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The Last Half Shekel Coin from the Beis Hamikdash



The Kesav Sofer

For, a few years the Kesav Sofer, Rav Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer zt"l gave away time and energy to protect the Jewish traditional way of life. Finally, he succeeded that the Government recognized the Jewish education system.

The Kesav Sofer made a big Seudas Mitzva and celebration and invited many Rabbanim, Torah Scholars and community leaders of Austria - Hungary some who were students of his father, the Chasam Sofer. During the meal there were many speeches and Torah lectures. The celebration reached its peak as the Kesav Sofer got up to speak.

In the middle of his speech, he said that since it was such a joyous event he brought something special and unique to show everyone. It was a genuine Machatzis hashekel - half a shekel from the time of the Beis Hamikdash that had been passed down and he had received from his holy father the Chasam Sofer zt"l. He added that it was very valuable as there are no other half shekels left anymore.

It was carefully passed around from hand to hand for everyone to see. After some time, the Kesav Sofer asked for it back. To everyone's shock it had disappeared. Everyone started searching but it was nowhere to be seen. After a few minutes the Kesav Sofer who was pale asked everyone to check their pockets, but it never reappeared.

No Choice But to Ask Everyone to Empty their Pockets

With no choice the Kesav Sofer said that although he does not suspect anyone stealing it but maybe someone had mistakenly mixed it up with a personal coin and therefore everyone will have to empty their pockets.

Suddenly an older respected Rav, a student of the Chasam Sofer got up and asked the Kesav Sofer to wait fifteen minutes. Out of respect for this great Rav, the Kesav Sofer agreed. Fifteen minutes passed and there was no sign of the coin.

As the Kesav Sofer got up to speak, so did the elderly Rav. He asked for the Kesav Sofer to give another fifteen minutes. People began whispering to each other and many started giving accusing looks at the Rav. The fifteen minutes passed and there was no trace of the coin. The Kesav Sofer arose and requested everyone to empty their pockets. Once again the elderly Rav arose and with tears in his eyes begged the Kesav Sofer to remember the close relationship between him and his great father . and to wait another final fifteen minutes.

The Tension in the Room was Growing from Minute to Minute

If after that last 15 minutes the coin was still not found the elderly Rav will agree to whatever the Kesav Sofer requests. The tension in the room was growing from minute to minute! The Kesav Sofer was pale and shaking and the esteemed Rav silently moving his lips in prayer with tears streaming down his face.

Just as the fifteen minutes were coming to the end, one of the waiters came in from the kitchen and asked if anyone had lost an old coin. The half shekel had accidently fallen into one of the plates, arrived in the kitchen and luckily never made it into the garbage. Now everyone turned in wonder towards the Rav.

The Rav got up and spoke. "Since today is such a special occasion I brought something along to show everyone." He took out his pocket a half a shekel. "This Machatzis hashekel is also from the Beis Hamikdash passed down from generation

to generation in my family. However, when the Kesav Sofer spoke and said that he had the last half a shekel, I didn't want to take away from his happiness and decided that I wouldn't mention that I had one too.

“Can anyone imagine the Chillul Hashem that would have happened if the coin would have been found in my pocket? No one would have believed me. So, I asked for fifteen minutes and davened to Hashem that the coin should be found. After the fifteen minutes were over I asked again and davened that there should be no Chillul Hashem. Baruch Hashem the coin was finally found.”

Before the celebration ended the Kesav Sofer arose again to speak. "Besides the great Simcha of tonight's celebration, this gathering has taught us a very important message. Chazal - our Rabbis in Pirkei Avos teach us to judge everyone favorably. Can anyone imagine what would have happened if the search would have been done immediately as I requested?

“Is there anyone who wouldn't have presumed that this great Rav had indeed stolen my coin, the one and only left in the world? (classic circumstantial evidence!) Our Rabbis teach us even if everything points in direction of someone's guilt we still have to judge them favorably and presume they are innocent until proven guilty. Tonight's event is a clear proof to our Rabbis teaching.

“May this message stay with us from this special event.”

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayechi 5784 edition of Inspired by a Story by Rabbi Dovid Caro.

