

THE WOODCUTTER

In a land by a river's edge lived a Jewish woodcutter named Shimon. Shimon was a good man — industrious, honest, and pious. From morning to daybreak he busied himself in the numerous forests, chopping wood and loading it onto his donkey and crate. Often he had to make deliveries miles away. Always, he went willingly. His wife, Baila, tended a small plot of vegetables near their hovel. She, too, was industrious, though less complacent.

The villagers spoke highly of Shimon's integrity. They also commented, somewhat wryly, that Shimon was a tad simple. Not stupid, really — he could manage through *alef bais* — just gullible. He tended to believe everything he heard; in addition, he tended to take things literally.

get back double. Double; think of that, Baila — just like the manna in the wilderness.”

“Wonderful,” Baila murmured, her back still turned.

“So, I have a great idea,” Shimon explained. “It's sure to earn us merit.”

“What is this idea?” she asked absently. She was accustomed to his bursts of inspiration.

Sucking in his breath, Shimon announced, “Every Friday, right before Shabbos, we shall take a loaf of fresh-baked challah to the river . . .”

Baila spun round, incredulous. “And set it adrift?”

Shimon nodded.

“Shimon, you're a fool! You'll be wasting good bread.”

“So you suggest an old loaf?”

Cast Your Bread

By Chaya Sarah Cantor

On Shabbos Zachor, the Shabbos before Purim, Shimon heard the rabbi's sermon on *zeddakah*, one of the *mitzvos* for the holiday. As some of the men began to stare out the window, Shimon listened raptly to the rabbi's exhortations.

“To those of you inclined to stinginess — fortunately a mere handful” — the rabbi joked, “you must remember the words of King Solomon: *Cast your bread on the waters, for some day it will return.* There is no reason to withhold your earnings. Hashem will certainly give you back double the amount you put out.”

Returning home, Shimon pondered the rabbi's words, feeling inspired. During *melaveh malkah*, as he munched on a piece of herring, he announced to his wife, “Baila, I was deeply impressed with what the rabbi said this afternoon.”

“That's nice, dear,” she answered as she washed the dishes.

“He's right,” Shimon continued thoughtfully. He took another bite of his herring. “We shouldn't worry about casting our bread on the waters. We'll

Baila shook her head in resignation. “Well, why not?” she declared. “Why not feed the fish with leftover bread, as we do for *tashlich*?”

“Woman, how can you be so shallow in your thinking?” Shimon argued. He sighed. “Do you think Hashem would be satisfied with moldy, stale pieces? Don't you see how much better it is to deliver a fresh, steaming loaf? Wouldn't it honor Him more? Can't you imagine what King Solomon must have given? We shall do them both proud.”

Baila sagged in defeat. Once her husband was dead set on something, she knew the *pointlessness* of arguing further. The next Friday, she baked a small braided loaf and placed it in the oven along with her usual Shabbos baking.

Shortly before sunset, husband and wife stood on the river bank and watched the bread float buoyantly into the horizon. As Shimon sighed happily, thinking of the heavenly dividends, Baila fought back the tears watching her earnings, in the yellowing horizon, start to sink.

THE BASKET

The next week, Shimon burst through the door with another original idea.

"Baila!" he called. "I was thinking . . ."

"Oh no," she groaned, plucking a chicken.

"This time, instead of a measly loaf of bread . . . why not send off a whole banquet?"

"What?!" Baila exclaimed, dropping the chicken.

Impatiently Shimon said, "Must I explain everything to you, woman? It's simple. Let us send out an entire Shabbos meal . . . chicken, fish, kugel, vegetables . . . why, even wine and candles.

In that way, Hashem will see the trust we have in Him, and He will surely repay us some day."

Baila whimpered, "All that food . . ."

"That is exactly what the rabbi was saying," Shimon insisted.

"Sometimes you worry too much, Baila. Anyone with common sense knows that we have no control over what we earn and what we eat. It's all up to Hashem. He provides . . . we merely dispense. He decides where it goes and how it goes. And He rewards."

Dejected, Baila picked up the chicken. Mentally she multiplied the number of hours plucking by two, and shook her head in exasperation.

The following Friday, before sunset, husband and wife again stood by the river bank. This time, instead of a solitary loaf, an entire basket laden with chicken, fish, challah, kugel, vegetables, wine, and candles sailed down the current.

