Reb Eliyahu Baal Shem's *yeshiva*, during which he continuously studied with him.

Reb Eliyahu had developed a personal liking towards this student of his, perhaps because of his sharp mind and dedicated studiousness.

Whatever the reason may be for this close relationship, the fact remains that Reb Eliyahu confided with Reb Yoel all his secret remedies for various illnesses, ailments, and various other purposes.

Upon his teacher's advice, Reb Yoel returned to Zamoshtch. On his way home, he went to visit

his previous teacher, the venerable Reb Yoel Sirkes, and on this occasion he was now able to openly discuss Kabbalah with him.

When he arrived in his hometown, he was greeted with great delight and he was bestowed with the honorable title of a "Baal Shem."

Reb Yoel Baal Shem's greatness spread far and wide. He not only became known as a miracle worker, but also as a great *talmid chacham*. He opened a *yeshiva* in Zamoshtch that was outstanding in both the study of *nigleh* and *nistar*.

As a true pupil of Reb Yoel Sirkes, he directed his *yeshiva* in a similar style of learning. Reb Yoel Baal Shem personally supported the majority of the *talmidim* and, as his teacher had done, he chose the best of them to study Kabbalah with him.

A protector of Yidden

During the terrible years of "*Tach v'Tat*" during which the dreadful Cossacks made the murder of Jews a sport, the pillaging of towns a way of life, and utter brutality a norm, Reb Yoel came to the rescue of many Jewish towns in the most miraculous of ways.

One such incident took place in a city that was located on the banks of the Dniester River.

In a desperate attempt to save themselves from the oncoming onslaught, they began piling on to a boat. One after another, they frantically loaded up the ship in the hopes that they could outrun the Cossacks. The bloodthirsty hoodlums were rapidly approaching and the boat refused to budge. The Cossacks were inches away from storming the boat, which would mean

only one thing—certain death at the hands of these cruel murderers.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Reb Yoel Baal Shem appeared and wrote some holy words on a piece of paper. He quickly tossed the paper towards the bottom of the boat and it miraculously began moving away.

The Cossacks, not wanting their prey to escape, gave chase, but they could not catch the boatload of frightful fleeing Jews.

After a short while they gave up in defeat and turned away.

The lives of all these Yidden had been spared through a holy act of Reb Yoel Baal Shem that surpassed all the laws of nature. ❶

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