



# Purim Stories

RAV SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT" L

## *Never-Ending Simchah*

RAV SHIMSHON REGARDED PURIM AS a special time to imbue *emunah* and *ahavas Hashem* in the hearts of his *kehillah*. His impassioned Purim *derashos* overflowed with the theme of *Hashem's* enduring love for *Klal Yisrael* as revealed through the saga of our salvation. The story of Purim, he further emphasized, is not merely an expression of *Hashem's* love, but also a propitious occasion for His love to increase exponentially, as a father toward a child who has just emerged from life-threatening danger.

Purim is likewise an opportune time to express our overflowing gratitude to *Hashem* with feelings of pure love. After a drink of wine and joyous dancing is the perfect time to unleash all our love and yearning for *deveikus* to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.



## *No One Leaves*

RAV SHIMSHON'S FAMOUS "MISHTEH HAYAYIN" commenced approximately one hour after the *megillah* reading on the night of Purim. First, he returned home to read the *megillah* again for his family and join them for the *seudah*, while in the meantime, members of his *kehillah* eagerly prepared the annual *Leil Purim Tisch* in the *shul's* hall. Slowly but surely, crowds gathered outside the Rav's apartment building to escort Rav Shimshon from his home, singing and dancing their way to the festive *tisch*.

Rav Shimshon's Purim *tisch* embraced the entire *kehillah* of Ofakim in genuine *simchah shel mitzvah* and uplifted spirituality. Usually, he opened his *tisch* by extolling the awesomeness of the day and placing Purim in the context of the annual cycle of *Yamim Tovim*.

Before lifting the first glass of wine to his lips, he would loudly recite "*Borei pri hagafen*". The crowds would respond with "*Amen*" and recite the *berachah* after him.

"Everyone who drinks with us now will merit being present at the hour of our redemption!" he would sometimes cry out, to which all would answer with a resounding "*Amen!*"

In the course of the *tisch*, Rav Shimshon strove to elevate his congregation and, particularly, to bring *simchah* and solace to the hearts of all. The drinking was liberal and spiritually uplifting.

One year, he announced that the mitzvah of drinking on that Purim would be devoted

to achieving four feats: health, *parnassah*, Torah, and *zera shel kayama*. Before the congregation began to drink, Rav Shimshon *davened* and aroused everyone to beseech *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to send a speedy recovery to all *cholei Yisrael*. As the guests recited *berachos* and partook of the wine, they recited the names of dozens of *cholim* in need of salvation. Thereafter, once they had mellowed from the effects of the liquor, he exhorted them to entreat *Hashem* for bountiful *parnassah* for all of *Klal Yisrael*, after which he proclaimed, “*L’chaim!*” and downed another cup of wine as the community burst out in stirring *niggunim* related to *parnassah*, such as “*Yehi hachodesh hazeh... v’Hu yishlach... berachah vhatzlachah.*”

Next, he proclaimed that it was time to beseech for Torah, that *Hashem* should unlock the hearts of *Klal Yisrael* to love and learn Torah. His declaration unleashed a chain of poignant melodies, all supplicating for *ahavas haTorah*. Then, climaxing the evening, he announced that everyone should drink a final *kos* as a merit for couples still waiting for children, and *iy”H*, *Hashem* would grant them *zera shel kayama* that very year.



### *Pain of the Shechinah*

AFTER THE SINGING DIED DOWN, Rav Shimshon then called for “a moment of solemnity,” imploring each person in the room to, for a moment, forget his own needs and requests and simply focus on the pain of the *Shechinah* which is still in *galus* and *daven* for her.

“*Shechinah! Shechinah!*” he cried out in tears, “Who prays for You? We’re all concerned about ourselves, but we forget You.” Through his tears, he would then begin singing with tears and pain: “*Shechinah, Shechinah avu bistu? Galus, galus, vi lang bistu? Shechinah HaKedoshah, vi vite bistu!*” (*Shechinah, Shechinah*, where are You? *Galus, galus*, how long will you be? *Shechinah HaKedoshah*, how far away You are!) He’d then cry out emotionally, “*Ribbono shel Olam*, what do we have when the *Shechinah* is so far away?!”

This heart-stopping shout, when Rav Shimshon’s voice broke in anguish for the pain of the *Shechinah*, was the pinnacle of the evening. At that moment, he gave expression to raw emotion, and as the wine entered, the secret of his yearning for *deveikus* emerged full-force. Even on a typical day, he would often repeat that every Jew has the power to hasten the arrival of the *geulah*, if he would only concede his own desires and concentrate his thoughts and *tefillos* on the *Shechinah* in exile. Yet specifically on Purim night, when hearts are open and engaged to accept his entreaties, his words penetrated hearts. As he burst into tears and sobbed over the pain of the *Shechinah*, the entire congregation wept and prayed along with him.



## *Davening for Childless Couples*

ANOTHER OF THE ISSUES that occupied Rav Shimshon on Purim was the pain of couples who were not yet blessed with children. Identifying with their pain, he expended great efforts in *tefillah* for their salvation.

