

She never complained. How could she? Wasn't this what she had dreamed about? A life of Torah, a life of good deeds. Her mother had married into the same kind of life, and her mother before her. It was almost a legacy. Who could ask for anything more?

Besides, to complain might be an affront to her husband, Rav Menachem Mendel. At the crack of dawn, without fail, he threw on his gabardine coat and hurried to the synagogue, the smallest in all of Rimonov. Ancient, walls filthy and crumbling with decay, its general neglect mattered little to a man like Menachem Mendel. Though he could have easily become a rav or

same coat to patch, the same shirt to mend? There never seemed to be enough customers. Often days went by before she picked up a needle and thread. In the meantime, her stomach rumbled.

She sighed. She just wasn't like her husband. He never seemed to feel that they lacked anything. Or if he did, he never let on. He was a true ~~tzaddik~~ He even seemed to dislike food, in a way — as if anything of the physical world tainted his soul.

How she wished she could be like him! But that was impossible — she was too much flesh and blood. Whenever she walked by a bakery or inn, she could almost carve with a knife the scent of braising meat, simmering fruits and vegetables,

Finally, after three days of staring at an empty cupboard, she could bear it no longer. Even were a customer to arrive with a fur pelt or gabardine, she was too weak with hunger to be much of a seamstress. She had to go the baker. Perhaps, if he were still compassionate, she might obtain stale bread.

Throwing on a ragged coat, she straightened her dress and fastened her kerchief in an effort to make herself presentable. People judge on appearances — she knew that only too well. She worried that she was starting to look too much like a beggar.

With trembling limbs she walked past the homes of Rimonov.

The Bargain

By CHAYA SARAH CANTOR

pulpit rabbi in a far more distinguished place, he had traded in the prestige for a humble life of endless study. No holy book known to the Jewish world escaped his scrutiny; he understood Talmud the way people understood their sons and daughters.

Beginning with morning prayers, he spent the entire day with his clique of students, scarcely seeing the sunlight. In the synagogue he would remain until long after dark, even after midnight.

It was up to his wife to provide the essentials. She had been blessed with considerable sewing skills, which she used to eke out a living — if such was the right word. The neighbors, Jews and gentiles alike, brought her their clothing for mending, more out of sympathy than necessity.

Unfortunately, although people cared, how long could they bring the

sweet pastry and raisin *challah*. She tried to tell herself that these things were all vanity, but she knew she was too much of this world.

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Pedestrians greeted her — some sympathetically, most deferentially. She was, after all, the wife of a famed and pious scholar. To some the couple looked impoverished; to most they were a symbol of self-sacrifice.

When she entered the bakery, she had to clutch the walls for support. The pungent, crusty smell was enticing to her nostrils. The presence of food, rather than its absence, reminded her painfully that she hadn't eaten for three days, and in an effort to fight temptation she kept her eyes on the sawdust floor.

The baker was a fleshy, enormous man, built sideways. Under the flour-encrusted apron his paunch practically overflowed, revealing where all the day's leftovers went. Watching him, she mused ironically over the far needier people who might benefit from eating them.

When he noticed her, the baker formally pulled his stomach in and his apron out.

"Good day, Rebbetzin," he announced. "What may I offer you? Some rugelach, perhaps? I'm afraid it is too early in the week for challah."

Tightly she shook her head no.

The baker continued, "Well, then, some sponge cake?" When she again shook her head, he frowned and crossly asked, "Well, what would you like? Please, Rebbetzin, I haven't got all day."

She took a deep breath and blurted, "A loaf of rye, please."

The baker shrugged and withdrew a round, bumpy loaf. Freshly baked, it exuded a warm, sour smell.

"Five kopeks."

She swallowed. "I'm afraid I'll have to owe you the money."

The baker stared at her coldly. Bending down, he withdrew a well-worn ledger and opened to a particular page. Her name appeared in and over a dozen lines, like a mathematical problem.

"Rebbetzin," he spoke, shaking his head, "I'm afraid your credit is overextended. I simply cannot give you any more bread."

It was too late to fight the tears — tears of rage, not disappointment. Rage because she knew that this man could have sacrificed a loaf of rye far more easily than she had sacrificed a life of ease.

Stiffly she said, "Good day," and turned to leave.

As she opened the door, she heard, "Rebbetzin, please wait!"

She turned around, and saw the baker beckoning to her. "Please come back. I'd like a word with you."



She shut the door and returned to the counter. The baker's eyes were softer now, and his face had melted.

"You must understand my position, Rebbetzin," he gently explained. "Certainly I understand

yours. I know of your husband. But business is business, and I've got a family to support. I once wanted to be a scholar. Perhaps, if I had a mind like your husband's, such would have been the case. But I don't, and so I chose to be a baker. That's life . . . full of decisions, often painful. And times being what they are . . ." he sighed, hoping to elicit sympathy. "I can't constantly give to poor families. I hope you understand."

Soberly the Rebbetzin nodded.