Again Shimon watched, proud of his achievement. Baila watched the steam rise from the freshly-cooked chicken, sending vapors of their earnings upward, vanishing into thin air.

MISSING LAMBS

Not far away, a farmer, scissors in hand for sheep-shearing, began counting his flock. To his dismay, he noticed that five lambs were missing. He sent his son and two hired hands through the hills in anxious search.

By evening, the three youths returned, empty-handed. To their amazement, they found the five lambs scampering near the pen. Nearby the farmer stood, watching angrily.

"Where on earth did you find them, Father?" asked the son.

"You'll never guess," the farmer muttered. "They



were in the pigsty of our neighbor. He swore up and down that he didn't steal them. But you can be sure I'll take it to the highest court in the land. I'll have no one thieving — not *my* flocks!"

He opened the pen door and prodded the lambs inside. "Tomorrow," he continued, "I'll saddle the mare and go into town. I'll have a word with Sir Peter about this."

The next morning, the knight tried to listen patiently to the farmer, who appeared in his chamber, pleading. Sir Peter might normally have been more interested, had this farmer not been the third to approach him that day. Each one had a similar tale: that his livestock had disappeared, only to turn up on some neighbor's property.

The next visitor was yet a fourth farmer, whose prize heifer, after disappearing from her barn late at night, inexplicably turned up the next morning in the cathedral. Enough. He would see the king about all this.

THE DECISION

"Perhaps the animal did penance," the king answered, blase at the reports.

"Sire," Sir Peter argued, "the matter is quite serious. It's been like this for the past week. I have been besieged with farmers, shepherds, milkmaids . . . each one with the same tale. Somebody is robbing their animals. No . . . not robbing, but *hiding*. The creatures are not stolen; they are merely *abducted* and transported somewhere else."

Barely listening, the king stared out the window. Below, in the courtyard, his son was perched awkwardly on a horse, like a hen on a nest. Under the riding instructor's coaching, the animal broke into a canter.

"Very good, Paul," the king called. The boy looked up and waved.

Suddenly the horse leaped over a row of stones. Frantically the prince clutched its mane, but failing to do so in time, slid off the horse's back and plopped onto the ground.

Horrified, the king fled from the window and raced down the steps, the knight and several attendants behind him. In the courtyard, the

instructor was helping the prince to his feet.

The boy was shaken. "That dirty little animal," he hissed. Holding his back, he groaned.

"Your Highness must learn to pay more attention," the instructor admonished. "When the animal leaps in the air, it is important to feel its arching body — and let yours rise simultaneously."

"Paul!" the king called, hurrying to the boy.

"He is all right, Your Majesty," said the instructor. "The grass was quite soft."

"The mud ruined my brand new suit," Paul sulked. "My fine silk. Now Mummy will have to have another one made for me."

"It shall be done, Paul," the king answered, hugging the boy. "Thank goodness you are all right."

"That awful horse — I hate it!" Paul declared. He pointed to the animal, who was now calmly grazing. "It should be destroyed."

"Paul," the king gently countered, "we musn't blame the horse. Blame me, instead. I distracted you. I am very sorry. If I buy you a new set of boots . . . will that make you happy?"

Grinning widely, Paul nodded.

"Some day," the king continued, "you'll be a fine horseman, like my knight here. Isn't that right, Sir Peter?"

Sir Peter skeptically studied this boy with the fleshy face and turned-up nose. "There is hope," he said, not very convincingly.

Paul stuck out his tongue and brushed off his pants. The knight and the king turned away, heads lowered in conversation.

"Now, about this thief," said the king. "No doubt he'll continue to have his fun, wreaking havoc on our livestock. This is thoroughly embarrassing to me."

Sir Peter nodded. "What shall we do to this culprit?"

"Obviously, he must be caught and condemned — as an example to others," the king answered sternly. "I will not abide any kind of *disrespect* for private property. Which ultimately belongs to the king, anyway. Therefore, one who attacks the farmer's property is, for whatever reason, rebelling against me. I think you'll agree."

The knight nodded thoughtfully.

