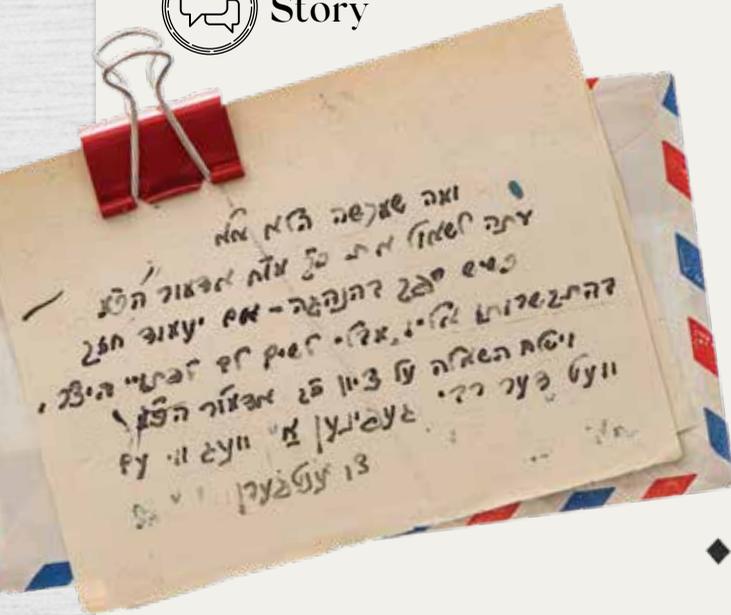




Story



נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' חיים צבי וזוגתו מרת
חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
לזרוב

דער רבי וועט געפינען א וועג...

WRITTEN BY: RABBI LEVI GREENBERG

Saving a Sefer Torah



AS TOLD BY
RABBI YITZCHOK MEYER LIPSZYC
(Tzfas, Eretz Yisroel)

When we started our shlichus in Crimea in 5752, there were no kosher Sifrei Torah in the shul of Simferopol. This was the result of an unfortunate scandal that took place in the former Soviet Union shortly after the fall of communism. Several unscrupulous individuals posing as *sofrim* from Eretz Yisroel found Sifrei Torah in various old shuls, convinced the unsuspecting community leaders they were taking them to be fixed in Eretz Yisroel, and disappeared with them for good.

In Simferopol they pulled the same trick on the Rosh Hakahal, Reb Shimon Korotka a”h, a special Yid who

was a truly dedicated community *askan*. They gave him fake IDs and took off with most of the shul’s Sifrei Torah, leaving only two extremely damaged ones. Thankfully, the *gabboim* of 770 were kind enough to lend us a Sefer Torah to use until we arranged one of our own.

After several years I found a potential sponsor who, upon hearing about the scandal, committed to sponsoring the repair of one of the pre-Soviet era Sifrei Torah. When I approached Reb Shimon with the idea, he adamantly refused to allow me to take it away even temporarily, suspecting I was a scam artist like the guys who stole the

other Sifrei Torah. After giving the community a very valuable item as collateral he finally agreed to have the Torah brought to a *sofer* in New York for repair.

The damage was quite extensive and although the *sofer* gave us a discounted price due to the unique circumstances, the repairs took over half a year and cost \$8,000. Entire sheets of parchment needed to be replaced and many letters rewritten. Throughout this time a very nervous Reb Shimon kept asking when the Torah would return and I kept patiently explaining how difficult and time-consuming the job was.

Finally, the work was done, but when I contacted the potential donor he informed me that unfortunately his financial situation had deteriorated and he could not honor his pledge. My search for another donor was unsuccessful for close to a year. Now two people were very upset with me: Reb Shimon kept badgering me to return the Torah and the *sofer* demanded payment for his work.

Finally, the *sofer* sent me the following letter. "Dear Itche Meyer. It is now more than a year since the Torah has been fixed. I have a lot of money invested in it and can't afford to wait any longer for you to find a sponsor. I am sorry, but if you do not pay me by Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, I will have no choice but to sell the Torah, take what I am owed, and give you whatever extra money is left over."

I was mortified. If I lost this Sefer Torah our shlichus in Simferopol would effectively be over and it would cause a tremendous *chilul Hashem!* I begged the *sofer* for a 20-day extension and traveled to New York to look for a sponsor, to no avail. Twenty days later, on the night of Chof Cheshvan, I felt it was time to go to the Ohel and hand my problem over to the Rebbe.

In my *tzetel*, I wrote the entire saga, concluding that it was crucial for our shlichus that I return to Simferopol with the Sefer Torah and asking the Rebbe for a bracha.

As I left the Ohel and entered the house nearby at around 4 o'clock in the morning, I saw a *yungerman* sitting at the table writing a *tzetel*. I figured I needed to do my part and Hashem would take care of the rest, so I approached him and asked if he had a few minutes to hear my story. He politely put down his pen and listened to my story.

I concluded by saying, "Obviously, if you are here at the Ohel, at this time of night, there must be something very important you urgently need. I imagine, if

you save this Torah, the Rebbe will surely grant you your request."

"That's a great pitch!" he said with a laugh, but he remained unconvinced.

"Do us both a favor," I said. "When you are inside the Ohel, just give my proposal a thought, so that if the Rebbe wants you to do it, he'll be able to get you the message." He smiled, "Ok, I'll give it a thought while I'm inside." I handed him my business card and left.

Two hours later I was overjoyed to receive a phone call from him. "Rabbi Lipszyc, your Sefer Torah is paid for. You can pick it up at the *sofer!*"

He proceeded to tell me that when he was standing at the Ohel, minutes after I spoke with him, he started thinking about how Chof Cheshvan is the birthday of the Rebbe Rashab and about the story told in connection with his birth. On the night of Yud Kislev, his mother, Rebbetzin Rivka, dreamed that her mother instructed her to write a Sefer Torah and the Mittlerer Rebbe blessed her with a son. On the night of Yud Tes Kislev the dream repeated itself, with the addition of a blessing from the Alter Rebbe. The Rebbe Maharash commissioned the writing of a special Sefer Torah and the Rebbe Rashab was born within the year, on Chof Cheshvan. Upon the instructions of the Tzemach Tzedek, both the *haschala* and *siyum* of the Sefer Torah were done quietly and without fanfare. (See the story at length in Sefer Hatoldos Admur HaRashab pages 3-5.)

"I found it interesting to be standing at the Ohel of the Rebbe and the Friediker Rebbe on the birthday of his father the Rebbe Rashab, and to suddenly think about this story shortly after hearing from you how a Sefer Torah needs to be saved. Then, when I walked out of the Ohel I saw the same *sofer* you had mentioned standing in the house near the Ohel, at 5-o'clock in the morning! I rushed over to him and after he confirmed the details of the story, I decided to donate the \$8,000 necessary to bring the Sefer Torah back to Simferopol. And just like in the story, it was done without fanfare, I want this donation to be anonymous as well."

And that is how the Rebbe saved the Sefer Torah from Simferopol and our shlichus. **1**

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