The Wealthy Man and Eliyahu HaNavi

There was once a wealthy man who owned many fields but did not have animals with which to plow them. So, one market day, he took a bag of money and went off to purchase oxen.

Intending to Buy Oxen

On the way Eliyahu HaNavi stopped him and asked him where he was going. When he said he was going to buy oxen, Eliyahu told him that he should add that this was dependent on HaShem's will; he should say, “im yirtze HaShem”.

The prosperous landowner insisted that he already had the money in hand, and it was now all up to his own will. Eliyahu warned him, “If you don't say ‘im yirtze HaShem,’ you will not succeed.”

Before he reached the market place, his money mysteriously disappeared. This repeated itself several times; he would have the money with him; he would meet Eliyahu who disguised himself differently each time and would suggest that he say “im yirtze HaShem”; again, and again he would not listen – and the money would again get lost.

Finally Learning an Important Lesson

Finally, he realized this was all hashgacha peratis due to his incomplete belief in HaShem’s providence, and resolved that from that day on he would say “im yirtze HaShem” about whatever he desired to do.

The next time he was on his way to the market, he again met Eliyahu, but this time he said, “I’m on my way to buy oxen, im yirtze HaShem”. When Eliyahu heard that, he blessed him with success and sure enough the man got a good deal on his purchase. Then, as he was on his way home, the oxen suddenly ran off the path into the forest and stopped near a stone, where he found his lost money bags.

Reprinted from the Parshas Va’eira 5784 edition of The Weekly Farbrengen.

Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov and the Wood-Chopper

Long ago in the small village of Sassov there lived a Jewish wood-chopper, a man of deep and pure faith. No one knew his name, and so, he was known simply as “the villager.”

All week he made his way into the forest and chopped wood which he sold in the town. During the week, he and his family lived frugally, eating just enough to sustain themselves. But for the Holy Shabbat, he joyfully bought challahs, candles, and other delicacies. Not only did the family enjoy the Shabbat treats, but despite their poverty, they always invited others to join them. At times they even went without food themselves so that their guests had enough to eat.

Approached by the Tzaddik Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov

One Friday morning the villager stood with his bundles in the village square waiting for customers to buy his wood when a woman came and bought the whole lot for six silver coins. He was about to begin his customary Shabbat purchases when the tzaddik Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov approached him with a request.

There was a woman in the town who had recently been widowed. She was so overcome with grief that she lay in bed all day weeping, and so was completely unable to take care of her two young children. Her health was failing and the poor orphans were going hungry. Could he help?

Not Content with the First Offer of Two Silver Coins

Now the villager was a good-hearted man. He immediately took two silver coins and handed them over to the tzadik. “Thank you so much, but could you perhaps give a bit more?” The wood-cutter reached into his pocket and handed over another two coins. Again, the tzadik thanked him and asked for maybe a bit more for the family.

“I’m sorry Rebbe, but I can’t give any more. I have only two coins left. As it is I won’t have enough money to buy wine and challa, but I must leave enough to buy candles to brighten our Shabbat.”

Reb Moshe Leib was moved by the man’s kindness, generosity and his love for the mitzva of Shabbat candles. He turned to the man and asked, “Do you have any valuable object in your house?”

“No, Rebbe, I have nothing except an old cow.”

“When you return home,” said the Rebbe, “sell the cow, and with the money you make, buy the first thing that comes your way. I give you my blessing that G-d will grant you success.”

The Wife Refuses to Sell their Only Cow

The wood-cutter ran home happily, brimming with anticipation. But when he told his wife of the plan to sell the cow, she absolutely refused. “How can we sell the cow? Its milk is our main source of food. How do you imagine we’ll live?” And with that the discussion ended.

When Shabbat was over the couple went to the barn to feed their cow. No sooner had they entered the barn when a carriage with two men pulled up. “Do you have a cow for sale?” they asked. The astonished Jew saw the words of the tzadik materializing before his eyes. His wife blurted out: “We’ll sell only for a hundred rubles!” The men agreed to pay the absurd price. Now, it was clear that the blessing was having its effect.

