

# A Chelemer Goes to Heaven

By Philip Fishl Kutner

There is a story about Bontshe Shvayg going to heaven and his humble request. Even the Great Houdini could not pull off the feat of speaking from there. However, we do not know anyone personally who visited and sent back word about what it is like "up there." That is, until this report came in about a Chelemer who sent a detailed account about his reception and a description of conditions there.

As history tells us, Chaim, the Chelemer Shnayder went to sleep one night after a hard day at the sewing machine. He had just recovered from a terrible bout with pneumonia and his body had really taken much abuse. The doctor told him to try and take it easy for a while, but Chaim was a poor man and his large family already was behind in storing up staples for winter. Sheyne, his hard-working wife, was very concerned about his weak heart and tried to comfort him.

It happened that night a week before the first night of peysakh. Chaim went to bed with a high fever and fell asleep with all of his clothes on. Not wanting to awaken him, Sheyne took off only his boots and covered him up with extra blankets. His face and hands were as gray as ashes and his feet wee ice cold.

It must have been a little after midnight that Sheyne awoke for Chaim was thrashing as if in the throes of death and it seemed he was not breathing. He could hear Sheyne whisper, "Chaim tell my mame that I am sorry about the way I treated her.

Morning came and Chaim rubbed his eyes and saw the sun shining and the sky was a beautiful blue with only a wisp of a cloud near the horizon. He was seated on a hard wooden bench and there were several older men who had on t'filn and were davening.

Shortly an older woman came over and asked Chaim if he was hungry. Chaim was surprised, for the woman reminded him of Sheyne's mame, but younger and somewhat taller.

After nodding yes, Chaim followed the woman into a long narrow hallway that opened into a brilliant yellow room that had no ceiling, but looked up into the sky. The woman motioned Chaim to sit at a table with three older men.

Chaim turned to the woman to ask her if she indeed was Sheyne's mame, but the woman had disappeared. Chaim was disappointed.

The men looked like Zelig, Shmuel and Sender, Chaim's older brothers. Chaim was the youngest of four boys by at least ten years. After the shock, he calmed down and in a soft voice whispered, "Zenen ir mayne brider?"

There was no response. In fact, it seemed to Chaim that they did not recognize their younger brother or they could not hear him. It made him very uncomfortable.

After finishing his breakfast, he looked around for the woman, but she was nowhere to be seen. So he decided to walk around to see if he could recognize anyone or find out where he was.

Suddenly someone has grabbed his arm from behind and said, "Come with me. They are waiting for you." Too startled to answer, Chaim followed meekly as he stared at the stranger. He was no one that Chaim had ever seen.

Chaim was led down a steep staircase into a narrow room with a very high ceiling and a man wearing a judge's robe pointed to a chair and Chaim was seated.

The judge proceeded to speak in Hebrew, for Chaim could grasp only a few words. When the judge seemed to have asked a question, Chaim responded with, "Ikh red nor yidish un a bisl poylish."

The judge burst out in a deafening laugh and continued in Hebrew, but now his voice became sterner and his face meaner and meaner. After a few more minutes of this tirade, he motioned to the other man to remove Chaim from the chambers.

Now the man was not gentle. The man had a tight grip on Chaim and seemed to be pushing him along. This time they did not go out the door through which they had entered, but down a winding staircase. It was getting more humid and the air was warmer.

Chaim begged the main to loosen his grip and to walk slower, but it had the opposite effect. Then he felt himself being shaken and a voice saying "Chaim, Chaim, Chaim dos bin ikh, dayn vayb Sheyne."

Chaim awoke in a cold sweat. His pillow was soaking wet, and he was shaking. Chaim had been to Heaven and returned to tell about his experience.