The baker's large frame expanded even wider with joviality. "However, I'll tell you what we can do. Since I always wanted to be a scholar — I traded in part of my portion of the world to come for a portion of bread — a little joke there — I'm willing to give you bread . . . as much as you want. It will be in exchange for your portion in the world to come."

"I'm willing to give you bread . . . as much as you want. It will be in exchange for your portion in the world to come."

She blinked at him uncertainly, wondering if she had missed another joke. Even had that been the case, she was too faint with hunger to laugh.

"My portion?" she repeated.

The baker nodded.

"In exchange for food?"

"As much as you need, Rebbetzin. No one should be denied the pleasures of this world."

Or the other, she thought. So long ago had she forsaken all pleasures that the only ones left had to be waiting in the world to come. She must have accumulated a lot, thanks to her husband. Everything she had done had been for his sake; he had — she hoped — left her with a considerable reward. She truly believed he would some day become a great sage in Israel. For him she was making this sacrifice.

Nevertheless, she decided to be businesslike. "If you add a pound of cheese each week . . . I think I can be reasonable."

The baker smiled, and said yes.

She straightened and said regally, "Very well. Agreed. My share in the world to come is yours." Her voice was increasingly firm and resonant. A bargain is a bargain, she decided, and she had to show strength. "Now, that loaf of rye . . . please. And a pound of rugelach."

"At once, Rebbetzin."

"And the cheese."

Holding the precious commodities, she decided to surprise her husband and take them to the synagogue. She didn't know when he would return home, and she felt he might enjoy eating them fresh. She would, anyway.

It was seven o'clock when she entered the tiny synagogue through the alleyway. She nearly stumbled over the cracks on the cement. Inside her husband had just finished a discourse in front of the students. His eyes were wide and pulsating, due to what he assumed was intensive study. He didn't think to guess that they might be burning with hunger.

At the sight of his wife he beamed and dismissed his students. "How kind of you to join me tonight for dinner," he exclaimed weakly. He beheld the rough, round loaf and the sugared pastries. "Nu, something to help break our fast?"

Not exactly a self-imposed fast, she thought darkly. Perhaps he had learned how to rationalize the endless hunger. She watched sadly as her husband washed his hands. If only he knew how much this meal had cost her.

Heavily she advanced to the basin and washed her own hands. She took a bite of the rye. But it seemed inedibly sour, and she could barely gulp it down. And the rugelach offered little delight. Its sweetness crumbled away in her mouth, like the plaster on the walls.

Her husband, however, calmly ate a slice of rye. He also placed a thin piece of cheese on top. He took two pastries, leaving the rest for his wife. Only when he noticed that they remained untouched did he look up curiously to see his wife's face, twisted to hold back the tears.

He frowned. "What is wrong?"

She put down the crust of bread and burst into sobs.

(Continued on page 32)



P.L.O. Bribes Greek Prime Minister

Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou has been charged with accepting secret contributions from Libyan leader Col. Muammar Khaddafi and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat.

The payoffs might explain a link between the Greek government and terrorism. On Oct. 9, 1982, a main synagogue in Rome was attacked and machine-gunned. A two-year-old was killed and 40 people were wounded.

The Greek government has refused Italy's request to extradite the suspect, a convicted Palestinian terrorist.

Instead, he was released and flown to Libya. He was defended by the Greek Supreme Court, which felt that he was fighting in a "struggle to regain a homeland." It is believed that Papandreou returned the terrorist to Libya in exchange for funds to finance his election campaign a year earlier.

A Greek banker claimed, "In 1981,

Papandreou got money from Khaddafi and Arafat to be elected. This I know from a very close friend of Papandreou. He told me about suitcases of money that he took from Arafat and Khaddafi."

Chacham Yosef Caro

(Continued from page 15)

calling for imaginary friends, lost children, long-gone voices. The doctor was sent for, but it was too late.

Now, standing before the open grave, Rav Yosef wrapped his cloak tightly around him. Face flushed, he fought to control his shivering. By now he had almost thought of himself as immune to disease, after constant exposure. But this most recent battle for a loved one's life had lowered his resistance, allowing sickness to invade. He had been bedridden until the funeral, and had walked on shaky legs to the cemetery.

The eulogy was short but moving.

"A woman of valor," declared Rav Beirav. "The crown of her husband's fame." He was answered by wailing from a crowd of women.

The crown, thought Rav Yosef. Always she had supported him. Long before they went to Safed . . . while in Adrianopol, then Salonika, she had counseled him. Though reluctant to leave Turkey, she had followed him around the world.

She had never chided him for leaving Salonika too late, even though the delay had forced them to suffer the pestilence there and its horrible repercussions.

A sudden breeze grazed Rav Yosef's cheek. In the wind he heard the whisper of the *maggid*, filling him with poignant memories, comforting him in his distress. If not for the *maggid*, Rav Yosef Caro might have felt truly alone.

(To be continued)

The Bargain

(Continued from page 4)

Anxiously her husband hurried to her side. "My dear, what is it?"