The next morning the wood-cutter went to town with the hundred rubles intending to carry out the Rebbe’s instructions. He noticed a group of landowners gathered for the auction of a choice estate. The Jew’s simple faith was so great that he pushed himself into the crowd intent upon buying the estate regardless of the fact that he couldn’t afford it.

Upsetting the Wealthy Non-Jewish Landowners

The wealthy landowners looked at the poor Jew. What a nerve he had to try to bid against them! They would punish him for hischutzpa and at the same time help themselves. They agreed not to bid on the property at all. When the Jew's offer would be accepted, he would lose everything because there was no way that he could afford the complete payment. Their plan succeeded. The wood-cutter bought the estate, giving the one hundred rubles as a deposit, and returned home feeling very satisfied.

That night as the Jewish family slept, there was a loud knock at the door. They were shocked to see the village priest standing in the doorway. "I understand that you bought an estate today, and I would like to be your partner," the priest said. Having heard about the low price, he figured he could take advantage of the simple wood-cutter.

The Priest Gives the Wood-chopper the Balance of the Money

"I agree to the partnership if you will pay the total outstanding amount," answered the Jew. The priest eagerly accepted, handed him the money, and agreed to formalize the deal in a few days. When the day came to complete payment on the estate, the furious landowners couldn't believe their eyes as the Jew paid up the entire balance.

The earnest Jew set out to visit his newly acquired estate. Travelling down the road he saw a group of people crowded around an accident. "What happened?" he inquired.

"The priest was just killed in an accident when his horses overturned the wagon," was the reply.

The Jew approached the accident site. It was his "partner" in the estate! Now, the property belonged to him alone. The blessing of Reb Moshe Leib had been fulfilled, and in gratitude the villager distributed large amounts of charity to the poor throughout his long and prosperous life.

Reprinted from the Parashat Va'eira 5784 edition of L'Chaim, a weekly publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.

My Special Wine Was Stolen. Would I Recover My Loss?

By Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin



Sofya and Ilya with their precious wine from the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Art by Sefira Lightstone

I was strolling along my favorite trail a few hours before Shabbat, enjoying the beautiful weather, when my phone started buzzing with strange text messages asking me to authorize bank charges. At first I thought it was simply spam, but then the phone rang and the person on the other end was from my bank, asking if I'd lost my credit card because someone other than me was trying to charge it at Walmart.

Overwhelmed by a Sudden Realization

I ran frantically towards my car, anxiety fueling my speed. Immediately, I saw shattered glass all over my vehicle. My car window had been smashed, and my entire purse stolen. Feeling completely violated, a sudden realization added to my overwhelm: the tiny bottle of wine I'd received from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in June of 1990 was in that purse. I never left home without it, and now the inevitable reality was sinking in: my treasure was gone.

I managed to dial my husband's number, crying indecipherably into the phone. "Bottle ... Lubavitcher Rebbe ... gone ... stolen ... park trail ... car window ... broken." My husband knew my deep connection to the Rebbe's bottle of wine and immediately understood what had happened. I assumed he called 911 because within minutes a police officer arrived at the crime scene. Trying to regain control, I started to explain to the officer who the Lubavitcher Rebbe was, and the indescribable loss I was feeling by having the bottle stolen.

The Bewildered Policeman

Needless to say, the bewildered policeman was more interested in details about the theft and recommended that I urgently cancel all my credit cards. He suggested I call my husband and ask him to help with this urgent task. When I dialed and began to speak Russian, the officer switched to Russian as well, and we discovered that we had both immigrated from the former Soviet Union.

This surreal "coincidence" helped me gain my composure, for I saw it as a sign that my ordeal was part of the Divine Plan. In my native tongue and in a more coherent way, I explained that while it is very unpleasant to face fraudulent charges and have a purse stolen, I was not crying about lost things, but about an irreplaceable sentimental item that was given to me by a very righteous person.