One *avreich* shares:

I was married for several years and still waiting for children.

Knowing that Purim was an *eis ratzon* in the eyes of Rav Shimshon, I waited patiently on *leil Purim* until the *tisch* ended. He was surrounded by exuberant *bachurim* and well-wishers eager to dance him back to the *yeshivah* when I approached him and requested a *berachah*.

In uplifted spirits from the drinking and the singing, he replied, "What? You think a day goes by that I don't think of you?" Yet I refused to suffice with that and beseeched him for a *berachah* and even a promise for children, which he was reluctant to deliver. Finally, when I burst into tears and begged him for a *berachah*, he surrendered and *bentched* me.

*Baruch Hashem*, slightly less than a year passed before we received the long-awaited news from the doctor. Knowing that it is best to keep *berachos* hidden, we told no one; the only ones who knew at the time were my wife and me.

In the midst of the *leil Purim tisch*, my friends literally dragged me over to the Rav for a *berachah*. Obviously, I didn't dare spill the beans or explain that it really wasn't necessary anymore, reflecting that an extra *berachah* from the Rav couldn't hurt in any case.

Yet as I approached, Rav Shimshon perked up suddenly and asked in a voice that could be heard by all, "Tell me, do you have good news?"

I was mortified. Unsure how to respond, I muttered something that resembled "No." Yet Rav Shimshon pressed me again and again, finally looking me straight in the eye and declaring, "You have to tell me, because if you don't, I'll have no choice but to break through the gates of *Shamayim* for you!"

With no choice, I shyly replied that, *baruch Hashem*, we had good news. His lips split

into such a brilliant smile, and he erupted with such a glowing, “*Yasher koach* for the good news!” that my heart stopped pounding. Then, he gazed at me penetratingly and said, “You know, if you hadn’t just told me that then I would have smashed the heavens open for you.”

Sometime later, when the *avreich* mustered the courage to ask him how he’d guessed, Rav Shimshon replied with natural simplicity, “I just felt that my *tefillah* was answered.”

*Chazal* teach, “Wine enters, secrets emerge,” and indeed on that evening, two secrets emerged – the expectant couple’s, and that of Rav Shimshon’s greatness!

Longtime residents of Ofakim still reminisce fondly about those bygone days when the *kehillah* was still in its fledgling years, and they would cavort through the streets on Purim together with the Rav to visit and bring *mishloach manos* to the *talmidei chachamim* in the town. One year, when the group finished singing and dancing in the home of a *talmid chacham* who had only a *ben yachid* for many years, Rav Shimshon took up his position at the front of the door and announced that no one was allowed to leave until each guest delivered his *berachah* that this house would soon be filled with the joyous voices of children!

On another Purim, a man once whispered to Rav Shimshon the names of a couple who were still waiting for children, and the Rav advised him to focus on their names while reciting “*Hashem Tzvako*” during *Kedushah*, which is an auspicious time to *daven* for *zera shel kayama*.



### *As Long as I Didn't Hurt Anyone*

WHILE HE FREELY SPOUTED DIVREI *Torah* and *berachos*, he also remained keenly attuned to the *halachos bein adam lachaveiro* and *bein adam la'Makom* even after partaking liberally of wine on Purim. Once, as visitors flowed in and out of his house in various states of intoxication, one man entered and, in the course of the visit, made a critical remark about someone else.

Rav Shimshon raised his finger and stopped him midsentence. “My friend, quiet! ‘*Dvash vchalav tachas l'shonech*, Only honey and milk beneath your tongue!’ (*Shir HaShirim* 4:11).”

Upset and more than a little tipsy, the man protested, “What’s wrong with what I said? Can’t a man say a word of criticism here or there?”

“Certainly you can,” replied the Rav, “but when it concerns someone else, only milk and honey!” And with that, he grabbed the man by his hands and began dancing energetically with him, intent on smoothing over the gentle rebuke with love and joy.

One *leil Purim*, one of his sons accompanied him home from the *tisch* after hours spent singing, dancing, drinking, arousing the hearts of his beloved *kehillah* to love and fear *Hashem*, and finding a good word and *berachah* for everyone who appealed to him.

Walking tiredly and slightly unsteadily up the path, Rav Shimshon suddenly burst out joyfully with a sentence that would remain with his son forever. “What’s most important is that I didn’t hurt anyone! We went through so much tonight, and no one was insulted!”

On Purim, the door to the Pincus home remained wide open as neighbors, friends, *talmidim*, and community members streamed in and out from early morning until long past sunset. The *Rebbetzin* spent the day receiving and returning *mishloach manos*, asking young guests about their parents, and wishing everyone well. She greeted everyone warmly and graciously, although depending on the flow of guests, she sometimes barely found time to respond with more than a cheerful “*A freilechen Purim!*” In contrast, when the heavy traffic lightened up, she would take the extra moment to walk the well-wisher to the door and even down the steps.