THE MASKED MEN

At midnight, Sir Peter flattened himself among a clump of bushes and waited. Across the fence, a herd of cows moved along gently. He surveyed the pasture, the only one in the county that remained unvisited — yet. The open field, dotted with stones that glowed in the moonlight, lay waiting. Something had to happen.

A few moments later, he heard the rustle of branches. A short form, swathed in black, crept heavily through the clearing of trees. It waddled to the fence and scrambled over it.

The target was standing in the center of the field, chewing grass. With a quizzical moo it noticed the intruder, now crouched a few yards away. Like a wounded bear, the figure lumbered toward the cow and, extending a pudgy hand under the clock, grasped the animal's neck.

"Got you!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Got you!" came a voice from behind him, and a larger, firmer hand clutched the intruder's shoulder.

With a gasp the figure in black turned around and beheld the tall, regal knight staring down at him. Each wore a mask — the intruder, a sinister cowl; the knight, his armor helmet.

"You'll come with me now to the king," Sir Peter commanded. "I think he'll be as excited as I to meet you. He knows so much about you already."

The king stood in his dressing gown, waiting and rubbing his eyes from interrupted sleep. The door was opened, and the servants ushered in the knight and his captive, still masked.

"I'm sure His Majesty will forgive me for disturbing his slumber," Sir Peter announced, "when he sees what I have brought."

The king glanced at the masked figure. "So this is the thief?" he asked, studying it with disdain.

"Yes, Sire."

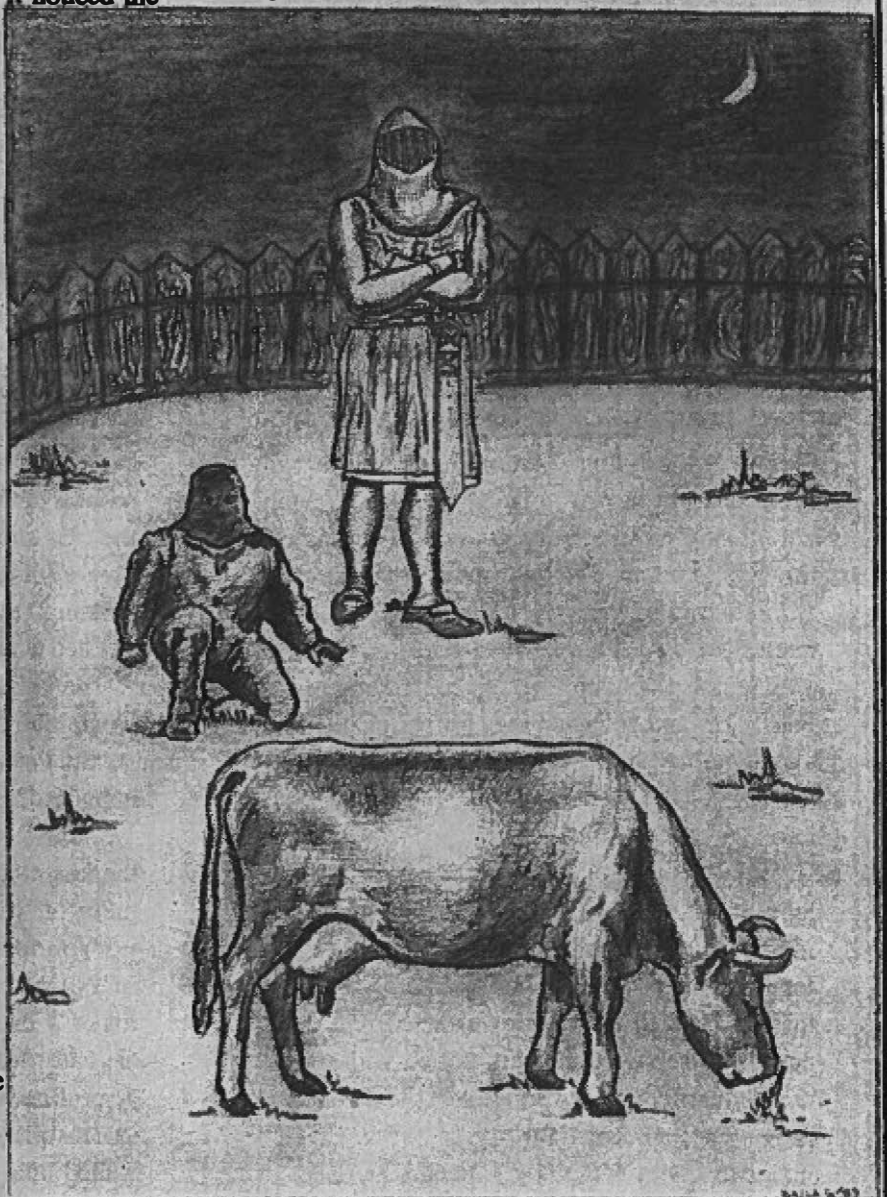
"Chubby little thing, isn't it?" the king said. "How did it ever manage to run away before?"