The policeman nodded in understanding but made it clear that it was unlikely my purse would ever be recovered. He explained that thieves take valuables and throw away the rest of the contents. The reality was that my bottle was gone forever. I don't remember how I managed to get home and prepare myself for Shabbat. When I lit the candles and recited the blessings, I instinctively sensed that this loss held a special lesson that I was meant to internalize. I spent the entire Shabbat in deep contemplation about my journey. *If the bottle was taken from me, I asked myself, then perhaps there's a reason it's no longer needed in my life?*

A Symbol of Transformation and Hope

My entire adult life, I held on to that bottle as a token of who I was meant to become after my encounter with the Rebbe. It was a symbol of transformation, a symbol of hope for a little Soviet girl to connect to G-d and her nation. The Rebbe himself taught that "One moment of Torah and mitzvot is eternal, for through them you are bound to the Eternal G-d and entirely transcend the boundaries of time."

Years went by and I embraced a life of Torah and mitzvot. That little girl found her place amongst the Jewish people, and the Rebbe's bottle of wine was no longer the only symbol of my Jewish identity.

Along my journey, I discovered that there are 613 mitzvot that bind us to our Creator. With each passing year, I made small steps and connected more deeply to my Jewish heritage and traditions. By the end of Shabbat, I had come to a profound

realization: Although I was sad about the loss of this incredibly important keepsake, I wasn't lost without it. I knew that it had served its purpose, and I no longer needed the "training wheels" to be able to find balance in my life.

In the following weeks I restored most of the lost documents and made peace with what had happened. Then, unexpectedly, when my brother Ilya visited me he casually mentioned that he had an identical bottle to the one that was stolen. I was speechless. Apparently, our grandmother Zelda gave her own tiny bottle to my brother who wasn't with the family that day when we drove to see the Rebbe.

Ilya had it all these years and decided to give it to me. I couldn't believe it. I later learned that my 7-year-old nephew and 11-year-old niece who attend Chabad Hebrew school in Newtown, Pa under the leadership of Rabbi Yudy Shemtov and Rabbi Aryeh Weinstein asked that their dad to give me his bottle. They felt that I built a special relationship with Hashem because I chose to live a "Jewish life," and thus deserved to have the Lubavitcher Rebbe's bottle.

The next day, filled with overwhelming gratitude, I picked up an exact copy of the bottle that was stolen on that fateful afternoon. With tears running down my cheeks, I held it in my hands for a long time, and then placed it into a special display case in my dining room, near the picture of my 13-year-old self on that visit to the Rebbe.

This is its new place—near the Shabbat candles, overlooking our beautifully set Shabbat table. I will continue to carry it with me, not in my purse but in my heart.

Reprinted from the Parshas Bo 5784 website of Chabad.Org

Showers of Thanks

By Rabbi Yosef Weiss

Rav Yisrael Gustman was the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Netzach Yisrael, in the Rechavia section of Jerusalem. Several of his students were walking past his house one day, and they noticed Rav Gustman watering his front garden.

"May we water the plants for the Rosh Yeshivah?" they offered.

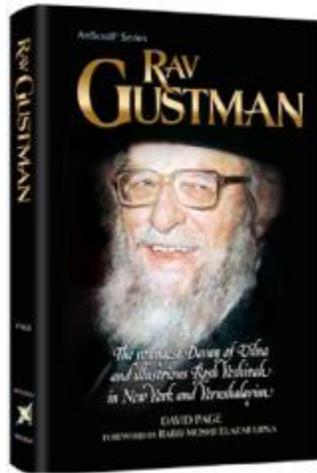
Rav Gustman hesitatingly explained that he preferred to water the plants himself.

A few days later, the same students passed Rav Gustman's house, and again found him watering the plants. "What can be so important about watering a few plants? The Rosh Yeshivah is spending so much time on it!" one of them wondered.

"Perhaps he does it for relaxation," another boy suggested.

"Impossible!" countered a third. "There must be a better reason for the Rosh Yeshivah to devote so much time to such a trivial task."

The boys decided to find out, and one of the students approached Rav Gustman with their question.



"I was once walking with R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky in a forest," Rav Gustman explained. "We were discussing various Torah topics, and I wasn't paying too much attention to the surrounding trees and bushes. We were completely absorbed in our discussion.