In the meanwhile, the Rav was busy distributing seemingly endless amounts of *tzedakah* together with his *gabbaim*, accepting and returning *mishloach manos*, and listening and responding to *divrei Torah* and *berachos*.

Despite the ceaseless flow of humanity and activity filling his home, Rav Shimshon somehow found the time to personally escort his children to visit the illustrious *rabbanim* and *talmidei chachamim* of Ofakim and deliver *mishloach manos*. He likewise took his younger sons to the homes of their *rebbeim*, whether they lived in town or in the surrounding communities, such as Tifrach or Talmei Eliyahu. In doing so, he demonstrated his profound *hakaras hatov* and reinforced both to the *rebbeim* and his children that the *rebbeim* were his full-fledged partners in one of his premier goals in life — *chinuch habanim*, educating his children to strive and achieve in Torah.

Never did he forget his final “*hakaras hatov stop*” on Purim which took him to the far edge of town, to the home of the family’s devoted housekeeper. Day after day, when the *Rebbetzin* left for school, this righteous woman came to the Pincus house to babysit the younger children and arrange the house for lunch, when the older children would return.

“How many times did I beg him not to go out of his way on Purim of all days!” she

reminisces with a shake of her head. “But he wouldn’t hear of it! The *Rebbetzin* would put together a *mishloach manos* ‘fit for a *rosh yeshiva*” — that’s how she described it — “and the Rav himself would come to deliver it, accompanied by their adorable children.”



### *A Superfluous Trip*

THERE WAS ONE PURIM EVENING that Rav Shimshon never forgot. One year, he shared the story of that night with one of his sons:

“A person never knows how he will acquire a *mitzvah*,” he exclaimed. “Sometimes one invests into a *mitzvah* and, instead, receives Torah; and sometimes, what happens is the other way around. And that’s exactly what happened to me that long-ago Purim night.”

The Pincuses were living in Bnei Brak then, and a *rosh yeshivah* of a *yeshivah* remote from the center of the country implored Rav Shimshon to deliver a *shmuess* to his *bachurim* on Purim night. Rav Shimshon, who was well-aware that Purim night is not a fortuitous occasion for heavy *shmuessen*, was reluctant, and he explained to the *rosh yeshivah* both his position and the technical difficulties of traveling so far on the night of Purim when the odds of his words impacting the *bachurim* were anyway so minute. The *rosh yeshivah*, however, was adamant, persuading Rav Shimshon that his words would work wonders and penetrate his *bachurim*’s hearts. Rav Shimshon finally relented.

Purim night arrived, and after *leining* the *megillah* in *shul* and then again at home for his family, Rav Shimshon quickly broke his fast and then rushed off to the home of his *rebbe* Rav Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub to bask in his *kedushah* on the eve of Purim.

It was an uplifting evening of inspiration and Torah, yet the hectic schedule began to take a physical toll on Rav Shimshon, and he felt exhaustion getting the better of him.

Still, ever faithful to his word, he eventually bid his *rebbe*, “*A freilechen Purim!*” and then set off up north as promised.

As soon as he entered the *beis midrash*, his heart sank, seeing that he’d been right on target. Only a handful of *bachurim* had even bothered showing up for the *derashah*, and those who did were already quite drunk and drooping before his eyes. There was no question in his mind that the *derashah* was doomed to failure and that the trip had

been for naught. All that remained were feelings of disenchantment and regret for the wasted time and energy on the night of Purim, which is a consummate opportunity for *kedushah* and spiritual ascent.

Yet what was done was done. Without even opening his mouth to begin his carefully constructed speech, he spun on his heel and exited the *beis midrash* supremely disappointed, finding solace only in the timeless refrain of "*Gam zu I'tovah*"

Driving down the dark highway, he suddenly recalled an old friend who lived not far from this outlying area of the country. A brilliant *talmid chacham*, the man was well-versed in both the Revealed and Hidden Torah, and Rav Shimshon had no question in his mind that, despite the late hour, this *tzaddik* would certainly still be awake and learning.

He turned into the entrance of the nondescript town. When his old friend opened the door, he was delighted to see Rav Shimshon, and before long, the two *tzaddikim* were delving animatedly into the secrets of Torah.

The hours passed in sheer ecstasy and bliss as they toiled in *sugyos* dealing with Purim.

"We learned until streaks of color appeared on the horizon. On that night," he divulged many a year later, "I touched, on my own level, the inner truth and *emes* of Purim, and I attained depth and insights that I never grasped before." This was likewise the night that the seeds of his famous Purim *shmuessen* were planted.

"Like I said," he concluded, "there are times when you invest in Torah and are repaid with *chessed*, and there are times when you invest in *chessed* and are remunerated with Torah. And that's what happened to me that night. I invested superhuman energy to deliver a *shmuess* on Purim, and *Hashem* rewarded me with newfound understanding of Torah!"