Sir Peter laughed. The figure trembled with indignation.

Sternly the king continued, "Young man, before I have you hanged, I should at least like to see your face."

Extending his hand, he reached for the cowl. With a light tug he pulled it away.

He jumped back in shock. The knight could not believe his eyes. There, hunched in guilt, stood the king's son!



"Paul!" the king exclaimed. "Why . . . you, the thief? It can't be!"

The boy stammered, "How did you like my little joke, Father?"

The king frowned. "It is not a joke for a king's son." He sighed. "Unfortunately, I have decreed that the thief be hanged."

Paul shuddered.

The king paced the chamber. "I am in a dilemma. To rescind my order would invoke the wrath of my citizens."

The prince protested. "But I didn't kill or steal any animals, Father. I only tried to hide them."

"But . . . you upset them," the king retorted. "The farmers, that is. They seek justice. And yet . . . you are my son," he whispered gloomily. "And the king's son, at that. To have you executed like a common criminal would be a disgrace."

Paul pouted. "It wouldn't be fair, either. I could have done worse things."

"You have," the knight thought to himself.

The king paused, then continued dramatically. "I

Sir Peter alighted behind him and followed him to the clearing. "Here it is, Your Highness," he announced. "You'll be left with a week's supply of provisions. Here . . . my knife. It comes in handy for attack against wild animals, as well as for slicing meat."

Paul nodded, staring at the weapon as if it had dropped from the sky.

Sir Peter bowed. "Good luck, Your Highness," he said.

"I hope Father changes his mind," Paul whispered, fighting the tears. "I don't like being here by myself."

The knight solemnly returned to the boat. Watching it disappear into the current, Paul sat on a rock in a sort of stupor, pondering what to do next and beginning to feel hungry.

THE ROGUE

has been caught!"

"Thief?" The king turned around, his haggard

Sire, the thief

Therefore, one who attacks the farmer's property is, for whatever reason, rebelling against me. I think you'll agree.

know of a solution. A compromise, if you will. Paul, I'll not have you hanged. Instead, I shall have you banished to a faraway realm. There you must remain. You are hereby forbidden to return."

Paul whimpered. "Not fair!" Weeping copiously, he called for his mother and followed the knight out of the chamber. The prince sourly returned to his room and snuggled into his warm bed for the last time.

BANISHED

The following morning, the sky was a dismal wash of gray. The forests flanked the river bed, watching the barge that now glided its way down the current. In the delta Paul surveyed the cliff, dotted with trees. As it loomed in view, towering over the turbulent waters, he trembled.

"I can't swim," the boy whined.

expression brightening with surprise. It had been six months since he had banished his son and thought the case closed. However, he had spent much of his time in mourning.

"Sire," the servant exclaimed, "Sir Peter himself will tell you." Bowing, he left.

The knight stridently entered the throne room, where the king stood, eager-eyed.

"Sir Peter," he said, "what in heaven's name has happened?"

"Your Majesty, the real thief has been caught," the knight announced. "The man who tried to make off with the farmers' livestock."

"You mean, it wasn't my son?"

"No, Sire," the knight explained. " 'Twas a rogue, a man who lived in the neighboring county. He had tried to confuse the farmers — make them suspect each other — by leaving the livestock in various places. After I was initially alerted, he waited until the suspicion had passed. Then he

tried again — this time for good. One farmer caught the thief making off with his stallion.”

“Why, what wonderful news!” the king exclaimed. “The real thief has been caught. And the other—” He gasped. “My son! And to think he was unjustly accused!”