"Suddenly, R' Chaim Ozer interrupted the conversation. He pointed to a plant we were passing by. 'This one is nutritious,' he told me. He pointed to another plant. 'This one is poisonous.'

"He then continued on with the topic under discussion. Several times during the ensuing conversation, however, he interrupted himself to point out other edible plants.

"I was a bit puzzled by R' Chaim Ozer's interruptions, but I didn't question him. I made sure, however, to observe and remember what he had told me, for I was certain that he had some reason for telling me this.

"Shortly after that, World War II began. I had to hide in the forest, and I had almost no food with me. The hunger was almost unbearable. One day, I happened to glance down at the forest floor, and I recognized one of the plants that R' Chaim Ozer had pointed out to me, many months earlier. I lived almost entirely on those plants during the war years, and they saved my life.

"I feel obligated to show my appreciation to the plants that saved my life, and therefore, I water them personally." (Excerpted from "Visions of Greatness" by Rabbi Yosef Weiss.)

Reprinted from the Parashat Shemot 5784 email of Rabbi David Bibi's Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.

How to Make Amends for a Terrible Sin!

By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn



Rabbi Sholom Schwadron and Rabbi Paysach Krohn

R' Shmuel Strashun, known as the Rashash (whose commentary on the Gemara is printed in most editions), spent many hours immersed in Torah study, while also spending time engaged in business and administering a free-loan fund. A tailor named Zalman approached the Rashash to borrow money, and was granted a loan of 300 rubles to be repaid in one year. The transaction was recorded in the Rashash's ledger.

Exactly one year later, Zalman appeared at the Rashash's home to repay the loan. Deeply involved in his studies, the Rashash took the money, tucked it into the back-cover flap of the sefer he was using, and continued with his studies. Many hours later, he returned the sefer to the shelf, forgetting to remove the money. When the Rashash reviewed his ledgers a few weeks later, he noted that the loan to Zalman had not been crossed out and was apparently overdue.

When he summoned Zalman, the latter claimed that he had returned the loan on the very day it had been due. Yet there were no witnesses, nothing had been

recorded and the Rashash had no recollection of the matter. It was decided that both parties would go to a din Torah where the matter would be decided.

The news spread around town like wildfire – the simple tailor, Zalman, had the audacity to be involved in a din Torah with the revered Rashash! The Beis Din ruled that Zalman would have to swear that he had indeed repaid the loan. The Rashash did not want to chance that a Jew would perhaps swear falsely, so he relented and dropped the case.

People Stopped Patronizing Zalman the Tailor

Anger and bitterness were cast upon the tailor. People stopped patronizing him, and soon Zalman and his family became the objects of mockery and degradation. He gave up his business and moved to a distant hamlet, a broken man.

A year later, the Rashash found the 300 rubles Zalman had given him, when he once again referenced that same sefer. The Rashash immediately sought out Zalman to make amends. He finally found him living in a dilapidated shanty in a desolate area. He begged Zalman's forgiveness.

"What good is forgiveness?" said Zalman bitterly. "My business is gone, my money is lost, and I have nothing. I am the laughing stock of the community."

The Rashash promised to return his money and to announce in every shul that it was his mistake and that people should restore their respect to Zalman. Zalman shook his head, "No, people will only say that the Rashash is a tzaddik, and his compassion compels him to act such. They will never believe that I was really right."

The Rashash Thinks of a Way to Rectify His Mistake

The Rashash understood human nature and knew Zalman was right. Then he thought of a way to rectify the situation. "Zalman, I have a daughter. If I take your son as a son-in-law, then no one would doubt that you are indeed a respectable man."

Zalman agreed to this proposal. The young couple agreed as well. Soon a marriage was arranged between Zalman's son and the Rashash's daughter, and Zalman regained his former status in the community.

When R' Sholom Schwadron recounts this story, he explains that under normal circumstances, it would not seem even remotely possible for such a shidduch to come about. Hashem put into motion an entire sequence of events – the Rashash becoming very wealthy, lending the money to Zalman, forgetting about the return of the loan, the lapsed time, the obstinacy of Zalman, the Rashash's desire to make amends – all so that the shidduch that was proclaimed in Heaven should come to fruition. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – "The Maggid Speaks")

Reprinted from the Parshas Bo 5784 email of The Weekly Vort.

