

How Chelm Really Was Created

by Philip *Fishl* Kutner

Angels dropping babies, storks dropping fools—those only can be stories for little children with keen imaginations. This is the real world. As a grown-up, wouldn't you really like to know the truth how Chelm came to be? Here is the truth as it was told to my maternal grandmother's, maternal grandmother's paternal grandfather.

This real story of how Chelm really was created was passed on by the next greatest storyteller of all time to his daughter, to her daughter un azoy vayer. Not a single word has been changed in all of these generations. I tell it to you exactly as my mother told it to me when I was a very young child.

Since this is the very first time it has appeared in print, it has profound historical and cultural significance, not only to Jews all over the world, but to cultural anthropologists who are concerned with the origin of mores and folkways of emerging communities.

The actual time has been lost in antiquity. We know it is so old that even the eldest of the Chelm Elders could tell you, but they will swear to this day to the complete accuracy of this account as it is related here.

Here is the story in its entirety as it was told to me.

In the Beginning

Not far from the very site of Chelm today was a very wealthy landowner. His family name, his age, his appearance, the nature of his vast estate, the origin of his vast wealth has long since been lost. All that is left today is the role he played in how Chelm was created.

It seems that it all started one night when very wealthy landowner had a dream. In the dream an angel appeared in a message directly from Him. What follows, is the dream and the message.

The very wealthy landowner sat under a huge shade tree on a stifling hot night and eventually fell asleep. In his dream he dreamed of having a dream. This is what he dreamed he dreamed.

The very wealthy landowner actually saw his great grandfather appear out of the darkness and told him that the very wealthy landowner should leave something so that for all eternity everyone would remember the very wealthy landowner.

"What should I leave?" he asked his grandfather. But at that moment the grandfather began to fade away. Immediately the very wealthy landowner reached out to grab his grandfather, and at that moment he awoke from his dream. His grandfather had disappeared, but on the palm of the very wealthy landowner's right hand was written—
C R E A T E T H E S E C O N D G A R D E N O F E D E N .

The Start of Chelm

Early the next morning he had his stagecoach prepared and set out to find the location where the T H E S E C O N D G A R D E N O F E D E N would be located. Late in the afternoon of the second day finished came upon the site of where Chelm is today. He immediately knew that this was the place that his grandfather had told him about in the dream. Stakes were placed in the ground and markers were put on trees to let anyone passing by know that this now was the property of the very wealthy landowner.

After returning to his estate messengers were sent out to find the best city planners, the most creative architects and artisans to plan, design and finally to build T H E S E C O N D G A R D E N O F E D E N .

When all the streets had been laid out, all the homes built, the Great Synagogue erected, the yeshiva and mikve finished, the central marketplace laid out and the City Hall was about to be dedicated, a problem arose—what shall we name T H E S E C O N D G A R D E N O F E D E N ?

How Chelm Was Named

The above question was asked by the youngest son of the very wealthy landowner. This startled the very wealthy landowner, just as he was ready to Moses the City Hall with a bottle of Manishvitz wine.

"I know," said the youngest son of the very wealthy landowner. "Since you had the idea in a kholem, let's call the town CHELM!" Everyone thought that it was the perfect name.

If you visit Chelm today, you will notice that it is still called Chelm and all the people there are called Chelmers, Chelmites or Chelmians—never Fools.

What was it that you just asked, "Where did the original fools come from who inhabited Chelm?" Ah, dear reader, that is the theme of another story.