The knight frowned. “He must have thought he was being punished for his prank!”

A tear trickled down the king’s cheek. “And to

“Why, it was the food you gave me,” Paul answered simply. “It sustained me quite well.”

“What food?” the knight asked.

“You know,” Paul insisted. “The basket of food that rolled down the river each week.”

“Basket?” the knight repeated.

The boy explained. “Every seven days I saw a basket of food floating in the water. It smelled wonderful — and had all kinds of cooked things.

Chances were slim that he would bring the boy back alive. The pampered lad knew nothing about outdoor survival.

think I would have had him hanged! For all I know, he may be dead — after I left him in some forsaken territory!”

“Sire, I shall find him and bring him back at once, dead or alive!” proclaimed the knight.

Immediately he boarded a small craft, en route for the delta. The knight bit his trembling lip in an attempt to quell his anxiety. Chances were slim that he would bring the boy back alive. The pampered lad knew nothing about outdoor survival. Especially after the way he had tried to ride a horse — why, the wilderness was no place for him.

As he approached the cliff, the knight took in a deep breath and looked to his right. By the ship’s stern, an empty coffin lay waiting to bring back the rotting remains. If Paul hadn’t been attacked by wild animals, most likely he had starved to death.

In the distance, directly below the cliff, he saw a ragged but rotund boy sitting placidly on the river bed. Instantly the knight recognized the brown mop of curls, the same turned-up nose.

“Paul!” he cried.

A disheveled head turned his way. The boy grinned sheepishly.

“Why, Sir Peter,” he exclaimed. “How good of you to come. I say . . . did you bring me something to eat?”

Incredulous, the knight studied the boy’s figure. It was far from skeletal. In fact, it was decidedly fat.

“Your Highness, how on earth did you manage to survive?” the knight asked.

Chicken, fish. There were vegetables — even wine!” He lustily pointed to a row of empty bottles. “There were also candles, which enabled me to see at night! I never wanted for anything! How kind of you, Sir Peter, to have pity on me. Thanks to you . . . why, I have managed to stay alive these past six months!”

The knight looked at the beefy prince as if the latter were hallucinating. The boy must be delirious from lack of food, Sir Peter thought.

Solemnly, he shook his head. “ ’Twasn’t I who sent the basket, Your Highness,” he said.

“No?” Paul asked in bewilderment. “Well . . . ’twas my father, then?”

“I suppose,” the knight said uncertainly. “I don’t know who else it could possibly have been. But whoever it was, he was certainly your savior and friend. Someone who knew you were innocent, and undeserving of death.”

“Innocent?” Paul repeated, open-mouthed.

“I shall explain to you later,” the knight answered. “Let us return.”

“Oh, yes, let’s,” Paul said. “Perhaps I’ll get something to eat.”

BANQUETS

At the palace, the king was overjoyed to find his son alive. Hugging and kissing him repeatedly, he exclaimed, “And to think, Paul, that I had mistaken you for the *real* thief.”

“It still was my fault, Father,” Paul replied

humbly. "I shall never again be naughty."

They embraced again. The king raised his tear-streaked face to the knight.

"Sir Peter, I must thank you for returning my son safe and well." Relieved, he gazed at his son's well-fed body and said, "Paul, you're a fine lad to have survived the wilderness the way you did. Why, I had expected you to be quite thin by now."

Paul looked at his father quizzically. "But Father," he said, "'twasn't it you who supplied me with sustenance all these months?"

"Sustenance?"

Bewildered, the boy explained how every week he had found a basket laden with food. Over the half-year he had had banquets in the forest.

The king stared wonderingly at the knight. "Sir Peter, did *you* feed my son?"

The knight shook his head no.

"Well, then . . . who did?"

By now all three stood still, groping for an answer.

At last, Sir Peter cleared his throat. "There is a way to find out, Sire."

Every afternoon he stood on the river bed, watching for a sign. Sure enough, late Friday afternoon, as the sun was setting and turning the water black, he spotted an object bobbing in the waves. Narrowing his eyes, he began to follow the basket backwards, against the current. Walking, walking . . . he went a full two miles until he reached a hovel on the river bed.

THE BREAD CAME BACK **W**hen

Shimon and Baila stood before the king, they were shaking, expecting the worse. To their surprise, the king smiled and thanked the couple profusely.