Reb Moshe of Lelov's Precious Treasure

R' Moshe and his entourage spent the Yomim Noraim on board the ship. R' Moshe had already bought a lulav, esrog and hadassim in Constantinople. However, he could not purchase aravos in advance as they would wilt and dry up before Sukkos, rendering them invalid in fulfilling the mitzvah of the four species.

Shortly after Rosh Hashanah, R' Moshe asked the captain to stop at one of the nearby islands where aravos could be found. However, the way things looked, the captain was not planning to make another stop along the way before they would dock in Eretz Yisrael. To make matters worse, the ship was proceeding at a snail's pace – or so it seemed to R' Moshe.

His mind was focused on obtaining aravos to complete his four species. R' Moshe decided to speak to the Greek captain and see what he could do. He explained the situation – in a few days would be Sukkos; could the captain speed up the pace of the ship so that they could arrive in Eretz Yisrael before Sukkos?

The captain empathized, but could not oblige. The ship was not in good condition, and he would be grateful if the trip would end without any mishaps. The captain estimated that they would arrive after Sukkos.

R' Moshe looked very upset. He asked if there would be any more stops along the way. The captain confirmed that in two days' time they would be passing quite close to the Greek island of Crete, but would not be stopping there.

R' Moshe asked, "Would it be possible to dock the ship at one of the islands, just for a short while?"

The captain apologized, "I am very sorry. The route we are taking has been established for quite a long time. It is the shortest, easiest and least expensive way. Every little change involves huge expenses. Much as I would like to, I cannot fulfill your request."

R' Moshe became thoughtful, and then said, "If I will pay for all the expenses, will you do it?"

The captain said he might, but he warned that the cost might be prohibitive. R' Moshe asked how much it would be. Adding up some figures, the captain came up with a figure of 8,500 rubles – an astronomical sum.

R' Moshe did not even think twice. He pulled his purse out, counted out the sum, and handed it to the astonished captain. Indeed, the captain – who kept counting the money over and over, not quite believing what he was seeing – promised that on

the day following the next, the ship would anchor for a few hours at one of the Greek isles.

R' Moshe left the captain with a heartfelt prayer of gratitude, thanking Hashem for giving him the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of the four species in such a big way. As they came close to the island, the captain had two of his sailors row R' Moshe out to the land, as it was impossible to anchor the ship. The captain, and all the passengers on the ship, wondered what on earth this holy but strange Jew would want on that island.

When they returned, with R' Moshe triumphantly holding his aravos, the captain grilled the two sailors who had escorted R' Moshe and asked them what he had done on the island. They told him that he went from tree to tree carefully inspecting the willows, as if his life depended on it. He chose what he needed, and then returned.

The captain could not make sense of it. He told R' Moshe, "All you returned with were some willows. I thought you found a precious treasure on that island!"

R' Moshe replied, "You are right. I did find a treasure there. A treasure so precious that all the money in the world cannot pay for it. See these willows? I would not give them away for anything in this world! They will enable me to fulfill the Will of the Almighty! A precious treasure, indeed!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Bo 5784 email of The Weekly Vort.

We Have Your Number!

Mossad chief David Barnea on Wednesday attended the funeral of former Mossad chief Zvi Zamir, hinting that anyone who participated in the October 7 massacre may be a target of future attacks. Zamir passed away earlier this week, at the age of 98.

"Let every Arab mother know that if her son was a partner in the October 7 massacre, his blood is on his own head," Barnea said. "Even today, we are at the height of a war. The Mossad today, as it was 50 years ago, is obligated to settle accounts with the murderers who infiltrated the border area on October 7, with the planners and those who sent them.

"It will take time. But our hand will reach them wherever they are. In this task, we will be accompanied by Zvika's spirit."

Zvika Zamir headed the "Wrath of G-d" Mossad squad that over several years searched for, found & eliminated the Black September organization terrorists responsible for the 1972 Munich massacre of 11 Israeli athletes.

Reprinted from a recent email of Lekavod Shabbos.