

Abducted in Yemen

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"Not so loud!" Mazal warned her twin brothers. "How many times do I have to remind you to keep your voices down?! *Ummi** will awaken from the noise!"

"Learning Torah is not 'noise,' Mazal," six-year-old Yosef hotly contested. "*Abbi** says that when we learn, we need to learn with passion!"

Mazal sighed. "And who says that passion must come along with deafening noise? You know that *Ummi* must rest. She is so weak that she hasn't even opened her eyes at all today!"

Instinctively, the three Sharabi children looked towards their mother's bed in the corner of the room. She had been lying in bed for nearly six weeks, and she was very pale and listless. The *tabib** had given up on her, muttering that there was nothing more he could do. His herbal remedies and lotions could not conquer the disease that held her captive.

Mazal took over the running of the home with maturity that belied her nine years. She cooked, she cleaned, she swept and she even tried to patch Yonasan's torn kaftan.

"*Abbi* should be coming home from the smithy any minute," Yonasan remarked. "We haven't even reviewed the first half of this week's *parshah*!"

With renewed energy, the twins bent over the Chumash. Like all Yemenite children, they were well-versed in the *taamim* — the traditional tune with which the Torah portion is read each week. Their long, black *simanim* (*peyos*) swayed gently as they learned, and their coal-black eyes sparkled with enthusiasm and intelligence. This time around, they tried to keep their voices down so as not to disturb their mother.

"*Ani Yosef*," Yonasan read aloud the words of the *passuk*. "I am Yosef!"

Yosef laughed with glee. "What's all this nonsense, Yonasan?! You know good and well that I am Yosef!"

"I didn't say that I'm Yosef," Yonasan defended himself. "I was just reading the words of Chumash! The Torah says that 'I am Yosef!'"

"But you're not! You can fool the whole world, but you can't fool me," Yosef gleefully replied. "I am Yosef!"

Mazal smiled at her brothers' antics. She had heard the same exchange played out last night, when they had learned with *Abbi*.

"Oh, all right. You say it," Yonasan grumbled. "You interrupt every time I read this *passuk*."

They smiled at each other in childish delight. They enjoyed their own humor, even the second time around!

"Here goes," Yosef declared. "*Ani Yosef* — I am Yosef! Does my father still live?"

The boys continued learning diligently. So diligently, in fact, that they didn't notice their father coming into the humble Sharabi home. They didn't see his worried face, and they didn't notice the shadow of fear that lurked in his eyes.

But Mazal noticed ... and Mazal understood.

"*Ummi* is still sleeping," she quietly informed him. "She hasn't stirred since the morning! I think ... I think that Mother is resting really, really well today."

Father's silence stretched a bit too long.

"It's a good thing, isn't it?" Mazal asked. "*Ummi* will sleep for a long time and when she wakes up she'll feel a lot better. When I sleep a long, long time, I always feel very rested when I wake up. Sleep gives me energy. *Ummi* will feel stronger tomorrow, won't she?"

Father bit his lips. Mazal's hopeful question went unanswered.

"Maybe ... maybe we need to call that big doctor, the Muslim," Mazal said. "He knows how to heal the most serious diseases."

Father sighed heavily. "Impossible, Mazali. You know that the Arabs here in Yemen refuse to treat a *dhimmi**. They look down at us, Mazal. Even the roofs of our homes must be lower than theirs!"

Mazal wanted to fight the facts. She wanted to cry at the injustice of it all. Instead, she fiercely commanded her tears to stay out of sight. Yosef and Yonasan would be frightened if she cried.

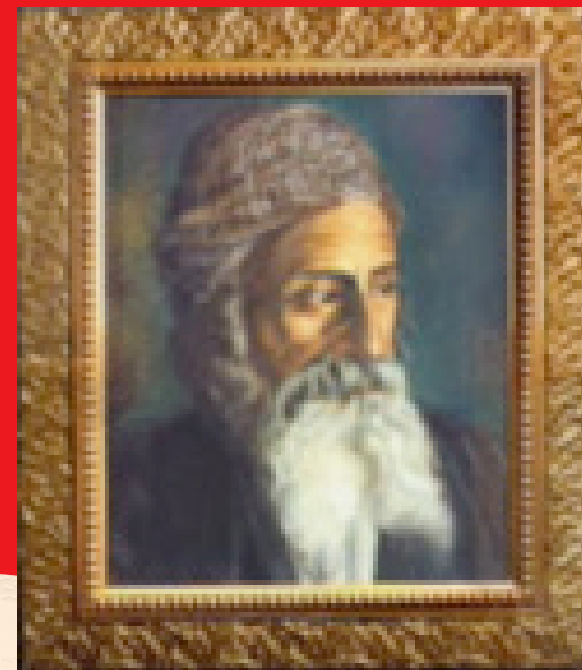
"I cannot convince any Arab doctor to enter *al-kaab*, our Jewish Quarter," *Abbi* continued. "They don't even let us touch their food because their fanatic religion considers us contaminated! An Arab would never accept a Jewish patient!"

"B-but *Ummi* ..." Mazal tried to argue, despite the tears that had rebelliously escaped and now flowed freely down her cheeks.

"The *Borei* will help," her father softly interrupted. "I am coming from the home of *Mori Yichya Yitzchok HaLevi*."

"And?" Mazal probed. She knew that the words of the *Mori* were sacred.

Abbi merely shook his head tiredly and said, "*Tefillot* and tears, Mazal. There is nothing more powerful than that."



Mori Yichya Yitzchak HaLevi

Tefillot and tears.

Mazal swiped at her eyes angrily. How treacherous these tears were! They crept out of her eyes at all the wrong moments. She busied herself with the pots simmering over an open flame. Dinner waited for no one, not even nine-year-old girls who feared that their world was caving in on itself.

Avraham Sharabi flashed an encouraging smile at his oldest daughter, and then turned to the twins, who were still studying at

the table.

"I got wonderful regards from your *melamed* today," he told them. "You are both learning well."

"Yonasan read and translated an entire passage all by himself," Yosef proudly reported. "Everyone listened quietly and then the *melamed* gave him two candied almonds!"

"And Yosef asked the best question from the entire class," Yonasan added. "The *melamed* said that if he continues learning diligently, he will grow up to be a real *chacham*!"

"Amen!" their father heartily exclaimed. "The *Borei* should prove those words true!"

The boys saw the pride and pure joy in their father's eyes and they knew that it was neither the smithy nor its profits that brought him happiness. Their father lived for the Torah and he treasured it above all else.

Yosef tugged at his long, black *simanim*. His eyes were ablaze with innocence and determination. He promised himself that he would do everything in his power to give his parents the ultimate gift. He would become a Torah scholar. He would bring the light of Torah to all of Sana'a ... to all of Yemen ... to the entire world!

Those were the thoughts of little six-year-old Yosef. He had dreams. He had hopes.

But life would lead him along different paths.

Who would have believed that the innocent, earnest desire of this young child in Sana'a would be shattered with such cruelty?! [k](#)

To be continued...