"What did we do?" Shimon asked.

"You saved my son's life!" The king joyously told them about the basket. "You shall be rewarded handsomely!" he declared.

Shimon poked his wife. "You see . . . I told you."

"What was that, Shimon?" asked the king.

The woodcutter cleared his throat. "I once said to my wife that G-d provides; we merely do the giving for Him. It was He who saved your son's



life. He merely rewarded us for carrying out His mission. I supplied the basket of food, but His hand guided it."

"Well spoken!" the king declared. "I hereby make you my prime minister!"

"Prime minister?" Baila exclaimed. "*Him?*" She pointed to her husband.

Shimon turned to her. "Why not?" he haughtily asked. "Do you mean to say that you still take me for a fool? After all, it was *my* idea to send the basket in the water. You still don't believe what the Sages teach? That when we throw our bread in the water we get it back? In fact, we get back double. And now, look at our reward. Riches for you . . . honor for me. And all for the sake of *zeddakah*."

The community did remember the woodcutter Shimon and his wife Baila. Every Friday afternoon, the custom developed of sending a loaf of bread down the river bed. And if you look down the river, you'll find rows of challos and other delicacies, sailing by like ships at sea.

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"Open your hand
generously
to your
poor brother."

TO OUR READERS

It's Purim time, and many of us are getting out those costumes and other paraphernalia. But we must not forget that at Purim we are commanded to remember our less fortunate brethren by giving **matanos l'evyonim**, alms to the very poor. There are organizations that collect money for the specific purpose of distributing it on Purim (among them is Od Yosef Chai). If you contact them, they will be more than happy to help you fulfill this wonderful **mitzvah**.

While many of us tend to stress **mishlo'ach manos** — the sending of gift packages — at the expense of **matanos l'evyonim**, we are taught that the opposite should actually be the case. Giving to the poor so that they may enjoy the Purim holiday along with their fellow citizens helps unite the Jewish people. "Torah Highlights" discusses this aspect of Purim.

Of course, the concept of **tzedakah**, charity, applies all year long, but at Purim it comes to the fore. And so, with tongues practically pinned to our cheeks, we present "Cast Your Bread," which, in humorous fashion, makes the point that charity eventually brings a reward.

"The Summer of Unity" is the first winning essay in our Writing Contest. Bracha Etengoff succeeds in getting across the point that all Jews are brothers (and sisters).

"The Jews of Germany" continues the saga of that ill-fated community. In a sidebar, the remarkable life of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch is detailed.

Have a happy Purim!

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Laboratories.

MAIL ROOM

The Shevat Issue

Dear Editor,

The cover art on your Shevat issue was beautiful! The colors were excellent. Keep up the good work.

Baruch Greenberg
Lakewood, NJ

□ □ □

The Hidden Secret

Dear Editor,

I thoroughly enjoyed your story "The Hidden Secret." Just one thing: why did you have to choose a typeface that looked like a cattle brand? It was really hard on the eyes. Please! Something more readable next time, O.K.?

Shlomo Glazer
Miami, FL

Sorry. We'll try not to do it again.

□ □ □

Rav Yosef Caro

Dear Editor,

I have been reading and enjoying "The Story of Yosef Caro." There are a lot of things that you have written that I did not know — in fact, just about everything in the article is new to me.

I think it would be really nice if our schools taught us more about the lives

of our *gedolim*. It's not enough to know which *sefarim* were written by which *gedolim*. It is also important for us to learn about the backgrounds of these great men, so that we can learn how to live our own lives.

I do have one criticism concerning this series. Why do you call Rav Yosef Caro "Yosef," without the title "Rav"? I think it would be more respectful to use the title.

Sara Cohen
Chicago, IL

We are glad you are enjoying the biography. The reason we use the name "Yosef" is because throughout much of the story the subject was a boy or young man. It would obviously not make sense to call a ten-year old "Rav Yosef." He is getting older now, and, as you will notice in the current installment, he is referred to as Rav Yosef on several occasions. But we feel it would be somewhat disruptive to the story to begin calling him Rav Yosef every time his name is mentioned. You will notice, however, that in the biography of Shimshon Raphael Hirsch the subject is always referred to with his title.

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