



## A Purim Passing

Everyone knows there is no shortage of people collecting charity in Yerushalayim. There are also many *gabbai tzedakah* (officers to overlook charity distribution), but 50 years ago, Rabbi Yosef Binyamin Rubin z”l, was reputed to be the finest *gabbai tzedakah* Jerusalem had ever known.

One cannot transcend overnight. His capacity for charity was partly indigenous, partly cultivated. The result was a paragon so exalted that he became a legend in his very own lifetime.

From the time that he was a child he had an inner drive to give *tzedakah* which would afford him no rest.

Directly after his wedding, during the week of *sheva brachot*, adorned in a *shtreimel* and a *bekishe* and accompanied by a *shomer* (guard who accompanies a groom when he is not with his bride during the week of *sheva brachot*), he stood on the street corner collecting *tzedakah*.

“Do the poor people have to suffer just because I have a *simcha*?”

Rabbi Rubin revolutionized giving *tzedakah* by introducing radical concepts in the art of giving. He contended that one must give according to the poor person’s needs and not according to the giver’s means (with substantiation for this policy from a Mishna in *Pirkei Avot*). He borrowed terms from the inflation-plagued Israeli economy to help the indigent: poor people must also have wage increments, price increases, value added supplements etc., he reasoned.

To cover his budget of fund allocation to the needy, he borrowed staggering

sums of money from a free-loan society every month. He borrowed because he felt he had a personal debt which had to be paid. He wasn’t doing the poor a favor, he was merely carrying out an obligation.

Poor people are all the same, he reasoned, and he was color blind as to background: Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Chassid, Lithuanian, Mizrachi, whatever; all have the same needs of life’s necessities and dignity. Rabbi Rubin’s greatest joy, however, was to provide for a *talmid chacham*.

An impoverished *talmid chacham* did not even have a proper jacket to wear. Rabbi Rubin purchased a wardrobe for him, and could not help boasting: “I have just bought a cover for a Sefer Torah.”

He was an undercover detective of the highest order. No matter what the camouflage – he saw through it. He had an uncanny nose for detecting who was truly in need, and when he found a worthy recipient, nothing stood in his path. Some way or another the needy received, usually never realizing how, when, or from where.

Jerusalemites will never forget Purim 1979. It was a *Purim Meshulash* – three consecutive days of celebration, bedecked with snow. Flurries began to fall early in the evening. Late into the night it still hadn’t stopped, and there was an eerie feeling that this was a sorrow-clouded harbinger.

Everyone in the Rubin house was still awake. Rabbi Rubin was ill, but still threatened to go out the next day collecting for the poor. Despite a chorus of protests, Rabbi Rubin was adamant he

could not let down the needy as Purim was the holiday of the poor.

Early the next morning, Rabbi Rubin was out celebrating Purim by collecting for the poor, trudging through the snow, battling his illness and fighting the weather. The fatigue was apparent and his knees gave way.

Yerushalayim’s greatest *gabbai tzedakah* lay motionless on the freezing asphalt. Rabbi Rubin was rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment to help him regain consciousness.

Nothing seemed to work. Not a move, not a twitch.

His family gathered around his bedside day and night. Specialists tried every possible method to restore him to consciousness.

Still nothing.

Until his wife went over to his bedside and whispered, “Yossel, it’s almost time for *kimcha d’pischa*” (Passover help for the needy. Customarily, collections begin 30 days in advance of the holiday, the day after Purim.) Only then did Rabbi Rubin awaken.

Rabbi Rubin lived for *tzedakah*, and forever after his memory is commemorated through *tzedakah* through the *Od Yosef Chai* (Yosef Lives Yet) Fund.

**Rabbi Hanoch Teller**, internationally-acclaimed storyteller extraordinaire, is an award-winning author and producer. Rabbi Teller’s new podcast is available at <https://link.chtbl.com/TellerfromJerusalem>.



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