Weeping, she recounted the events of the day and the bargain she had made with the baker. She ended by saying, "Enjoy your meal, Menachem. You can now have both worlds. And I have nothing!" She burst into a fresh round of sobs.

Her husband watched her with admiration, and a smile crossed his lips. Soon his entire face shone, with renewed physical energy as well as spiritual enlightenment.

He cut off a substantial slice of cheese and rye. "Here, eat this," he commanded gently.

She took the makeshift sandwich, but simply held it in her hand. She looked at him pitifully, indicating that she could not eat.

Her husband continued, "So consumed was I with Torah study that its wisdom sustained me during the times that bread could not. I have

grown accustomed to your faithful delivery; in the past you left it for me cheerfully, never daring to interrupt my studies. You are my provider, my true helpmate. Without your aid, I might have perished long ago of hunger.

"This time I didn't realize that I hadn't eaten in three days, so immersed was I in study. However, just before you came in, I began to feel its effects. My head grew light, my body weak and pale, and my students feared I would faint — or worse, G-d forbid. You saved my life. And it is written that he who saves the life of a Jew creates an entire world.

"You, my dear wife, may have sold your old share, but by saving the life of a Jew you have earned a newer and far larger place in the world to come."

Through the tears she smiled and ate her sandwich.

The two enjoyed the rest of their evening meal. There were more to come. With a sudden increase in customers, as well as the baker's steady supply, she continued providing for her husband, assuring him of worldly comfort. In time, he became one of the greatest Torah giants of his generation — assuring them both of a place in a higher, better world.

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The
GIRL

TO OUR READERS

Over 3,300 years ago, the Jewish people received the Torah from G-d at Mount Sinai. That event has stood by us through the darkest years of exile. Even in those greatest moments of despair, we have declared: *Hashem echad u'shemo echad* — G-d is one and His name is one. The jealousy of the nations at our being the Chosen People has sparked many attempts to destroy us, but we continue to live.

The darkest moment of the *galus* was the Holocaust. During that time, there were many non-Jews who were repulsed by the actions of the Nazis and came to the defense of the Jews. The most famous of the Righteous Gentiles is Raoul Wallenberg, who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews, only to be thrown into a Soviet prison after the war. He has not been heard from since. "A Special Hero" details Wallenberg's superhuman efforts.

"Torah Highlights" discusses a number of items related to the giving of the Torah.

There is a custom among Jews to remain awake the entire first night of Shavuot studying Torah. In the merit of our Torah study, may we soon witness the final redemption of the Jewish people.

Have a happy Shavuot!

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MAIL ROOM

A Pair of Sixes

Dear Editor,

I love reading *The Jewish Reader* every Shabbos, but this week something strange happened. The Adar II magazine and the Nissan magazine were both Vol. 1 No. 6. I just don't understand. I think you made a printing mistake.

Naomi Fishman
Houston, TX

□ □ □

Dear Editor,

In the March-April issue it says Vol. 1 No. 6. But in the April-May issue it also says Vol. 1 No. 6.

I think your magazine is super. Keep up the good work.

Zevi Sandman
New Haven, CT

Hmmm. OK, we admit it. We goofed. Now, if that were our only mistake . . .

□ □ □

The Nissan Issue

Dear Editor,

Your Holocaust issue really hit home. We must remember this tragedy and prevent it from happening again.

Chana Rosenwasser
Brooklyn, NY

□ □ □

Dear Editor,

I thought the Holocaust (Nissan) issue was too, too depressing. One article was fine — but an *entire* issue? Hasn't this subject been exploited enough? I afraid young people will get the impression that to be a Jew means to be a victim.

Leah Weiss
Queens, NY

One can never speak enough about the worst tragedy in Jewish history.

□ □ □

(Continued on page 31)

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Table of Contents

The Bargain By Chaya Sarah Carter

Decisions often lead to pain. And in this moving story, hunger leads to a painful choice.

page 2

A Special Hero

By Chana Sharfstein

The story of Raoul Wallenberg is told. A courageous man and Righteous Gentile, who helped many in the darkest hour in Jewish history.

page 5

The Story of Chadim Yosef Caro

By The Editorial Staff

In Chapter VIII, Rav Yosef Caro is commanded by a "friend" to leave for Safed. When he delays, he tragically pays the price.

page 8

Torah Highlights

By Abraham M. Goldstein

The Torah could be given to the Jews only because they were united in their desire to accept it.

page 16

Geography Jews of Poland

By Deborah Mink

The Jews, plunged in darkness, discover the light of chassidus. Through this dynamic movement, Judaism takes on a new shape and style.

page 19

Across the Atlantic

By Chaim Pasach Sherman

Will Memtuchan be saved from the hands of Roger Tate? Will Aharon Yosef prove himself a hero?

page 23

Cover art and design by Rivka Stern

News and Views / By Jacob Fried page 30

Puzzles / By Dawn Posner page 33

